

UNTAPPED

TRANSFORMING TEACHER LEADERSHIP TO HELP STUDENTS SUCCEED

For more information, read the full report: *Untapped: Transforming Teacher Leadership to Help Students Succeed*

Executive Summary

Unleashing the Potential of Teacher Leadership

Across the education field, there is unusual consensus that strong teacher leaders are key to improving our nation's schools. Unfortunately, clear expectations for what teacher leaders should do, and strategies to prepare them to do it, are few and far between. A recent survey found that while 86 percent of urban school districts have teacher leader roles, only 32 percent offered specialized training for teachers stepping into those roles.¹

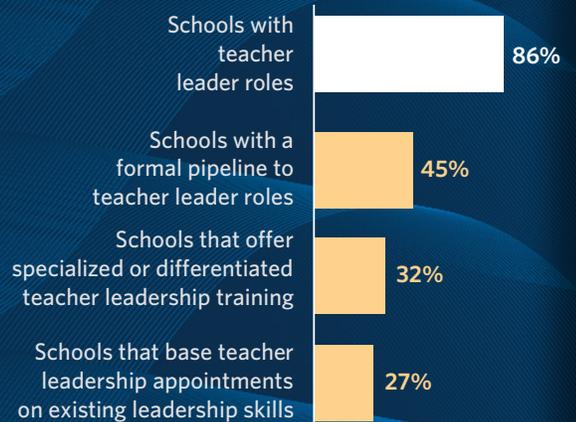
If the point of teacher leadership is to improve teaching and learning, thrusting teachers into leadership roles without quality training does a double disservice: It takes teaching time away from the educators best prepared to accelerate student learning, and then fails to equip them with the skills they need to lead colleagues to similar success.

It doesn't have to be this way. At schools with true teacher leaders, carefully selected and well-prepared adults are supported to gradually master and share leadership responsibilities.² They work as a team to make hiring decisions, set curriculum, design training and establish practices based on their various sources of expertise. They make school leadership more inclusive for teachers and more sustainable for principals.³ And they accelerate student learning—research shows schools have better academic outcomes when leadership is shared.⁴

Now more than ever, strong and effective teacher leadership is needed to help schools, students, and educators meet the unprecedented challenge of more rigorous college and career-ready standards. But what will it take to develop teachers into true leaders? In our new report we share promising findings from New Leaders' Emerging Leaders Program (ELP)—a selective, job-embedded teacher leadership development program—that help to answer this question.

Most schools have some sort of teacher leader role, but few have clear pathways and quality training to prepare educators for success in those roles.

Council of Great City Schools (2015). *Assistant principals and teacher leaders in America's great city schools*. Unpublished data.



The Emerging Leaders Program: Empowering teachers with the skills and capacity to lead

Teacher and principal effectiveness are the two most significant school-based factors contributing to student achievement, and principal effectiveness alone accounts for 25 percent.⁵ Since our founding in 2000, New Leaders' work has been motivated by this strong link between effective school leaders and student success. In our early years, we focused exclusively on training principals; however, it became clear to us that to create schools where all students can excel, strong teacher leaders were also essential. We developed ELP to address this need.

More than 1,000 participants in 13 high-need school districts have gone through ELP since it was launched in 2011. Two years of data collection from the program provide promising evidence that purposeful, hands-on leadership training for teachers and other staff has transformative potential.

“Emerging Leaders was more than PD; it became real. It wasn't just that you sat there for six hours and then you left, and maybe you come back a few months later. We met on a regular basis, did projects and had coaching and time to improve along the way. There was detailed feedback, and a rubric to follow... And at the end of the year, we had gains.”

ELP Participant and Dean of Students, Charlotte

About ELP

ELP is skills-focused and job-embedded. It minimizes theoretical study and emphasizes integrating purposeful leadership practice into participants' daily work at school. All participants lead teams of 2 to 7 teachers at their schools and set goals for student achievement growth that are informed by and aligned to the schools' overall improvement targets.

Throughout the training year, participants study and practice specific skills within four high-impact leadership domains that have a direct influence on student learning:

Instructional Leadership: Setting high expectations for all students, applying content expertise, leading data-driven instruction and coaching teachers.

Personal Leadership: Receiving feedback and self-reflecting to continuously improve performance and instruction.

Culture Leadership: Building expectations, systems and incentives to promote urgency and efficacy among adults to improve student achievement.

Adult Leadership: Communicating skillfully, motivating a team, giving constructive feedback and facilitating effective meetings.

All ELP participants go through an introductory seminar and instructional leadership training and then are assigned leadership duties that include leading a team of teachers at their schools. Participants must complete job-embedded assignments that include providing feedback on instruction, leading their team in a meeting to review student data or having a difficult conversation to help a colleague understand where they need to grow. These interactions are captured on video, so participants are able to watch themselves in action while getting feedback from peers in their ELP cohort along with personalized, expert coaching from their Director.

Throughout the training year, participants undergo a continuous learning cycle of practice, review, refinement and practicing again, focusing on the same high-impact skills that we've seen our most successful principal apprentices master over the years.

About 70 percent of ELP participants boosted student learning across the classrooms they supervised—and these gains were realized during the training year.

Key Findings

Early findings from our analysis of ELP provide promising evidence that intensive, hands-on training can meaningfully increase student learning and leadership capacity in schools and districts.⁶

Finding 1: Teacher leaders can immediately boost student learning in their schools.

Among ELP participants for whom we had complete data, 70 percent led their teacher teams to deliver gains in student performance on annual statewide tests in at least one of the grades or subjects they influenced during their training year.

Finding 2: Teacher leaders can quickly develop and apply core leadership skills.

By the end of the program, participants grew more skillful in virtually all of the program's key leadership concepts and skills. More than half met our proficiency standard on at least 8 of the 11 skills, with especially high rates of proficiency in reflective practice and continuous improvement, professional development and interpersonal relationships. Three out of four participants became more proficient in leading the critically important skill of leading data-driven instruction.

Finding 3: Teacher leaders can fill critical gaps in the leadership pipeline.

ELP outcomes suggest that well-prepared teacher leaders can shore up the leadership pipeline, creating important stability and a ready source of qualified leaders to step into administrative roles as needed. While not every ELP participant sought a principal position immediately after completing the year-long training program, about 40 percent of participants applied and were accepted to our highly selective principal apprenticeship program, the Aspiring Principal Program (APP). Significantly, 80 percent of those accepted met our proficiency standards for teacher leaders on 10 of the 11 key leadership skills common to both programs, giving them a strong foundation for success—in APP and as a novice principal.

Better Practice

ELP is still a new program and we are undertaking ongoing improvements based on student achievement outcomes and feedback from participants. Several findings from these analyses have spurred us to modify and expand our programs, and these findings are relevant to others who are working to improve teacher leadership training.

INVEST PRINCIPALS IN SUPPORTING TRAINING.

Job-embedded teacher leadership training programs call on principals to prioritize participants' real-world learning opportunities—most importantly, the opportunity to supervise a team of teachers as part of the training experience. Without strong buy-in, this structure can pose a challenge: 13 percent of our 2012-2013 ELP cohort said they did not have sufficient opportunity to complete their on-site assignments, which many attributed to lack of support from their administrators.

Principals working with ELP are now required to certify their commitment to the program before an accepted candidate enrolls. This ensures that they understand what will be required of ELP participants and we, in turn, partner with principals to ensure that ELP participants' responsibilities are designed to address the school's specific leadership priorities.

PRIORITIZE INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP SKILLS.

The unprecedented challenges and opportunities presented by the introduction of Common Core and similarly rigorous academic standards have raised the bar for instructional leadership across the country. Like educators nationwide, our participants have found these changes daunting, particularly when curriculum updates have outpaced training and support. We have therefore put greater focus on instruction and have built into our programs more opportunities to practice instructional leadership skills. We are also introducing a new teacher leadership training pathway that focuses intensively on instructional leadership.

FOCUS ON BUILDING LEADERSHIP TEAMS.

From our successful ELP work we have learned that no one can be a truly transformative leader in isolation. Dramatically improving student and school performance requires multiple strong leaders working together toward a shared vision of student and school success. We have therefore launched a new program to foster thriving school leadership teams. We work with principals to identify educators with clear potential to be effective leaders. Then, we help the team collectively develop the skills and practices that create a strong culture of shared leadership. This allows principals to strengthen their instructional leadership impact by sharing responsibilities with colleagues who bring complementary strengths to the table.

Lessons for the Field

Early positive indicators from ELP support the idea that the development of strong and effective teacher leaders should be central to any school and district improvement strategy. Here are steps district and charter leaders, policymakers, and principals can take to unleash the untapped potential of teacher leadership.

Recommendations for District and Charter Leaders

Make building teacher leadership capacity a priority, and ensure principals receive support to achieve this goal.

- Provide high-quality professional development and support for principals to build leadership capacity among their staff, and create opportunities for principals to collaborate across schools, sharing best practices to cultivate schoolwide leadership.

Expand pathways to teacher leadership positions and provide meaningful professional development for teacher leaders.

- Help principals design job-embedded opportunities for aspiring teacher leaders to build relevant skills, and require them to include opportunities for existing teacher leaders to practice and receive feedback on specific leadership strategies as part of their professional development plans.

Make teacher leadership a priority in collective bargaining conversations.

- Define and secure appropriate flexibility for teachers to assume meaningful leadership responsibilities, and establish clear expectations for teachers who take on leadership roles.

Recommendations for Policymakers

Remove barriers that prevent teachers and staff from taking on leadership responsibilities, and empower principals to identify and support teacher leaders.

- Amend rules so that teachers and staff with leadership responsibilities can formally observe and give feedback to their colleagues, and adopt rules that give principals a measure of control over school-level hiring, budgeting and scheduling decisions so they can recruit and promote strong teacher leaders.

Dedicate funds to support high-quality teacher leadership training and build systems to help principals manage teacher leadership.

- Direct funding toward teacher leadership training, and support states and districts that have clear goals and evaluation systems for teacher leaders that are tied to student achievement.

Incorporate practitioner feedback when developing policy proposals around teacher leadership.

- Convene teacher working groups around key questions, such as what effective teacher leaders should know and be able to achieve, and give these perspectives fair weight in the policy conversation.

Recommendations for Principals

Prioritize shared leadership as a critical strategy for school improvement, and inventory current and future leadership needs at the school.

- For example, undertake a school needs assessment to identify gaps in leadership capacity, including expertise to meet the challenges of new and more rigorous standards, and set a time-bound goal to collaborate building skills in key responsibility areas.

Assess staff for strengths and expertise and define shared leadership responsibilities based on these strengths and school needs.

- For example, look for evidence that individual staff members can lead academic gains, set and exemplify high expectations for all, navigate difficult conversations or guide colleagues to delivering better instruction, then draft a playbook to align discrete responsibilities with individual staff member talents.

Support targeted opportunities for staff to develop key leadership skills and set specific impact goals for teacher leaders.

- Develop job-embedded opportunities for aspiring teacher leaders to road-test and receive training in relevant skills, communicate clear expectations, and establish and track progress toward measurable goals.

In a climate of rising academic standards, we need great teacher leaders today more than ever before.

Across the country, educators and students are striving—and sometimes struggling—to meet new academic expectations. To meet that bar, we need to take great teachers and transform them into true instructional leaders. Yet collectively, we are not providing the training and support necessary to unleash this potential.

By sharing our experiences, we hope to spur long-overdue changes in policy and practice that will allow us to fulfill the promise of teacher leadership. We also hope this paper will serve as a springboard for new conversations, more collaboration and even deeper insights for our organization and the field.

To learn more, visit newleaders.org/untapped and download the full paper and other teacher leadership resources.

1 Council of Great City Schools. (2015.) *Assistant principals and teacher leaders in America's Great City Schools*. Unpublished data.

2 For more, see our 2015 report *Untapped: A policy roadmap for improving schools through shared leadership*.

3 MetLife, Inc. (2013). *The MetLife survey of the American teacher: Challenges for school leadership*. New York, NY: Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. Retrieved from <https://www.metlife.com/assets/cao/foundation/MetLife-Teacher-Survey-2012.pdf>

4 Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. H. (2009). *Leadership for learning: Does collaborative leadership make a difference in school improvement?* Retrieved from http://philiphalinger.com/old-site/papers/EMAL_dist_2009.pdf

5 Seashore Louis et al. (2010). *Investigating the links to improved student learning*. Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, University of Minnesota, and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. Retrieved from <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/key-research/Pages/Investigating-the-Links-to-Improved-Student-Learning.aspx>

6 Student achievement findings are based on 2013-14 ELP program data. For details, see technical appendix in *Untapped: Transforming Teacher Leadership to Help Students Succeed*.