



RTTT Pilot Project Newsletter

Volume 2, Issue 1

October 2012

Seven Levers of Reform

- Recruitment, Hiring, and Placement
- Comprehensive Induction
- Professional Development
- Supervision and Evaluation
- Teacher Leadership
- Organizational Structure
- Adult Professional Culture

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Reimagining Teachers' Career Ladders

In its criteria for successful planning, the HR Pilot Project asks that districts identify, define, and develop teacher leadership roles with the highest possible leverage for improving student outcomes in the local context. The nature of those roles is best determined by the district itself; there is no single best approach to teacher leadership.

The districts and individuals profiled in this newsletter have employed multiple approaches to teacher leadership, from formal ones that require significant training to embedded, culture-building practices. Yet all of these approaches share significant features: a thoughtful underlying philosophy, sensitivity to context, the strong support of school and central office administrators, and a student-centered definition of success.

Fostering meaningful teacher leadership in a school or district can be challenging— it requires time, patience, clear communication, and financial resources. Yet the districts profiled here have found it worth the commitment. Projects such as the HR Pilot may help to evaluate the impact of the work. For the time being, enlightened

leaders are continuing to develop and improve opportunities for teacher leadership based on a conviction that those closest to students must have a consistent and powerful voice in school- and district-wide decision-making. As Plainville Superintendent David Raiche puts it, “the more people that you have leading in a district, the better you are.”



Creating a Culture of Teacher Leadership in Attleboro

After an initial year of developing seven interconnected lever plans and building a strong core of deeply invested teachers and administrators, Attleboro’s focus has turned to the sustainability of its pilot project efforts. Superintendent Pia Durkin and new Assistant Superintendent Dave Sawyer feel that distributed leadership is a vital part of any reform effort at both the district and school levels.

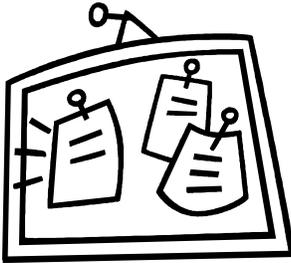
Dr. Durkin distinguishes between “teacher leader” as a role and “teacher leadership” as a philosophy that undergirds the district culture. “Teacher voice is critically important for any district focused on continuous improvement,” she says. “We know from research and data that when people are invested in understanding what makes good practice, and invested in the process of attaining good practice, we have a much better

chance of success in changing practice.” Teacher leadership is not an isolated reform effort in the district, but one that is deeply embedded in its day-to-day operation.

Dr. Durkin has worked to foster a culture of teacher leadership since she arrived in Attleboro six years ago. In her first weeks in the district, she met with teachers to ask, “What do you want the new superintendent to do? What will help you to do your job better?” Across schools, from individuals at all stages of experience, a clear answer emerged: teachers wanted to be a part of the process of improving instruction. One early manifestation of this incorporation of teacher voice was the collaborative process through which new core literacy and math programs were chosen, along with the professional development that

[Continued on page 2]

PILOT DISTRICT UPDATE



**“Teacher leaders
bridge the gap
between what the
administration is
trying to lead and
what teachers are
doing day to
day.”**

**-Dave Sawyer,
Attleboro Public
Schools**

A Culture of Teacher Leadership in Attleboro, continued

[Continued from previous page] supported those new programs. Over the next several years, the district’s literacy and math scores—disappointingly flat in the years before Dr. Durkin began her tenure—began to rise. Recently, with the release of the 2012 MCAS scores again reflecting an increase, a five-year trend analysis showed the percentage of students in the proficient and advanced categories outpacing the state in every grade level (see chart, below). Dr. Durkin sees this sustained improvement as something closely tied to the degree of teacher investment in curriculum selection. Rather than something “done to teachers,” says Dr. Durkin, this kind of improvement is “done with them.”

Mr. Sawyer, too, sees teacher leadership as a vital component of sustainable change, and highlights the administrator’s role in creating a culture conducive to teacher leadership. With over sixteen years as a teacher and a school administrator in Attleboro, he has had the opportunity to observe various leadership styles and initiatives. In his opinion, the effectiveness of school-based and district administrators is “almost completely correlated with how much they employ the teacher leaders in their effort.” If a principal encourages ideas, dissent, and feedback, teacher leadership will flourish; if teachers are fearful of making mistakes, they will be less willing to come forward. While a top-down approach might lead to temporary change, significant teacher involvement has accompanied lasting school and district reforms. Teacher leaders “are the catalyst,” says Mr. Sawyer. “When things change around here, it’s because teacher leaders have bridged the gap between what the administration is trying to lead and what teachers are doing day to day.”

One common concern about initiatives branded with the “teacher leadership” stamp is their tendency to draw from the same pool of teachers, time and again. Attleboro has worked to combat this problem by creating a variety of opportunities for teachers to get involved (see article, opposite). However, Mr. Sawyer also sees an important role for administrators in ensuring a more equitable distribution of leadership responsibilities. “For any initiative, there are people out there who have special interests, a unique knowledge base, or a set of experiences they’ve had that will make them great leaders on this particular team,” he says. As an administrator, “you have to hold yourself accountable to try and find those people.” Dr. Durkin agrees, pointing out that people may choose not to take on leadership roles simply because they have not been asked. She meets every year with individual teachers in whom she sees potential—“I call it building my leadership bench”—and asks them where they see themselves in three to five years. Many of those people have taken on new roles in the district or pursued administrative certification after such encouragement.

Despite her record of success in building a culture of teacher leadership, Dr. Durkin is quick to point out that she and her colleagues are always on the lookout for new strategies: “We love to learn about what other districts are doing, because we’re always trying to incorporate more teacher voice.” This attitude of continuous learning is itself a model of the type of culture that is conducive to teacher leadership, a culture where no one constituency has the monopoly on answers, and where new ideas and perspectives are actively encouraged.

CHANGE IN % OF STUDENTS SCORING PROFICIENT OR ADVANCED ON MCAS, 2008-2012					
Grade	ELA		Math		
	Attleboro Change	State Change	Attleboro Change	State Change	
3	+9%	+5%	+4%	+0%	
4	+22%	+8%	+14%	+2%	
5	+9%	+0%	+14%	+5%	
6	+1%	-1%	+15%	+4%	
7	+10%	+2%	+20%	+4%	
8	+6%	+6%	+11%	+3%	
10	+15%	+13%	+12%	+6%	

Attleboro: Providing Opportunities for Teacher Leadership

In addition to a supportive culture, multiple structures through which teachers can participate in school decision-making processes and knowledge generation have helped to ensure a wide distribution of leadership in Attleboro.

Instructional Learning Teams (ILTs): These teams vary by school, but generally include the principal, full-time coaches or department chairs, and representatives from each grade level and specialty area. ILTs meet on a regular basis to review the data of the school, help formulate a whole-school improvement plan, and champion their own grade / subject areas in discussions of the instructional agenda. Specific actions depend upon the needs of the school; for example, one elementary school ILT has focused on setting up cross-grade meetings to ensure continuity for students as they advance from grade to grade. With the introduction of team goals in the new state evaluation tool, the hope is that the ILTs will rise to a new level of accountability.

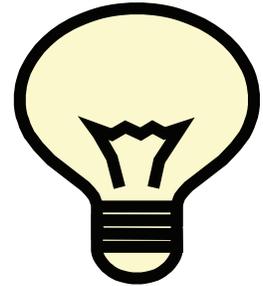
Best Practice Classrooms: Another avenue for teacher involvement, these classrooms will be used to showcase particular practices. Teachers can request coverage to observe these class-

rooms and ultimately take back some of the strategies that they observed.

Learning Walks: For several years, Attleboro has used building-wide learning walks to examine school-wide trends, successes, and areas for improvement. Each walk targets a specific issue and concludes with debriefing and data analysis. In the past, learning walk participants were administrators, but in 2012 membership was extended to teachers. Teachers who participated found it beneficial to observe others' practices and felt that participation in learning walks helped them to understand better the goals of the administration. They recommended that the entire faculty be involved the following year.

Professional Development: When possible, professional development providers are drawn from within the district, giving teachers the opportunity to share particular areas of expertise with their colleagues. One example, instituted by the district's Comprehensive Induction committee, is a series of mini-workshops for new teachers; the workshops are run by mentors and other experienced district staff members.

PROMISING PRACTICES IN TEACHER LEADERSHIP



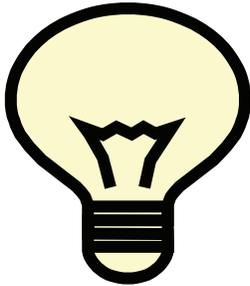
“People in schools move in and out of followership and leadership roles depending on the situation, and acknowledging and documenting these shifts is important... leadership connects to classroom practice through followers.”
-Spillane and Diamond, 2007

Dispelling Myths about Distributed Leadership (from Spillane and Diamond, 2007)

In their 2007 book, *Distributed Leadership in Practice*, James P. Spillane and John B. Diamond theorize about the distributed leadership perspective, which sees leadership as something shaped by the interaction of leaders, followers, and situations. Using six in-depth case studies, they challenge myths about distributed leadership (see below) and encourage thoughtful, measured use of the term.

Myth #1: The distributed perspective is a blueprint for leadership and management.	Rather than a formula or approach, teacher leadership must be understood as something to be developed over time. School leaders need to provide opportunities for leadership development that reflect an understanding of existing organizational structure and culture.
Myth #2: The distributed perspective negates the role of principals.	Formally designated leaders are critical in defining the ways in which distributed leadership will play out in context.
Myth #3: From a distributed perspective, everyone is a leader.	A distributed perspective assumes that all stakeholders can participate in leadership, but does not assume that everyone can or will. The number of people involved in organizational leadership will differ by school. It is not the number of individuals that matters, but what they can contribute to the task at hand.
Myth #4: Distributed leadership is only about collaborative situations.	A distributed perspective is helpful in understanding all leadership situations, even those that involve contrary goals.

PROMISING PRACTICES IN TEACHER LEADERSHIP



A Two-Pronged Approach to Teacher Leadership in Dennis-Yarmouth

Over the last five years, Dennis-Yarmouth Public Schools have built a strong, formalized system of teacher leadership. “Teacher Leader” is a stipended position in Dennis-Yarmouth; with the stipend comes considerable responsibility to lead PLC work, attend annual trainings (one week in the summer and five meetings during the school year). Superintendent Carol Woodbury describes the work as two-pronged: the first prong, which she calls “working on the work,” deals with the technicalities of leading data analysis teams. The second, which receives equal importance, is the “human resource” side of leadership; teacher leaders need to learn strategies and skills that will help them to teach adult learners. A few guiding questions can be found in the chart below.

So, is the approach working? Superintendent Woodbury provides an illustrative example. When Dennis-Yarmouth began its work on the new evaluation system, the district put together a labor-management committee including the administrative staff, union leaders, and teacher representatives from all buildings. During its four days of study, the committee found that the “new requirements” included many activities in which the district was already engaging, and others that could fit easily into existing district structures. “Here’s something that’s new and scary for a lot of districts,” says Superintendent Woodbury, “and because of the kind of culture we’ve been creating, teachers see this as no big deal. I think that’s a testament to the culture.”

Working on the Work	Human Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we look at data? • What are some effective protocols for looking at student work? • How do we develop common assessments as a team? • How do we create narrow, measurable goals to assess student progress? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you get your group to work together? • How do you encourage a reluctant participant? • What are the norms and protocols for working as a team? • How does adult learning differ from student learning?

Roles for Teacher Leaders (from Gabriel, 2005)

In addition to traditional teacher leader roles (i.e., department chair or grade leader), John Gabriel suggests a number of ways in which more teachers can influence a school’s mission development, programming, and student achievement. Among the roles that he proposes:

- *Vertical Leader*: Ensures alignment of curriculum across grade levels.
- *Peer Coach*: Member of a pair in which each peer acts as both mentor and protégé. Peer coaches observe each other and provide diagnostic and constructive feedback in a safe environment.
- *Recorder*: Keeps an accurate record of team meetings.
- *Presenter*: Reports to the team about a professional article or topic of interest.
- *Conference Attendee*: Responsible for sharing information with the team at a later meeting.
- *Speaker/Writer*: Identifies a personal or team strength and writes a conference proposal, journal article, or presentation.
- *School Plan Chair*: Works with all teachers in the building to coordinate and guide the school in developing and enacting its plan.
- *Faculty Representative*: Brings colleagues’ questions, concerns, and issues to the administration.
- *Search Committee Panelist*: Participates in the selection of an administrator, having gathered faculty input about desired applicant qualities.
- *Student Activities Coordinator*: Oversees placement of advisors and coaches.
- *Web Page Curator*: Creates and monitors a department or team web page.

Insights from a Teacher Leader

Karen Engels currently teaches third and fourth grade in Cambridge. She drew from her experiences as both a teacher leader and a trainer for Teachers21 when answering our questions about teacher leadership.

Based on your experiences and research, what do you think the role of the teacher leader should be?

Teacher leaders shape a school's approach to meeting the needs of every child. When teachers move from being primarily concerned with the 25 or 30 students in front of them to thinking of themselves as responsible for all the students in the building, their expertise is what's most relevant in figuring out how the school should move forward. This role has been missing; there has been so much emphasis on school reform and so little emphasis on the existing wisdom of the people being asked to implement the reform.

Would you say that teacher leadership is becoming more prevalent?

I think that newer teachers who are coming into the profession have more of an expectation that they will be empowered stakeholders in their school. And I do think that it's increasingly becoming the norm for administrators to rely on a leadership body that involves teachers. One reason is that administrators' roles have become so complicated that they no longer have the luxury of making and implementing every decision by themselves.

How can school structures help to optimize that natural move toward teacher leadership?

First, schools need to organize teachers into teams. Teachers need to have access to common planning time during the school day, with people who have the same age students as well as people who teach the same discipline. There does need to be an identified leader for each of those teams, and it works best when that leader is a teacher, but in some schools it could be a coach or an administrator. Teams need ample time to meet, and they need to use that time to develop narrow, specific, measurable objectives for improving student performance. In a lot of districts, schools have created teams and teams have scheduled times to meet, but schools have either asked teams to tackle much too much, which leads to dissatisfaction and discouragement, or they're not specific enough about what the objectives are and nothing ever happens.

So it's not enough to have the structures. Teams really need to be trained in how to collaborate,

and they need very specific direction about priorities that, ideally, a school leadership team determines collectively. For example, last year, we knew from whole-school data that our school needed to focus on writing. Then each team looked at the data at its specific grade level and we asked, what is the highest-leverage thing we can work on? We knew we weren't going to improve all aspects of student writing by meeting for a year. So we decided to look really closely at our grade-level data. Students in our district are assessed on narrative writing prompts, and we noticed that they were having a hard time pacing stories. Students would narrate a vacation and spend three quarters of the piece describing the plane ride to the vacation. Or students would list a series of events without really establishing a conflict and gradually drawing the action to a climax and resolution. To determine narrative pacing as our area of focus, we didn't just look at the numbers from district and state assessments. We examined lots of student work samples in order to identify a common obstacle to proficient writing. It was that specific. Then we were able to say, this is a measurable outcome that we can achieve. We can really focus on this and sink our teeth into it. How do we teach kids to structure a story? We read, shared ideas, talked with experts, came up with new graphic organizers to help students organize their prewriting, chose mentor texts that could allow us to teach story structure, and worked together to implement new practices that would help improve the narrative writing. And then we came back together and asked, did we succeed or not? That's what's really effective, when teachers have the ability to look at the data very specifically—not general data, not numeric data, but concrete examples of student performance tasks—identify the strengths and weaknesses, and then collectively implement interventions.

How did you find the time to do all of that?

We did have common planning time during the school day, but we used that time for our day-to-day collaborative curriculum planning. We also held school-wide instructional improvement meetings, which we called Inquiry Cycle meetings, after school. We have a faculty meeting

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PERSPECTIVES



“There has been so much emphasis on school reform and so little emphasis on the existing wisdom of the people being asked to implement the reform.”

*-Karen Engels,
Cambridge Public
Schools*

PERSPECTIVES



“It’s just a much closer chain of causality between the input and the output.”

**-Karen Engels,
Cambridge Public
Schools**

Insights from a Teacher Leader, continued

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once a week, and we used that time to implement the inquiry cycle within our smaller clusters of teachers at the same grade levels.

To get a whole school functioning under that ethos, what kind of training is necessary?

At Teachers21, I worked with schools to train teacher leaders and whole staffs to do this work. Collaboration is expected as a given, but it’s not a given. Learning how to be collaborative in this kind of objective-oriented environment is a skill. And it’s not a skill that all people necessarily bring to their work as teachers, because teaching historically has been a very individual occupation. So teachers need training in how to listen, how to navigate conflict, how to have open, honest dialogue about issues that raise vulnerability about people’s own practice, how to be non-judgmental in identifying issues. Even for me, with my background in this work, I find that laying my data on the table is very anxiety-provoking. Teachers need lots of practice. They also need to be assured that the purpose of digging into student work is not to judge teachers, not to evaluate teachers, but to collectively take on the responsibility for improving outcomes to students. It’s a collective responsibility rather than an individual responsibility.

After the training is in place, how can a school continue to foster a culture conducive to teacher leadership?

Schools need ongoing structures for teacher voices to participate in decision-making. Having a structure like a leadership team with representation from all of the different stakeholders in the building, where people are able to vocalize concerns as well as implement decisions, is really important. So is having instructional coaches who support teams in implementing their goals. It takes a culture of trust. For some schools, that’s already in place, and for other schools it’s going to happen over time.

What supports do teacher leaders need to fulfill the leadership role?

I think that coaches and teacher leaders need a lot of training and support around how to find the balance between pushing for improvement and maintaining a supportive relationship with teachers. And I think it’s a very hard role to navigate.

How can a school or district identify and

select those who would be good instructional leaders? What should the selection process look like?

It’s important that teachers are self-selected. In other words, teachers must have the opportunity to volunteer for these positions; they shouldn’t be required. It’s a lot of time and responsibility and another level of skill. Not all excellent teachers are necessarily excellent teacher leaders.

Your school doesn’t offer incentives for team leaders, so what do you think leads people to take on such a demanding role?

I think that teachers want to feel that they have agency. When teachers do take on leadership roles they feel more satisfied with their school culture, with the professional development they’re getting, with the way their time is being spent, and with the kinds of decisions that the school is making.

Do you think that incentives of a more tangible kind are a good idea?

I do. I do think that for this work to be sustainable, teacher leaders should ideally be compensated. It’s the only field in the world where people take on more sophisticated work requiring greater expertise and don’t actually get more pay. I am in favor of districts coming up with differentiated pay scales that aren’t based on how long you’ve served or how many credits you’ve obtained. If you take on more responsibility because you’ve proven that you have unique skills to offer, then it makes sense for you to be compensated for that responsibility.

How would you say that a strong culture of teacher leadership impacts the actual students in the classroom?

I think it’s very, very direct. When there isn’t a culture of teacher leadership, what teachers are doing with their time is driven by a central office agenda that’s often very far removed from the reality of a particular group of students. It leads to a lot of wasted time and teachers working on things that aren’t really the highest-leverage areas of need. When teachers are looking at their own students’ work and figuring out what needs to be done to improve it, it’s just a much closer chain of causality between the input and the output.

How could that impact or that improved chain of causality, which is not as simple as raised test scores or even a change in student narrative structure, be evaluated?

Insights from a Teacher Leader, continued

[Continued from opposite page]

When teams set out to accomplish a specific goal, it's critical that part of their planning include developing a way to assess their progress over time. When our team looked at narrative organization, we decided that we would use the district's winter and spring writing assessments to analyze student improvement in the trait of organization.

On a larger scale, I think teachers will be more likely to stay in the profession when they feel more empowered and more satisfied. We know that right now there's a 50% turnover for teach-

ers after 3 years, and numerous studies say it's not teacher pay that pushes teachers out of the profession, it's isolation, the working conditions, or the feeling that they don't have agency. So when teachers do feel like they have agency, they're going to be happier, and a happier teacher's classroom is without question a better place for students to be. I'd like to see more research on the connection between school cultures that prioritize teacher leadership and retention rates in those buildings.

The Central Office Administrator's Role in Sustaining Teacher Leadership

Teacher leadership as an organic phenomenon will always be a part of the educational landscape, but the formalization and wide adoption of expanded teacher influence requires a sustaining culture and well-crafted organizational structure. The role of the school administrator has been discussed at length in teacher leadership research. However, central office administrators also shape the ways in which teacher leadership is formalized and sustained.

Superintendent David Raiche of Plainville emphasizes the importance of staying close to the work of teaching and learning. Raiche is the superintendent of a two-school elementary district, and can maintain a constant presence in both schools. Having worked in larger districts, he knows that such immediate access is not always possible, but recommends that every central office make the commitment to have someone near the action. "Regardless of what the title is, I think there needs to be someone in central office whose role is to support and if necessary to direct the work of teachers and administrators." In Dennis-Yarmouth, a larger regional district, Superintendent Carol Woodbury shares the work with a Director of Curriculum and a Director of Pupil Services; the three administrators meet frequently with principals and then reconvene to discuss the trends that they see.

Superintendents can also act as powerful advocates for teacher leadership structures. Ms. Woodbury feels that it is her role to persevere when school committees question the need for stipends for teacher leaders. "I stand with my principals and teachers. If we really want to make changes and improvement in student learning we

need the structure to do that." A strong partnership with the teachers' union has also paved the way for a collaborative culture. Ms. Woodbury is a proponent of interest-based bargaining, an alternative to traditional bargaining that involves stakeholders working as a team to develop a contract. "When I had the opportunity to talk about why I wanted teacher leaders during the negotiations, I could get buy-in from the people around the table," Ms. Woodbury recalls.

The administrator's culture-building role [discussed on page 1 and 2] also impacts the level of teacher participation in district-wide decisions. Superintendent Maureen Sabolinski of Franklin suggests that administrators can encourage risk-taking through example: "The administrator needs to be reflective and willing to take a risk by allowing personnel to make mistakes. He or she needs to establish a culture of trust and reflection for any distributed leadership to be effective." Mr. Raiche holds an expectation that teachers will be involved in leading. "Every person who works in the district should lead in some way, and I think it's an administrator's responsibility to define how a particular teacher can lead others, or how others can learn from that teacher." He recalls his early years in the classroom, when a group of senior teachers—informal teacher leaders—met with him every day to discuss his students, their progress, and possible improvements to his practice. "They took that responsibility," says Mr. Raiche, "and that's the kind of teacher I wanted to be. You want to do your best, but also to help everybody else do their best, and the kids have the best chance for a good education when everyone's on board with that philosophy."

PERSPECTIVES



"If we really want to make changes and improvement in student learning, we need the structure to do that."

*-Carol Woodbury,
Dennis-Yarmouth
Public Schools*

**WORKING GROUP
FOR EDUCATOR
EXCELLENCE**

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Mission of the Working Group for Educator Excellence

WGEE is a broad coalition of 60 individuals from 26 statewide organizations who are united in the belief that the most effective way to provide every child with an excellent education is to take a systemic approach to influencing what teachers and educational leaders know and can do. We believe when key elements of the human resource system are strengthened to align with one another and with a common research-based, field-tested core of professional knowledge, the cumulative effect will be improved student achievement and a more efficient and effective system that strengthens teacher and leader expertise.

Human Resource Pilot Project

The pilot project, funded by the RTTT initiative, is a joint effort by the WGEE and DESE to systematically and strategically create, strengthen, and align the key influences on the quality of teaching and leadership in three school districts: Attleboro, Brockton, and Revere. The influences, or levers, include Recruitment, Hiring, and Placement, Comprehensive Induction, Professional Development, Supervision and Evaluation, Teacher Leadership, Organizational Structure, and Adult Professional Culture. Through qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis, we aim to determine whether alignment will improve the quality of teaching and leadership. Goals of the project include:

- Increasing student achievement.
- Using cost, time, and resources with greater efficiency.
- Improving teaching and leadership practices.
- Increasing the satisfaction and retention of teachers and leaders.
- Improving school and district culture.