

Promising Practices and Implementation Tools

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- 3. Lever Addressed:** Teacher Leadership and Professional Culture
- 4. Title of Promising Practice:** Team Leaders at Every Grade Level or as the Heads of High School Departments
- 5. District(s) Where Implemented:** Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District
- 6. Applicable Grade Levels:** All PreK-12
- 7. How This Practice Reflects District's Mission & Core Values:** The establishment of teacher leaders at all levels K-12, mirrors the districts mission to "Empower Each Student to Achieve Excellence with Integrity in a Changing World." The district further believes that teachers are key to student learning in that 1.) Teachers are role models, 2) Teachers inspire, motivate, and empower learners and 3.) Teaching is collaborative and involves on-going learning.
- 8. Goals of This Practice:** 1.) Continuously improve student achievement through focused team efforts, shared leadership and decision-making 2.) Utilize the skills and talents of the teaching staff in meaningful leadership roles to expand leadership capacity beyond that of the building leader.
- 9. Description of This Practice and How it Addresses Criteria for This Lever:** The district began it's work to build a strong teacher leadership model in the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional Schools over five years ago. As a result of this continued commitment, team leadership positions have been created at every grade level and at every school across the district.

These Teacher Leader positions were successfully negotiated into the contract and are all stipend positions. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, and the detailed job description is also attached as an implementation tool.

Specifically, Team Leaders are responsible for:

Leading weekly grade level or content Professional Learning Community meetings (PLC's)

Coordinating special programs and team meetings

Attending five two-hour district meetings throughout the year for ongoing training

Participating in a five day summer leadership training

Communicating and planning with other team members and building principal

Initiating activities that promote collegiality and positive school culture

Serving on both the site-based Teaching and Learning Council and district

Teaching and Learning Council on an advisory basis to examine data, develop budget requests, recommend professional development, provide oversight for curriculum review and teacher induction program, and recommend new programs or policies.

Extensive training, the equivalent of forty hours, has also been in place at Dennis-Yarmouth for over five years. The Superintendent refers to this teacher leader training as a two-pronged approach that she identifies as "Human Resources" and "Working on the Work".

First, annual training is provided for the development of leadership skills, i.e. how to foster collaboration, encourage reluctant participants, how to develop team norms and protocols, understand the similarities and differences between adult and student learning etc.

Secondly, in terms of "working the work", training is provided on the educational focus for the year. Examples are: training in the development of common assessments, effective protocols to examine student work, and how to create SMART goals to assess student progress. The initial training started with how to use data effectively and each year a new skill has been added to the repertoire.

As detailed below, this promising practice exemplifies many of the criteria necessary for successful teacher leadership, career advancement and professional culture as they relate to levers for positive change.

For Teacher Leadership and Career Advancement:

The district utilizes the expertise of teachers to enhance student learning by creating new roles and career opportunities for exemplary teachers to have responsibility for instructional leadership.

District has identified, defined and developed teacher leadership roles with the highest leverage for improving student outcomes in the local context.

District has a plan for how teacher leaders will be utilized and implemented. It provides a clear job description for each role, which focuses teacher leadership on instructional improvement (rather than functions such as coordination of testing, or direct services to students).

Support structures, professional development and schedules enable teacher leaders to have the same regular opportunities with colleagues to collaborate. Leadership teams at the school and district level allow teachers and administrators to collaborate and share decision-making. Teacher-leaders' roles, administrator roles, and leadership team functions are well defined to enable those purposes.

District has established a process for identifying, recruiting, training, and supporting teacher leaders.

Union and management have collaborated to determine compensation for new roles.

Support structures, and operating relationships are clearly defined for maximum effectiveness.

For Professional Culture:

Teachers regularly engage in instructional conversations, peer observations, collaborative planning, and ongoing collegial support.

District and schools are characterized by a climate of shared responsibility for continuous improvement.

Data are continuously examined and analyzed to guide instructional decision-making.

District and school culture is characterized by trust and willingness to discuss "undiscussable" issues.

10. How This Practice Was Implemented So It Was More Successful Than Others:

The key to the success of this practice started with the teacher contract

negotiations process the year prior to implementation. Teachers agreed to use an interest-based bargaining process, which created the opportunity to discuss the importance of teacher leadership, identify what the benefits of having teachers in this role would be, and what roles and responsibilities the leader would have. This started the professional educational process moving in a positive direction.

Training for principals with reference to the work of PLC's occurred the same year as contract negotiations with the teachers. To begin the work of creating PLC's in each school, grade level and content area teams were then allowed to meet during common planning time, but without an official leader, as the positions had not yet been approved. However, the reason this was a more successful endeavor than others is that all were committed to having conversations that were student and instruction centered, and these conversations were also happening simultaneously with principal and teacher's union leadership trainings.

Team Leader training with principals was the next important factor in successful implementation. Teachers and principals trained together for forty hours annually, and this included specifics of effective leadership practices. Beyond selecting "good" teachers and expect that they will be successful leaders of their peers, teachers need the training and ongoing support that this model offers. In addition, they receive the support of their principals who train beside them and meet with them at least monthly or twice a month to address their teams' and school's needs.

The Superintendent, Director of Instruction, and Director of Pupil Services all modeled the importance of PLC's that are focused on student learning by participating in the training throughout the year as well. The central office staff engages principals in dialogue about what types of training they believe the teacher leaders need next, and principals attend as many PLC meetings as they can. Overall, administrators and teachers jointly share the work of school improvement and student achievement.

In addition, when the district was faced with closing a school the year before, they were able to maintain staff rather than reduce positions. This allowed increased flexibility to create a schedule for teams of teachers to meet weekly during the school day.

The leadership model implemented throughout the district has created tremendous ownership of the professional learning community work, evidenced in the fact that the district Teaching and Learning Council is comprised of sixty teachers and administrators, or about a fifth of the overall staff.

11. How This Practice Changed The District or School:

The value of teachers in leadership roles focused on the goal of improving student achievement has been clearly demonstrated. For instance, the results of Mass Tell and the district's own K-12 Insight Site-Based Culture survey indicate that teachers feel empowered as partners; and beyond the team leader positions, the district has begun the work of creating content coaching positions.

Based on the effective implementation of team leaders throughout the district, there is now a mechanism in place to work together to collaboratively handle any changes and challenges that arise. This proved to be true this year when facing the new educator evaluation system. Having the teachers' union in a place where they are used to working collaboratively with administrators made this implementation a joint process. Having a process in place to provide team leaders with additional training to help their teams through the development of SMART goals and educator plans was invaluable. According to the superintendent, the current attitude toward this team process is that it's "just the way we do things around here."

12. Resources (time, money, materials etc.) Required For Successful Implementation:

The team leader position was negotiated into the contract during regular negotiations, and as a result, the district funds an annual stipend. Team Leaders in PreK-8 currently receive a stipend of \$3214 annually. High school team leaders receive \$1071 in addition to a department head stipend.

Time to meet during the day is another valuable resource that contributes to the successful implementation of this leadership model. This is also a budget issue, in that money is provided to hire staff needed to cover classes, so that teacher teams can meet regularly.

The district also recognizes that it is important to provide extensive training and time for people to work together, as training may need to vary depending on whether a teacher is more veteran or brand new. Therefore, the support must be there to help teachers at varying levels of experience to transition from working in isolation to working collaboratively and to cultivate the skills needed to take on these leadership roles.

13. Tools You Used To Implement Or Advance This Practice:

See separate attachment:

Team Leader Job Description