

A Guide for Teacher-Powered Site Administrators

*Collaborative Leadership
for Thriving Teams*

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Having a shared purpose (mission, vision, values, and goals of the school) is commonly seen as important in traditional schools as well as teacher-powered schools. One key difference is that teacher-powered teams “use their autonomy to take the words off the wall and translate them into action in significant and substantive ways... It’s not just the shared purpose statement that matters—it’s the process of *developing* the shared purpose.” (Shared Purpose Discussion Starter). A teacher-powered administrator is often tasked with the duty of helping the team stay focused and true to their co-created shared purpose.

For more information about developing your team’s shared purpose, view the Teacher-Powered Discussion Starters at www.teacherpowered.org/starters.



Reflection Questions for Individual Administrators

1. As the site administrator who do you serve?

2. How do you see your role as a site administrator of a teacher-powered school in regard to your teacher team?

3. In what ways do you keep your school’s shared purpose and students at the center of decision-making?



Team Conversation Starters

1. Many teacher-powered teams describe that one role of the administrator is to help the team stay focused on their shared purpose. How can the administrator do this at your school?
2. How has your team's shared purpose stayed true to the original design, and at the same time adapted to meet the changing needs of your students and community?
3. How often do you review/adjust your shared purpose and what is that process?
4. What decisions should always be made as a whole team?



Common Challenges

Teams that co-create their shared purpose and devote time regularly to keeping it alive know how important it is to the success of their school. The challenges that arise in this area often stem from team members who, for a variety of reasons, were not part of creating (and reaffirming) the shared purpose. This might include new teachers who started later in the process, part-time teachers, and support staff.

You will notice that one of the top tips for multiple topics in this guide is to “hire well”. This is because **teams can stop a lot of challenges from occurring by hiring people who are a good fit culturally as well as skill-wise for their school.** By hiring teachers who are already aligned with your school's shared purpose, the cultural integration will be much easier.

Part-time teachers and support staff need to have time built into their schedules to participate in team discussions and decision-making. Michele Pellam, headmaster at Another Course to College in Boston explains, “It is so important we all feel as equals on our team and generate shared purpose and investments from all staff in all decisions.” Being upfront about that expectation with all staff sets everyone up for success.



Tips and Tricks

Be a Facilitator

- The role of facilitator is one that collaborative leaders often take on. In this role, the **administrator helps the team find paths to accomplish their larger vision, mission, and goals.** Alissa writes, “My role can best be described as a facilitator who helps the team stay focused on the task at hand and ensures that the decisions support the mission and vision of our school.”
- Successful teacher-powered teams have a **well-developed shared purpose.** This is the foundation upon which everything else is built. “Although we may change the methods of meeting our goals based upon the students and school community, our goals stay the same,” shares Irene Salter, administrator at Chrysalis Charter School.

Focus on Vision When Prioritizing

- **Constantly evaluate and frame discussions back to your shared purpose.** Ayla explains it this way: “We also have what we call ‘meta moments’. Those are times when we stop our conversation during a meeting, and we explain what’s happening with the view that people may know what’s going on or they may not. We just want to be sure that everyone has equal access to the conversation.” This ensures that the whole team, especially newer staff who lack historical knowledge, is on the same page and approaching the discussion from the same space.

Teams also intentionally weave in questions to keep themselves accountable to their agreed upon shared purpose. “We ask each other ‘How is that innovative? How does that impact students with disabilities, including significant disabilities?’ And we hold each other accountable through the conversations, decisions made, and support that we give each other to co-construct something that is unique for our education system,” explains Anna O’Connor-Morin, Senior Director at UCP Bailes.

- **Weave shared purpose into a weekly event or meeting.** “[A] mission committee has a place on our weekly Staff Meeting Agenda, anchoring us to our shared purpose through sharing positive stories of student successes as well as celebrating one another for living our values and bringing that to light through staff members honoring one another both at close of staff meeting as well as in our Weekly Bulletin. This keeps us grounded in our shared purpose and in maintaining a positive school culture,” writes Michele.

Schedule Specific Time Devoted to Shared Purpose

- **Intentionally scheduling time for this important task means it will actually get done on a regular basis despite the constant pace of schools.** Shared purpose conversations often fall into the category of important, but not urgent. “Creating the time and space for staff members to discuss and choose an instructional focus, be explicit about our values, and how this is reflected in the professional practice and student learning goals we set—individually and in teacher teams—which are linked to observations and evaluations, has helped to create congruence between whole school goals and individual teacher practices,” writes Michele.
- Many teacher-powered teams have **retreats at least once a year** preferably over multiple days and off campus. “The first way we stay focused on our shared purpose is assuredly at our annual GSC Retreat. It’s a time away from campus when we are blessed with the warmth and serenity of summer sunshine to reflect on who we are and why we do what we do.” shares Letitia. “Spending time at the beginning of the year, every year, with our whole team revisiting our founding principles and big ideas sets the stage for the whole year and gets everyone on the same page,” writes Buffy.

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