

Bettendorf Community School District teacher leadership study results

Introduction

Dramatically improving our nation's public schools is no simple matter. Teachers must teach increasingly diverse students, who must be able to compete in a global economy that requires them to master more complex knowledge as well as new basics of cross-cultural problem-solving and communication. Today, schools, districts, and states are under unrelenting pressure from the public, the private sector, and the federal government to improve education and increase student learning. Even the best individual school principals—and a small cadre of assistants—do not possess all the know-how and/or bandwidth to address the needs of growing numbers of highly mobile families, second language learners, and students living in poverty as well as the opportunities created by new technologies for 21st-century teaching and learning. A recent poll found that one in four teachers nationwide are extremely or very interested in hybrid roles that would allow them to both teach and lead outside their schools, districts, and states—while 84% of those who teach do not want to become administrators.¹

In June 2013, the State of Iowa enacted the Teacher Leadership and Compensation System, which aims to transform the profession by adequately compensating teachers and creating teacher leadership systems. The goals of the legislation are ambitious: to attract promising new teachers, retain effective teachers, promote collaboration, reward professional growth and effective teaching, and improve student achievement. Besides raising the minimum salary and providing induction support for all novices, Iowa's new policy framework provides the opportunity for administrators, with the activation of teacher leaders, to reinvent their profession.

As part of this legislation, school districts are charged with establishing their vision and goals for the program and developing systems appropriate for their local contexts. All district systems must include a minimum salary of \$33,500 for all full-time teachers, provide induction programs for teachers new to the profession, identify multiple differentiated teacher leadership roles and develop a rigorous selection process for placing teachers in those roles, and provide professional development aligned with the Iowa Professional Development Model. Once these requirements are met, districts are at liberty to select one of three approaches in designing their system:

- The Teacher Career Pathways Model creates model, mentor, and lead teacher roles;
- The Instructional Coach Model creates three leadership roles: model teacher, instructional coach, and curriculum and professional development leader; and

- The Comparable Plan Model is open to local innovation.

In the current year, the State of Iowa has appropriated \$3.5 million for planning grants. For the following three years, the state intends to allocate \$150 million to the districts participating in the system. While the notion of teacher leadership is not new, enacting teacher leadership models on such a grand scale is.

How do school districts identify and select teacher leaders—and for what purpose and role? How ready are teachers and administrators for the new roles of leading from the classroom? What kind of roles do teachers believe they are ready to fulfill? And how well-suited are schools, as they are currently organized, for teachers to lead? These are a just a few questions Iowa educators need to answer in developing their plans.

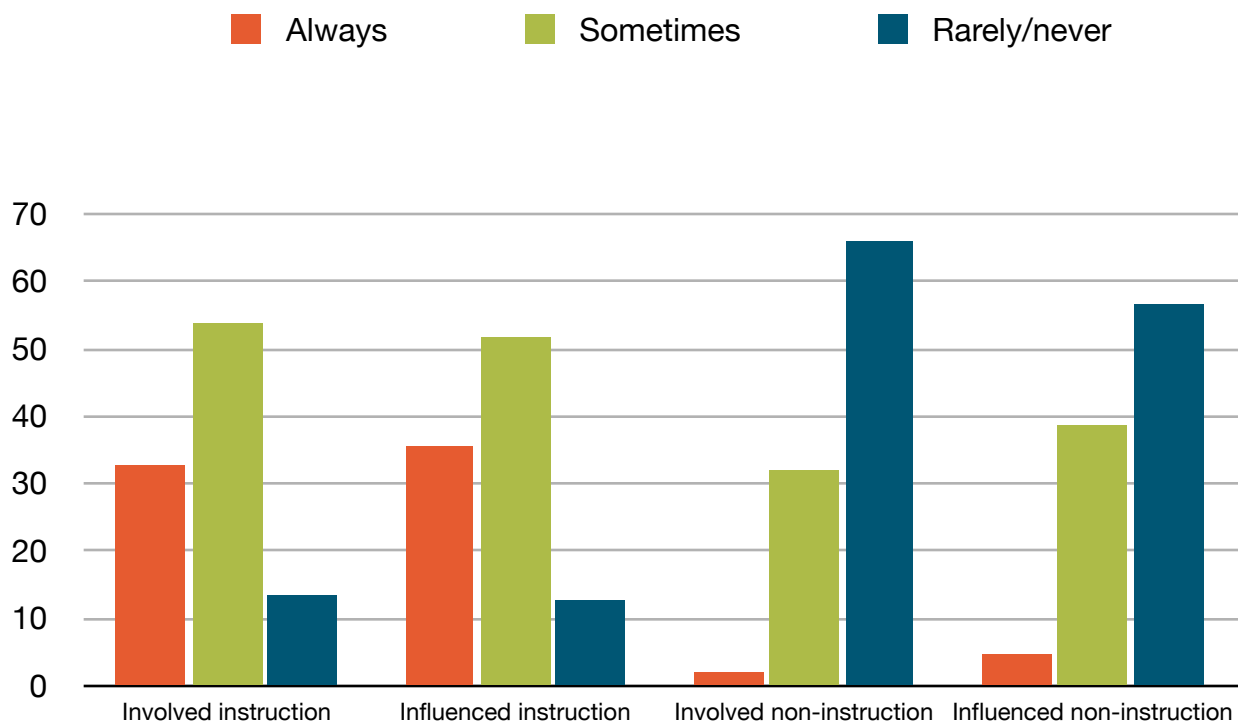
In this report, the Center for Teaching Quality offers the Bettendorf Community School District some insight into these matters, drawing on an analysis of an online survey of 278 teachers and administrators (88% of the total). As expected, the vast majority of the respondents serve as teachers (n= 255). (See Appendix A for a brief overview of CTQ's approach.)

This report (#1) provides a general analysis of survey findings, focused primarily on the key conditions related to cultivating district plans for a new leadership structure, as well as a detailed summary of how teachers defined the role they would play as leaders to advance student learning and other school goals. (In report #2, we will focus on how teachers' responses differed by their years' experience, subjects and grade levels taught, and schools, as well as what might explain these differences—if they exist.)

Top-line survey findings

- Approximately 17% of the teacher respondents consider most of their colleagues as leaders, and over 50% believe “about one-half” of their school staff could be considered as teacher leaders. At the same time, administrators reported that “just a few” of the district’s teachers could be considered leaders.
- The vast majority of teachers (over 80%) report that they are “involved in” and “influence” decisions related to instruction. But only about one-third claim that they “always” or “nearly always” have opportunities to lead when it comes to instruction. Far fewer teachers report that they are “involved in” and “influence” decisions related to matters such as schedules, budgets, and staffing—all critical to defining and capitalizing on leadership from the classroom.

Table 1: Percentages of teachers who report frequency in leading when it comes to instruction



While over 60% of the teachers surveyed believe they are “equally able to volunteer their opinion” about plans and programs in their school, fewer than one in five report they can do so “always.” At the same time, more than 80% of the teachers believe they are “supported to implement their own solutions to challenges in their buildings,” but yet again, only 21% report they are “always” supported in doing so.

- While 80% of the teacher respondents believe they can “access professional learning opportunities that can help them lead,” fewer than one in three report they can do so “always.”
- About 75% of the teachers surveyed believe their colleagues “know who the teaching experts are”; less than 12% “strongly agree.”
- More than 86% of the teacher respondents believe that current teacher leaders “are respected by their colleagues”; only 18% “strongly agree.” Slightly over one-half of the districts’ teachers agree that principals (and APs) are teaching experts; less than 10% strongly agree.

- The vast majority of teachers have few opportunities to one another teach. Less than 20 percent report that they “observe one another teaching” at least once a month. Almost 40 percent report that they “never” are able to do so. Only a slightly higher percentage of teachers report having opportunities to team teach, but almost 50 percent report that they are “never” able to do so.
- A large percentage of the teachers surveyed (88%) report daily or weekly collaboration with “colleagues in their building,” but very few have opportunities to collaborate across the district or state and with outside organizations. Very few also report writing about teaching or making presentations to outside groups.

Table 2: Percentages of teachers who report frequency in collaboration with colleagues and outside the district

Collaboration	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Less often
With teachers and administration in building	34%	54%	8%	4%
With teachers and administration across the district	1%	1%	22%	76%
With teachers outside of the district	0%	1%	3%	96%

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Less often
Working with outside organizations on partnerships	1%	5%	10%	84%
Writing about their teaching and other leadership work	0%	2%	8%	90%
Representing the school at public meetings	0%	2%	21%	77%

How Bettendorf educators view the roles of teacher leaders

Of those teachers who responded to the survey, 236 provided an answer to our open-ended prompt regarding the role they would play as leaders from the classroom.

Imagine that next school year, you were in a teacher leadership role. Describe the role you would play during your release time as a teacher leader to advance student learning and other goals for your school.

It is important to note that this prompt was oriented in a manner that might influence respondents to contemplate teacher leadership roles in particular ways and not others. The mention of release time implies work during the school day. The focus on student learning suggests instruction-related leadership, rather

than other areas of leadership. Still, taking into consideration the orientation of the question, the answers provide an interesting and important perspective on what educators think about teacher leadership work that might matter to student learning.

While our analysis categorizes answers by primary teacher leadership roles, in practice these roles are likely related, even closely entwined. For example, a number of respondents wrote about working to provide more time for teacher collaboration to improve instruction. These responses were grouped in the category of promoting teacher collaboration; however, it is difficult to see how this could be achieved without working with school administrators—another role category.

Table 3: Frequencies and percentages of respondents by self-identified leadership role

Type of leadership role	Number of respondents	Percentage (n=236)
Promoting teacher collaboration	47	19.92%
Individual teacher support and development	41	17.37%
Learning and sharing with teacher colleagues	36	15.25%
Curriculum development and implementation	26	11.02%
Technology in the classroom	14	5.93%
Working with administrators	10	4.24%
Leading formal professional development	7	2.97%
Multi-function work	12	5.08%
Miscellaneous	21	8.90%
Not sure	12	5.08%
Not interested	10	4.24%
Total	236	100%

Note: Row percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

Promoting teacher collaboration

The largest number and proportion of respondents identified promoting teacher collaboration for instructional improvement as the primary focus of the teacher leadership work they might do. Forty-seven respondents (20%) identified this particular role. They pointed to many aspects of collaboration that they might work to promote, including mutual sharing of knowledge and practice, joint identification of problems and needs, interactive learning, collaborative problem-solving, and team planning and development. Also noted were collaborative data collection and analysis of current practices leading to the development of new practices.

Typical among answers were the following:

- “I could offer more collaboration time with grade level teams within the building.”
- “Being more of a facilitator of discussion and inputs.”
- “Collaborate and work with others to develop solutions to issues.”
- “Collaborating and discussing issues then generating action plans to implement [solutions].”

Most respondents described their efforts to promote teacher collaboration as “facilitation,” rather than “direction” or “in-front” leadership. Their answers suggested an enabling function, an approach to create space and opportunity for others to interact in order to learn and improve their work in the classroom with students. They also suggested a stance of “leadership from the middle” or even “leadership from behind,” being primarily attentive to the process of collaboration, and being led themselves by other teachers’ needs, concerns, and definitions of problems. As one respondent wrote: “I would meet with teachers and gain their input to see what needs to be addressed.” Indeed, the way in which those needs would be met would more likely be collaboratively co-constructed by teachers than provided by the teacher leader.

Several respondents went further to write about creating additional “occasions” for collaborative work, finding additional time for teachers to work together, providing materials and other tangible resources, and even establishing new collaborative groups. A number of respondents included the ideas of promoting collaboration within their grade level or other teams (e.g., data teams). Others wrote about promoting collaboration more broadly, across structures of teams and formal workgroups. Even more suggested a view of collaboration as transcendent of such structures (e.g., “... support teachers across different subject areas across all grades”), as being something natural and informal, emanating from teachers’ interests and needs, rather than driven by particular organizational arrangements—most likely established by administrators).

Individual teacher support and development

The second largest number and proportion of respondents (n=41 or 17%) identified individual teacher support as the primary role they would play as teacher leader. Respondents described this role in a number of different approaches, but focused on developing and supporting individual teachers in their classrooms. Teachers surveyed mentioned particular support roles, such as coaching and mentoring. They described visiting individual teachers’ classrooms, observing instruction, providing feedback on what might and might not be working, and helping teachers develop solutions to problems they might be having.

Unlike the role of promoting collaboration for collective learning, development, and improvement, this role is described as more personal and more distinctly tailored to the particular needs and concerns of the individual teacher. Respondents mentioned support that can be provided to individual teachers by informing them of “best practices,” assisting them in identifying and framing problems, and providing examples of what other teachers may be doing. In addition to a focus on instructional improvement, some respondents in this category also focused on social support for teachers (e.g., encouragement).

Like the manner in which others described the role of promoting collaboration, respondents who wrote about this role used language of “support” and “development,” rather than direction. Common were the verbs “facilitate,” “help,” “assist,” and “guide.” Rare were verbs such as “tell” or “direct.”

Examples of answers in this role category include:

- “I would meet with [other teachers] and observe their teaching and see what is working and not working.”
- “I would envision sharing different instructional methods, providing instructional feedback..., and anything else that would be necessary to help teachers.”

- “I would come alongside teachers to encourage them to be the best teachers they can be by observing them with their students, discussing solutions, and modeling strategies if needed.”
- “I would ask teachers in what areas they felt they would like to improve and work with them to improve those areas. I would observe and help coach teachers on best practices.”

Learning and sharing with teacher colleagues

Thirty-six respondents (15%) identified their primary leadership role as what can be called learning and sharing. These respondents wrote about attending workshops and conferences, reading and conducting research, visiting other schools and districts, and speaking with other teachers to develop their own understanding and to identify new ideas and “best practices” to share with their colleagues to improve instruction. One individual wrote succinctly that the primary role he or she would undertake is “learner.” Other respondents also spoke about identifying and securing tangible resources (e.g., instructional materials) for their colleagues’ use. While this “brokerage” function of leadership was focused primarily on bringing learning and resources from the “outside in,” some respondents also wrote about gathering ideas and information about practice and disseminating this knowledge to others all within the same building.

Typical of responses in this category are the following:

- “I would go to conferences, workshops, schools with proven success to learn what they are doing that [we] are not doing. I would like to share that knowledge with [my colleagues].”
- “Give opportunities to compare what your current strategies and techniques are to... other schools and districts across the nation.”
- “Attend conferences, read, research.”
- “I believe in not reinventing the wheel. We have many programs going on in other districts that are close [to our district]. Visiting and observing [are] a wonderful way to learn.”
- “I would research different types of instructional strategies and programs to maybe implement in our school.”

Curriculum development and implementation

The fourth largest group of respondents identified curriculum development and implementation as the primary focus of their teacher leadership work. Twenty-six respondents (11%) focused on this role. These individuals mentioned working on a number of tasks associated with curriculum design, particularly developing materials and lesson plans. Some referred to working directly with other teachers to develop their understanding of curriculum and their ability to implement it.

Several curricula and curricular foci were mentioned in these responses. A number of respondents referred to the development and implication of curriculum related to the Common Core State Standards. Others referenced Problem-Based Learning (PBL) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS). A few respondents wrote about working to promote math-science curriculum and arts curriculum, and several mentioned promoting greater curricular integration and coherence.

Consistent with the first two role categories, respondents frequently framed curriculum leadership in terms of collaborative development and providing individual teacher classroom-level support for implementation.

Technology in the classroom

Fourteen respondents (6%) identified roles related specifically to introducing and integrating technology in the classroom and providing support to teachers for doing so. Some of these individuals drew a link between technology and curriculum development, but their answers gave primary emphasis to technology. Most all respondents who focused on technology leadership did so in relation to instructional improvement.

For example, one respondent pointed to “helping roll out any technological advances/opportunities as part of the tech team to help the entire staff or my department members be more skilled and comfortable using them to improve instruction.” Another respondent wrote: “Research ways to integrate technology into projects.” Two others noted: “I would see myself helping other teachers infuse technology into their lessons” and “giving technology help to those who are challenged.”

Working with administrators

Ten respondents (4%) identified working with administrators as their primary leadership role. These individuals identified several dimensions of this work. First, several pointed to serving as a voice of teachers to administrators and advocating to administrators on behalf of teachers. A number of others wrote about participating with administrators in school-level instructional decision-making (e.g., development of school-wide instructional goals, textbook selection, scheduling). For example, one respondent wrote: “Leaders could be advocates for the teachers, especially those who don’t feel comfortable approaching their administrators with concerns.” Another stated: “Be a possible go-between for teachers and administration so that people can feel their problems can be heard without backlash.” And yet another: “I would focus on common building goals and set up common tools for usage by all.”

Several respondents indicated that they could serve as conduits for communication and information flow between teachers and administrators, particularly helping administrators get information to staff members, and helping teachers communicate what is happening in classrooms to administrators at both school and district levels. For example, one respondent wrote: “[I would] work to facilitate communication within my department and between my department and administration.” Another added: “I would make [administrators] more aware of the work that happens in our rooms.”

Several other respondents pointed to working with administrators to make better use of time spent in faculty meetings and formal teacher professional development sessions. As one individual wrote: “Whatever the area I’m leading may be, I would make sure that the time was being spent productively.”

Leading formal professional development

Compared to those who wrote about providing support to individual teachers and others who talked about promoting and facilitating collaboration for instructional improvement, relatively few respondents identified planning and leading sessions of formal professional development (e.g., workshops, training sessions, etc.) as their preferred leadership activity. Only seven respondents (3%) identified this role. Among these respondents, several indicated that they would lead professional development that was focused on teachers’ particular classroom needs. Typical among these answers: “I would lead workshops based on teacher need to help them help their students.” Another respondent suggested that working to plan and lead formal

professional development might help teachers to manage the implementation load of multiple programs for which they hold responsibility.

Multi-function work

A relatively small number of respondents described leadership work they might do in terms of multiple functions. That is, they described work that embodied several of the roles described above, portraying teacher leadership in a more holistic or comprehensive way. Implied in some of their responses is a “complementarity” of roles, where particular aspects of teacher leadership might inform and mutually support other aspects. This work is described by several of these respondents as cutting across classroom, team/grade, and school levels.

Perhaps the best way to describe this more comprehensive view of teacher leadership role is to present a few examples:

- “I would collaborate with teachers to work on ideas to support their subject area learning, research ideas to support any brainstorming idea for a project. Also it would be great to visit or talk with another school [that] has done something similar or have a guest speaker come in to assist. Plus, it would be wonderful to pull the community in if applicable. Helping teach the project would be great as well. I would definitely be hands-on and team teach whenever possible. Another problem I would try to help solve is funding.”
- “Work collaboratively with teachers to increase effectiveness of instruction through the implementation of research-based instructional practices. I would also plan on leading professional development with the building principal, leading professional research groups/PLCs, co-teaching, model teaching and providing increased opportunity for collegial collaboration. Additionally, I would provide support with data analysis and data team work.”
- “Collaborating with teachers to create an agenda that meets the needs of the teaching staff, presenting professional development as needed/requested AND (emphasis in the original) supporting data teams, work on [organizational] barriers to learning, removing barriers to [achieving] specific school goals; ensuring that release time throughout the year is connected to achievement gaps and school goals. Overall—facilitating and collaborating.”

Miscellaneous

Twenty-one respondents (9%) provided answers that do not fit neatly into the categories above. However, they provide additional insight into many different ways that teachers think about the leadership roles they might engage. Several teachers wrote about working to link or bridge different groups or grade levels of teachers in improvement work (n=4). A few others wrote about assuming leadership roles to chair or lead meetings of formal committees, teams, or departments (n=3). Still more wrote about providing leadership directly to student groups, student co-curricular activities, or student services (n=4). And finally, others (n=7) provided very general or vague responses that ranged from “Follow the job description ... developed for my role,” to “Be a good communicator,” to “Speak or lead to a specific area [of leadership work]”.

Not sure or not interested

Twelve respondents (5%) indicated that they were not sure what teacher leadership roles they might perform if they had the opportunity. And 10 teachers (4%) responded that they were not interested in assuming a teacher leadership role or that they thought that developing teacher leadership roles was not a good idea. Some of these responses reflect personal occupational preferences (e.g., “I am happiest as a teacher in the

classroom with young people.” “I am not interested in taking on a greater role.”). Other answers point to hesitation related to lack of preparation or ability to do the work (e.g., “I do not feel qualified to properly address the scope of a job like this.”) or to a sense that being a leader conflicts with the work and identity of being a teacher (e.g., “Personally, I like to see most/all adults working with children, not peers.”).

Concluding thoughts

In general, the findings of this analysis are not surprising. According to research on teacher leadership, classroom practitioners are likely to frame leadership in terms of collaboration and individual support, which reflect occupational norms of equality, personalism, and non-intervention as well as the existing social relationships with their colleagues and administrators.² Given what has been documented about the sociology of teaching,³ it is not surprising that the primary focus of teacher leadership reflected in these data is instruction or that teacher leadership would be performed primarily in direct interaction with colleagues, rather than administrators. Nor is it surprising that for most respondents the work is aimed at the classroom-level, rather than at the school-level. Classrooms are the places and instruction is the work that teachers know and care most about—and about which they are likely to feel most comfortable and efficacious.

That said, these findings reveal substantial variety in how respondents conceptualize the role of teacher leader, at least as they would perform it if given the opportunity. This variation may reflect differences in school context, in individual teachers’ occupational identities, in their areas of perceived capabilities, in their areas of comfort, and in their proclivities to take risks and stretch the ways in which they envision their work.

In our new book, *Teacherpreneurs*, we documented how teachers come to lead in more expansive ways and the underlying conditions that allow for their influence to be felt in and out of schools.⁴ Leadership skills and opportunities emerge when teachers have a chance to see one another teach in different contexts—and few district teachers (like most of their American teaching colleagues) have chances to do so. In Bettendorf, less than 20 percent of the teachers reported that they “observe one another teaching” at least once a month.

Also, in these responses are both direct and implicit recognition of different work prerogatives of teachers and administrators, conventional domains of work and influence. For teachers contemplating teacher leadership, those domains primarily concern the classroom, instruction, and collegial support. There are relatively few mentions of teacher leadership that overlaps or intrudes upon the “administrative function.”

Related to this point, it is interesting to note aspects of teacher leadership that are absent from survey responses. Our analysis revealed very little focus on school-level, non-instructional decision-making, such as budget and finance (even as it might relate to instruction). We also found virtually no attention to personnel and faculty development (particularly evaluation and accountability, but also hiring and termination). We also found little, if any, mention of teacher leadership at the district level or in relation to professional associations. And there is virtually no mention of teacher leaders’ role in promoting the profession.

We do not believe there is a lack of teachers who are capable of or interested in leading in these roles. Perhaps these omissions are a function of the way the prompt was phrased or because teachers have been socialized to believe these matters are not the province of teacher leadership. These omissions may very well

be a function of what we would predict from research as the conventional orientations that teachers apply in contemplating new teacher leadership roles for themselves. This suggests that it might be important and perhaps most effective to begin to develop teacher leadership around roles about which teachers feel most knowledgeable and comfortable; for which they believe they will receive the most support from teaching colleagues and administrators; and in which they believe they can be the most efficacious.

ENDNOTES

¹ MetLife Corporation (2013). *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Challenges for school leadership*. Retrieved on February 24, 2013 at <https://www.metlife.com/assets/cao/foundation/MetLife-Teacher-Survey-2012.pdf>

² Murphy, J. (2005). *Connecting teacher leadership and school improvement*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press; Smylie, M. A. (1997). Research on teacher leadership: Assessing the state of the art. In B. Biddle et al. (Eds.), *International handbook on teachers and teaching* (pp. 521-592). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer; York-Barr, J., & Duke, K. (2004). What do we know about teacher leadership? Findings from two decades of scholarship. *Review of Educational Research*, 74(3), 255-316.

³ Lortie, D. (1975). *Schoolteacher: A sociological study*. University of Chicago Press.

⁴ Berry, B., Byrd, A., and Wieder, A. (2013). *Teacherpreneurs: Innovative Teachers Who Lead but Don't Leave*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.