The Whole Package:
12 Factors of High-Impact Teacher-Leader Roles

PUBLIC IMPACT

Introduction

"Teacher leadership" is a hot topic across the country. The idea of creating teacher-leadership opportunities that might attract and retain teachers—especially the most effective teachers—appeals to districts wrestling with teacher vacancies, at a time of declining enrollment in schools of education. Stubborn student learning gaps add to the urgency.

But teacher-leader roles will have only the impact they are designed to have. And few are designed to achieve large student learning gains and widespread improvement in teacher effectiveness. This has been true through decades of teacher-leader reforms—renamed and repackaged as career ladders, pay programs, grade-level chairs, and such, but all lacking the core design elements necessary to succeed at scale.

Teacher-leadership efforts will fall short once again—for students, the majority of teachers, and teacher-leaders themselves—unless they avoid the common pitfalls. Any one of the following pitfalls can kill the chance for success of a teacher-leader role, and most roles stumble over several:

- **Temporary.** Teacher-leadership positions funded by temporary grants or a political line item, or associated with a political movement, do not persist long enough to influence recruitment and retention. Teachers notice which positions are tenuous.
- **Detached.** Roles that prevent teacher-leaders from spending a hefty portion of their time teaching students make it much harder for them to keep teaching skills fresh and stay connected to student needs and challenges.
- **Low reach.** Many teacher-leadership roles actually reduce the number of students for whom the best teachers are responsible. If fewer students benefit from the best teachers, fewer will make the learning gains these teachers induce.
- **Short on time.** Too many teacher-leader roles are heaped on top of teachers' other responsibilities. Co-planning, modeling, co-teaching, coaching, and collaboratively adjusting instruction based on student data require more planning time—for teacher-leaders on their own and together with those whom they lead.
- **Low or no pay.** Most teacher-leader roles are low- or no-pay roles, and few pay big dollars through recurring funding. This sends the message that excellence and teacher leadership are expendable, rather than essential to schoolwide success.
- **Low authority, low accountability.** Teacher-leaders' formal authority and evaluations rarely align with responsibility for wider student spans and a positive impact on peer and students success.

Requiring great teachers—the biggest asset schools have—to work alone in a traditional school model limits their impact on peers and students. But low-impact teacher-leader roles are no better, and they are a distraction from what great teachers really crave: helping their peers and more students succeed. **Defining and organizing high-impact teacher-leader roles can allow great teachers to have a far greater effect on vastly more students and teaching peers.**

State and district education leaders can ensure that schools have the support they need to design and implement high-impact teacher-leader roles. Twelve factors affect the magnitude of a teacher-leader's impact. Designing teacher-leader roles with these factors in mind—and involving teachers collaboratively in the design work—will help education and policy leaders invest in programs likely to generate a large, positive impact for the long haul. Designing most roles to incorporate the "whole package" of these elements is well worth the effort.

High-Impact Teacher-Leader Roles: 12 Factors

Factor	Consideration
Selectivity	Is entry into advanced roles selective? Selection using the right criteria and a high applicant : position ratio are two key indicators. Do the selection criteria include teaching excellence and competencies specific to each role, including demonstrated leadership? Does the district recruit actively and early?
Preparation	Are teacher-leaders trained or otherwise prepared for the specific new roles they have, in advance and during the early years of service in a new role?
Reach	Is the teacher-leader responsible for more students, directly and/or by leading a team? Most can reach far more students than typical teachers—33%–500% more—with additional support from paraprofessionals, technology, and a team.
Teaching	Do teacher-leaders continue to teach students at least 40%–60% of their time, to maintain professional skills and understand the needs and challenges of the students they serve?
Time to Lead and Learn	Do teacher-leaders have time to lead while teaching? They should have 40%–60% of their time to plan and collaborate. Do other teachers have time at school to learn from teacher-leaders?
Development	Are there ongoing opportunities to learn and improve with others in similar advanced roles?
Accountability	Do formal evaluations match each role's responsibilities, and do they include the teacher-leader's impact on the success of all of his/her team's teachers and students? They must.
Authority	Do the teacher-leaders have formal authority, so that other teachers are expected to use their methods and materials? Teacher-leaders must have informal influence skills, but formal authority will help them help more peers and students faster.
Pay	Are supplements at least 10% of average pay, with 20% or more the norm? Top pay supplements should be at least 50% for teacher-leaders with large teams.
Funding Stability	How permanent and sustainable is the funding source for additional pay? Temporary grants, programs, and budget line items are the least stable. Allocating stable, recurring funding that schools can use flexibly to pay more, with teacher input, is ideal.
Funding Scalability	Is funding sustainable *and* applicable to most schools, as it must be? Less-sustainable funding is less scalable within and across districts. Pay funded by local supplements will not work in poorer districts. Sustainable, state-level funds are the most enduring source of widely scalable teacher-leader pay.
Prevalence	What is the average number of advanced positions per school? A typical school should have a teacher-leader for every 3–8 teachers, on average. This spreads instructional excellence schoolwide, supports and develops all teachers on the job, and provides many teachers with paid advancement.

Teacher leadership is strongest as part of a **career path** of increasingly high-impact roles. In addition, supportive district systems increase the quality and durability of roles, particularly strong digital instruction tools, instructional data matching the span of each role, and flexible budgets, among others.

This is just one part of a new **virtuous cycle** within schools that is launched by using job redesign and age-appropriate technology to extend the reach of excellent teachers and their teams to more students, directly and by letting great teachers lead teams. This "Opportunity Culture" **virtuous cycle** is just one part of a **new human capital chain** across districts and states to support instructional excellence and growth for teachers and students alike.

Research shows the impact of Opportunity Culture multi-classroom leaders (MCLs): An average range of teachers who joined teams led by MCLs (who had prior high growth as teachers) produced learning gains equivalent to those of teachers from the 75th to 85th percentile in math, and, in six of the seven statistical models, from 66th to 72nd percentile in reading. Teams had a median of five teachers in addition to the MCL.