



Washington State Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

"The Practitioner's Best Friend"

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How does a district systemically support teacher leadership?

To successfully support the development of the whole child for every child, classroom teachers use varied instructional strategies to grow the academic and social emotional potential of their own students. With this in mind, how can teachers amplify this impact? System-wide change for all students relies on teachers' having tools beyond their instructional strategy toolbox to effectively collaborate across classrooms. Teacher leadership amplifies the impact of one accomplished teacher while not disrupting the work they do every day with students.

In Tacoma Public Schools, when we talk about teacher leadership we mean teachers using specific knowledge, skills and dispositions to affect positive outcomes for students beyond the walls of their own classroom. Teacher leadership is a stance and a service more than it is a title, position or role.

For the last two years, Tacoma Public Schools' Curriculum and Instructional Department has supported a [Teacher Leadership Academy](#) to train cohorts of teachers in the knowledge, skills and dispositions of teacher leadership; as our foundation, we use [The Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession's Teacher Leadership Skills Framework](#) and draw upon a [recent study](#) by The Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, the purpose of creating systems and structures for supporting a Teacher Leadership Academy. The Academy is supported by funding for full-release days and purchasing books and resources to support participants' learning.

Tacoma has always had teachers willing to lead: from running grade-level data teams, or department PLCs, to facilitating professional development and serving on district committees. So why invest in a Teacher Leadership Academy? What does this learning add if you are already leading? One of our high school teachers in the academy summed up the cohort's response to this question saying, "I can download a Tom Douglas recipe and make it at home, but it won't be the same as dining at one of his restaurants." Just as our students perform better both academically and socially when we teach them the skills of successful learners, so too do our teachers lead better when they have practice with the knowledge, skills and dispositions of leadership.

Hattie's "new number one" in effect size (at 1.57) is Collective Teacher Efficacy, which is defined as the collective belief of teachers in their ability to affect students ("Collective Teacher Efficacy (CTE) According to John Hattie," [Visible Learning website](#)). One way we grow collective teacher efficacy in Tacoma is through the Teacher Leadership Academy. A member of the first cohort described how the Academy impacted her collective efficacy, writing "Teacher leadership work in Tacoma helped me dig in with other teacher leaders facing similar struggles across the board of elementary to secondary. I learned from my peers to courageously change the small in myself for others' sake. I celebrated other teacher leaders' projects as they came to fruition, and am grateful to have seen success in my own (Kate, MS World Language teacher)."

The unfortunate exodus of early and mid-career teachers from our schools negatively impacts our students. Retaining teachers means recouping the sizable investment made to support them. Having opportunities to continually grow and learn encourages the revitalization and growth needed to retain teachers, while also building their resilience. Tacoma's Teacher Leadership Academy helped this veteran teacher come to the following realization about his practice, "As the school year rapidly comes to an end and my participation in the Teacher Leadership Academy winds down, I have realized that being good is not good enough." He goes on to detail how the Academy has reinforced his resolve, sharing "I have

not only learned effective strategies for working with adults, but many of the strategies can and have been utilized in my classroom with amazing results - from setting norms to the utilization of instructional strategies that focus on effective questioning, reading protocols, and beneficial terminology (e.g. strengths vs stretches; instead of weaknesses) to areas of personal growth and development where I have focused on truly listening to hear, and have strived to master additional methodologies for collaboration and conflict resolution.” (Tony, MS Science teacher).

Why invest in teacher leadership? If we want to see sustainable change over time we must build collective efficacy, and one of the ways in which we can do this is to develop leadership knowledge, skills and dispositions in our teachers. As one of our current cohort members remarked, “Investing in teacher leadership is investing in the future of teachers, education and foremost students. Imagine a room full of engaged teachers learning and growing from each other’s stories, successes and challenges. Elevating their practice through face to face communication and a willingness to grow. Teacher leadership is empowerment (Ciara, Pre-K & multiage elementary teacher).

References:

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