

Making Space for Teacher Leadership

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Hatice Nigdelioglu, (above) teaches math at Revere High School. She is also a Muslim, and immigrated to the United States from Turkey. “The girls in my village didn’t go to college, or high school for that matter,” she explains. “I had to convince my father to let me get an education. I wanted to become a teacher so I could give back.”

Nigdelioglu’s experiences as an immigrant and a Muslim help her connect with her students. She’s the faculty advisor for the Muslim student group at Revere High School and serves on the school’s cultural competency committee. In the aftermath of the Boston marathon bombing in 2013, Nigdelioglu helped sooth tensions within the school community by speaking up on

behalf of Muslim students.

She is one of many teacher leaders in Massachusetts and nationwide. With support from their peers, principals and district leaders, teacher leaders have created and found leadership roles that enable them to deepen their impact on students, coach and support their peers, mentor new or struggling teachers, and influence school district and state education policies—all while continuing to work directly with students in the classroom.

This work has the potential to change school culture, improve instructional practice and education policies, and ultimately help address some of the most complex challenges in our public schools. The problem is not everyone knows the potential for leadership, or how to realize it in their school or district.

This overview and accompanying videos, case studies and guide to teacher advisories is intended to push the thinking of school and district leaders, and to embolden them to create the space, the conditions and opportunities for more of their teachers to become leaders.

1. The Case for Teacher Leadership:

The argument for teacher leadership and how it benefits, educators and students alike

2. Teacher Leadership in Action:

Stories of what four exemplary Massachusetts teacher leaders have been able to accomplish in their schools

3. Building a Sustainable Structure to Elevate Teacher Voices:

A Guide for School and District Leaders



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SECTION 1: The Case for Teacher Leadership

Teacher leadership roles vary significantly from district to district, and in some cases, from school to school. Teacher leaders in Revere Public Schools sit on the district’s Educators Leadership Board, which provides oversight and advice on the design and implementation of district initiatives. ¹ Teacher leaders in Springfield Public Schools serve as mentors—or Effective Educator Coaches (EECs)—to support new and struggling teachers. ² And since the 2014-15 school year, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has recruited teacher leaders from across the state to participate on the Teacher Advisory Cabinet, which provides feedback and input on ESE policies and resources, such as the state’s equity plan, teacher evaluation policies, and pre-service assessments for teacher candidates. ³

**WHAT WE MEAN BY
TEACHER LEADERSHIP**

Across Massachusetts, teachers are stepping into leadership positions and helping solve some of the most complex challenges schools face. But what does teacher leadership mean? We developed the following definition of teacher leadership with input from educators across the state:

Teachers play a leadership role in the work of improving their schools and systems, and have access to the opportunities, time and resources necessary for teachers to collaborate, learn from one another, and share instructional strategies and strengthen their practice in order to improve student outcomes.

Impact of Teacher Leadership

DESE initially promoted teacher leadership across Massachusetts as a strategy to make teacher evaluations more manageable. By distributing administrative tasks and other responsibilities to teacher leaders, school leaders were able to focus more on instructional leadership tasks, such as observing teachers in the classroom and providing them with feedback. DESE developed a step-by-step planning guide to help district leaders improve the quality of feedback teachers receive on their practice through distributed leadership strategies like peer observations and instructional coaching.⁴

But teacher leadership is more than that and can address challenges including the implementation of new instructional materials and standards, low quality professional development, retention and equitable distribution of effective teachers, and a lack of coherence and rigor in teacher training and credentialing, and weak principal performance and retention.⁵ Many school and district leaders have signaled their commitment to teacher leadership by changing school policies and schedules to allow for more teacher-to-teacher collaboration, creating new job descriptions for teacher leaders, and reallocating resources to support teacher leadership efforts.

A growing body of evidence suggests that teacher leadership has an impact, particularly on teacher morale and satisfaction. Surveys have shown that teacher leaders gain new skills and



“Because of teacher leadership, the stereotype of boring professional development is gone. The school culture has changed too. **Students see the difference that teacher leadership has on our school.** They see a lot of people coming through the classroom. They get the idea that teachers aren’t perfect and we’re trying to improve. It’s good modeling for the type of learners we want them to become.”

—Matthew Condon,

Collins Middle School, Salem Public Schools

78%

Percent of mentees agreed or strongly agreed that working with a teacher leader improved their practices

72%

Percent of mentees reported higher job satisfaction as a result of working with a teacher leader.⁷

knowledge by taking on leadership responsibilities. For example, by mentoring their peers, teacher leaders learn how to collaborate with others and reflect on their own practice, which can lead to more intentional and effective teaching practices. Similarly, by promoting a growth mindset among others, teacher leaders feel more comfortable taking risks, trying new instructional techniques, and building a culture of continuous improvement.⁶

¹ Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Leadership Boards and Councils: Decentralizing Decision-making in Revere Public Schools (2015), accessed November 7, 2017, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/leadership/RevereCaseStudy.pdf>.

² A. Checkoway et al., Springfield Public Schools’ Effective Educator Coach Program (Menlo Park: SRI International in partnership with Abt, 2015), accessed November 7, 2017, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/reports/2015/10TIFResearchBrief.pdf>.

³ Mass.gov, “Educator Evaluation,” Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, accessed November 7, 2017, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/communications/>.

⁴ Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, An Interactive Planning Guide for Distributed Leadership (2015-2016), accessed November 7, 2017, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/leadership/DistributedLeadershipIPG.pdf>.

⁵ Leading Educators, State Teacher Leadership Toolkit: Created by States, for States (2017), accessed on accessed November 7, 2017, <http://education-first.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Education-First-Leading-Educators-State-Teacher-Leadership-Toolkit-Jan-2017.pdf>.

⁶ A. Checkoway et al., Springfield Public Schools’ Effective Educator Coach Program (Menlo Park: SRI International in partnership with Abt, 2015), accessed November 7, 2017, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/reports/2015/10TIFResearchBrief.pdf>.

Enabling Conditions

Given its appeal and the opportunities it provides teachers to build skills and improve their practice, why aren't more school and district leaders putting resources into teacher leadership? Simply put, teacher leadership initiatives take time, commitment and resources to be successful:

Time. Teachers only have so many hours in each day, and in Massachusetts the number of hours in each workday is negotiated through collective bargaining. In places where teacher leadership has taken root, school leaders provide teacher leaders with flexible class schedules, release time from the classroom, and guaranteed substitute coverage to allow them to meet their classroom and leadership responsibilities.

Commitment. Successful teacher leadership models marry form and function.⁹ In other words, teacher leadership roles should be carefully designed to advance specific goals, backed by the resources needed to ensure that teacher leaders will be successful. School leaders who provide their teachers with meaningful opportunities to lead and shape school policies will be more likely to see those policies succeed. Union leaders also have a role to play, since in many Massachusetts school districts, teacher leadership roles are determined by collective bargaining agreements.

Resources. Many school districts and states compensate teacher leaders with stipends. But monetary compensation is not essential to the success of teacher leadership models. DESE encourages district and school leaders to think creatively about ways to compensate teacher leaders.¹⁰ For example, Title II-A funds can be used for programs related to the preparation, training and recruitment of effective educators. DESE also suggests that non-monetary awards, such as release time or

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF TEACHER LEADERSHIP ON STUDENT OUTCOMES?

Teacher leadership policies are relatively new, but the evidence that teacher leadership leads to improved student outcomes is promising. In October 2017, the New Teacher Center and Dr. Richard Ingersoll of the Consortium for Policy Research in Education studied the correlation between teacher leadership and student achievement. They found that when teachers are involved in decision-making processes related to school improvement planning or student conduct policies, students learn more.⁸ And in Massachusetts, teacher leadership has helped shift cultures in many schools. As 2017 National Teacher of the Year Sydney Chaffee explains, "When teachers feel like we're leaders within the school, we can make a difference. What we're doing is bigger than just the four walls of that classroom. Teacher leadership improves the quality of teachers' professional experience."

professional development credits, can be used to encourage teacher participation in leadership opportunities.

Teacher leaders like Nigdelioglu inspire not only their students, but also their colleagues in other classrooms. We hope that this guidebook inspires you, gives you new ideas about promoting teacher leadership, and convinces you that tapping into the expertise of teachers is a way to solve challenges in our public schools.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ New Teacher Center, "School Leadership Counts," accessed November 7, 2017, <http://info.newteachercenter.org/school-leadership-report>.

⁹ The Aspen Institute Education & Society Program and Leading Educators, *Leading from the Front of the Classroom: A Roadmap to Teacher Leadership that Works* (Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute, 2014), accessed November 7, 2017, <http://www.aspendri.org/portal/browse/DocumentDetail?documentId=2402&download>.

¹⁰ Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, *Creating and Sustaining Teacher Leadership Roles: Lessons Learned From Districts* (2015), accessed November 7, 2017, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/leadership/CreateSustainRoles.pdf>.

Making Teacher Leadership Possible

Even when school leaders are prepared to surmount these barriers, the prospect of creating new teacher leadership opportunities, on top of everything else they need to juggle, can seem daunting. Where should a school leader start? What promising practices can they learn from?

Leading Educators and the Aspen Institute examined this issue closely in *Leading from the Front of the Classroom: A Roadmap for Teacher Leadership that Works* and identified clear recommendations for school and district leaders. The text that follows lists 10 concrete steps and guiding questions that we adapted from the report that school leaders can take to provide teachers with leadership opportunities.

Step 1

Identify a challenge you hope to address through teacher leadership.

Step 2

Assess available resources and staff capacity.

Step 3

Check your local teachers union contract for provisions related to teacher leadership.

Step 4

Engage stakeholders to design teacher leadership roles.

Step 5

Decide how to assess the impact and monitor progress of teacher leadership initiatives.

Step 6

Consider accessing professional development on ways to support teacher leaders.

Step 7

Adjust school-level policies/procedures to facilitate teacher leadership (e.g., release time, substitute coverage).

Step 8

Identify and select teacher leaders in your building.

Step 9

Provide access to training for teacher leaders, or connect them with external professional learning opportunities, and provide ongoing support.

Step 10

Collect data on implementation and adjust teacher leadership roles as needed.

Step 1. Identify a challenge you hope to address through teacher leadership.

What challenges are your school facing that can be informed by teacher input? Here are some of the challenges that teacher leaders are well-situated to help address:

- Is your school launching a new curriculum or school turnaround strategy?
- Are you trying to incorporate more technology into classroom instruction?
- Are you trying to provide additional support to new or struggling teachers?

Step 2. Assess available resources and staff capacity.

- What are the skills, knowledge, interests and other assets of the teachers in your building?
- What district or ESE supports—especially funding—can you access?
- If funding is not available, what creative incentives are available to encourage teachers to participate?

Step 3. Check your local teachers union contract for provisions related to teacher leadership.

In Massachusetts school districts, teacher leadership roles and responsibilities are negotiated in collective bargaining agreements. Check the teachers union contract in your school district to make sure you understand the opportunities and limitations associated with teacher leadership in your school district. Consider:

- Does the teachers union contract identify specific teacher leadership roles?
- How can you collaborate with bargaining units and the teachers in your building to provide leadership opportunities in the absence of specific contract language?

Step 4. Engage stakeholders to design teacher leadership roles.

Ask teachers, district leaders, parents, school committee members and union representatives to help brainstorm ideas for leadership roles. Follow up with them as plans are developed so they can see how their input was used. Consider:

- What are the priorities of the teachers, parents, students, district leaders and community?
- How might you address those priorities through teacher leadership?
- What stakeholder groups can help develop or improve a teacher leadership strategy?

Step 5. Decide how to assess the impact and monitor progress of teacher leadership initiatives.

Pick data and metrics that align with the challenge you hope to address. For example, if you're launching a new curriculum, you might examine student assessment scores. If you're asking teacher leaders to serve as mentors to new or struggling teachers, you might collect data on working conditions or school climate. Consider:

- How will you determine whether your teacher leadership initiative is successful?
- What metrics can you measure to determine whether or when you need to make adjustments?

Step 6. Consider accessing professional development on ways to support teacher leaders.

→ What new skills do you need to support teacher leaders? Many school leaders find that coaching teacher leaders is different than coaching a classroom teacher, and requires a new set of skills. Assess your own skills and seek out professional learning, if appropriate.

Step 7. Adjust school-level policies/procedures to facilitate teacher leadership (e.g., release time, substitute coverage).

A lack of time in the school day is one of the biggest hurdles school leaders face when implementing teacher leadership roles. Build collaborative planning time into the school schedule to allow teacher leaders to work together or meet with other teachers, and provide teacher leaders with release time and substitute teacher coverage if their leadership responsibilities require them to be out of the building. Consider:

- Does your school schedule provide teachers with collaborative planning time? If not, what adjustments can be made?
- Are teachers able to get release time or substitute coverage to pursue leadership opportunities that may require them to be out of the building?

Step 8. Identify and select teacher leaders in your building.

Be transparent about the criteria you're using to identify and select teacher leaders, and select teacher leaders who have the respect of their colleagues.

- What criteria or processes will you use to identify and select teacher leaders?
- How will you communicate expectations and responsibilities of leadership roles to interested candidates?
- How will you ensure that the process is fair and free of bias?

Step 9. Provide access to training for teacher leaders, or connect them with external professional learning opportunities, and provide ongoing support.

Many teacher leaders will need training and support in their new roles. School leaders can provide this support, or they can direct teacher leaders to resources and professional learning opportunities offered by organizations like Teach to Lead and Teach Plus.


- What training and skills do teacher leaders need to be successful?
- What training or coaching can you provide?
- What professional learning opportunities are available in your school district or across the state?

Step 10. Collect data on implementation and adjust teacher leadership roles as needed.

In addition to data and metrics that assess the impact of teacher leadership, be sure to check in with teacher leaders and teachers to hear about their experiences.

- Do teacher leaders have the support they need to be successful?
- Do they feel empowered to lead within their role?
- Do they perceive that their leadership role is meaningful?

Be prepared to adjust teacher leadership roles, responsibilities, and supports based on their feedback.

 **For a more detailed discussion about these steps,** we encourage you to check out the Leading Educators and Aspen publication here. Other resources are available through DESE on its website dedicated to teacher leadership, including a suite of resources, a planning guide for distributed leadership, teacher leadership case studies from across Massachusetts, and information about state and district teacher advisory cabinets.

**IN THEIR OWN
WORDS**

WE ASKED TEACHER LEADERS IN MASSACHUSETTS TO TELL US HOW THEIR SCHOOL LEADERS SUPPORT THEIR GROWTH AND SUCCESS AS A TEACHER LEADER. HERE'S WHAT THEY HAD TO SAY:

* "Our principal and vice-principal have been very supportive in a lot of the teacher leadership work. They understand its relevance and importance. **Every time I bring them a new idea or something to try they let me go ahead and report back.** All principals should help develop the leadership skills of their teachers. It leads to better morale and conditions."

—KEVIN CORMIER, NISSISSIT MIDDLE SCHOOL, PEPPERELL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

* "My principal has helped me take on different leadership roles throughout my career. When our district was classified as a Level four district, my principal allowed me to be part of the data leadership team, where I learned basic data routines. **When I became an ELA teacher, my principal let me schedule home visits to engage families.** And when I asked for an even bigger leadership role, my principal agreed to have coaches cover my ELA class so I can work with new teachers."

—MATTHEW CONDON, COLLINS MIDDLE SCHOOL, SALEM PUBLIC SCHOOLS

* "In my second year at Codman Academy, I asked the principal if I could take over community circle, which at the time, was joyless and not a place where people loved to be. **I was intimidated to ask and thought, 'Who am I to ask the principal if I can take over part of his job?'**" But he was excited to give it up because he had so many jobs in the building. His willingness to share leadership is a pattern that's been replicated over and over here."

—SYDNEY CHAFFEE, CODMAN ACADEMY, BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



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