Teacher Career Ladders and Leadership Roles

Examples and Lessons Learned

July 2014
This document contains information regarding districts that have a teacher career ladder structure in place.

- These examples are meant to serve as a springboard for discussion when designing a teacher career ladder framework and teacher leadership roles.
- While this is not an exhaustive list of sites using a teacher career ladder or teacher leadership roles, these examples were chosen because they represent a variety of approaches.
- It is important to note that this is new and innovative work. As a result, “best practices” are not readily available or published. These examples should be seen as a source of ideas as opposed to a sampling of best practices.
- A series of lessons learned regarding the design and implementation process are also captured in this presentation and should be considered when undertaking this initiative.
- This document should be shared with members of the district’s Central Office who will be responsible for aiding in the design and implementation of a new teacher career ladder system and/or teacher leadership roles.

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Agenda

• Houston Independent School District
• Denver Public Schools
• Tennessee Achievement School District
• Baltimore City Public Schools
• District of Columbia Public Schools
• Design and Implementation Lessons Learned
HISD has partnered with a variety of representatives throughout the district to develop and pilot 7 teacher leadership roles with 220 teachers across 62 schools.

**Identified Areas of Need**
- Academic support for subpopulations of students
- Teacher content specialization
- Curriculum support
- Technology-driven instruction
- Support to analyze, interpret and use student data effectively
- On-site professional development
- Student assessment support

**Career Pathways Roles**
- Intervention Specialist
- Instructional Practice Coach
- STEM Instructional Leader
- Data Tracking and Analysis Specialist
- Instructional Technology Specialist
- Campus Induction Coach
- Assessment Specialist

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In addition to meeting school-based needs, these teacher leadership roles aim to address district-level priorities.

**Year 1 Program Focus**

- **Stakeholder Satisfaction**: New teacher leadership roles are attractive to principals and teachers.
- **Strong Implementation**: Information is collected to ensure the strong implementation of leadership roles in year 1, 2, and beyond.
- **Retention**: Career Pathways Teacher Leaders remain in the district longer.

**Year 2 Program Focus**

- **Teacher Growth**: Teachers who receive support from Career Pathways Teacher Leaders improve their instructional practice.
- **Student Growth**: Students whose teachers receive support from Career Pathways Teacher Leaders show improvement in their academic performance.
- **Retention**: Career Pathways Teacher Leaders remain in the district longer.

As the program continues to evolve, so do the program’s high-level objectives.
Below is an overview of the seven teacher leadership roles that have been piloted in HISD over the last two years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Role</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional Technology Specialist</strong></td>
<td>Builds colleagues’ capacity to use instructional technology tools to differentiate instruction by facilitating professional development sessions and training teachers on instructional technology tools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data Tracking and Analysis Specialist</strong></td>
<td>Improves colleagues’ abilities to collect, analyze, interpret, and use student performance data by creating data analysis tools and templates, facilitating data driven PLC and department meetings, and training teachers on how to effectively use data to know when and what type of differentiation is needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional Practice Coach/STEM Instructional Leader</strong></td>
<td>Coaches colleagues on their instructional practice by observing classroom instruction and providing actionable feedback aligned with the district's evaluation tool. STEM Instructional Leaders focus on STEM content areas, with a focus on increasing rigor of instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intervention Specialist</strong></td>
<td>Works directly with a small group of students in the area of literacy and math to address areas for development and provide supplemental and remedial instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment Specialist</strong></td>
<td>Assists colleagues with the selection, creation, and vetting of assessments used to measure student outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Campus Induction Coach</strong></td>
<td>Manages and works closely with mentor teachers to assess the needs of new teachers, provide them with tailored professional development, and connect them with resources.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The current HISD career ladder includes the newest, most rigorous instructionally focused teacher leadership roles.

**Level II and III roles involve working with progressively more teachers**

**Emerging Teacher Leader**
Selection Criteria:
- Most recent rating is effective or higher
- Demonstrated a strong interest in taking on additional responsibilities

**Current Proposed Roles:**
- Instructional Technology Specialist
- Data Tracking and Analysis Specialist

**Accomplished Teacher Leader**
Selection Criteria:
- 2 most recent ratings are effective or higher
- Previously demonstrated success in a prior leadership role by measurably improving student achievement

**Current Proposed Roles:**
- Campus Induction Coach
- Instructional Practice Coach
- STEM Instructional Leader
- Intervention Specialist
- Instructional Tech Specialist II
- Data Tracking & Analysis Specialist II
- Assessment Specialist

**Expert Teacher Leader**
Selection Criteria:
- 2 most recent ratings are highly effective
- Demonstrated success in an official career pathway leadership role
- Demonstrated success at the “Accomplished Leader” level by measurably improving student achievement

**Current Proposed Roles:**
- Instructional Practice Coach II
- STEM Instructional Leader II
- Intervention Specialist II
- Instructional Tech Specialist III
- Data Tracking and Analysis Specialist III
- Assessment Specialist II

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Denver Public Schools has been working to design and implement robust teacher leadership roles that meaningfully distribute leadership.

Below are the roles that are currently being piloted in select schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content Team Lead</td>
<td>An expert in a particular content area who ensures his/her team of teachers grows in their ability to effectively deliver content against state standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Team Lead</td>
<td>Responsible for building a team of teacher’s ability to collect, analyze, interpret, and use student learning data; evaluates team’s ability to use data effectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Team Lead</td>
<td>Responsible for leading, developing, and evaluating a team of colleagues on all areas of the evaluation rubric.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Culture Team Lead</td>
<td>Responsible for increasing the capacity of teachers on their team to improve the culture of their classrooms through the analysis of data, design and delivery of professional development sessions, peer coaching, modeling and co-teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Acquisition (ELA) Team Lead</td>
<td>Responsible for building capacity among a team of colleagues to improve instruction for ELL students and is responsible for improved outcomes among students taught by that team of teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subgroup Team Lead</td>
<td>Focused on building the capacity of a team of colleagues to work with specific subgroups of students and is responsible for improving the school's capacity to serve the group of identified students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blended Learning Instruction Team Lead</td>
<td>Responsible for building capacity among a team of colleagues to better use technology for differentiation and inquiry-based/project-based learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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The Tennessee ASD framework allows effective teachers to receive higher salaries, earn bonuses, and access increasing levels of leadership as they progress.

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Below are the teacher leadership roles that were developed as a part of the career pathways framework.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role Title</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content Specialist</strong></td>
<td>Provides both school- and district-wide leadership and expertise in their assigned content area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Course Leader</strong></td>
<td>Leads foundational planning for and provides instructional support to teachers who lead the same or similar courses, working in collaboration with a Content Specialist who is responsible for the content area in which the teacher’s assigned course falls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data Tracking and Analysis Specialist</strong></td>
<td>Supports schools’ collection, dissemination, analysis, and interpretation of student and school data, along with the identification of appropriate teacher responses to data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade-Level Chair</strong></td>
<td>Provides organizational leadership and support to all teachers within their grade level to ensure the grade level team meets ambitious student achievement goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support Team Fellow</strong></td>
<td>Engages deeply with the school leadership team to design and implement a special school-based project or initiative to help the school and the district move closer to achieving its mission of increasing student achievement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Baltimore City Public Schools has developed a career pathway framework that includes an increasing degree of leadership over time.

Baltimore City Public Schools Career Pathway

- **Standard Pathway**
  - Focus on instruction; professional development

- **Professional Pathway**
  - Focus on classroom success; active in school-based roles

- **Model Pathway**
  - Serve as model of excellence; play a leadership role; create professional development opportunities

- **Lead Pathway**
  - Serve as lead academic teacher at a school; collaborate with the principal to improve academic performance

Source: Baltimore City Public Schools: [http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/Page/14091](http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/Page/14091)
Once in the “Model Pathway”, teachers have the opportunity to take on a variety of leadership responsibilities.

**Selection Criteria:**
- Teachers on the “Professional Pathway” submit a portfolio consisting of evidence of high performance (e.g., artifacts, videos, student performance data), which is then assessed using a selection rubric.
- Some teachers were grandfathered into the system if they had 10+ years of experience in the district, a Master’s + 30 credits, and at least 2 Proficient evaluation ratings in the last 3 years.

**Leadership Responsibilities:**
- Opening their classroom to other teachers in order to model effective teaching and increase their colleagues’ instructional skills.
- Serving on the Professional Peer Review Committee (PPRC) – a review committee that is charged with vetting other teacher candidates trying to enter the Model Pathway.
- Attending ongoing Model educator training provided by the district in order to ensure they are continuously developing their skills and maintaining a high level of performance.
- Collecting relevant documentation to continuously support and develop their Model profile/portfolio.

Source: Baltimore City Public Schools: [http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/Page/14091](http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/Page/14091)
Teachers on the Lead Pathway are selected through a rigorous four-step selection process and are charged with supporting a school’s area of investment.

Five investment areas were identified by a design team composed of teachers and principals. During the selection and planning process, schools will have the opportunity to identify one area of focus for their Lead(s), based on their school needs.

- **Instructional Strategy**: Research and implement school-wide strategies to support the transition to Common Core and the Instructional Framework for evaluation.

- **Teacher Coaching**: Help small cohorts of teachers improve their performance on the Instructional Framework through regular coaching and support.

- **Blended Learning**: Research emerging practices in blended learning and implement school-wide strategies to personalize learning through face-to-face and online instruction.

- **Partnerships**: Develop and implement a strategy to mobilize parents, community partners, and private partners to support the school’s academic goals and student well-being.

- **Student Interventions**: Create and manage school-wide systems for identifying students in need of extra support (academic and non-academic) and delivering interventions.

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District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) has worked to develop a five stage career ladder system called the Leadership Initiative for Teachers (LIFT).

The goals of the LIFT framework are to:

- **Retain Top Performers:** As teachers advance on the ladder, they will become eligible for additional career and leadership opportunities that will not require them to stop teaching. LIFT allows teachers to plan a long and rewarding career in DCPS, filled with new challenges and opportunities for growth.

- **Reward Experience:** LIFT highlights the achievements of successful teachers who have demonstrated a long-term commitment to DCPS.

- **Broaden Recognition:** LIFT honors and rewards those who have earned both Effective and Highly Effective ratings.

- **Increase Career Stability:** In most cases, a teacher will spend several years at the same LIFT stage. Once teachers reach a particular stage, they will not revert to a previous one. These aspects of LIFT bring an important level of stability to a teacher's career in DCPS.
LIFT allows teachers to access a variety of teacher leader positions based on the stage they are in.

Teachers are eligible for leadership positions in their stage and any stage below them. Below are the leadership roles available at each level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Available Leadership Roles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Chancellor’s Teachers’ Cabinet, Meet-up Group Organizer, Teaching Audition Host Teacher, Wilson Reading System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established Teacher</td>
<td>Common Core Math/Reading Corps, Curriculum Writer, Early Childhood Grade Level Chair, Teacher Lead, Teacher Selection Ambassador, Teaching in Action Consulting Teacher, STEM Master Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Teacher</td>
<td>Assistant Principal, Early Childhood Instructional Specialist, Instructional Coach, Master Educator, Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinguished Teacher</td>
<td>Same as Advanced Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert Teacher</td>
<td>Same as Advanced Teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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• **Design and Implementation Lessons Learned**
As districts undertake this initiative, they should ensure the district’s vision for teacher leadership drives the design process.

- Start the design process knowing why you want to create a career ladder and what you are trying to accomplish as a result. Having a clear vision for the objectives of the framework leads to stronger outcomes and a more efficient process.
- A career ladder can be used to communicate the district’s vision for teacher leadership, organize the leadership opportunities available, and aid teachers in their career progression over time.
- All of the leadership roles on the career ladder should be in alignment with the overall vision for teacher leadership in the district, resulting in consistent messaging regarding teacher leadership.
- The teacher leadership roles should not only meet school and district needs, but should also be reflective of the types of leadership opportunities teachers would be interested in taking on in order to protect against a lack of interest amongst the district’s top performers.
- To ensure the career ladder structure is reflective of teacher, school, and district needs, teachers’ and principals’ voices should be included in the design and implementation planning process. This will help build buy-in and investment later on and will result in a stronger design and implementation process.
Below are a series of lessons learned that have been informed by the experience of several districts throughout the design process.

- Having clearly defined role descriptions creates clarity for both principals and teacher leaders about which activities teacher leaders should and should not undertake.
- Each teacher leadership role should be aligned to clear, specific, and measureable goals in order to focus teacher leaders on specific outcomes.
- Clear selection criteria and a rigorous selection process help ensure the best candidate is selected for the role, increasing the prestige associated with these opportunities.
- Teachers need sufficient release time in order to complete additional leadership responsibilities. It is not reasonable to assume that a teacher can complete a robust, substantial leadership position on top of a full student course load. Not creating sufficient release time can lead to increased stress and burnout for your best teachers, counteracting the benefits of having teacher leadership opportunities available.
- The compensation for each teacher leadership role should be benchmarked against existing stipends within the district and of surrounding districts and charters. The compensation amount should also be commensurate with the level of additional responsibilities requested. This will help ensure the compensation is attractive and competitive and that it sends the right message regarding the importance of the teacher leadership opportunities in the district.
However, even with the strongest design, implementation remains key to the success of any teacher leadership initiative.

- Principals are the key to the successful implementation of teacher leader roles. It is important to build school leaders’ buy-in for these leadership roles and ensure the roles are implemented with fidelity.
- School leadership teams should establish a clear vision for how teacher leadership roles will be strategically used to support the school’s goals and needs.
- There should be a clear plan for engaging the whole school in the development and roll-out of the teacher leadership roles in order to build school-level buy-in for this work.
- School leaders should be transparent about the roles available, their purpose, and why each team was selected to work together.
- Schools need to proactively plan for ways to enable the implementation of these leadership roles and teacher collaboration by changing their school’s schedule, structures, and/or instructional approach.
- Teacher leaders should receive a variety of differentiated professional development opportunities and support to build the skills necessary to be successful in their role.
- Districts should ensure that the impact of teacher leadership work exceeds the value that each teacher would provide if they were still in the classroom full time.

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