

Leading Leaders: Principals and Teacher Leaders in Delaware's Schools

A Report Prepared For:

**Teacher Leadership Advisory Committee
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A highly capable principal is key to learning in schools. Principals are second only to the quality and expertise of an excellent classroom teacher in affecting learning for students in schools. I would like to acknowledge the commitment of the 12 principals from across Delaware who gave valuable time to sharing their views—which are found in this report. These school leaders from each of Delaware’s three counties were crucial in constructing the themes found on the following pages.

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Introduction

In the Spring of 2009, the report, *Teacher Voices: Teacher Leaders in Delaware's Schools*¹ was produced and presented to the Teacher Leadership Advisory Committee, the Delaware Department of Education, the University of Delaware, and the Delaware Academy for School Leadership. The report presented insights from a sample of identified teacher leaders in school districts across the state of Delaware. The research sponsors sought data about teacher leaders' daily work, to see what supports or inhibits their work, and what types of resources might be implicated in the exercise of teacher leadership.

What is clear in this prior study is that teacher leaders don't work alone, but work in close partnership with school principals as part of an instructional leadership team. The purpose of this second phase of research was to bring together a sample of principals to explore their work with teacher leaders in their schools. Each report is designed to inform the Teacher Leadership Advisory Committee as policymakers in Delaware consider expanded opportunities for teacher leaders in the schools.

Leading learning in schools

The work of leading the learning work of a school has become increasingly complex and increasingly prominent. The last years of educational reform and a driving idea behind educational initiatives in Delaware have mandated that all schools must be places where students can count on a highly competent teacher, a safe and stimulating environment, and engagement in the kind of learning that will prepare them for the future as a citizen and in career. While traditional educational practices may have served many students well in the past, these are often not adequate to meet future expectations for equitable learning outcomes. Instead of "many students" the explicit expectations is "all students." In addition, our globally connected, information rich, and technologically driven society calls for new kinds of learning and the ability to learn in many contexts—formal and informal. Continuous improvement of instructional practice is the norm, not just for the school that fails to meet AYP.

This is a big agenda—a learning improvement agenda and as succinctly described by one Delaware principal:

"You can't do it by yourself!"

This report looks at this dimension of the shared (or distributed) instructional leadership imperative in Delaware's schools. In preparation for looking at the

¹ Portin, B. (2009, May). *Teacher Voices: Teacher Leaders in Delaware's Schools*. Report prepared for the Teacher Leadership Advisory Committee, Delaware Department of Education, University of Delaware, Delaware Academy for School Leadership. Seattle, Washington: Author.

insights of a sample of Delaware’s principals, it is useful to explore how the same challenge of “not doing it all by yourself” is being accomplished in other locations in the US. Coinciding with a writing of this report, a major study of learning focused leadership in urban schools is ready for release². The study, with generous support from The Wallace Foundation and conducted by researchers at the University of Washington, examined the very issues that drive this inquiry in Delaware:

- How do principals respond to the growing challenge and urgency of instructional leadership?
- How do they work with others to build instructional leadership teams that use teacher leaders in important ways to support classroom practice?
- How do principals learn to do this kind of shared work?

The following section from the report (Portin, et al., 2009) describes it this way:

Whatever their skills at and propensity for working directly with teachers, in and out of the classroom, the principals and other supervisory leaders understood the limits of their own capacity to serve the instructional improvement needs of the entire school, as established by research on the principalship (Portin, DeArmond, Gundlach, & Schneider, 2003). As one assistant principal in an elementary school put it:

My intention for the day is always to be in classrooms. The reality of my day, most of the time, is dealing with discipline problems or going to meetings, or like today, I’m meeting with you and this afternoon I have the [arts organization meeting]... As far as my informal [interaction] or the walk-throughs that I plan, a lot of times those are disrupted by discipline problems, a parent’s here, or we have to do this meeting, or this has to go out today—those kinds of things.

The size and complexity of the school, not to mention limitations on the principal’s base of instructional expertise, prohibited the principal from providing direct instructional support to all teachers who needed it. Furthermore, the sharing of a learning improvement agenda presumed and was nurtured by a team-oriented culture, which principals were fostering, as noted earlier. The kinds of conversations that would help school staff focus on instructional improvement were, and needed to be, mediated by whatever team structures were in place or could be developed.

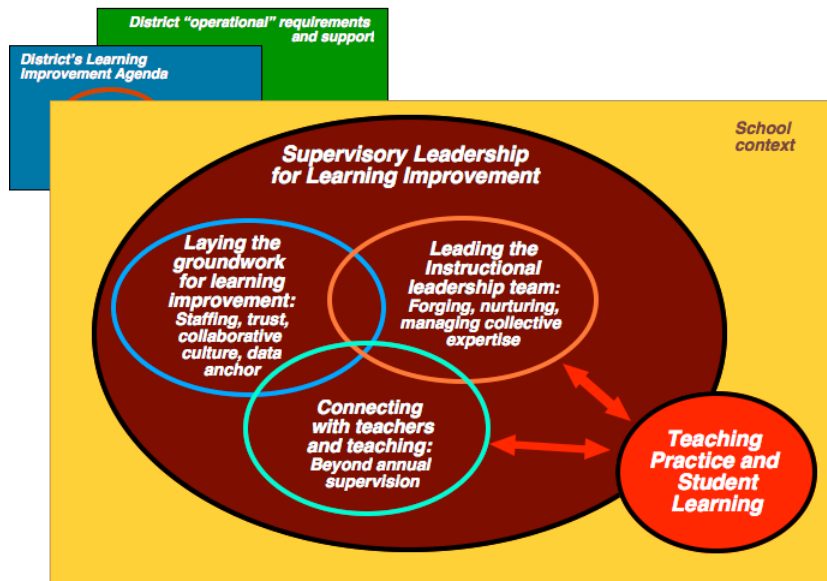
² Portin, B. S., Knapp, M. S., Dareff, S., Feldman, S., Russell, F. A., Samuelson, C., & Yeh, T. L. (2009). *Leadership for Learning Improvement in Urban Schools*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Center for Teaching Policy. [Monograph prepared for The Wallace Foundation under contract]

For all these things to happen productively and in a mutually reinforcing way, *principals needed to act, and see themselves, as leaders of an instructional leadership team as much as, or more than, the sole or chief instructional leader of the school.* Our data point to three facets of this important responsibility: (1) forging one or more teams with instructional leadership as their central responsibility; (2) finding the principal’s own role and voice in this team configuration; and (3) explicitly inviting and nurturing leadership skills and capacity. (Portin, et al, 2009, pp. 71-72)

In the course of this multi-year, national study, we found that supervisory leaders (largely principals) spent a great deal of their time with three interrelated dimensions of instructional leadership. We described it as follows:

The leaders we studied were doing far more than responding to, or engaging, the larger environment.... They were guiding and participating in a process of creating *the school’s own learning improvement agenda*, and then doing what they could, along with their colleagues, to realize that agenda. As they did so, the principals and other supervisory leaders were simultaneously engaged in three interrelated spheres of activity that together embodied the exercise of learning-focused leadership in their schools. These interrelated leadership actions are portrayed in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Supervisory Leadership in Pursuit of the School’s Learning Improvement Agenda



First, they were laying the groundwork for learning improvement in the school and for their leadership work to pursue this goal, through goal setting, culture building, data use, and other means. Second, they were connecting

with teachers and classrooms directly and continuously in a variety of ways, by shifting the pattern of the annual evaluation cycle to one of largely ongoing and informal interactions with teachers. But third, and more important perhaps, they were forging and leading an instructional leadership team rather than a collection of individuals, and finding a voice as principal in this collective work. (Portin, et al., 2009, pp. 50-51)

What this report aims to do is to explore in greater detail what “leading the instructional leadership team” looks like in Delaware. The 12 principals who participated in this small study were consistent in their responses: They can’t imagine doing their work without teacher leader colleagues. As one exclaimed,

Thank God for teacher leaders.

Methodology

This small-scale study was designed to collect perspectives from principals in the three counties of Delaware. Two-hour focus groups were conducted in three locations over the course of two days, August 10-11, 2009.

A semi-structured protocol was developed for the guided focus group discussion. The purpose of the questions was to identify how principals think about and work with teacher leaders in their schools. Their perceptions are a follow-up on the themes that were identified in previous research with teacher leaders in Delaware³.

Six areas for data collection were identified and are outlined in the protocol below:

Guiding Questions for Focus Groups

- 1. What does teacher leadership look like in your school?**
 - a. Who are your teacher leaders?
 - b. What do your teacher leaders do on a regular basis in your school?
- 2. How do your teacher leaders contribute to teacher expertise in your school?**
 - a. How do your teacher leaders support classroom teachers?
 - b. What has teacher leadership brought to your school?
 - i. How are teacher leaders viewed by others in the school?
 - ii. How is teacher leader expertise accessed by teachers?
 - c. How do your teacher leaders influence the learning culture of the school?
- 3. How do you see teacher leaders as helping you to lead in teaching and learning?**
 - a. Do you have something you would think of as an instructional leadership team? What does this team do?
 - b. How do teacher leaders specifically assist you in your leadership responsibilities?
- 4. How do you identify prospective teacher leaders? What do you look for?**

³ See Portin, B. (2009, May). *Teacher Voices: Teacher Leaders in Delaware's Schools*. Report prepared for the Teacher Leadership Advisory Committee, Delaware Department of Education, University of Delaware, Delaware Academy for School Leadership. Seattle, Washington: Author.

- a. What is needed to be successful as a teacher leader?
 - i. Knowledge
 - ii. Skills
 - iii. Dispositions
 - b. How do you support and develop existing teacher leaders?
- 5. What direction and/or support do you get from your district (state) aid your inclusion of teacher leaders in your school?**
- a. What barriers do you see to teacher leadership in your school and/or district?
 - b. What resources would assist you to further utilize teacher leaders?
 - c. Are there ways you can imagine using teacher leaders that you are not able to at this time?
- 6. How did you learn to work with teacher leaders as part of your role as a principal?**
- a. What do/can teacher leaders do that you can't?
 - b. How has working with teacher leaders changed how you think about your own role?

Participants

Principals were recruited statewide from school districts in the three counties by the study sponsors, the *Delaware Academy for School Leadership*. Principals were invited and provided with a small honorarium for participation. Participant numbers by county are listed in Table 2.

Table 1: Participants by county

County	TOTAL
Sussex	2
Kent	2
New Castle	8

While more extensive participation is desirable, the summer period is a difficult time for busy school principals. Given the small number of participants, the views reported here cannot be considered statistically representative of principals across Delaware. The degree of generalizability from these findings will be best be judged by readers. However, the author will note parallels in responses with a larger national representation of principals.

The themes shared by these 12 principals find resonance in other studies of the principalship currently underway.

Data Collection and Analysis Process

Data for this report were comprised of the following:

- Field notes/transcripts were recorded on laptops by members of the DASL staff during the focus group meetings. Participants received a unique identifier and identities have been removed from the documentation. These written transcripts formed the core of the data.
- Audio recordings were made of each session for the purpose of fact-checking field notes, but were not transcribed.
- At the 2009 Delaware Policy and Practice Institute⁴ participants in breakout sessions generated ideas in relation to teacher leadership. The generated themes also formed one data source for this report.

The transcripts taken by the observers were then subject to thematic and content analysis following an inductive approach. Themes and categories were identified and examples and quotes then extracted to illustrate the themes. Attention was made to privilege representativeness and outlying examples are identified as such in the report.

Participant protections

Participants are not identified in this report. The researcher has also removed situational identifiers and, in a few cases, modified the quote to assure anonymity.

⁴ 7th Annual Delaware Policy and Practice Institute, June 24, 2009, Dover, DE. See, <http://www.udel.edu/dasl/conferences/2009ppi.html>

Findings from Focus Groups

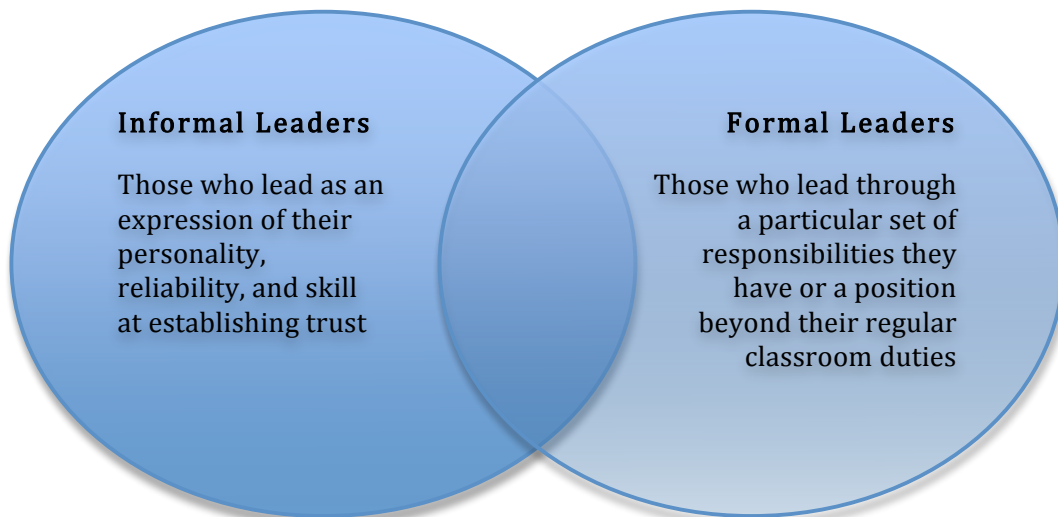
In this section, the findings from the focus groups are clustered around the six categories of questions posed to the participants. Analytic observations and themes are illustrated with selected quotes from the 12 participating principals.

Perspectives on teacher leaders in the schools

In order to begin to understand how principals work with teacher leaders in their school we first asked principals to describe their teacher leaders and what they do on a regular basis. This descriptive orientation—in the initial moments of the focus group discussion—provided an insight into how these school principals even define what a teacher leader is.

Generally, their responses fell into two categories that are common among practitioners and the leadership literature. There was a distinction between the informal leaders (what they called, “natural leaders”) and those whose influence was seen through the lens of the role they hold (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: Distinguishing between types of teacher leaders



The informal leaders often work behind the scenes helping to shape the culture of the school and the orientation toward the improvement of teaching and learning. These are often the ones that peers “go to” for advice and support when a difficult issue comes up. The point is, there is a wide range of activities and ways that informal leaders shape the school. As one principal noted,

Teacher leadership is hard to define. It's carrying on the work the direction the school is going in and it's me not having to do it. It goes deeper than that- Keeping my voice going, the direction of the school going.

Another principal stated,

The teacher leaders help to keep the tires moving. They are involved and understand why we're doing the things we're doing. They talk to those that are the naysayers and fence-sitters.

The people performing influential activities in schools were not necessarily a separate group of people from those who may be formally appointed or recognized, but they simply execute a separate set of activities that might be associated with a role or not. In addition, teacher leaders were often described as arising from two ends of teacher experience continuum—either the “experienced, seasoned” teachers or younger teachers who were more “adaptable to trying new things.”

As in most schools, a variety of formally defined roles were present throughout the schools represented. These roles varied in the amount of time devoted to them, the way teachers get into the roles, and whether additional resources went along with the positions. A few of the following description portray this traditional orientation:

I have a leadership team that is each grade level chairs and then the curriculum chairs as well. We have a leadership meeting every other week after school. I have leadership team and the PBS team that include RTI and the PBS team.... The leadership team does everything.

Teachers have official titles such as leadership team comprised of teachers electing teachers to that group (peers). We divide staff into six teams, each has some piece of leadership. Teams have leadership in our school as far as developing the initiatives in our school. Teachers lead these teams. Teacher leaders are often nominated peer-to-peer.

They have formal roles: lead teachers, department chairs. I have grade level leaders, school improvement team, Vision 2015 team.

These formal teacher leaders work with content and also often lead professional development activities. The “train the trainers” model was often cited as the means by which teacher leaders brought new ideas to the school.

An important finding from this study—and reflected in other work⁵—is that while formal and sometimes traditional roles continue to be found in many schools, these principals talked about a shift that has occurred in teacher leadership activity and in their relation to it. These are roles beyond mere delegation of tasks, but ones where teacher leaders take a primary role in leading and the principal may step back into a more supportive role.

I don't run our leadership meetings, teachers rotate the leadership. We do a time-task-driven agenda, I may have a section of time on it and so may a teacher leader. When we set our goals for the year (school leadership team), we use the expertise of all (administration and teacher leaders) to fill the goals.

A consistent tension that was noted by most of the principals who participated in these focus groups was that the identified teacher leaders represented their greatest talent in schools. As these capable teachers take on leadership responsibilities, that can create an inherent tension. The best teachers are sometimes pulled away from the students that most need their expertise. This, in addition to burn out issues, will be described later in this report. A principal cited this quandary in the following way:

Providing the support with PD means the teacher leaders are out of the classroom. That can hurt instruction, because they are strong instructional leaders and you are pulling them out.

How principals view teacher leaders contribution to teacher expertise

We were interested to know how teacher leaders in these schools connect to the activities of teaching and learning and the improvement of practice. In the past, teacher leaders often were more closely connected to classroom practice through responsibilities such as scheduling and managing matters. This is not the case any longer. In many schools and districts, these traditional managerial roles are giving way to more substantive work around supporting teaching practice. Professional development and a presence in the classrooms of teachers are common activities that these teacher leaders are participating in.

There are two dimensions to how these principals see their teacher leaders supporting instructional practice. The first is through their leadership in the professional development activities of the school. The teacher leaders often are sent to learn the practice, then bring it back and serve as the primary leadership agent for professional learning in the school. One participant described this as follows:

⁵ Portin, B. S., Knapp, M. S., Dareff, S., Feldman, S., Russell, F. A., Samuelson, C., & Yeh, T. L. (2009). *Leadership for Learning Improvement in Urban Schools*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Center for Teaching Policy. [Monograph prepared for The Wallace Foundation under contract]

Teacher Leadership has taken on a different role. We have teachers doing PD activities. We send them out to be trained. We have had teachers leading PD for the last 2 years. They lead curriculum meetings, faculty meetings and workshops. The teachers that lead are not the same every time, it depends on their strengths. They are mostly natural leaders but some are also chosen.

Another principal put it this way:

They do the department meetings. My faculty meetings are also professional development. I do my walkthroughs and I see something and think that is something great to do. And I have them bring that in to the meetings.

The second activity that the principals described was generally in the area of being a more prominent presence in their peers' classrooms. These range from informal peer collaboration to formal processes for walk-through visits. It should be noted that the practice of peers in walk-through activities has a wide range of uses around the country. In some instances, walk-through activities are coupled with evaluation practices. The practices described by these principals were more formative in nature. The following quotes help to portray a range of peer observation practices:

The peer observations have helped tremendously, it has opened everyone up. I want everyone to know why we are doing this process.

Our teacher leaders support—if I see someone is struggling I have to put on the administrator hat, but those teacher leaders will do peer observation, peer coaching, before I have to go in an administrative role, or if I have already met with the person struggling the teacher leaders will help support their improvement plan.

In the past, leaders, including union leaders, are fully supportive and in agreement when we have confronted ineffective teaching. When we actually observe classrooms they understand why we have to do what we do. Peer observation has helped this understanding of other teachers.

It is important to note that this sense of help to classroom practice was not unanimous. One participant declared,

They work for the district. They do the district work, instead of helping the teachers they help the administrators. They're not really helping the teachers.

This seems to suggest that, at least in this context, the role is still being worked-out.

We were interested to know how these principals see teacher leaders being viewed by the other teachers in the school. Principals suggested that their teacher leaders were generally known to be the positive and capable members of their school

community. However, they voiced a concern that teachers who are always willing to “step up” could be viewed as the “principal’s pets.”

Those that are repetitive can be seen as a principal pet. Sharing the wealth, that is the most difficult part for me.

A similar concern was expressed in the teacher leader focus groups conducted earlier. As a result, many of these principals spoke about how they worked to both encourage their teacher leaders, but also to distribute opportunities to others whenever possible.

How teacher leaders contribute to principal instructional leadership

A center point of learning about leading schools is the renewed focus on what it takes to truly undertake instructional leadership in schools. While formerly a nearly sole domain of principal practice, these principals clearly note the importance of a wider instructional leadership capacity. One principal put it succinctly,

We definitely ‘gotta’ have them. We would not be where we are without them!

It is also not just the heavy load of all there is to undertake in supporting teaching and learning across the school, principals also find a sense of personal support in teacher leaders. Teacher leaders have a sense that they are often the “go to” person for principals.⁶ On the other side of the coin, principals often describe their teacher leaders as providing a helpful, confidential forum for issues they are working on.

One principal summed this up in this way:

They are a sounding board. This can be a lonely job. I rely on them. It’s a team effort. I can’t imagine not having people to discuss things with. You always want to work together. You don’t know what the district is thinking.

All of the schools represented spoke of some form of an instructional leadership team that served the purpose of guiding the school’s instructional learning agenda. The names vary and different districts provide an array of models or mandates (as well as state supported team efforts such as *Vision 2015*). For the principals, these instructional teams were the main driver in the school’s instructional improvement work and the principal’s role may be more one of directing or supporting from the side or as a member of the team.

The following comments from the participants show the range of activities in this area:

⁶ Portin, B. (2009, May). *Teacher Voices: Teacher Leaders in Delaware’s Schools*. Report prepared for the Teacher Leadership Advisory Committee, Delaware Department of Education, University of Delaware, Delaware Academy for School Leadership. Seattle, Washington: Author.

I do PBS a little differently. I have a teacher leader lead the meeting. I will sit in the meeting, but the teacher leader will sit at the head of the table. I am a member of the team, but I let the teacher lead.

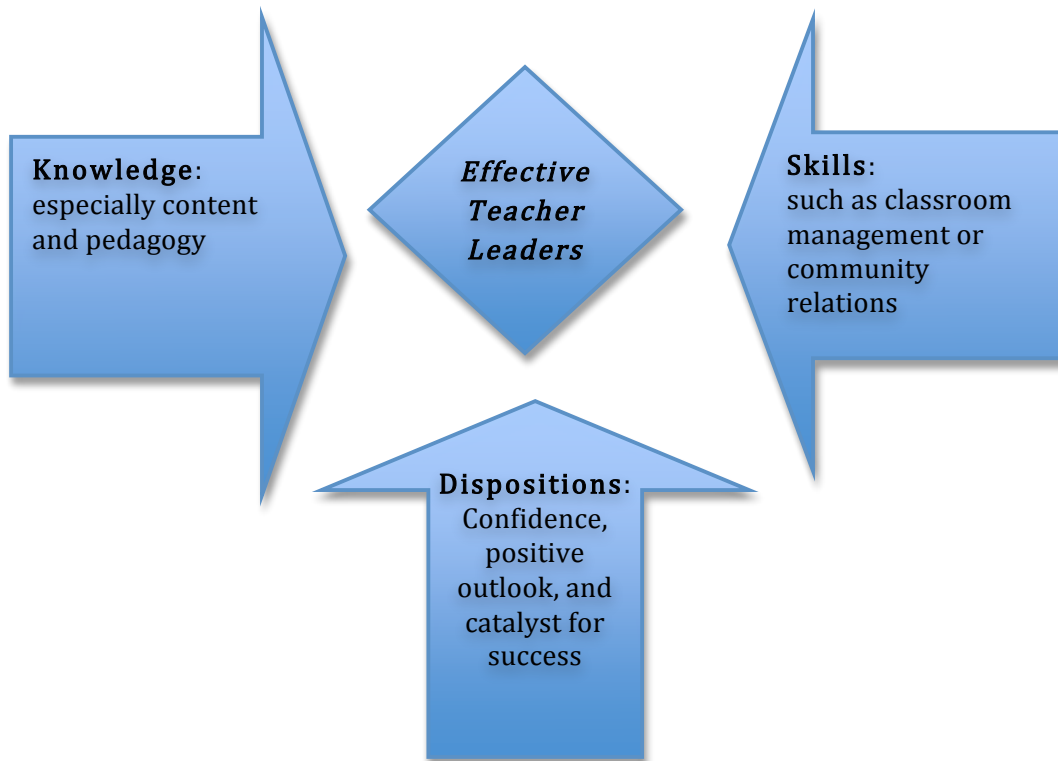
It's all about distributed leadership. There is no way I can do it all. I can't know every problem in the building. I rely on them to bring the latest things, attend conferences that are worthwhile and be an extension of me. It has to be that way for our school and for us to reach every kid. They are leaders in the building. We have department meetings. They are respected people in the staff. They were leaders before they were picked. If they aren't good, then I am and not good and the school isn't good.

This portion of the focus group interviews hit a recurrent concern that distribution is a great aim, but they also worry about the load it places on teachers who may be stretched between responsibilities. One principal summarized this concern in this way:

Now I'm trying not to burn out the teacher leaders. It's easy to give the same people the leadership roles, but that can be bad in the long run. It's about giving them the ball and letting them run with it.

Identifying and supporting teacher leaders

We asked the 12 principals to reflect on the mix of attributes that contribute to the success of teacher leaders and also what, for them, are “looked-for” qualities in prospective teacher leaders. Their responses fell into the three areas of knowledge, skills, and dispositions. While these three areas were part of the question prompts, it is the interaction and distribution that is the interesting story. The responses indicate that each individual category is—on its own—necessary, but insufficient without the other categories. The ways these characteristics interact to contribute to a teacher leader’s success are portrayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Interacting characteristics of effective teacher leaders

While knowledge and skills are essential for the work of teacher leaders, the principals spoke most forcefully about the dispositions of teacher leaders and how these characteristics shaped the learning climate of the school. Two spoke about the challenge that can arise if all three areas don't work together in teacher leadership practice:

Expertise is important. Also, they have to have a certain personality. I made a big mistake in a person I had who was very knowledgeable but abrasive to staff.

I have had people in the past that were teacher leaders, but in the wrong direction. I would never pick them to lead in an area unless their attitude shifted. Don't want them to negatively influence the group's opinion/etc. Have to be a "cheerleader" along with being a leader.

Clearly, these principals see that effective teacher leaders must have a critical orientation toward problem solving as part of their skill set. Different responses presented this as follows:

You want those people who stand up and ask the question why. The teacher leader has the ability to say I can do that too.

All teachers bring you problems, but a teacher leader will bring you a solution or ideas of what the solution to the problem is.

They get the others opinions. I don't want someone who is just going to agree with me. I also like getting the other side. "Why do you think this isn't going to work?" That way we can have a conversation about it.

Need to have the attitude that one person does not have all the answer—including me!

I think teacher leaders become the go-to people; staff coming to me or standing in my doorway has decreased because they go to each other now with questions, when they need help.

For principals, perspective is an important attribute for teacher leaders. They must have a broader view than just their classroom, or even just their school. They stated it this way:

They can see bigger picture outside classroom, it's about the school system as a whole.

I also look for teacher leaders who can see the bigger picture than just their classroom: "I'd like to see the school..." Instead of just thinking about their classroom

And finally, effective teacher leaders build on a base of sound practice as a classroom teacher:

Would I want that teacher teaching my child? That puts it into perspective for me. A teacher leader has to be a good teacher.

Finally, in this section of the group discussion, the principals were asked how they support and develop existing teacher leaders. Teacher leaders were identified and fostered through a process of developing rapport with staff members. Some principals were able to hand-off responsibilities such as developing agendas and facilitating meetings. Some described a process of identifying and mentoring specific teachers.

For me it's spreading the wealth, not going to the same person every time. I try to make sure I spread tasks, but I have some people (like me) that take on 20 things and keep going, but I do try to make sure I don't ask too much of one person.

Many principals indicated that they provide a structure for everyone to have a chance for some type of leadership by offering responsibilities and recruiting staff members to work on specific initiatives. Other principals indicated that they had a more formal process where they annually invite letters of interest for leadership positions. This process, some thought, has a role in the prevention of *cliques* among the school community. Finally, some principals were bound by board policy to hold elections where teachers elect colleagues to official representative posts.

State and district direction and/or support for the work of teacher leaders

An important part of understanding how principals see their work with teacher leaders is in how they view the contextual supports and influences. We wanted to know how district and state resources and colleagues assist principals or contribute to the practice of shared instructional leadership.

The State of Delaware emerged as prominent in several comments. This is especially so in relation to specific policy initiatives. Both *Vision 2015* and the influence of *DPAS II* were noted.

My connection with Vision 2015 has led me to think of teacher leaders in a different way. Trying to keep the same people in that group that goes to those meetings but I have extended that group a little more. That is our instructional leadership group.

I think it's helped that the professional responsibilities have changed a little in DPAS II. It's implied that you will participate in PD outside the school day, serve on committees, that's being a professional. Part of being a teacher leader is being a 'Component 4⁷' teacher in DPAS II. This is part of my hiring now. What can you lead? What can you do? What have you done in the past that shows leadership?

While prominent, the view of consistent state resource for teacher leadership wasn't unanimous. One respondent claimed:

Statewide at this point we are not receiving anything. RTI and substitutes. District-wide, they are big on aspiring administrators. Identifying leaders in the building.

⁷ Component 4 deals with "professional responsibilities" of teachers such as Communicating with Families; Developing a Student Record System; Growing and Developing Professionally; Reflecting on Professional Practice. See: <http://www.doe.k12.de.us/csa/dpasii/default.shtml>

The role of districts in supporting principals in their work with teacher leaders was more opaque in the comments shared during these sessions, although one respondent noted:

I get lots of support from the superintendent and district leaders.

Analysis of the responses indicated that time is a major systemic barrier to the work of teacher leaders in schools. This is powerfully resonant with themes shared in the parallel study of teacher leaders.⁸

Principals did not feel that they, and their teacher leaders, had enough time in the day to accomplish all of the tasks that they would like. Various structures were noted as helpful, from blocking out time for professional development each term to holding more meetings with the staff.

The competing pressure between teachers needing more time to complete their classroom work and teacher leadership duties was noted. A principal suggested that while it was helpful for a literacy coach to take on certain duties, she lost three weeks of instruction time with her students. This “cost versus opportunity” analysis was applied several times to the role of teacher leadership and lost time with students.

The final component that time plays in developing teacher leadership is the significant amount of time taken to develop a truly collegial culture consisting of support and trust. Not only does it take time for the staff to believe in this culture shift, the principals in one session expressed that the districts must first rethink school leadership structure to make teacher leadership truly successful.

Learning to work with teacher leaders

Working extensively with teacher leaders is a new practice for many principals. Shared instructional leadership causes principals to look at their own roles in different ways and discover that others may be better positioned than they are to lead some of the work of instructional leadership. The former model—and some based more on “heroic” leadership notions—vested all leadership activity with the principal. These principals reflected on this shift.

When I came in I thought I would do it all. You can't. You can't do it all. I learned that as an assistant. I started to learn and really process. As a teacher I had a lot of answers. As an assistant I had less answers. I rely on the teacher leaders if I am going to be successful. I have to make them feel successful.

⁸ Portin, B. (2009, May). *Teacher Voices: Teacher Leaders in Delaware's Schools*. Report prepared for the Teacher Leadership Advisory Committee, Delaware Department of Education, University of Delaware, Delaware Academy for School Leadership. Seattle, Washington: Author.

Metaphorically, the work of principals with teacher leaders is more akin to an orchestra conductor than a soloist.⁹ As one principal described,

I see that I'm more of an organizer. I don't want to say I'm an HR person. You are organizing it, contemplating more on teacher leader roles and those key components. It's like putting a puzzle together, trying to find where the pieces go.

Principals also recognize that there are certain things that teacher leaders are uniquely positioned to do. For example, since teacher leaders are in a non-evaluative position, they can often engage in peer conversations about practice in different ways than can the principal who wields evaluative power. A participant put it this way:

To be honest, teachers know who the good teachers are and the bad teachers are. You can tell by the requests. If they could go into the classroom and develop that comfort-level, it would be easier coming from the teacher leader than coming from me. Having that professional conversation, this is what I'm doing that's working. I can't be an expert in everything and be in the classroom all the time.

Working with teacher leaders is new for many principals. They are often the first to acknowledge that they have gaps in their skill base for working with teacher leaders. The following comments from the principals outline where they are finding the expertise:

I was not trained in developing teacher leaders. It was more by trial and error. In my first years, I didn't have teacher leaders because I was afraid to let the control go. I compensate that by leaving the how up to them, but they are clear in their expectation. Those first couple of years were crazy trying to micro manage.

I've learned through experience; trial and error; being able to talk to your people to listen, but also work with them and believe in them and push them to work on new things/take on new roles.

To try to remember your own experience, how you were asked to take on leadership roles, to try to emulate that because it worked for you too.

⁹ Portin, B. S., DeArmond, M., Gundlach, L., & Schneider, P. (2003). *Making sense of leading schools: A national study of the principalship*. Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington, Seattle.

Further Considerations

The Teacher Leadership Advisory Committee and policymakers in Delaware will interpret of the findings of this study for policy and practice. This report, in tandem with the report *Teacher Voices*, suggests a number of ongoing issues for expanding leadership to support teaching and learning in schools and the ways that principals work with teacher leaders.

Professional learning

At least in the view of these principals, they see the emerging elements of a cohesive system of support for teacher leaders and for principals as they work with teacher leaders. This suggests that for principals, new learning in the practice of sharing instructional leadership is necessary. One principal stated,

The principals need to be trained too.

The professional learning needs of teacher leaders were expressed as being both a district and a state need. As suggested in the previous section about desired outcomes, a similar comment was made by the following principal:

Something specific for teacher leaders to develop skills, if something could be offered to them in effective communication, leadership, consensus building, etc. If they could use this is a professional development experience that prepares them for being a better teacher or for the administrative track. And also for someone who wants to be a leader in a different track than administration.

Critical questions

The findings from this study suggest a number of critical questions for policymakers and educational leaders who are considering enhancing a system of instructional leadership—especially one that includes the expansion of teacher leadership roles and activities. Policymakers, school, and district leaders may need to ask:

- **What forms of instructional leadership teams work best for our districts and schools?**
- **How are principals best prepared to work with teacher leaders?**
- **What cultural shifts in schools are necessary to support the broad-based work of instructional leadership teams?**

- What resources make the most difference for instructional resource teams in schools?
- How can the educational system (state and district) support teacher leaders to prevent burning out those who hold the potential for the most impact on teaching and learning?
- What professional development is most effective for supporting teams?
- What contractual obligations facilitate or inhibit the exercise of learning-focused teacher leadership?
- How should the work of an instructional team be evaluated? Who is best placed to do that evaluation?
- What resources can universities and third party providers bring to the work of principals and teacher leaders?
- Is there a “threshold” level of commitment to shared leadership practice that is necessary for instructional leadership to flourish?
- What opportunities can be provided to “grow” teacher leaders and the principals who work with them?
- What is the right balance of school adaptation and system cohesion for instructional leadership team effectiveness?

Sharing leadership

Finally, the at the *7th Annual Delaware Policy and Practice Institute*, attendees in a break-out session generated a list of suggested strategies that principals can use to develop teacher leadership in their schools. The list is relevant to this discussion and suggest ways that principals might further their own expertise at sharing leadership. These ideas are summarized in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Sharing leadership responsibilities with teachers can be accomplished by:

- *Having an open door policy*
- *Asking teachers to attend formal meetings and outside professional development and reporting back to staff*

- *Asking teachers to lead professional development, in-service and faculty meetings*
- *Allowing collaborative walk-throughs and peer observations*
- *Providing common planning times for teachers*
- *Expecting that every teacher can and will be a leader*
- *Requesting teacher input and help on issues*
- *Identifying individual strengths of staff and utilizing those strengths for appropriate tasks*
- *Providing both formal (committees, professional development) and informal (books clubs, etc.) leadership opportunities*

[7th Annual Delaware Policy and Practice Institute, June 24, 2009, Dover, DE. See, <http://www.udel.edu/dasl/conferences/2009ppi.html>]

Building teacher leadership capacity

At the same institute, another break-out session focused on the question of what might enhance the capacity of teacher leaders to engage in supporting teaching and learning. The brainstormed suggestions are outlined in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Recommended strategies for building teacher leadership capacity

- *Define the role of teacher leaders and expectations*
- *Matching teacher leader interests with tasks*
- *Realignment of resources (i.e., monetary compensation, time allocation) to support teacher leader roles*
- *Summer institutes at school or district level for teacher leaders*
- *Identifying the talent of faculty*
- *Systematic professional development*
- *Reward schools that are finding success with better training and monetary incentives*
- *Provide administrative support and recognition*

- *Maintain high expectations for high quality instruction*
- *Provide advanced certification for teacher leaders*
- *Share what works between schools*
- *Empower teachers and then give them autonomy*
- *Build trust by providing a means/framework for school leaders to learn how to work with teacher leaders*
- *Professional learning communities in schools*
- *Provide celebrations for success of teacher leadership*
- [7th Annual Delaware Policy and Practice Institute, June 24, 2009, Dover, DE. See, <http://www.udel.edu/dasl/conferences/2009ppi.html>]