The tEACH Factor

UNLEASHING
TEACHER LEADERSHIP

How Formal Teacher Leader Roles Can Improve Instruction

NIET

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Today's teachers increasingly demand opportunities to take on nonadministrative leadership roles that enable them to have a broader impact beyond their own classrooms. And the past decade has seen a growing attention to and investment in teacher leadership among national organizations and state policymakers.

The movement to expand teacher leadership coincides with a great challenge for education. Nearly every state has adopted new learning standards that require teachers to change their instructional practices in significant ways. But, in the past, American education has proven chronically unable to reliably upgrade instruction across classrooms.

We know what *could* work. Research has shown that, under the right circumstances, certain school-based strategies can improve teaching and accelerate learning: teacher participation in structured collaborative learning; job-embedded professional development and coaching; and growth-oriented evaluation that includes more frequent feedback based on classroom observations.

However, research has also shown that the successful models of these strategies are all very leadership-intensive. That is, they require significant investments of time and energy from expert instructional leaders in order to deliver reliable results. Unfortunately, too often principals are still being asked to shoulder the full responsibility for instructional leadership in their schools, even though they are stretched too thinly to do so effectively.

Teacher leadership offers the perfect solution. Today's teachers *want* instructional leadership roles, and such roles *could be* leveraged to bridge the massive capacity gap in instructional leadership that is holding back progress in improving teaching and learning in American schools.

Yet mounting evidence suggests that too many current models of teacher leadership are inadequately designed to achieve this aim. Many teacher leadership roles are not squarely focused on the kinds of proven engines for instructional improvement identified by recent research. Moreover, even when teacher leader roles do clearly focus on instructional improvement, the teachers who take them on too often lack the formal authority, support and tools to be successful.

Therefore, while many forms of teacher leadership can be beneficial, policymakers and school system leaders need to pay particular attention to creating and expanding *formal instructional teacher leadership roles*.

While such roles are still relatively rare in American education, there are homegrown examples that can provide inspiration and valuable lessons learned. For example, the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) has nearly 20 years of successful experience helping school systems implement formal, instructionally-focused teacher leader positions in hundreds of schools across ten states. Over that period, NIET has directly trained 30,000 new teacher leaders.

In school systems supported by NIET, expert teachers take on instructional leadership positions such as the following:

- *Mentor Teacher:* Teacher leaders who remain embedded in their own classrooms as "teachers-of-record" for one or more classes of students while also spending several hours per week working with a group of colleagues to improve teaching and learning.

- *Master Teacher:* Teacher leaders who are released from all or most regular classroom teaching duties in order to provide instructional leadership for about fifteen of their colleagues.

Working closely with their principals, Master Teachers and Mentor Teachers lead collaborative teams of teachers (called "cluster groups"); formally observe classroom lessons to give detailed feedback to teachers; and provide teachers with weekly classroom-based coaching and support. They also serve on a schoolwide instructional leadership team led by the principal.

Policymakers and education system leaders who invest in formal instructional teacher leadership need to carefully consider how to do so in ways that will best sustain teacher leadership and maximize its benefits for instruction and learning. NIET offers the following advice based on lessons learned over the past two decades.

1. *Design formal teacher leadership responsibilities to encompass all of the main schoolwide systems for improving instruction.* Formal instructional leadership roles for teachers should be designed to focus squarely on addressing the most pressing need in education — the gap in school-level capacity to systematically and reliably improve teaching and accelerate student learning. To accomplish that, the roles should give teacher leaders significant responsibility for managing and implementing research-proven, high-impact levers for improving instruction; leading collaborative learning teams; conducting formal observations to provide useful feedback to teachers; and ensuring that all teachers benefit from classroom-based coaching.

2. *Leverage teacher leadership to create coherence across major instructional improvement initiatives.* Surveys show that teachers are suffering from "reform fatigue," not only because of the amount of change they are being asked to accommodate but also because new initiatives are frequently rolled out to teachers across multiple platforms in disconnected ways. Many of NIET's school system partners have found that formal instructional teacher leadership roles offer a strategic opportunity to quell the cacophony and create more coherence. Teacher leaders can go first, field-testing new strategies in real classrooms with real students, and they can leverage school-based professional development to help teachers integrate new strategies into their own classroom practice.

3. *Establish multiple, interconnected leadership positions to increase opportunity, reach, and impact.* Decision-makers should consider creating multiple, interconnected teacher leadership roles that are sequenced in a career ladder. Among other benefits, such an approach creates more opportunities for expert teachers in a school to take on formal instructional leadership roles. It also expands schoolwide instructional leadership capacity in ways that enable more teachers to benefit from the focused, job-embedded support teacher leaders provide.

4. *Emphasize that formal instructional teacher leadership roles enhance, rather than limit, opportunities for all staff to engage in leadership.* Research and experience have shown that leadership is not a zero-sum quantity in schools. Formal instructional teacher leadership positions enhance, rather than limit, opportunities for administrators and for all other teachers to engage in leadership. However, because of misconceptions about formal teacher leadership roles, policymakers and system leaders need to communicate this up front.

5. *Select teacher leaders who have the right set of accomplishments, skills and dispositions to succeed.* Formal instructional teacher leadership roles are not honorifics bestowed on more senior teachers with long experience in a particular district or school. Rather, they are highly demanding positions that require commitment to the unique nature of "hybrid" leadership. Achieving success in such roles requires a relatively rare combination of skills and attributes. Therefore, it is important that such leaders be competitively selected from a robust candidate pool based on explicit job-related criteria.

6. *Provide teacher leaders with training and ongoing support focused on specific job responsibilities.* Teachers who take on formal instructional leadership roles require specialized training and ongoing support to fulfill new responsibilities they will not have encountered before. The most effective training and support will be targeted to specific responsibilities of the role — such as leading collaborative teams or conducting formal observations to provide instructional feedback.

7. *Empower teacher leaders by adopting common tools and protocols, including a research-based instructional framework or rubric.* Master and Mentor Teachers invariably cite the adoption of common protocols and frameworks as a significant advantage for their leadership practice. Far from stifling creativity or stymieing initiative, such tools provide teacher leaders with critical scaffolding for doing their jobs well, and they relieve new teacher leaders from having to "reinvent the wheel."

8. *Create and protect release time during the week for teacher leaders to lead, and give them enough time to build trust and long-term relationships that enable success.* Teacher leaders need sufficient, predictable and dedicated release time to fulfill their specific job responsibilities every day and every week. Moreover it takes time for teacher leaders to develop the relationships, trust and credibility necessary to realize maximum impact on classroom practices and student learning. Therefore, policymakers and local school boards must give new investments in teacher leadership time to take root rather than demanding big results after only one year.

9. *Make more strategic use of existing resources to fund formal teacher leadership positions.* NIET's partner districts have found they can pay for formal teacher leadership positions even when dedicated state or federal funds are not available if they make more strategic use of their existing resources. First, district leaders can repurpose spending on budget items that are not producing measurable improvements in instruction and student learning. Second, they can use school-based teacher leadership positions to "insource" professional development, repurposing funds previously spent on expensive outside providers in order to deliver more relevant job-embedded learning for all teachers.

10. *Place teacher leaders at the school level, but expect districts to play a key role in sustaining and leveraging teacher leadership for maximum impact.* Formal instructional teacher leadership positions are best embedded at the school level, enabling teacher leaders to build and capitalize on deep relationships with the teachers they lead and support. However, districts play a critical role in establishing, sustaining and leveraging formal teacher leadership to achieve maximum impact. District-level leadership is especially crucial when it comes to the recruitment and hiring of teacher leaders, providing ongoing support for teacher leaders, funding and sustaining teacher leadership positions, and leveraging teacher leadership to create coherence across districtwide improvement initiatives.

I. Wedding Teacher Demand for Leadership Opportunities with the Need to Expand Instructional Leadership in Schools

Today's teachers demand and even expect to have opportunities to take on leadership positions that *do* allow them to keep one foot in classroom teaching and *do not* require them to become administrators. Interest in "hybrid leadership" or "middle leader" roles is especially strong among younger teachers and even pre-service teachers. (See sidebar, "Teachers Want Leadership Opportunities.")

Fueled in part by that rising demand, the past decade has seen a growing attention to, and investment in, teacher leadership. For example, in 2010-11, a consortium of education groups and associations, including the National Association of Elementary School Principals, published *Teacher Leader Model Standards* with accompanying policy recommendations.[4] Several states have introduced new efforts to expand leadership opportunities for teachers, including Iowa, which in 2014-15 launched a statewide Teacher Leadership and Compensation System.[5]

The current movement to expand teacher leadership coincides with a great challenge for educators. Nearly every state has adopted new learning standards that require teachers to change their instructional practices in significant ways.[6] Yet, in the past, American education has proven chronically unable to reliably and significantly change instruction across classrooms. For example, many teachers continue to report that professional development experiences are not relevant or useful.[7]

Fortunately, recent research has greatly clarified what kinds of school-based strategies *can* work to better support teachers as they engage in the hard work of improving instruction. One recent study by researchers at Brown University found that teachers working in schools with more supportive professional environments improved their instructional effectiveness by *39 percent more* than teachers in less supportive environments over a ten-year period.[8] In addition to having a skilled principal and a safe and orderly workplace, high-support environments included the following elements:

- opportunities for teachers to collaborate on improving instruction;

- extensive time and resources for professional development; and

- an objective and accurate approach to evaluation that offered meaningful feedback for improvement.[9]

Those findings mirror other studies that show positive impacts on teaching and learning for three kinds of strategies — teacher participation in collaborative learning teams, job-embedded professional development and coaching, and growth-oriented evaluation that includes more frequent feedback based on classroom observations. Based on such research, education leaders and policymakers would be wise to ensure that all schools incorporate those three strategies as core "engines" for continuously improving instruction across classrooms.

Teachers Want Leadership Opportunities

- The most recent MetLife Survey of the American Teacher found 51 percent of all teachers are at least somewhat interested in "teaching in the classroom part-time combined with other roles and responsibilities," compared with only 16 percent who were similarly interested in becoming a school principal.[1]

- Research conducted by Harvard University's Project on the Next Generation of Teachers found that, unlike their predecessors, many beginning teachers have a strong interest in differentiated, "hybrid" roles that would allow them to continue teaching while moving beyond the classroom to have a greater influence in their schools.[2]

- A 2016 study of pre-service teachers concluded that "the new generation of teachers will likely seek to move rapidly along a career path that incorporates opportunities for leadership and role diversity early on."[3]

However, there is a catch. The evidence also makes clear that, in order to actually achieve results, such strategies must be implemented in ways that require huge investments of time and expertise by instructional leaders. For example:

- The only quasi-experimental study of teacher collaborative teams found that they did not increase student achievement when led by principals — who often lacked the time and expertise to lead them successfully. However, collaborative teams did increase student achievement when they were led by teacher leaders who had been trained to use a structured protocol to identify and address student learning problems.[10]

- The only experimental study of in-person instructional coaching found that it can have a significant impact on instructional practices, but the results were achieved through dozens of hours of coaching and a 10-1 ratio of teachers per coach.[11]

- A major longitudinal study of instructional coaching also found that it can have substantial impacts on student learning gains if teachers received high enough "doses" of coaching — a factor that varied widely across schools in the study.[12]

Unfortunately, too often principals are still being asked to shoulder the full load of leading and implementing proven but labor-intensive instructional improvement strategies, even though

Principals Need Help Leading Instructional Improvement in Schools

Principals are under increasing pressure to significantly expand the time and effort they spend on "instructional leadership"—activities that can improve or upgrade the effectiveness of instruction across classrooms. But the evidence is now strikingly clear such expectations are unreasonable given the many other critical demands on principals' time, such as overseeing school scheduling and logistics, hiring and supervising instructional and non-instructional staff, managing facilities, filing written reports, and meeting shifting state and district requirements.

Therefore, it should be no surprise that principals manage to spend, on average, only 8 to 17 percent of their working hours on instructional leadership, and they are often spread so thinly during those hours that their efforts have little impact on teaching and learning.[13]

One recent study found teacher and school performance did improve when principals spent more time on such activities as instructional coaching, evaluating teaching, and developing the school's instructional program. However, principals spent less than 13 percent of their time on those three activities combined. Incredibly, principals managed to spend less than 1 percent of their time on the activity that showed the strongest link to improvements in teaching and learning—instructional coaching.[14]

In fact, several recent studies suggest that principals are hard-pressed even when it comes to meeting just one instructional leadership demand—conducting teacher evaluations in ways useful for improving instruction and learning. For example:

- A 2016 study on the implementation of a new evaluation system in one urban district found that nearly all principals expressed serious concerns about meeting its requirements, with some describing them as "a nightmare" and "nuts." In consequence, "the demands on principals and their administrative teams to conduct extensive evaluations for all teachers limited the frequency and quality of feedback teachers received."[15]

- Similarly, a 2016 survey of winners and finalists for State Teacher of the Year suggested that "the challenges of time, resources, and overall capacity of evaluators limited teachers' opportunity to receive information about their performance that can help them improve their craft."[16]

Several programs now exist that can help schools hire and support additional managerial assistance for principals to free up more time for instructional leadership.[17] Yet even if such strategies could double or triple the amount of time principals spend on instructional leadership, that would still amount to—at most—only around half of a principal's working hours.

they are stretched too thinly to do so effectively. Simply put, principals lack the time, and sometimes the instructional expertise, to single-handedly provide effective instructional leadership in their schools. (See sidebar, "Principals Need Help Leading Instructional Improvement in Schools.")

Principals agree they need help. In November 2017, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) released a position statement that suggests a solution: "According to the 2012 MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, three-quarters of all principals reported that the job 'has become too complex,' which demonstrates a need

Teacher Leadership as a Teacher Retention Strategy

Expanding formal teacher leadership roles can be a powerful strategy for addressing teacher retention if those roles are carefully designed. In fact, such roles can exert positive influence on teacher retention through two different levers.

First, research clearly indicates a huge demand among today's teachers for opportunities to step into hybrid or middle leader roles that focus on improving instruction and do not require becoming an administrator. Common sense suggests that teachers are more likely to remain in schools where they can access such opportunities.[19]

Second, if leadership roles focus on proven strategies for supporting classroom instruction, they will contribute to a professional environment in which all teachers are better able to succeed. Research shows that teachers in schools with stronger instructional supports are more satisfied and less likely to leave.[20]

Recent research from England, which has invested heavily in expanding "middle leader" roles for teachers, supports the link between leadership opportunities and retention. Based on survey data from over 50,000 teachers, "scope for progression" ranked among the top three school-level factors driving higher job satisfaction and a lower desire to move to another school.[21]

for principals to involve teacher leaders by instilling shared responsibility for school culture, policies, and practices."[18]

In other words, the problem isn't a lack of *knowledge* about what works to improve instruction but a lack of *capacity* to get the job done. Schools need more fuel in the "instructional leadership" gas tank, and expert teacher leaders are the obvious energy source.

When viewed through this lens, it becomes clear that instructional teacher leadership *could be* a high-octane fuel for improving and continuously upgrading the quality and consistency of classroom instruction in American schools. More than that, teacher leadership *could be* a "super fuel" offering many overlapping benefits at once — meeting the increasing teacher demand for hybrid leadership roles; expanding instructional leadership and distributing leadership in school buildings; reliably evaluating teaching and providing more frequent and more useful feedback to teachers; greatly improving the relevance and effectiveness of professional development; increasing teacher retention (see sidebar, "Teacher Leadership as a Teacher Retention Strategy"); and, ultimately, accelerating student learning.

Given this "perfect storm," why isn't teacher leadership having the impact that it should in and across our nation's schools? More specifically, why haven't school systems been able to successfully marry the increasing *demand* for, and investment in, teacher leadership with the clear *need* to build greater and more effective instructional leadership capacity in schools?

According to mounting evidence, the answer is that too many current models of teacher leadership are inadequately designed to achieve this aim. Many teacher leadership roles are not squarely focused on the kinds of proven engines for instructional improvement identified by recent research. Moreover, even when teacher leader roles do clearly focus on instructional improvement, they often do not confer enough formal status and authority to get the job done.

Consider a recent foundation-supported initiative to train teacher leaders and increase school-level instructional leadership in a number of Philadelphia schools. An evaluation of the effort found that, although it succeeded in recruiting and training a robust cadre of teacher leaders, the initiative had only a limited impact on classroom instruction and no impact on learning. According to a follow-up study by Jonathan Supovitz, a University of Pennsylvania

researcher and national expert on school leadership, "Without the right resources, support, structure, and authority to enact instructional leadership, teacher leaders face[d] strong headwinds to influence the instructional practices of their peers, which is the core challenge of instructional leadership."[22]

Based on that study, as well as his careful review of additional relevant research, Supovitz calls for an evolution in teacher leadership. "Identifying strong teachers and building their leadership and coaching skills is only part of the solution," he writes. "Without empowering teacher leaders with more authority to exert influence on their colleagues to engage in instructional reform, efforts to leverage teacher leadership for school improvement will continue to fall short of their potential. [...] What seems to follow from the accumulated research on teacher leadership for instructional improvement is that even quasi-formal teacher leadership is not a substitute for formal leadership authority. This might provide the impetus for the next evolution of teacher leadership."[23]

A 2016 survey by Bain and Co. suggests the same. Bain surveyed more than 4,200 teachers and administrators in school systems of varying sizes around the country. Those systems had clearly invested in teacher leadership. About one in four

teachers reported having some kind of "teacher leader" title. However, only 22 percent of those teacher leaders said they felt responsible for the performance and growth of the colleagues they led. Only 32 percent of the teacher leaders felt responsible for the learning and development of students taught by those teachers, and only 19 percent felt accountable for student progress in those classrooms.[24]

The evidence is clear: Today's teachers want instructional leadership roles, and such roles can be leveraged to bridge the massive capacity gap in instructional leadership that is holding back progress in improving teaching and learning in American schools. We know that teachers and their students will benefit from expanding formal teacher leadership roles in schools if those roles are carefully designed to focus squarely on proven engines for improving instruction. However, teachers who step up to fill those roles must be provided the formal status and tools to succeed — including clearly defined leadership responsibilities described in written position descriptions with commensurate titles, compensation, release time, and professional authority and accountability to get the job done.

II. Getting Clear about Formal Instructional Teacher Leadership Roles

In order to expand formal instructional teacher leadership, education leaders and policymakers must be very clear about what those roles look like and how they differ from other varieties of teacher leadership. Unfortunately, despite growing enthusiasm for "teacher leadership," our current national conversation about the issue suffers from a potentially crippling lack of clarity. As Supovitz puts it, "The teacher leadership movement … has an identity crisis."[25]

Across reports, blog posts, studies and news articles, the term "teacher leadership" is used to describe a staggeringly broad range of concepts.[26] For example, two recent studies — and news articles about them — defined teacher leadership as the extent to which teachers, on average, say they have a voice in school-level decision-making, as measured by survey data.[27] At the same time, the term "teacher leadership" can also refer to more formal positions that allow some teachers to take on additional responsibilities, such as mentoring new teachers or providing peer-to-peer coaching in math instruction. Figure 1 illustrates a broad range of meanings that the term can convey.

Complicating matters, formal instructional teacher leadership positions — the kind represented on the left-hand side of Figure 1 — are still relatively uncommon in the United States. (See sidebar, "Lack of Instructional Leadership in U.S. Schools: An International Perspective.") As a result, education

FIGURE 1. What Can "Teacher Leadership" Mean?

The concepts below illustrate the wide range of approaches the term "teacher leadership" can convey.

"FORMAL"	"QUASI-FORMAL"	"IMPROVISED"	"ORGANIC"	"CONSULTATIVE"
Restructuring schools to incorporate "middle level" leadership positions with formal titles and commensurate compensation, release time, and professional authority and accountability	Incorporating teacher leader roles into the formal structure of schools, along with training and support, but stopping short of conferring formal professional authority and accountability	Creating opportunities for teachers to take on leadership roles to support schools, providing them with training and resources, but not changing the organizational structure of schools	Making efforts to improve education within or beyond the school in self-directed, informal ways	Having a say in schoolwide decisions that impact classroom teaching
Example:	**Example:**	**Example:**	**Example:**	**Example:**
TAP System Master Teacher and Mentor Teacher positions as described in this report	Recruiting expert teachers to be literacy coaches in support of a districtwide reading initiative	Mentoring new teachers without release time	Collaborating with colleagues on lesson plans Organizing a book study or designing an educational app	Teachers' influence on school's curriculum, instructional, discipline and budget decisions

Source: National Institute for Excellence in Teaching. The "organic," "improvised," and "quasi-formal" categories are based on Supovitz, J. (2017). Teacher leaders' work with peers in a quasi-formal teacher leadership model. School Leadership & Management, 1-37.

researchers have paid increasing attention to formal teacher leadership roles and career ladders in other school systems around the world, such as Singapore, Shanghai and England.[29]

Yet American education leaders and experts need not look abroad to find examples of formal instructional teacher leadership. Through its support of the TAP System for Teacher and Student Advancement and the technical assistance it provides through its Educator Effectiveness Best Practices, the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) has two decades of successful experience helping school systems implement formal, instructionally-focused teacher leader positions in hundreds of American schools across ten states. (See sidebar, "About NIET and the TAP System.")

Ascension Public Schools in Louisiana offers one useful case study for contrasting quasi-formal teacher leadership and the kind of formal teacher leadership NIET supports. Teacher leadership played a critical role in improving teacher practice and student learning in Ascension, which today ranks among the top seven percent of school districts nationwide in terms of annual student achievement growth in math and English language arts.[30]

Ascension's story begins in 2007, when the district introduced the TAP System into a handful of its lowest-performing schools. Those schools, in turn, began to see improvements in student learning over the next few years. When Ascension Superintendent Patrice Pujol (who became President of NIET in 2016), created a local "Turnaround Zone" in 2010, it made sense to select the TAP System as a core strategy for improving instruction in all of the turnaround schools. Because the TAP System introduces school-based "Master Teachers" and "Mentor Teachers" who formally co-lead instructional improvement with the school's principal, the turnaround effort expanded *formal* instructional teacher leadership to a larger number of schools in the district.

Lack of Instructional Leadership in U.S. Schools: An International Perspective

"Vertically, the U.S. school principal hovers over a staff of generally equal status (with each other). There are few or no interceding layers of responsibility, except for the managerial functions of teachers in roles like high school department heads. This system turns instructional leadership into a travesty of what it should be. The end of instructional leadership should be to develop great instruction for all students by working with the school's best experts on instruction to make this happen....But because the U.S. has few ways of formally recognizing instructional leadership among the teaching staff, principals are being required not to lead teams of effective teacher leaders, but to be performance managers who are responsible for judging good and poor performance. Hovering above the flattened structure of schools, principals are therefore being overwhelmed by their formal observational responsibilities of individual teachers and their lessons. There is just nobody else with the formal authority to do the job."

— Andy Hargreaves
Brennan Chair in the Boston College Lynch School of Education and Education Advisor to the Premier and Minister of Education of Ontario[28]

About NIET and the TAP System

NIET partners with states, districts, schools and institutions of higher education to implement multiple strategies that promote educator effectiveness, including teacher leadership and career advancement, accurate and meaningful evaluations, and focused professional development. NIET's expertise centers on its comprehensive model, TAP™: The System for Teacher and Student Advancement (TAP System), as well as its suite of customizable Educator Effectiveness Best Practices. Taken together, these initiatives impact over 250,000 educators and 2.5 million students each school year.

Teacher leadership lies at the heart of NIET's mission and activities. Over the past two decades, NIET has trained 30,000 teachers to take on formal instructional leadership roles in their schools. Most of those teacher leaders have worked in high-need schools implementing the full TAP System or core elements of TAP.

First launched in 1999, The TAP System promotes educator effectiveness through the following four integrated components:

Multiple career paths. In TAP schools, skilled teachers have the opportunity to serve in formal instructional leadership positions called "Master Teacher" and "Mentor Teacher." Master and Mentor Teachers serve on a schoolwide instructional leadership team, led by the principal, which develops the schoolwide plan for improving student learning and manages the school's core instructional improvement strategies. They lead collaborative teams of teachers, formally observe lessons and provide feedback, and provide individualized instructional coaching.

Ongoing applied professional growth. Master and Mentor Teachers lead colleagues in collaborative teams that meet weekly to examine student data, plan instruction, and learn new strategies for teaching and learning that have been field-tested and proven effective in their own schools. They also support teachers through individualized, classroom-based coaching.

Instructionally focused accountability. In TAP System schools, teachers are formally observed and receive targeted feedback for improvement on their classroom instruction several times per year by multiple trained observers, including the Master and Mentor Teachers in addition to the principal and other school leaders.

Performance-based compensation. Teachers in TAP System schools have the opportunity to earn annual bonuses based on their observed skills, knowledge, and responsibilities, their students' average achievement growth, and schoolwide achievement growth. Master Teachers and Mentor Teachers receive additional compensation based on their added roles and responsibilities, and principals can earn additional compensation based on schoolwide achievement growth and other measures of effectiveness.

SUPPORTING RESEARCH

Based on multiple research studies conducted over more than a decade, schools implementing the TAP System have demonstrated higher student achievement, greater improvements in student learning over time, better success narrowing racial and ethnic achievement gaps, and higher rates of teacher retention.[31] Individual studies and summaries of research related to the TAP System can be found on NIET's website at www.niet.org/our-impact/research. Below are findings from a selection of more recent studies.

Student achievement. A 2010 study used a quasi-experimental research design called "differences-in-differences" to measure the effect of TAP System implementation across 151 schools in 10 states. The study found that students in TAP System schools outperformed students in comparison schools in both math and reading. The authors noted that, "the estimated effect of TAP on mathematics achievement is more than twice as large [as class size reduction effects]."[32]

Student achievement growth. A 2016 analysis examined student achievement growth in 353 schools implementing the TAP System across multiple states. The analysis found that TAP System schools were more likely to show a year's worth of student achievement growth, using a composite of math and reading test scores, compared with a control group of 3,870 other schools. Among schools implementing the TAP System for more than one year, 88 percent showed at least one year of student achievement growth, compared with 77 percent of control group schools.[33]

Gains in student achievement. A 2013 study of schools in Louisiana found substantially higher gains in student performance among a group of 15 schools implementing the TAP System compared with a group of comparison schools over a four-year period, based on a quasi-experimental method called "propensity score matching."[34] A separate 2014 analysis using the same methodology also found higher gains in student achievement among 66 TAP System schools in Louisiana over a two-year period compared with a matched group of non-TAP schools.[35]

Reductions in student achievement gaps. A 2016 analysis examined the impact of implementing the TAP System on Black-White and Hispanic-White achievement gaps in Indiana schools, again using the quasi-experimental method "propensity score matching." The analysis found that while achievement gaps in most matched schools widened over a four-year period, achievement gaps narrowed in schools implementing the TAP System.[36]

Teacher retention. A 2014 study of 413 schools implementing the TAP System across ten states found those schools to have substantially higher rates of teacher retention compared with national averages. Over a three-year period, TAP System schools retained 94 percent of teachers, compared with a national average of 84 percent and an average of 80 percent in high-needs schools.[37]

Master Teachers are expert teachers who are released from all or most regular classroom teaching duties in order to provide instructional leadership in their schools. Mentor Teachers remain embedded in their own classrooms as "teachers-of-record" for one or more classes of students while also devoting several hours per week to instructional leadership. (Because the terms "Master Teacher" and "Mentor Teacher" have specific meanings in the context of NIET's work, both terms are capitalized throughout this report.)

Master Teachers and Mentor Teachers in Ascension's turnaround schools benefited from clear job descriptions, intensive training and ongoing support. They received compensation commensurate with their roles, release time to fulfill their responsibilities and formal authority to work with all teachers to improve instruction. Teacher leaders joined schoolwide instructional leadership teams, and were accountable for meeting the expectations of their role. Working closely with their principals, they led collaborative teams of teachers (called "cluster groups"); formally observed classroom lessons to give detailed feedback to teachers; and provided weekly classroom-based coaching and support to all teachers. (See Sidebar, "Master Teachers and Mentor Teachers: A Closer Look.")

Those Master Teacher and Mentor Teacher roles offered a striking contrast with Ascension's existing teacher leadership strategy — placing an instructional coach in every school building and providing that individual with training on effective coaching practices. "We were a district that had really begun to value teacher leadership, but to that point we had only introduced what could be called 'quasi-formal' leadership roles," Pujol recalls.[38]

The instructional coaches had gained some traction in some schools, but overall implementation — and impact — had been inconsistent. "Their ability to work effectively in a school was totally dependent upon the principal's understanding of how he or she could give them the authority and the accountability for really moving classroom practices," says Pujol. "In some schools that 'quasi-formal' teacher leadership worked because the principal moved it toward a more formal leadership position and helped teachers understand the role of the instructional coach. But in other schools, it was just somebody who had to fight like heck to try to get into a classroom to make any difference at all."[39]

Master Teachers and Mentor Teachers: A Closer Look

In systems and schools partnering with NIET, "Master Teachers" are expert teachers who are released from all or most regular teaching duties in order to provide instructional leadership in their schools. "Mentor Teachers" remain embedded in their own classrooms as "teachers-of-record" for one or more classes of students while also devoting several hours per week to instructional leadership. While staffing strategies can vary across schools, Master Teachers ideally lead teams of about 15 other teachers, and Mentor Teachers each ideally support about eight of their colleagues. Taken together, Master and Mentor positions can add up to nearly 20 percent of a school's teaching roster.

As formal instructional leaders, Master Teachers and Mentor Teachers have clear job descriptions that detail their specific responsibilities for co-leading the school's core strategies for improving instruction within and across classrooms.

Leading collaborative teams. Master and Mentor Teachers lead collaborative teams of teachers called "cluster groups," which meet weekly to learn and develop new classroom strategies and to analyze the impact of those strategies on student learning. (Similar structures are often called "professional learning communities" in other schools.) Before Master Teachers introduce any new strategy in cluster group, they first rigorously "field-test" the strategy themselves to make certain it will work as intended. They do this by teaching the strategy to students in a range of classrooms within the school, conducting pre- and post-assessments and collecting before-and-after samples of student work. Master and Mentor Teachers follow a detailed protocol for planning and facilitating cluster group meetings. The protocol focuses the group's work on solving specific problems of student learning identified by data, and structures meeting time to concentrate on deliberate analysis, learning, practice and planning.

Formally observing lessons and providing feedback to teachers. Master and Mentor Teachers conduct formal observations of classroom lessons using a research-based framework for evaluating instruction, and they provide detailed feedback to teachers after each observation. During the feedback meeting, they help the teacher analyze how a particular strength of the lesson contributed to student learning and discuss how the teacher can build on that area of strength in future lessons ("area for reinforcement"). Next, they help the teacher analyze an element of the lesson that could have better supported student learning and plan how to improve that area in future lessons ("area for refinement"). Prior to conducting any observations, Master and Mentor Teachers complete formal evaluator training and certification (as well as annual recertification) to be sure they can accurately observe and score lessons and deliver useful feedback.

Providing individualized coaching and support to classroom teachers. Master and Mentor Teachers provide teachers in their cluster groups with individualized, classroom-based support to improve instruction and student learning each week. In some cases, they are following up to provide teachers with support to implement a new strategy studied and practiced during the previous cluster group meeting. In other cases, they are providing coaching to help teachers master instructional practices based on an "area for refinement" identified by a formal classroom observation.

Master and Mentor Teachers employ a variety of coaching techniques and carefully select the best ones to use with each teacher depending on the situation. For example, some teachers benefit from lighter-touch coaching based on observation and feedback. Others might benefit most from a "demonstration lesson," during which they get to observe the Master or Mentor Teacher modeling effective instructional strategies with that teacher's own students. Still others might need more intensive elbow-to-elbow coaching wherein they "co-teach" a full lesson with an expert teacher leader.
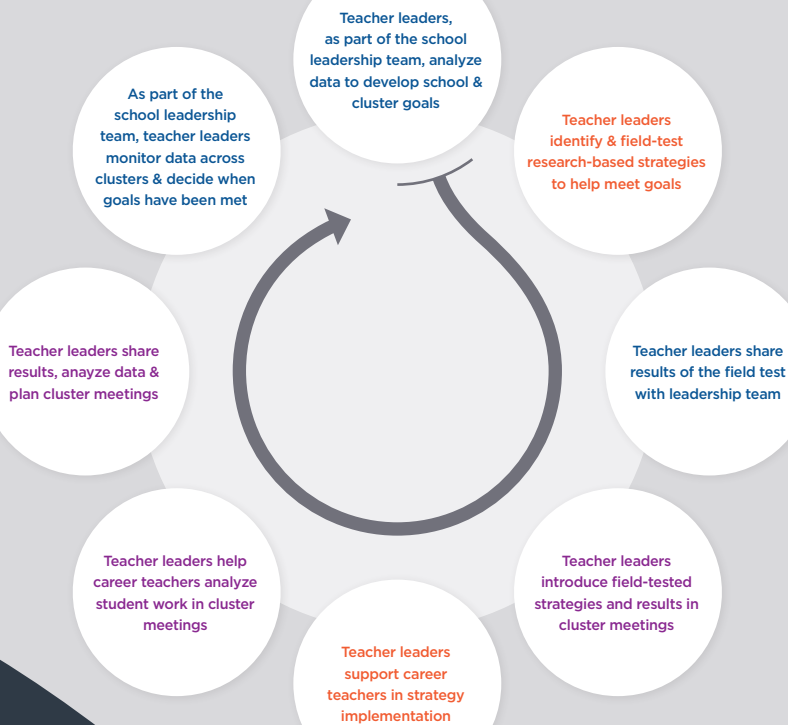
Participating on the schoolwide instructional leadership team. Master and Mentor Teachers are full members of the school's instructional leadership team. Led by the principal, that team meets on a weekly basis to analyze data to develop student learning goals and advance the schoolwide improvement strategy; to create and adjust the school's formative assessment approach; to plan cluster group activities and monitor the success of each cluster group; and to ensure that classroom observations and feedback remain accurate and useful for all teachers.

FIGURE 2. How Master and Mentor Teachers Co-Lead Major Schoolwide Systems to Improve Instruction

The diagram below shows how Master Teachers and Mentor Teachers co-lead 1) professional development through collaborative learning teams ("cluster groups") and 2) formal classroom observations and feedback, two major levers for improving instruction in their schools. It also shows how teacher leaders weave individualized, classroom-based coaching into both of those systems.

TEACHER LEADER ROLES IN COLLABORATION & PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

- ■ Schoolwide Leadership Team
- ■ Teacher Collaborative Teams
- ■ Classrooms

Teacher leaders, as part of the school leadership team, analyze data to develop school & cluster goals

Teacher leaders identify & field-test research-based strategies to help meet goals

Teacher leaders share results of the field test with leadership team

Teacher leaders introduce field-tested strategies and results in cluster meetings

Teacher leaders support career teachers in strategy implementation

Teacher leaders help career teachers analyze student work in cluster meetings

Teacher leaders share results, anayze data & plan cluster meetings

As part of the school leadership team, teacher leaders monitor data across clusters & decide when goals have been met

Teacher leaders train & certify to conduct observations & provide feedback

Teacher leaders build understanding with career teachers around teaching standards & the observation process

Teacher leaders conduct individual pre-conferences

Teacher leaders conduct individual classroom observations

Leadership team members provide individual feedback in post-conferences

Teacher leaders monitor support & follow-up to ensure that feedback is being implemented

Teacher leaders consider individual teachers' goals when providing support following cluster meetings

Teacher leaders monitor the quality of observations & feedback, & analyze data to inform professional learning

TEACHER LEADER ROLES IN PROVIDING CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS & FEEDBACK

Source: National Institute for Excellence in Teaching.

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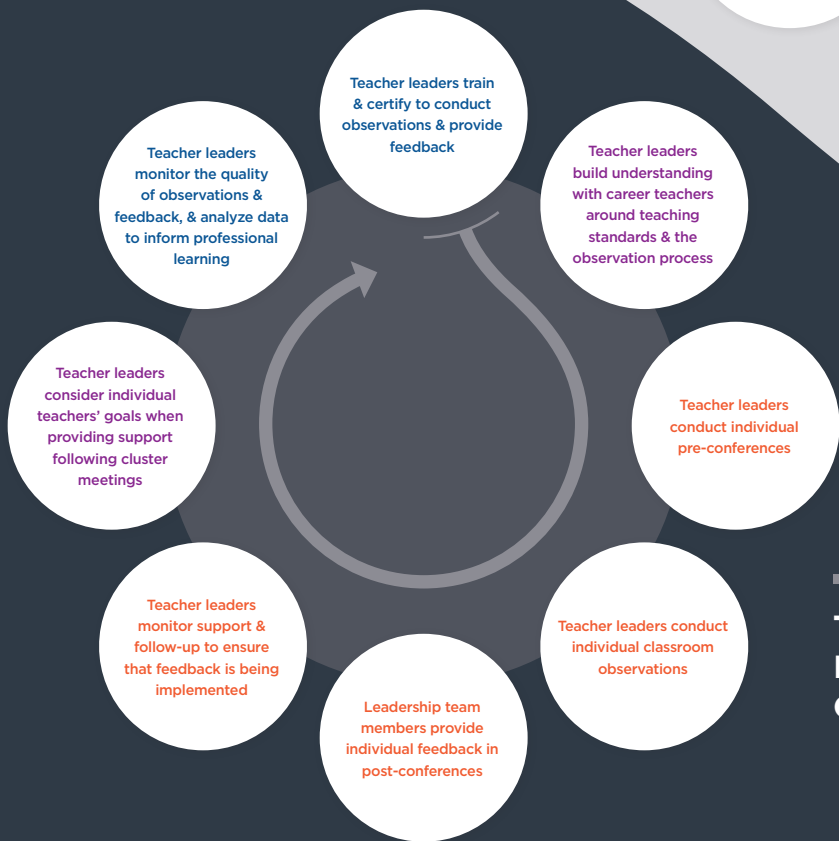
Over time, Pujol and other district leaders could see that the new Master and Mentor Teachers were gaining much better traction in the turnaround schools, and, as a result, having a bigger impact on instruction and learning. Thereafter, district leaders gradually began to "formalize" the instructional coach role in Ascension's non-turnaround schools by integrating elements of formal teacher leadership from the turnaround schools.

For example, the district asked the instructional coaches to take on additional responsibilities for

formally observing classroom lessons and providing feedback to teachers. The district provided coaches with intensive training and certification with support from NIET. The district also made sure that all coaches began participating in schoolwide instructional leadership team meetings led by the school's principal. And it adopted a set of tools and protocols used by Master and Mentor Teachers in the turnaround schools, including the TAP instructional rubric and protocols for leading collaborative learning teams.

"In a lot of ways, we were able to leverage what we were learning about formal teacher leadership in the turnaround schools to improve instructional leadership across our other schools," Pujol explains. "As a result, that instructional coach role started to morph more and more from a quasi-formal leadership role into a more formal role — and a more effective role — for those teacher leaders, too."[41]

Master Teachers and Mentor Teachers in other NIET partner states and districts often comment on the contrast between their current roles (elements of which are described in Figure 3) and less formal leadership roles they may have had in the past.

"Prior to becoming a Master Teacher, I was an instructional coach in a different school that had also been deemed persistently low-achieving," recalls Traci Lust, Executive Master Teacher in the Saydel Community School District in Des Moines, Iowa. "However, in that role, we followed more of a model where if people wanted support, we gave them support. If they didn't want support, I encouraged them and I tried to convince them, but they could choose whether or not to have me come into their classrooms. And, honestly, the people who really needed my coaching were the ones who said 'no thank you.'"[42]

Limitations in Past Efforts to Leverage Teacher Leadership: One Expert's Summary

"The problems encountered in implementing roles for teacher leaders proved to be legion. Individuals were often chosen without a formal application process, leading their peers to question why they deserved the job. Principals frequently announced the new appointments without explaining to their staff how a teacher leader's efforts could contribute to their school's vision for improvement. Meanwhile, teacher leaders were frequently left on their own to drum up business, often finding that their offers of help elicited only cold stares or closed classroom doors. Sometimes they gained admission to a classroom only to discover that the teacher they had hoped to assist expected to leave for a break rather than watch a model lesson. Teacher leaders themselves were unprepared to guide others in changing their practice. Those who were dazzling with their own students often stumbled when they used the same approaches with their colleagues. Few who accepted these new positions understood the unique needs of adult learners or what it would take to guide others in relinquishing old practices for new. The school schedule rarely provided sufficient time for observations and conferences, and many teachers were asked to assume their new responsibilities on top of a full-time teaching assignment."

— Susan Moore Johnson,
Harvard Graduate School of Education Faculty,
Director of Harvard's Project on the
Next Generation of Teachers[40]

FIGURE 3. Elements of Formal Instructional Teacher Leadership Roles

State and local decision-makers should consider the following nine elements when designing formal instructional leadership positions for teachers.

ELEMENT	EXPLANATION AND RATIONALE
Rigorous, Competitive Selection Process	Formal instructional teacher leadership roles are not rewards for long service, but rather, highly demanding positions that require exceptional levels of expertise and commitment. Achieving success in such roles requires a relatively rare combination of specific skills and attributes. Therefore, it is important that such leaders be competitively selected from a robust candidate pool based on specific job-related criteria.
Training and Ongoing Support	Teachers who take on formal instructional leadership roles require specialized training and ongoing support to fulfill new responsibilities they will not have encountered before. Training and support should be targeted to specific responsibilities of the role — whether leading collaborative teams or conducting formal observations to provide instructional feedback.
Span of Responsibility	The number of formal instructional leadership roles on a faculty should be based on ratios that allow for success in fulfilling specific job responsibilities. For the kinds of teacher leader roles described in this report, NIET has found that, ideally, Master Teachers should lead teams of no more than 15 teachers, and Mentor Teachers should support about eight colleagues each. Taken together, that equals a ratio of about four or five teachers for every teacher leader.
Grounded in Classroom Teaching	Formal teacher leader roles that are focused on instructional improvement should be designed so that leaders can continue to spend a substantial portion of their time in classrooms teaching or co-teaching students. This is true even for roles that confer full-time or near-full-time release from regular teaching duties, such as the "Master Teacher" position described in this report.
Integration into Staffing/Leadership Structure	Formal teacher leadership positions should not be conceived as a standalone initiative or an "add-on" resource. Instead, they should represent a fundamental restructuring of school staffing to incorporate "middle leaders" who have a seat on the schoolwide leadership team and co-lead all core instructional improvement systems in the school.
Time	Teacher leaders need sufficient, predictable and dedicated release time to fulfill their specific job responsibilities.
Compensation	Teachers who take on formal teacher leadership roles deserve compensation that is commensurate with the responsibilities of those roles. For example, the Master Teacher position described in this report generally provides a salary augmentation of about $7,000 to $15,000 depending on local economic factors.
Professional Authority	Formal instructional teacher leaders must have written job descriptions that detail their authority to work with the teachers they lead to improve instruction and learning in measurable ways. Their positions should also come with a seat on the schoolwide instructional leadership team led by the school's principal.
Professional Accountability	Formal instructional teacher leaders should be evaluated based on the quality of their instructional leadership and its impact on teaching and learning. For example, in school systems that partner with NIET, the principal and the teachers led by a Master Teacher complete a "Responsibilities Survey" in which they rate the Master Teacher on 22 indicators directly related to their specific instructional leadership responsibilities.

Source: National Institute for Excellence in Teaching.

III. Designing, Supporting and Leveraging Formal Instructional Teacher Leadership Roles

Recognizing the need to expand formal instructional teacher leadership and understanding the unique nature of such roles is just the first step. System leaders who invest in formal instructional teacher leadership need to carefully consider how to do so in ways that will best sustain teacher leadership and maximize its benefits for instruction and learning. This section offers advice based on lessons learned by NIET and its state, district, charter and school partners over the past two decades.

1. Design formal teacher leadership responsibilities to encompass all of the main schoolwide systems for improving instruction.

Formal instructional leadership roles for teachers should be designed to focus squarely on addressing the most pressing need in education — the gap in school-level capacity to systematically and significantly improve classroom instruction and accelerate student learning. To accomplish that, the roles should give teacher leaders significant responsibility for overseeing and implementing research-proven, high-impact levers for improving instruction.

Researchers are beginning to recognize that teacher leaders can play a critical role in bridging the formal instructional leadership gap. For example:

- Based on the recent experimental study of teacher coaching described earlier, researchers recommended that, given the intensity of coaching needed to get results, "districts [should] develop a corps of coaches from within their current workforces, [which would] have the added benefit of creating new career-ladder opportunities for expert teachers to serve as coaches."[43]

- A recent study of New Orleans schools responding to Louisiana's teacher evaluation legislation found two factors in schools with the most thoughtful and useful implementation: shared instructional leadership, including involvement of teacher leaders in conducting observations, and opportunities for teachers to collaborate. Based on those findings, the researchers recommended that districts "consider ways to allocate resources to teacher leadership positions" and that state-level policymakers "adopt policies and allocate resources that allow for distributed leadership, teacher collaboration, coaching, and career-ladder programs."[44]

Yet such advice raises a critical design question for teacher leadership roles: Is it better to design many kinds of formal teacher leadership roles, each with a relatively narrow focus, or to "bundle" responsibility for all of a school's core improvement strategies into a smaller number of leadership roles?

Based on the experience of NIET and partner school systems, there are multiple advantages to the bundling option. First, it creates greater alignment and coherence among the school's core instructional improvement strategies. Too often in the past, teacher professional development has been decoupled from teacher evaluation, and various professional development strategies have been decoupled from each other. For example, instructional coaching often does not connect with the work teachers are doing in collaborative team meetings. Bundling creates coherence across all instructional development strategies, making the job of improvement easier for teacher leaders and teachers alike.

For instance, bundling allows teacher leaders to provide much more sophisticated, multilayered coaching than is typically found in most professional development. A Master Teacher who follows up a collaborative math team meeting by visiting a teacher's classroom to provide a demonstration lesson on a new strategy related to fractions will know the teacher's current "area for refinement" based on the teacher's last formal observation — for example, "grouping students" or "lesson structure and pacing." The Master Teacher will then be able to explicitly model effective instructional techniques for "grouping students" or for "lesson structure and pacing" *within* that demonstration lesson related to the new strategy for teaching fractions.

Second, bundling helps reinforce that teacher leaders are leaders in action rather than in name only. It positions them at the center of the school's major efforts to improve instruction, rather than being yet another "add-on" resource provider requesting access to teachers' classrooms. (Providing teacher leaders with a formal seat on the schoolwide instructional leadership team also enhances the coherence of their work and elevates their status and impact.)

Let's be clear: Involving teacher leaders in the formal evaluation of their peers, even if only through observation and feedback, offers a serious challenge to the status quo and can prompt a host of concerns. However, based on decades of experience, NIET and its state, system, charter and school partners have found those concerns to be unwarranted. (See sidebar, "Can Teacher Leaders Objectively Evaluate Instruction While Also Providing Support to Improve Instruction?")

Can Teacher Leaders Objectively Evaluate Instruction While Also Providing Support to Improve Instruction?

Proposals to involve teacher leaders in the formal evaluation of their peers, even if only through observation and feedback, often raise a host of concerns. For example, since the 1980s, many experts in professional development have warned that involving instructional coaches or other professional development providers in teacher evaluation would undermine their ability to offer supportive assistance to teachers.[45] Others have raised the concern that teacher leaders would not have the objectivity or fortitude to accurately evaluate lessons or to provide peers with the kind of frank, "hard feedback" necessary to guide improvement.

However, based on decades of experience, NIET and its state, district, charter and school partners have found both concerns to be unwarranted — if teacher leadership roles are designed thoughtfully and if teacher leaders receive the training to perform these multiple responsibilities well. According to more than one million records of classroom observations spanning nearly two decades, Master Teachers and Mentor Teachers do not score observed lessons in an inflated way when compared with principals.[46] Moreover, Master Teachers, Mentor Teachers, and their colleagues report that bundling these responsibilities makes evaluation feel more like professional development, rather than the reverse.

"Having to go in there and evaluate another teacher was challenging because, in the past, administrators were seen as observing to 'get you' and not to help you, so evaluation came to be viewed as a kind of

'gotcha,'" explains Keith Creager, a Mentor Teacher and fifth-grade math teacher in Slaton, Texas. "So, before any formal evaluation, I made sure I spent a lot of time in the classrooms with them being helpful and coaching and giving strategies and supporting their growth plans. Then evaluation just became an extension of those things, a more formal way of coaching for me, and just another opportunity to improve for the teachers."[47]

Sadly, too many experts still do not see, or refuse to acknowledge, this obvious opportunity to enhance the feasibility, reliability and usefulness of evaluation. Consider a recent report on a large-scale, federally sponsored experiment to study the impact of new systems for providing feedback to teachers, which included four cycles of classroom observation and feedback per year. The study trained principals to conduct one of the required observations, but hired and trained outside professionals from the local community to conduct the other three. A footnote reads: "This distribution of effort was intended to engage principals in the implementation of the performance measure without overburdening them. Using multiple observers to rate the same teacher also produces a more reliable end-of-year average, compared with using a single observer for each teacher … "[48] Nowhere does this federally published report even mention the possibility of enlisting school-based teacher leaders as a viable strategy for making multiple classroom observations more feasible and more reliable.

2. Leverage teacher leadership to create coherence across major instructional improvement initiatives.

According to a recent survey by the Education Week Research Center, 86 percent of teachers say they have experienced new changes or initiatives in the last few years. "There are signs teachers are starting to feel reform fatigue" as well, *Education Week* reported. "More than half of teachers (58 percent) surveyed said they've experienced 'way too much' or 'too much' change in the last couple of years."[49]

However, as any teacher can tell you, it is not just the number of changes and new initiatives that engenders fatigue, but also the disconnected way they are often rolled out to teachers. Teachers become frustrated because of mounting imperatives that do not appear to be related, seem to be coming from many directions at once, and send mixed signals about what is most important and how to meet new demands.

Many of NIET's school system partners have found that formal instructional teacher leadership roles offer a strategic opportunity to quell the cacophony and create much more coherence when introducing changes and new initiatives. For example, when Partnership Academy, a public charter school in Richfield, Minnesota, launched a new initiative focused on racial equity and culturally sensitive instruction, Master Teachers and Mentor Teachers worked with administrators to design and roll out the initiative. They helped create a "Racial Equity Crosswalk" to supplement the existing instructional indicators in the TAP Rubric used for formal classroom observations. And they worked with teachers during their regular collaborative team meetings to plan culturally relevant lessons and community-building activities related to indicators in the Crosswalk.

This kind of strategy represents an especially important opportunity in an age when many states and districts are rolling out new curriculum-related initiatives to help teachers upgrade their instruction to align with new learning standards adopted in most states. In the *Education Week* survey, 58 percent of teachers reported "changes to the curriculum I teach."[50] Teacher leaders can go first, field-testing new curriculum-based teaching strategies in real classrooms with real students. And they can leverage school-based professional development to help

teachers integrate new strategies into their own classroom practice — during common lesson planning time, collaborative team meetings and classroom coaching visits.

However, according to Vicky Condalary, executive director of NIET's LA BOLD Project, who provides support to schools and systems in Louisiana, this can be challenging in larger school districts that have a history of different central office divisions "owning" different improvement initiatives and rolling them out independently and directly to teachers. She describes a recent case in a large school district in Louisiana where the district curriculum office went straight to the classroom level with a new improvement initiative, bypassing Master and Mentor Teachers entirely. The district realized its mistake, and is planning to roll out new curriculum initiatives to Master and Mentor Teachers as a first step moving forward.

"The teacher leaders were being contradicted by well-meaning curriculum specialists, and teachers didn't know which way to turn," says Condalary. "Now the entry point is going to be at the teacher leader level, not the classroom level. We'll be working in unison and filtering the noise. And that's a huge restructuring of the way the central office does business."[51]

Condalary says that, in her experience, district staff members are less likely to bypass teacher leaders when they have participated in new teacher leader training and have a clear sense of teacher leader roles and responsibilities. It is also less likely to happen when teacher leadership *itself* has been conceived as a deep change in school staffing structure, rather than yet another disconnected initiative sitting alongside many others.

3. Establish multiple, interconnected leadership positions to increase opportunity, reach, and impact.

Introducing formal teacher leadership positions raises other important design decisions: Should more than one role be established? If so, should the positions be connected to one another in a "career ladder" structure that enables teachers to advance from one role to the next in a sequenced way?

NIET and its partners have found that, at least when it comes to formal instructional teacher leadership positions, there are numerous advantages to creating multiple, interconnected roles. Specifically, incorporating classroom-embedded "Mentor Teacher" positions into a schoolwide leadership structure alongside full-time (or nearly full-time) "Master Teacher" positions confers the following advantages:

- First, adding Mentor roles provides more teachers with opportunities to take on formal instructional teacher leadership roles in their schools. When Master and Mentor positions are incorporated into school staffs at a ratio of about 15 teachers per Master Teacher and eight teachers per Mentor Teacher, nearly 20 percent of a school's faculty can hold formal instructional teacher leadership roles at one time.

- Second, the Mentor role offers an important opportunity for expert teachers who are not ready to engage in instructional leadership full time and would like to continue teaching their own classes as "teachers-of-record" for the time being.

- Third, having multiple roles extends the reach of formal instructional teacher leadership in significant ways. Incorporating both Master Teacher and Mentor Teacher positions into a school's teaching staff *greatly* expands instructional leadership capacity, enabling all teachers to benefit from more frequent observation-based feedback, higher doses of in-classroom coaching, and greater support from expert teachers during collaborative team meetings. Ideally, there should be about four or five teachers for every teacher leader.

- Fourth, because they spend most of their working hours as "teachers-of-record" for their own classrooms of students, Mentor Teachers help keep the schoolwide instructional leadership team deeply grounded in the realities of day-to-day classroom teaching. "During our meetings, we'll look to our Mentor Teachers and ask, 'How does that sound to you as a classroom teacher? Does that sound manageable? Does that seem like it really matches your needs? Does that seem like it will make sense to teachers?'", explains Amy Whittington, the principal of North/South Elementary in the Central Decatur Community School District in Leon, Iowa. "One of our Mentor Teachers is really good about saying, 'OK, this is me speaking from the classroom, and that's

unreasonable' or 'We're not going to be able to do that that way, so let's look at it from another angle.'"[52]

- Finally, defining a two-tiered structure for teacher leadership establishes the kind of career ladder that teachers in places like Singapore, Shanghai and England enjoy, but most American teachers do not. Schools and whole school systems can leverage the career ladder as pipeline for growing instructional leadership — a way to identify, cultivate, train and advance future instructional leaders, thereby increasing instructional leadership capacity even further over time.

Slaton Independent School District in Texas provides a vivid example of that last benefit. Last year, both of Slaton's primary-grade Master Teachers accepted offers to enroll in a Principal Fellows Partnership Program at Texas Tech University. (The program is an alliance between the Texas Tech University Educational Leadership Program and NIET.) That opened up Master Teacher positions which two of Slaton's Mentor Teachers advanced to fill, in turn. Finally, Principal Lori Andrus recruited two classroom teachers to fill the newly opened Mentor Teacher positions that had opened up.

Andrus is already taking advantage of the pipeline to groom her next generation of instructional teacher leaders. "I tell my rising 'rock star' teachers, 'After a couple more years under your belt, I want you on this leadership team.' If they know that, if they know that that's the direction I'm thinking for them, then they're going to stay here, because that becomes a goal for them."[53]

4. Emphasize that formal instructional teacher leadership roles enhance, rather than limit, opportunities for all staff to engage in leadership.

One common misunderstanding about introducing new formal instructional teacher leadership roles into schools is that principals will have a greatly reduced role in instructional leadership. However, in the experience of NIET and its partners around the country, *exactly the opposite* is true. Instructional leadership is not a zero-sum quantity in schools, and formal instructional teacher leadership positions enhance, rather than limit, opportunities for administrators and other teachers to engage in leadership.

"When I first heard about Master Teachers, I literally asked the question, 'Then what do I do as a principal? What I am supposed to do if these people are taking on what I attempt to do?'," recalls Slaton Principal Lori Andrus. "But now I know the key word there was 'attempt,' and it was a weak attempt compared to what I can accomplish with Master and Mentor Teachers working alongside me."[54]

She uses an apt metaphor to describe how those positions have created a "distributed" instructional leadership structure in her school. "We're kind of like an octopus now. If I'm the head of the octopus — and notice I didn't say the brain because in an octopus the brain cells are distributed through the body — then I've got all of these intelligent arms out there, and those are my Master and Mentor Teachers. They are an extension of my leadership, doing what it would take ten of me to do."[55]

Similarly, formal instructional leadership positions for teachers enhance, rather than limit, opportunities for other teachers to engage in leadership. For example, classroom teachers often collaborate with Master Teachers to field-test new instructional strategies. Those teachers do so by "scripting" what happens during the field-test lesson; analyzing student work to examine impact of a new strategy; and working with the Master Teacher to hone the new approach until it works for all groups of students.

Lisa Hendricks, Executive Director of Minnesota's Partnership Academy charter school, provides another example. "We have some informal teacher leaders, too, who have grown in their classroom teaching abilities and have a lot to offer other teachers — but might not yet want a formal teacher leadership role. So, we've kind of pulled them up through the ranks a little bit to help lead in certain ways, such as by co-leading a cluster cycle with the Master Teacher."[56] (A "cluster cycle" is a series of collaborative cluster group meetings led by teacher leaders, through which a team of teachers identifies and solves a problem of student learning identified by data.)

Such opportunities are a key aspect of the "instructional leadership pipeline" described above, allowing teachers to try out instructional leadership activities as they explore opportunities for career advancement. And they make critical contributions to collective efforts to improve results because they are embedded within the school's core leadership strategies for improving instruction.

In addition, sometimes teachers worry that expanding formal roles will diminish or devalue other forms of teacher leadership whether related to instruction or not — including important and useful varieties of "consultative," "organic," and "improvised" teacher leadership in Figure 1.[57] For example, in one of the most widely read and shared pieces in a recent edition of *Education Week*, Kentucky Teacher of the Year Ashley Lamb-Sinclair wrote, "I worry that defining teacher leadership in terms of specialized titles makes educators who are not labeled 'leaders' feel as if they are not doing enough."[58]

However, once again, leaders and practitioners in places supported by NIET have found these worries to be misplaced. "Formal teacher leadership roles empower all teachers to be leaders," explains Pujol. "They see the strength that a teacher leader can have, and the impact, and it emboldens them to be more engaged in the entire process, and to use their leadership to push the whole school."[59]

The formal research on teacher leadership confirms this dynamic. "Based on the literature in this review, we found that teachers taking on leadership roles resulted in feelings of empowerment for all teachers in a school," concluded two researchers who published a comprehensive review of research on teacher leadership last year. "Many teacher leaders reported that they felt empowered by taking on leadership responsibilities, but the literature also indicated that teacher leadership within a school contributed to feelings of empowerment and professionalism for all teachers."[60]

5. Select teacher leaders who have the right set of accomplishments, skills and dispositions to succeed.

If designed as described in this report, formal instructional teacher leadership roles are not honorifics bestowed on more senior teachers with long experience in a particular district or school. Rather, they are highly demanding positions that require exceptional levels of expertise and a deep commitment to the unique nature of "hybrid" leadership. Achieving success in such roles requires a relatively rare combination of specific skills and attributes. Therefore, it is important that such leaders be competitively selected from a robust candidate pool based on specific job-related criteria.

NIET and its partners have learned that the strongest candidates will bring superior expertise in student instruction, credible evidence of demonstrable success teaching students, skill in leading and guiding adult learners, and a growth mindset about their own and others' professional practice. The interview process is critical. NIET provides principals and instructional leadership teams with sample interview questions based on the specific instructional practices described in the TAP Rubric. Moreover, teacher leaders should have higher ratings on formal observations of their classroom lessons, and — if possible — selection committee members should observe and evaluate their teaching firsthand.

Laura Roussel, a former Master Teacher who went on to become an executive master teacher and, most recently, supervisor of elementary education for

Ascension Public Schools, explains that successful selection also demands a laser-like focus on the unique nature of hybrid instructional leadership roles, which have one foot firmly rooted in the classroom and the other in leadership.

"If you recruit folks who are only interested in becoming 'future administrators,' you get candidates who want the leadership without the teaching," says Roussel. "I have seen folks who have the potential to be a good manager-administrator, but perhaps not necessarily to be a great teacher leader. 'Teacher leader' means you are a leader of teachers, but it also means that you are a teacher who is leader. You need to recruit someone who wants to have that broader leadership impact but absolutely does *not* want to give up teaching in classrooms."[62] (See sidebar, "Understanding the Unique Nature of a Hybrid Instructional Leadership Role.")

Understanding the Unique Nature of a Hybrid Instructional Leadership Role

"My day-to-day work as a Master Teacher consisted of working and teaching in many classes. I did not value simply visiting classes. I valued the work where my sleeves were rolled up and I was working alongside students and teachers. Teachers' students became my students and WE began to work together to think about how our work was specifically impacting student achievement. I knew all 17 teachers' students by name (over 200 students). I spent time talking about the students and their goals. I became strategic as I field-tested [teaching and learning] strategies in order to ensure that these strategies would yield results, and then shared those strategies with teachers and students across the entire school."

— *Former Master Teacher Laura Roussel[61]*

6. *Provide teacher leaders with training and ongoing support focused on specific job responsibilities.*

Too often in the past, schools or districts have appointed teacher leaders without giving them training and support related to the new and very different kinds of responsibilities they face. But leading and developing other adults is a different kind of job than teaching and developing students. Therefore, all teacher leaders who support their peers need training and support related to best practices in leading adult learning.

NIET and its partners have learned that the most powerful training and support are tied to challenges presented by the specific job responsibilities built into leadership roles. For example, in addition to expertise in adult learning, Master Teachers must call on different kinds of expertise when they are formally observing teachers and providing feedback, field-testing new teaching strategies, planning and leading collaborative learning teams, and providing instructional coaching in classrooms.

Consider just one of those responsibilities: leading collaborative teams. Research suggests this can be a high-impact application of formal teacher leadership, but it is a challenging responsibility requiring a range of knowledge and skills. And the evidence suggests that too many American teachers are losing out on this potentially productive form of professional development. (See sidebar, "Lack of Focus and Leadership Is Crippling PLCs.")

To successfully lead collaborative teams in ways that change instruction and improve learning across classrooms, Master Teachers need to engage in strategic thinking and both short- and long-range planning, skillfully analyze data and student work samples, apply formative assessment strategies, engage in "field research," and lead other adults in a collaborative learning process. Over the years, NIET and its partners have developed many layers of support specifically targeted toward this particular job responsibility, including the following:

- Covering "the essentials" for leading collaborative teams during an initial eight-day training session for new instructional leadership team members;

- Offering a selection of tools and resources related to leading collaborative teams on NIET's portal;

- Scheduling sessions related to collaborative learning at summer institutes and annual conferences, such as "Cluster in a Bubble" which allows participants to observe and analyze an effective team meeting; and

- Creating a Cluster Observation Rubric that principals and system-level support providers use to review weekly collaborative team meetings and provide detailed feedback so Master Teachers can continuously improve this area of their instructional leadership. (Figure 4 shows one dimension of the Cluster Observation Rubric.)

Suzanne McCall, a new Master Teacher in Slaton, Texas, and current president of the Texas Classroom Teachers Association, cites such feedback as one of the most important forms of support she has received as a teacher leader. "Our assistant principal and principal intern will observe the cluster [meetings] and give feedback, and that's been so helpful," she explains. "It's never just a simple, 'Hey, this was great,' or, 'This was not so great.' It's through questioning us based on what they observed in the cluster [meeting] to help us reflect on what we are valuing, where we're going with it, what could be improved and where we need help. It's also a way they hold us accountable for this piece of our work. And as much as possible, an administrator is there to observe every week."[66]

FIGURE 4. Example of One Dimension in the Cluster Observation Rubric

The Cluster Observation Rubric is used by school- and district-level leaders to observe and provide feedback to teacher leaders on the quality of the collaborative team meetings they lead each week (called "cluster group meetings"). The visual below illustrates one of the five dimensions on the Rubric, "Leader as Facilitator."

LEADER AS FACILITATOR

Above Proficient	• Begins meeting with link to previous learning and references to the long-range plan in a brief and systematic manner. • Is prepared with appropriate materials and activities that have been applied to cluster members' students. • Provides an agenda with measurable outcomes, aligned assignments and definitive follow-up.	• Establishes a strong sense of purpose, which connects what they are doing to the classroom and student learning. • Effectively and actively assists all members to develop competency during cluster time.
Proficient	• Begins meeting with link to previous learning and references the long-range plan. • Is prepared with appropriate materials and activities. • Provides an aligned agenda with outcomes and adequate information.	• Establishes a sense of purpose. • Assists all members to develop competency during cluster time.
Approaching Proficient	• Begins meeting without adequate link to previous learning through the long-range plan. • Is unprepared and without appropriate materials and activities. • Has no agenda or it is without adequate information.	• Does not establish a purpose as to why members are engaged in the activities/learning. • Extends insufficient effort to assist all members in developing competency during cluster time.

Source: National Institute for Excellence in Teaching.

7. ***Empower teacher leaders by adopting common tools and protocols, including a research-based instructional framework or rubric.***

In dozens of interviews NIET has conducted with teacher leaders over the years, Master and Mentor Teachers invariably cite the adoption of common protocols and frameworks as a significant advantage for their leadership practice. Far from stifling creativity or stymieing initiative, such tools provide teacher leaders with critical scaffolding for doing their jobs well, and they relieve new teacher leaders from having to "reinvent the wheel."

In addition, such tools enable teachers to experience consistency in instructional leadership approaches when teacher leader positions turn over. Finally, they allow teacher leaders within and across schools to share a common approach to performing common tasks, enabling them to share ideas and grow their professional practice together.

For Master and Mentor Teachers working in NIET partner states and school systems, the two most important tools are the *TAP Rubric* — the framework used for describing, observing, discussing and planning effective instruction — and a protocol for collaborative teamwork called the *Steps for Effective Learning*.

FIGURE 5. Example of One Instructional Indicator in the TAP Rubric

The TAP Rubric provides a detailed description of teaching practice in four domains encompassing 26 indicators. The visual below illustrates an example of one of the 12 indicators in the "Instruction" domain, "Academic Feedback."

ACADEMIC FEEDBACK	
Significantly Above Expectations **(5)** Exemplary	• Oral and written feedback is consistently academically focused, frequent and high-quality. • Feedback is frequently given during guided practice and homework review. • The teacher circulates to prompt student thinking, assess each student's progress and provide individual feedback. • Feedback from students is regularly used to monitor and adjust instruction. • Teacher engages students in giving specific and high-quality feedback to one another.
At Expectations **(3)** Proficient	• Oral and written feedback is mostly academically focused, frequent, and mostly high-quality. • Feedback is sometimes given during guided practice and homework review. • The teacher circulates during instructional activities to support engagement and monitor student work. • Feedback from students is sometimes used to monitor and adjust instruction.
Significantly Below Expectations **(1)** Unsatisfactory	• The quality and timeliness of feedback is inconsistent. • Feedback is rarely given during guided practice and homework review. • The teacher circulates during instructional activities, but monitors mostly behavior. • Feedback from students is rarely used to monitor or adjust instruction.

Source: National Institute for Excellence in Teaching.

The *TAP Rubric* is especially empowering. In many schools and districts, efforts to leverage instructional teacher leadership stumble over a very simple yet profound obstacle: the lack of any shared vision and common language for describing, discussing and collaborating to achieve excellent instruction. Lacking a shared vision and language, efforts to improve instruction resemble a kind of "Tower of Babel," and teacher leaders struggle to find the words and concepts to help teachers grow their practice. (See Figure 5 for an example of an area on the *TAP Rubric*.)

"If we didn't have the *Rubric*, we wouldn't have any common vision or language for what effective teaching looks like and sounds like in the classroom," says Central Decatur Master Teacher Laci Erke. "That would make it much harder to do what we do."

The *Steps for Effective Learning* protocol provides teacher leaders with a systematic process to ensure that the valuable time teachers spend in collaborative team meetings is focused, productive, and useful. The *Steps* help Master and Mentor Teachers facilitate
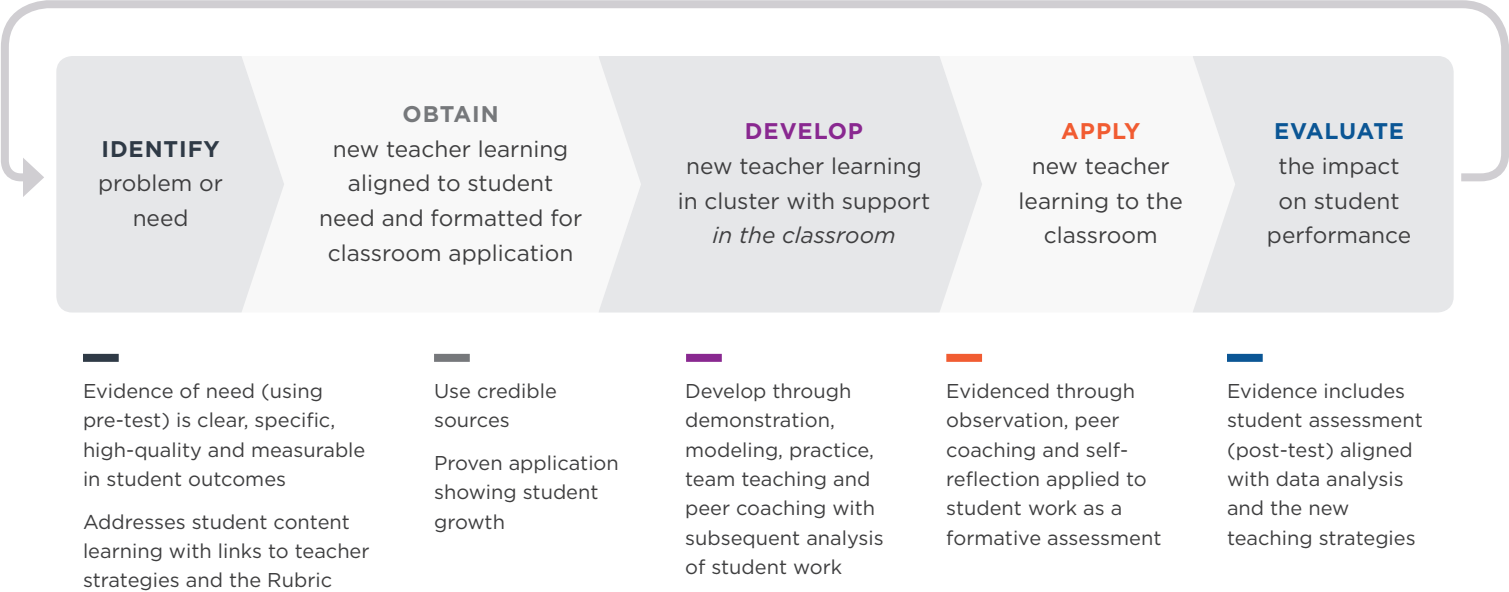
meetings that are well-planned, tied to specific student needs identified through data, introduce new strategies with proven impact on student growth, support teachers in applying what they have learned in their own classrooms, and include steps to measure the impact of new strategies on student learning. (Figure 6 provides an overview of the *Steps for Effective Learning* protocol.)

8. **Create and protect release time during the week for teacher leaders to lead, and give them enough time to build trust and long-term relationships that enable success.**

In the past, too many teachers were asked to take on new leadership responsibilities on top of full teaching workloads, leaving them too little time to engage deeply in instructional leadership and squeezing leadership itself into the margins of their busy calendars. A recent review of research on teacher leadership found lack of time to be one of the biggest obstacles to success.[67]

FIGURE 6. Overview of Protocol for Leading Collaborative Teams: Steps for Effective Learning

Teacher leaders use a protocol called Steps for Effective Learning to guide teacher collaborative team meetings called "cluster group meetings." The Steps ensure that the time teachers spend in collaborative team meetings is focused, productive, useful and—most importantly—positivity impacts teaching and learning.
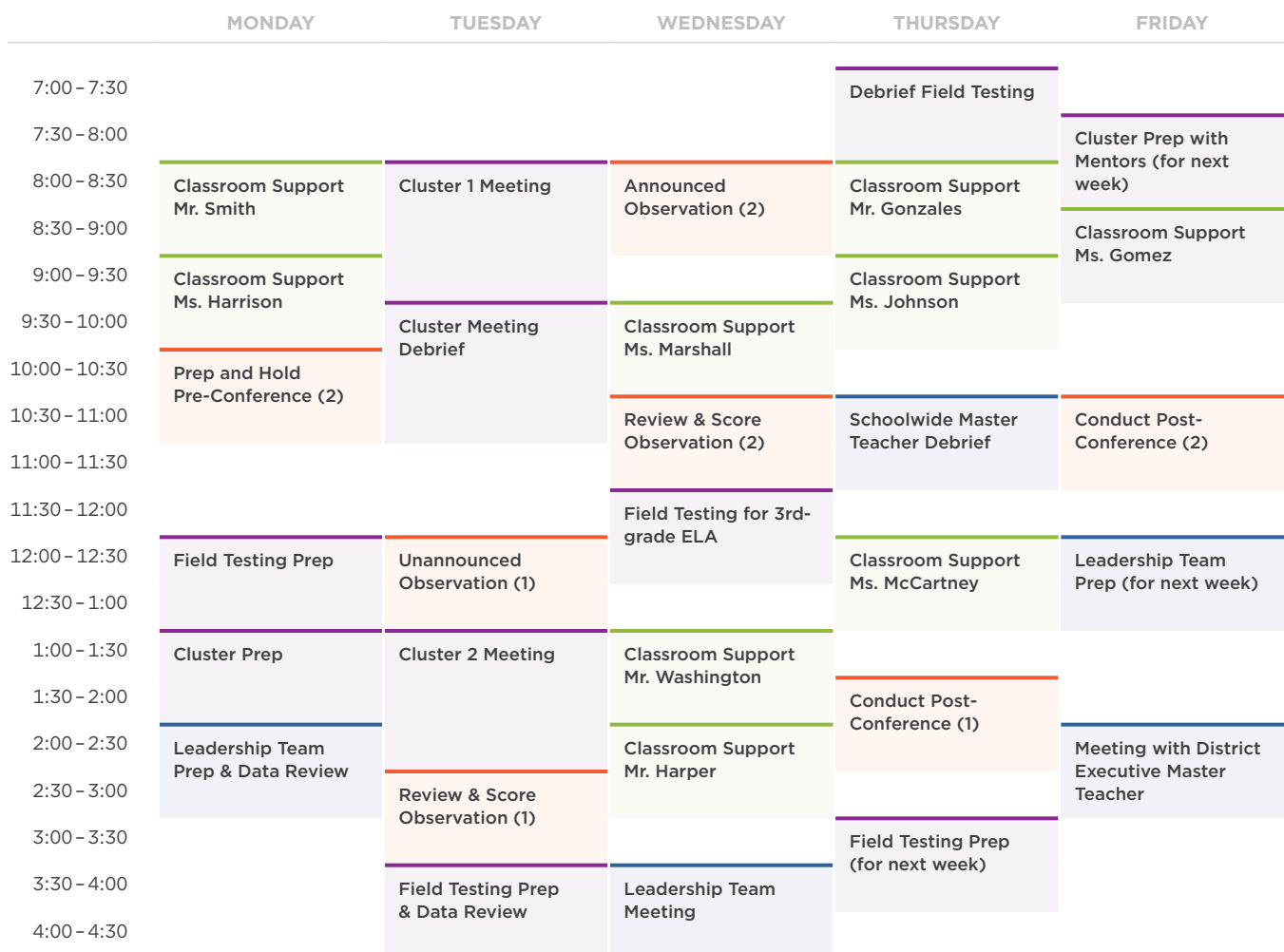

IDENTIFY problem or need	OBTAIN new teacher learning aligned to student need and formatted for classroom application	DEVELOP new teacher learning in cluster with support *in the classroom*	APPLY new teacher learning to the classroom	EVALUATE the impact on student performance
Evidence of need (using pre-test) is clear, specific, high-quality and measurable in student outcomes	Use credible sources	Develop through demonstration, modeling, practice, team teaching and peer coaching with subsequent analysis of student work	Evidenced through observation, peer coaching and self-reflection applied to student work as a formative assessment	Evidence includes student assessment (post-test) aligned with data analysis and the new teaching strategies
Addresses student content learning with links to teacher strategies and the Rubric	Proven application showing student growth			

Source: National Institute for Excellence in Teaching.

Across NIET's partner school systems, Master Teachers and Mentor Teachers alike point to time as their most precious resource and lack of time as their most formidable opponent. "If you really want that Mentor Teacher position to work," explains Mentor Teacher Arlene Juhl-Vandal of Central Decatur School District in Leon, Iowa, "you need to develop a schedule or some kind of flexibility so they can get out and actually be a part of those leadership team meetings, get into classrooms, and do real follow-up work with teachers."

School systems and schools must begin by deciding upon a strategy that will ensure that each teacher leader has sufficient release time to perform leadership responsibilities adequately. Next, school district leaders and principals need to deliberately protect that release time so that it is reserved for core instructional leadership responsibilities, rather than ad hoc administrative tasks.

FIGURE 7. Example of a Master Teacher's Weekly Calendar

The following visual shows how a Master Teacher might fulfill her responsibilities related to instructional leadership during a typical week. Because of the highly demanding nature of formal instructional teacher leadership roles, the teachers doing this work must be very strategic in planning how they will spend their time day by day, week by week and month by month.

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
7:00–7:30				Debrief Field Testing	
7:30–8:00					Cluster Prep with Mentors (for next week)
8:00–8:30	Classroom Support Mr. Smith	Cluster 1 Meeting	Announced Observation (2)	Classroom Support Mr. Gonzales	
8:30–9:00					Classroom Support Ms. Gomez
9:00–9:30	Classroom Support Ms. Harrison			Classroom Support Ms. Johnson	
9:30–10:00		Cluster Meeting Debrief	Classroom Support Ms. Marshall		
10:00–10:30	Prep and Hold Pre-Conference (2)				
10:30–11:00			Review & Score Observation (2)	Schoolwide Master Teacher Debrief	Conduct Post-Conference (2)
11:00–11:30					
11:30–12:00			Field Testing for 3rd-grade ELA		
12:00–12:30	Field Testing Prep	Unannounced Observation (1)		Classroom Support Ms. McCartney	Leadership Team Prep (for next week)
12:30–1:00					
1:00–1:30	Cluster Prep	Cluster 2 Meeting	Classroom Support Mr. Washington		
1:30–2:00				Conduct Post-Conference (1)	
2:00–2:30	Leadership Team Prep & Data Review		Classroom Support Mr. Harper		Meeting with District Executive Master Teacher
2:30–3:00		Review & Score Observation (1)			
3:00–3:30				Field Testing Prep (for next week)	
3:30–4:00		Field Testing Prep & Data Review	Leadership Team Meeting		
4:00–4:30					

Notes: Observation boxes noted with (1) are for the unannounced observation held on Tuesday as 12:00. Observation boxes noted with (2) are for the announced observation held on Wednesday at 8:00.

Cluster Meetings 1 and 2 are held with different mentor and career teachers.

Source: National Institute for Excellence in Teaching.

■ **Schoolwide Leadership Team**
■ **Teacher Collaborative Teams**
■ **Observation and Feedback**
■ **Classroom Support**

"This isn't just about creating a few leadership positions with release time to help out in some random ways. The real traction comes from what we are having those folks do during their release time," explains Roussel. "And it's not just 'pitching in'; it's critical activities like field testing that are so important to achieve that impact on classroom teaching, which will then lead to student achievement. Teacher leaders can't just be conducting walk-throughs with a cup of coffee in their hands. They need to be moving from focused activity to focused activity in line with their specific responsibilities."

"Being spread too thin is one of the biggest challenges to a teacher leadership role," according to Master Teacher Lisa Berken at Hmong College Prep Academy, a K-12 public charter school in St. Paul, Minnesota. "We need to have enough time to work intensively with individual teachers."

That time pays off for teachers, students and the entire school community. "We are able to identify the strengths of each teacher and make those strengths a distinctive part of our school community," explains Berken. "For example, one of the teachers I work with is terrific at supporting low-level readers. She is a part of our student support team now, and because I have the time to work with her and get to know her skills, I have been able to help bring out those strengths in her, which are furthering our campus goals."[68]

In schools where teacher leaders are responsible for leading collaborative teams, systems and schools must also create and protect common release time for all teachers on those teams to meet during each week. True collaboration — the kind that really improves instruction and advances learning — simply cannot happen when teachers do not share sufficient common release time.

Finally, teachers in formal instructional leadership roles emphasize another way that time is a precious resource in their work: It takes time for teacher leaders to develop the relationships, trust and credibility necessary to realize maximum impact on classroom practices and student learning. State policymakers and local school boards must provide time for new investments in teacher leadership to build a solid leadership foundation in schools, rather than demanding big results after only one year.

For example, Laci Erke has been a Master Teacher in Central Decatur for five years, but it is only in the last two that she began to move beyond observations and feedback in her coaching to employ what she calls "whisper coaching" — providing feedback to a teacher while the teacher is teaching a lesson. "The first couple of years were all about building that relationship and that trust with each other," she says. "Because of developing those relationships and that 'trust factor,' teachers now have more comfort in allowing me to come in and give feedback and support during their lessons."

Her Central Decatur colleague, Mentor Teacher Arlene Juhl-Vandal, puts it more bluntly: "You just don't walk in and say, 'Hi, I'm Arlene, and by the way, I'm going to come in and model because I think you can improve in this area.' You have to put in the time to build that trust and nurture those relationships."[69]

9. Make more strategic use of existing resources to fund formal teacher leadership positions.

Formal instructional teacher leadership positions incur costs — for example, to pay for release time during the year, for any extended time teacher leaders are expected to work beyond the regular school year, and for salary augmentations to ensure that compensation is commensurate with responsibility.

Some states have provided dedicated funding to support teacher leadership. For example, Iowa's Teacher Leadership and Compensation System provides $150 million per year to enable districts to implement a local teacher leadership system, including ways to establish higher-paying leadership opportunities for highly effective teachers.[70] However, many state education revenues and annual budgets still have not fully recovered from the Great Recession, and dedicated funding to support teacher leadership is still rare.[71]

Yet experience shows that school systems can pay for formal teacher leadership positions even when dedicated state funds are not available. They can do so by making more strategic use of existing resources.

For example, Patrice Pujol first established Master Teacher and Mentor Teacher positions in Ascension schools without dedicated funding from federal or state sources. She did that, and later sustained those roles, by identifying and repurposing expenditures that were not getting results.

"I would walk into my lowest-performing schools and see classrooms that had eight or ten or fifteen kids in them with a core teacher, and I would see four

teachers' aides coming in throughout the day doing different various and sundry things," she recalls. "I would see ten computer programs not aligned with anything else we were doing, but just things that teachers thought might work. I would see principals ordering paper at the end of the year with Title I money that they hadn't spent yet. And I looked at all of that and thought, "OK, these kinds of spending practices, though well-intentioned, are not moving the needle in these schools because we haven't seen any improvements in student achievement.'"

When viewed through that lens, Pujol realized the money was already there to fund new kinds of teacher leadership, and set about repurposing spending in order to do so. "We had to slay some sacred cows in order to get it done," she recalls. "One was an after-school tutoring program where we cut back hours of operation because it was not showing significant results, and that was a move that some in the community were not happy about. Sometimes it means you put one more child per class in order to create that position of the Master Teacher, since the research is pretty clear that small differences in class size will not make a difference in student achievement. But you have to have the political courage, the moral courage, and most importantly the ability to bring people on board to do what's right for students rather than what may be popular with adults."

District leaders in Slaton, Texas, engaged in a similar process. The superintendent and school board analyzed budget expenditures and conducted a personnel utilization study, which identified a number of existing expenditures they could redirect to fund teacher leadership. For example, the district was able save $160,000 per year by cutting extra photocopiers and saved another $18,500 by cutting an underutilized computer program subscription. The district also saved $76,000 per year by ending a pullout program that showed no positive effect on student achievement. These funds were then used to create an initial group of teacher leaders, who proved so effective that they produced an additional $64,000 "in savings" per year by reducing the need for intervention positions. All told, the budget examination and initial success of the teacher leader cohort produced an annual savings of $318,500.

In Ascension, Pujol also identified recurring federal funding streams that could support teacher leadership, such as Title I, Title II and special education funds. "Every year I'd have a budget meeting with my chief financial officer, special education director, federal programs director, and

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In-Sourcing Professional Development at Minnesota's Partnership Academy

"From a financial perspective, it's been wonderful, because bringing in external folks to provide professional development was really expensive. And teachers would often wonder, 'Well, who is this? What do they know about what I'm dealing with here at Partnership Academy on a Tuesday?' But the teacher leaders you're working alongside all of the time know their stuff and they know the context, so teachers are eager to engage right away. 'Now this is someone who really knows what challenges I face and can offer some learning tied to my context.' You can't have professional development be ongoing, frequent, contextualized, and relevant when you have to rely on somebody else's external schedule. By the time you get them in, you've moved on and the issue is not even an issue anymore. Having Master and Mentor Teachers deliver professional development gives you the flexibility to meet the needs of teachers and students every week."

— *Lisa Hendricks*
Founder and Executive Director[72]

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school improvement director. And I would say, 'Here are our agreed-upon priorities. Here are the data that show teacher leadership is working in turnaround schools. So, how are we going to pay for it this year?'"

Critically, when formal teacher leadership positions focus on leading core instructional improvement processes in schools, they become a mechanism for insourcing professional development at the school level to create more relevant and effective job-embedded learning for teachers. Many of NIET's partner systems and schools repurpose funds that previously had been used to outsource professional development to external providers in order to pay for Master and Mentor Teachers who deliver much better professional development in-house. (See sidebar, "Insourcing Professional Development at Minnesota's Partnership Academy.")

10. Place teacher leaders at the school level but expect districts to play a key role in sustaining and leveraging teacher leadership for maximum impact.

Formal instructional teacher leadership positions are best embedded at the school level, enabling teacher leaders to build and capitalize on deep relationships with the teachers they lead and support. However, districts play a critical role in establishing, sustaining and leveraging formal teacher leadership to achieve maximum impact. In fact, NIET stopped working with single traditional schools as individual partners in establishing formal teacher leadership because they were not able to sustain such models without significant involvement of their districts.

Recruiting and hiring. "Districts are critical for recruitment because they are best positioned to cast a wide net for candidates," says Condalary. "They can present a deeper pool of candidates for principals to choose from, and that is so important given the skill sets these teachers need to have." She also has found that when districts play a larger role in recruitment and hiring teacher leaders, they have a stronger sense of "skin in the game" when it comes to teacher leadership positions, making them more likely to support and sustain teacher leadership over time amidst competing priorities. Moreover, that "skin in the game" is also helpful in those rare cases when a principal later needs district backing to replace a new Master Teacher who has turned out to be a poor fit for the role.[73]

Providing support. While principals are the first essential support for teacher leaders, district central office staff need to play an important role as well. For example, Ascension Public Schools central office staff members are appointed to coordinate professional support for teacher leaders, including the establishment of a district-level "executive master teacher" position. Central office staff then provide on-site coaching to Master Teachers in schools and also convene Master Teachers regularly in their own "professional learning communities" so they can learn and grow their practice together.

"If you don't do that, then you may have some islands of excellence out there, but you are not going to have a scalable, systemic, really deep implementation of teacher leadership and teachers leading other teachers to improve their practice," says Pujol. "You will leave too much to chance if you're not bringing teacher leaders together to deepen their understanding of their own practice and coaching and supporting them in their work together."[74]

Protecting time. District leaders must ensure that all central office staff members understand the specific roles and responsibilities of formal instructional teacher leaders in schools to ensure that they will not make ad hoc demands that encroach on teacher leaders' time to perform their core duties. "If central office folks don't understand the importance of the role and what those expectations are, you can end up having them ask teacher leaders to do all kinds of other tasks, pulling them out for this, that, and everything under the sun," warns Condalary. "And that will water them down to the point where they are not able to do the things that are critical for moving instruction."[75]

Sustaining funding. Because they have much more control over the education purse strings, districts play the most critical role in sustaining funding to support formal teacher leadership roles.

Creating coherence among improvement initiatives. When district leaders and central office staff members do not sufficiently understand the role and the importance of formal instructional teacher leaders, they are more likely to bypass those leaders when launching new initiatives. As described above, that undermines teachers and teacher leaders alike in their efforts to improve instruction in schools. Instead, districts can use teacher leadership as an anchor to create coherence across initiatives.

Building an instructional leadership pipeline. Savvy district leaders take full advantage of the career ladder created by multiple, school-based teacher leadership roles in order to extend the "instructional leadership pipeline" up to the school system level. For example, when she was superintendent of Ascension Public Schools, Pujol communicated that Master and Mentor Teacher positions in turnaround schools were the launching pad for anyone who had ambitions to attain a central office position related to instructional leadership.

"We set the expectation that the way to advance was through those types of positions in our most at-risk schools," she says. "To be a principal or an assistant principal or to work in the district office, being a Master Teacher in the "Turnaround Zone" is where you wanted to serve. Those were the people who had the level of expertise that we wanted principals to have and that we wanted central office people to have. Indeed, that's where we really got our pipeline of leadership." [76]

IV. Conclusion

The current movement to expand leadership opportunities for teachers is a positive development that is long overdue. However, there are signs that it might not deliver on its full potential. While many kinds of teacher leadership can be beneficial, there has been too little attention to the kinds of *formal instructional teacher leadership roles* that have been known to help improve the quality and consistency of classroom instruction across whole schools and systems.

Today's teachers want instructional leadership roles, and such roles can be leveraged to bridge the massive capacity gap in instructional leadership that is holding back progress in improving teaching and learning in American schools. Leveraged strategically, such roles can provide a kind of "super fuel" for solving many pressing challenges at once: expanding instructional leadership and distributing leadership in school buildings; reliably evaluating teaching and providing more frequent and more useful feedback to teachers; greatly improving the relevance and effectiveness of professional development; increasing teacher retention; and, ultimately, accelerating student learning.

In order to capitalize on that promise, however, education leaders must understand the unique nature and potential impact of formal instructional leadership roles. If not, "teacher leadership" might become yet another missed opportunity in the annals of failed educational initiatives. It is time to tap the full potential of teacher leadership in every school and district in America.

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[57] Several recent studies found positive impacts in schools where teachers report having more say in schoolwide decision-making, the "consultative" form of leadership on the right of the description in Figure 1. See Ingersoll, R.M., Dougherty, P., & Sirinides, P. *School Leadership Counts*. Santa Cruz, CA: New Teacher Center; and Sebastian, J., Allensworth, E., & Huang, H. (2016, November). The role of teacher leadership in how principals influence classroom instruction and student learning. *American Journal of Education*, 123(1), 69-108.

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[69] Telephone interview with Arlene Juhl-Vandal, November 9, 2017.

[70] For more information on Iowa's teacher leadership system, see https://www.educateiowa.gov/teacher-leadership-and-compensation-system.

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[72] Telephone interview with Lisa Hendricks, November 3, 2017.

[73] Telephone interview with Vicky Condalary, December 5, 2017.

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