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How Can School Leaders Maximize the Impact of Teacher Leadership?

By **Madeline Will** on April 6, 2018 10:39 AM

Teachers want instructional leadership roles, a new report says—but too often, those roles lack the formal authority, support, and tools to be successful.

The National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, a group that works to increase educator effectiveness, launched [The Teach Factor](#) last week, which is an initiative to find scalable solutions around a factor "pivotal" to the teaching profession each year. This year, the factor is teacher leadership—and how schools and districts can create formal roles for teachers.

Through this initiative, NIET is working with educators across the country—including 12 Teach Factor fellows—to define the most effective models of teacher leadership and conduct a series of trainings for educators. After about a year of research, the group hopes to release a comprehensive study on its findings.

The initiative launch [was accompanied by a report](#) that said improving teaching and learning is tied to having an instructional leader work directly with teachers. But on average, the report said, principals only spend 8 percent to 17 percent of their working hours on instructional leadership—so teacher-leaders should shoulder some of this responsibility.

But too many models of teacher leadership seen in schools and districts today are informal and not backed by research, the report says. Few school districts have formal

teacher leadership roles, which the report defines as ones with titles, commensurate compensation, release time, and professional authority and accountability.

NIET outlined nine elements that the group wants state and district decisionmakers to consider when designing these formal positions—including having a rigorous, competitive selection process; [offering training and ongoing support](#); integrating the positions into the school's staffing and leadership structure; and giving these teacher-leaders professional authority. Teacher-leaders should still spend a substantial amount of time in the classroom with students, and they should have sufficient release time and receive extra compensation. They should also be evaluated based on the quality of their instructional leadership and their impact on teaching and learning, NIET recommends.

By the end of the year, the Teach Factor will develop a formal structure that schools, districts, and states can implement to maximize teacher-leaders' impact, NIET officials said.

NIET already runs a teacher-leadership system called [TAP: The System for Teacher and Student Achievement](#). Teachers in school districts that have implemented the TAP system can apply to two formal leadership roles: master and mentor teachers. To varying degrees, those teachers provide peer coaching, conduct evaluations and observations, and help implement curriculum.

Joni Readout, a master teacher at the Central Decatur school district in Iowa and a Teach Factor fellow, said on a press call that having a formal leadership role has been pivotal to her work. She's able to "hit the ground running" because her responsibilities are clearly defined, she said: modeling lessons, giving feedback to teachers, and planning and delivering weekly professional development.

"Teacher leadership means growth for educators, which means growth for students," she said.

The Central Decatur district is headed by Superintendent Chris Coffelt, who was named [a 2017 Education Week Leader to Learn From](#). He told me last year that the

TAP system helped the district recruit and retain qualified teachers, as well as increase student achievement.

"Our classrooms and classroom teachers are no longer isolated," he said. "They feel energized and supported."

Patrice Pujol, the co-president and chief strategy officer of NIET, said Teach Factor will explore one factor related to the teaching profession each year.

This year, "we're really aiming to change the conversation around teacher leadership," Pujol said. "[We're focusing] on models that most impact student outcomes."

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