

Teacher Leadership Toolkit: Central Office

Encouraging and Supporting Principals and Teacher Leaders



May 30, 2019



Introduction

This guidance document is provided to encourage the broad practice, cultivation, and effective deployment of teacher leadership in schools and districts across Georgia. Over the past two decades, there have been canons of research and thought leadership produced on this topic. The seminal works guiding the field and the thinking behind this document are listed in the References section.

Despite the prevalence and clarity regarding the importance of optimizing teacher leadership in effective schools, when we convened a cross-section of Georgia's education practitioners including teachers, principals, superintendents, higher education and professional learning partners, we heard that the practice of teacher leadership is not mature or broadly implemented in Georgia. Teachers early in their careers do not routinely encounter clear opportunities to take on meaningful leadership roles. Likewise, teachers late in their careers have too few opportunities to be recognized, utilized, or rewarded for their efforts and wisdom.

There are bright spots across the state where teacher leadership is thriving. Those places are distinguished by school leaders with a clear vision for sharing leadership with teachers, understanding that the most ambitious goals for student achievement can only be realized if leadership, decision-making, and action are distributed broadly throughout a school. Indeed, there are some school systems where teacher leadership thrives across schools and in those districts, central office leaders recognize, encourage, scaffold, and reward school leaders who successfully deploy teacher leaders in the day-to-day leadership work of the school.

Whether you are a teacher aspiring to become a teacher leader, an underutilized teacher leader, a principal, a superintendent, or a policy maker, this guidance document is for you. In it, you will find recommendations and resources that will help you engage others at your school or district in dialogue and planning to optimize the untapped teaching and leadership talent already inside your school buildings. Together, with other instructional leaders, we can bring about strong school cultures that connect every child with a bright, successful future.

Organization of the Documents

In each of the toolkits you will find guidance and resources targeted to specific groups: teachers, principals, central office leaders, and policy makers and funders. As resources are added and updated, the toolkits will expand. Version numbers will be included in the footer, along with publication dates.

Acknowledgements

This document was developed by members of the Teacher Leadership Task Force, convened and facilitated by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC), the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE), and the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement (GLISI). We are sincerely grateful to these Georgia educators, educational leaders, and teacher and leader educators who contributed significant time and professional expertise to this project.

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Other Teacher Leadership Toolkits:

- **Teacher Leadership for Teachers**
- **Principals: Growing and Sustaining Your Teacher Leaders**
- **Policy Makers and Funders: What is Teacher Leadership and Why is it Important**

Common Definitions of Teacher Leadership & Our Beliefs

There are several commonly accepted definitions of teacher leadership within or informed by relevant literature, including the following:

Teacher leaders are defined as highly effective teachers who take the initiative to serve (or are appointed) at their schools to educate and encourage their colleagues with the goal of enhancing student achievement and teacher satisfaction.

“Teacher leadership is the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of the school community to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement” (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, pp. 287-288).

From these definitions, as well as other findings from within the literature, we believe the following about Teacher Leadership and have developed this guidance document according to these beliefs:

Teacher Leadership is the process by which highly effective and empowered teachers serve as catalysts to facilitate continuous improvement resulting in an enhanced culture of teacher engagement, student learning, and achievement.

We believe Teacher Leadership:

- Encourages collaborative and distributed leadership;
- Allows teachers to maintain focus on classroom teaching while enabling contributions to other leadership roles;
- Enables teacher leaders to step out of the classroom to lead, if desired;
- Creates opportunities for teacher leaders to influence colleagues toward collective action that promotes student growth; and
- Recognizes teacher leaders as a critical part of continuous school improvement.

For Central Office Leaders

Overview

The degree to which teacher leadership thrives in schools is ultimately a reflection of the leadership style of district leaders. When district leaders subscribe to a top-down “law and order” superhero leadership style (Wheatley, 2010) that elevates the leader as the primary and best source of good ideas and “right” decisions, that leadership style is mirrored by principals to teachers (and by teachers to students). A shift to teacher leadership is more fundamental than simply giving teachers responsibility for the bus duty schedule. It goes to underlying levels of trust and belief in the untapped capacity of ordinary people to do extraordinary things. When district leaders perpetuate a style of leadership that consolidates decision making and authority at the top, it sends a message that other than formal leaders, no one has the responsibility to innovate, look for better ways to achieve goals, or share accountability for outcomes.

Are you that district leader? Do you believe your principals need to be fixed? Do you believe your teachers are not very strong or simply need guidance in cultivating and developing sustained teacher leadership within their building(s)?

Are you ready to consider an alternative? Is it possible that you or your principals unknowingly create conditions that stamp out teacher agency, imagination, and passion for creating vibrant learning experiences for every student? What is your responsibility to create a working environment where your teaching force is liberated and their motivations are met with optimism, appreciation, and support from you and your principals to draw it out in its highest form?

Research points to a number of important responsibilities of central office leaders with regard to supporting teacher leadership as a pathway to school improvement. Among them are: creating learning-focused partnerships with principals; teaching principals how to more effectively deploy teacher leaders to achieve deep learning opportunities for every child; and redesigning central office structures to support principal growth (Honig, 2013; Honig & Rainey, 2015).

This tool kit provides guidance to help district leaders create cultures and conditions in which teacher leadership will thrive. Included are guidance and resources for:

- Leading a shift in culture, including a district-wide embrace of risk-taking;
- Memorializing the priority of teacher leadership in the district strategic plan;
- Defining and adopting widely shared expectations in a teacher leader competency model;
- Building multi-way communication pathways to facilitate conversation about shifts to teacher leadership and invite feedback from teacher leaders;
- Providing high quality professional learning support not only for teacher leaders, but also for the school and district leaders - including the superintendent - to develop the knowledge, skills and structures to nurture a teacher leadership culture.

Also included are links to resources, as well as a set of talking points you may find helpful when discussing teacher leadership with policy makers. To read more, download the Central Office Toolkit.

Culture Shift

Why is this important?

“Culture” in a school or district refers to the “norms, values, beliefs, rituals, ceremonies, symbols and stories that make up the ‘persona’ of the organization (Deal & Peterson, 2010). In many districts, the prevailing culture is rooted in conventional hierarchies that place responsibility for leadership - strategy, planning, innovation - on formal leaders, and relegating others in the organization to just “do as you are told.” The complexities of teaching today in the context of change in the global economy, in community and student demographics, and in the rigor of curriculum render that conventional model obsolete. Teachers must be empowered to make more decisions at the classroom and student level because teachers have the best vantage point to know students. Without a culture shift in how we perceive and support teacher leadership in our schools, we will not be able to sustain the changes needed to empower our teachers in helping students.

How do we implement this?

Not all things that make an environment conducive to teacher leadership are directly about teacher leadership. Leading district-wide culture shift is a good example. It starts with the enactment of any and all leadership. An excellent starting point for superintendents or principal supervisors in navigating this shift is to begin with building or recasting your relationship with principals. The superintendent or principal supervisor relationship with principals should be a model for the principal of how to relate to teachers. If the relationship between superintendent and principal is strained—if conversation is halting and clipped; if there is little back and forth dialog; if the principal raises few questions and never offers push back; if they rarely see each other or talk one-on-one; if the superintendent or supervisor doesn’t come to the school; if the superintendent never demonstrates any curiosity about successes, new ideas, or stuck points; if the superintendent never says thank you—it would not be surprising to find that the principal turns around and replicates that same type of relationship with his or her teachers, and that is a recipe not only for crushing teacher leadership, but all leadership and learning.

When the superintendent and principals have not only a congenial but also a collegial relationship where they discuss the work of leadership, of instruction, of continuous improvement, of innovation, and do so managing conflict constructively, it is evident for many to see. It is a powerful foundation for principals to model that kind of relationship with teachers (and teachers to students). However, simply building relationships will not get you all the way there.

Sharing meaningful decision-making responsibility, and trusting leaders to make good decisions, is a critical companion to (and strategy for) relationship building. Common

barriers to sharing decision-making responsibility are fear that others will get it wrong; do it differently than you; undercut your authority; take credit for your ideas; or get access to information that will put you at a disadvantage. Are you this leader? Do these fears speak to you? Leading a culture shift conducive to teacher leadership starts with confronting the root of these fears and barriers within you, and acting with intention to overcome them. The work of Kegan & Lahey (2001) on diagnosing immunity to change offers an excellent framework to surface those competing commitments and step-by-step dismantle those fears that stand in the way of trust.

Risk-Taking

Because principals are the gatekeepers for how teacher leaders experience opportunities to lead (or not), it is important for district leaders to create conditions for principals to empathize with teachers and teacher leaders so they can better evaluate their impact as school leaders. The fastest way there is to take a risk with your principals is by showing your own vulnerabilities - those places in your own work where you are struggling, working through questions, focusing on getting better. Do they know what you are working on to improve your own leadership practice? Modeling the way by making your own journey to improve public is a powerful first step to creating this safe space for principals. And the more vulnerable you are, the more safe they will feel. When principals can experience what it is like to be vulnerable with you, their supervisor, and emerge from the experience unscathed, it establishes a model they can emulate for how to build trust for teacher leaders, who in turn can mirror that approach in encouraging their peers. As you know, leadership requires courage. That first step out of the classroom to a teacher leadership role, even if it is informal, is scary. Your work has to be to create a climate in the district that normalizes that kind of risk taking in the quest to become better.

Any culture shift that involves sharing leadership is a risk. Building trust, relationships, and willingness for folks to take risks are all critical foundational steps. However, if there is no appetite for an idea that comes from someone other than you or acknowledgement that implementing new ideas can come with bumps in the road, all the trust-building in the world will still end in a compliance culture. Heighten your own alertness and awareness of whether others are freely offering new ideas or alternative approaches, how you respond when that happens, and how you recognize and elevate the contributions of others when successes are achieved. All of these behaviors and actions by you as district office leader create an environment that will either encourage and nurture principals and teachers to try new things and be vulnerable, or will send the message that anyone who does that will ultimately be embarrassed or shut down.

Other tips for district leaders to create a learning culture that values responsible risk-taking include the following.

- Be the first in line to show how you embrace ongoing professional learning for yourself and evaluate your own impact on the growth of adults.
- Encourage rapid inquiry cycles to constantly refine understanding of how adult action impacts student learning and growth using a Plan-Do-Check-Act

cycle.

- Engage principals in collaborative exploration for evidence of teacher learning, similar to the task of teachers looking for evidence of student learning in professional learning communities.
- Map the relationship between student learning, adult learning, culture, and principal leadership. Connect conversations with principals about their performance to this framework inviting them to self-identify growth goals that will impact adult learning and culture in the building.
- Look for, listen for, and ask about the degree to which teacher and leader dialog during PLCs or leadership team meetings includes ideating fresh approaches, new ideas, and robust back-and-forth about best instructional strategies to meet identified student needs.
- Watch and listen for teachers and leaders willingness to make mistakes paired with high interest in exploring what we can do and how we can do it to get better results.

Strategic Plan

Overview

Why is this important?

To elevate a commitment to cultivate teacher leadership beyond a trend or initiative of a particular leader to a system-wide shift in the culture and structure of the district, that commitment must be memorialized in the district strategic plan.

How do we implement this?

Make explicit reference to the importance of growing teacher leadership (not just teacher leaders) as a clear strategy to achieve enduring school improvement. Articulate beliefs and core values that lift up and highlight the importance of teacher leadership, and those conditions that nurture teacher leadership.

Engage teachers, leaders and community members in studying the definition of Teacher Leadership in this guidance document. Begin that conversation with an exploration of why individuals believe teacher leadership is important and valuable to district and student success. After all stakeholder groups have an opportunity to articulate the “why” of teacher leadership, then engage in dialog to define how to make teacher leadership real in your district. Be prepared for people to point to the barriers and reasons why teacher leadership “can’t work here.” Plan to acknowledge that achieving a learning culture that honors and elevates teacher leadership is aspirational, and will require attention to many aspects of the strategic plan beyond simply recruiting and retaining talented teachers. The common focus areas of strategic plans that will have implications for teacher leadership include culture, curriculum and assessment, student voice, community engagement, and facilities.

Defining a Teacher-Leadership Competency Model

Overview

Why is this important?

Talk about elevating teacher leadership is only as good as the clarity stakeholders share about what teacher leadership means and looks like in your district. A teacher leader competency model is a document, developed collaboratively with input from teachers, leaders and even students that clarifies for all to see, what characteristics, behaviors, and practices are most essential for teacher leaders.

Implementation

Teacher leadership is highly contextual and it can be implemented in formal and informal ways. A critical first step is to recognize that effective teacher leadership is based on the identified needs of a school and that in practice it may be vastly different from one building to the next. Following is one example of an approach to developing a competency model.

The first step is for a school system to convene a representative group of stakeholders as a design team. Over a series of meetings, the work of that design team is to study research and standards to distill those most essential characteristics, interpersonal skills and attributes that they value in teacher leaders. The resulting competency model will include:

1. Concise and clear definitions of teacher leader attributes
2. Clearly defined processes the district will use to identify teachers who possess those skills and attributes
3. Descriptions of the support available to teacher leaders across a continuum from informal to formal roles
4. Definition of the roles that fall under the heading of teacher leader. (e.g., mentor, aspiring academic coach, model teacher, master teacher, professional development leader, etc.)
5. Well-defined measures that will indicate success in cultivating teacher leadership (e.g., teacher satisfaction surveys especially on items relating to involvement in decision making and leader respect for their professional contribution; teacher retention; teacher attendance; student surveys especially on items relating to instructional innovation and engagement; student attendance; meeting PLC and school improvement goals, etc.)

Engaging reputable and experienced third party organizations to facilitate this dialog and produce the resulting competency model and tools is a best practice to build confidence in the process as objective and research-driven, rather than political or agenda-driven.

Communication Pathways

Overview

Why is this important?

You already know that everything you do, say, or write, as well as everything you do not do, say, or write as a central office leader communicates something to your stakeholders. As you embrace a more robust and intentional approach to elevating and growing teacher leadership in your district, attention to communication is essential to success lest teachers feel out of the loop or passed over, resulting in the exact opposite effect you intend!

How to implement?

First, invite feedback and input from as many stakeholders as possible in formulating your plan for cultivating teacher leadership in your district. The easiest communication is the communication you do not have to do because they were there! Once you have a plan drafted, over communicate the same message through multiple channels, repeatedly.

Premeditate who in the district might be most likely to jump to the wrong conclusions, as well as those who have substantial influence on teacher opinion. Develop a plan to talk to them face to face if possible, in as small a group setting as possible. Make those conversations dialogic, inviting questions and critiques, not downloads by you of your plans.

If you do not already have one, consider creating an ongoing channel for teachers to communicate directly with the central office about ideas, issues, and suggestions for improvement. Many superintendents do this through a Teachers Advisory Council. Other examples might include a central email, a survey link, a team of communications employees who can be reached via email or phone, a twitter account, or even a team of designated teacher leaders who are communication ambassadors from central office to teachers in their departments or grade level teams. All of these channels must be manned and prioritized in order for them to work.

Some best practices for a Teacher Advisory Board may include:

- Annually invite a teacher to represent each school (TOTY or other)
- Monthly meetings with the superintendent
 - Scheduled topics
 - Open forum
 - Minutes published with superintendent's response, shared system wide

Professional Learning

Overview

Why is this important?

The role of teachers in selecting and providing professional learning speaks volumes about the district appreciation for, knowledge of, and belief in the professional knowledge of the staff. Of course, not all professional learning needs to be provided by teachers, but in districts where no teachers are involved in sharing their expertise with their peers and celebrating successes in your local context, the climate of respect for teachers is weak.

In addition to teachers' professional learning, as a district leader you are directly responsible for the ongoing professional learning of your principals, and particularly the development of their knowledge, skills, and mindsets for cultivating teacher leadership.

How to implement?

Teachers need input on what is important and effective in their classrooms. Each site may have different needs to meet the same goals. Individualization of HOW to get there is okay. In order to make this possible, promote site based administration and teachers feedback and allow them to make decisions regarding tasks that do not lead to the goal set. In addition to needed changes, provide opportunities for teachers to share successes.

- Ensure principals have site-based freedom and decisions- not all professional staff have the same needs or talents.
- Reach out to frustrated staff and create a safe environment to share the “whys” of frustration and then allow them to come up with solutions, and implement them.
- Consider encouraging teacher leaders to create a system of self-stated strengths and weaknesses that will help match teachers with other teachers for support.

As chief teacher of principals, your visits and coaching of school leaders are vital in creating conditions in schools hospitable to nurturing teacher leadership. Provided below are suggested question stems that you and other central office leaders who make visits to schools to support principals might ask/look for during those visits:

Central Office Role	Coaching Questions You Can Ask Principals
Human Resources	<p>Who are the teachers who have indicated interest/strength as leaders?</p> <p>What do you notice about their work that tells you they have leadership strength?</p> <p>What support would most help them to grow?</p> <p>What support do you need as a principal to create conditions for your teacher leaders to thrive?</p>
Professional Learning	<p>What opportunities have you provided to teachers to define their professional learning needs particularly around leadership?</p> <p>What do the data tell you are their needs?</p> <p>How do your observations differ if at all from the data? Why do you think that is?</p> <p>How can we design professional development to address the needs you see and the needs teachers have indicated they have?</p> <p>In what ways would we differentiate professional development opportunities for teachers at different points on the teacher leadership continuum?</p>
Curriculum & Instruction	<p>How do you create opportunities for less-experienced teachers to have access to their most accomplished colleagues for support with curriculum and instruction?</p> <p>What do you do to encourage innovative instructional strategies? What are the most innovative strategies happening here and what opportunities do teachers have to share those strategies with others?</p> <p>What happens when staff go “off script” within their classrooms? Tell me about a conversation you had when that happened, what the teacher’s response was, and where you ended up. What do you think that teacher told his/her colleagues and was that a net win for the culture in your school?</p>

Central Office Role	Coaching Questions You Can Ask Principals
School Improvement	<p>How would you describe the dialog among teachers at PLC or leadership team meetings?</p> <p>What strategies are you using to encourage teacher dialog that is collegial not just congenial?</p> <p>What roles have you defined for teachers in PLC meetings, and how well are they working? If not well, what are the barriers? What leader moves can you make to better understand the strengths and limitations of these processes?</p> <p>How would you describe teacher engagement in school improvement in this school?</p> <p>What leader moves can you make to encourage teachers to plug in to the work of improving instruction and learning at this school?</p>

Communicating with Policy Makers

Explaining why Teacher Leadership is important

Research supports teacher-leadership in schools as a method for increasing student engagement, staff retention, and improved school culture. By allowing teachers to engage in leadership roles while staying in the classroom, teachers are more likely to stay in the teaching profession and have a positive outlook on teaching. This leads to increased student engagement in the classroom of that teacher-leader and the school as a whole, because they school-culture has also improved.

Student engagement leads to student growth and performance, which is the goal of all schools.

The US Department of Education recently gave their support to the teacher-leader movement, citing teacher retention and student growth as their motivating factors for their support.

Communication outcomes:

- Policy makers should guide decisions and policies in alignment with the [belief statements](#) about teacher leadership developed by Georgia P-12 practitioners in collaboration with GaDOE, GaPSC, and GLISI.
- To avoid creating unintentional consequences and barriers to effective teacher leadership, policy makers must understand teacher leadership is more than a field of certification—it is a practice that is visible in the day-to-day work of school improvement.

- Funding should incentivize implementation of the common beliefs about teacher leadership at the local level.
- Establish clear and explicit beliefs about teacher leadership at the policy level within which there is local flexibility.
- Adequate funding levels and flexibility in funding use
- Funding for training for leaders explicitly for creating climates and processes that draw out and cultivate teacher leaders; ideally leaders learn alongside teacher leaders
- Innovative incentive structures that recognize teacher leader contributions separate from certifications or degrees
- Establish guiding questions that can support board member “look fors” regarding teacher leadership when they make school visits

Communication strategies and talking points:

Explain how schools will look and function differently when teacher leaders are optimized. For instance, in schools where teacher leadership thrives:

- Teachers help expand the capacity of other effective teachers and leverage improvements in instructional practices to benefit students
- Teachers are happy to teach there—morale is high
- Teachers respect their colleagues
- Teachers are willing to champion what is right and confront status quo
- Teachers are willing to try new instructional practices

Georgia is in a strong position to support great school improvement and it all hinges on the capacity of our teachers, especially teacher leaders. There is a shortage of quality teachers coming and you have the opportunity to curtail that issue while also helping to put Georgia at the forefront of education.

Educators need policy makers to be intentional in their decisions, from the state house and senate, to local schools, by helping everyone understand the attributes of teacher leaders and by creating opportunities for those teachers to be recognized, elevated, and utilized so they can be a critical part of helping schools improve.

Policies must be grounded in these guidance documents to avoid creating barriers to empowerment and cultivation of teacher leaders.

As you make new policy, please be mindful of using this evaluative criterion: is any new policy under your consideration helping or harming, or introducing barriers to superintendents and principals to creating an environment where teacher leaders thrive.

Resources

Provided below are links to resources to help central office leaders cultivate teacher leadership.

[Assessment for Principals to Gauge Their Readiness to Share Leadership and Grow Teacher Leaders](#)

Quick Report #107 | Cultivate Teacher Leadership

Assessing Readiness to Grow New Leaders

In order to prepare their readiness to absorb leadership, principals at all levels throughout the state are invited to take the opportunity to assess their readiness to share leadership with others. The assessment is designed to help principals assess their readiness to share leadership with others. The assessment is designed to help principals assess their readiness to share leadership with others. The assessment is designed to help principals assess their readiness to share leadership with others.

Leadership Behavior	Definition of my leadership behavior:	How well I can practice my leadership behavior in my district
I. Leading Change: A clearly defined vision and an understanding of how leadership behaviors align to that vision are essential to leading change. A clearly defined vision provides a common purpose and direction for the organization. A clearly defined vision provides a common purpose and direction for the organization. A clearly defined vision provides a common purpose and direction for the organization.	1. I have a clear vision of the future of my school/district and I can communicate this vision to others.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
II. Developing People: One of the most important conditions for effective leadership is the ability to identify and develop talent. One of the most important conditions for effective leadership is the ability to identify and develop talent. One of the most important conditions for effective leadership is the ability to identify and develop talent.	1. I have a clear vision of the future of my school/district and I can communicate this vision to others.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

CEA has to assess each and ensure that can help shape off these leadership behaviors

[Guidelines for District Responsibilities and Structure of Teacher Leader Model](#)

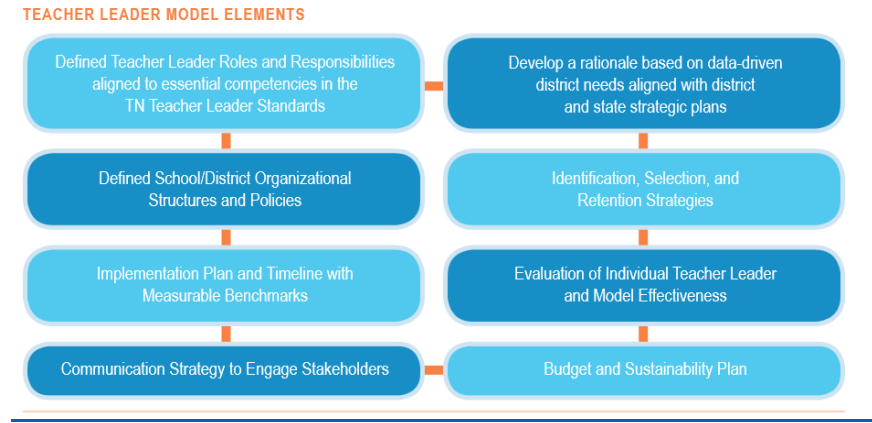
DISTRICT RESPONSIBILITIES

Create and implement teacher leader models that:

- Focus on improving student outcomes
- Dovetail with existing state/district initiatives and resources
- Are sensitive to a district's size, culture for collaboration, and funding resources
- Establish a rigorous, fair, and well-communicated teacher leader identification and selection process

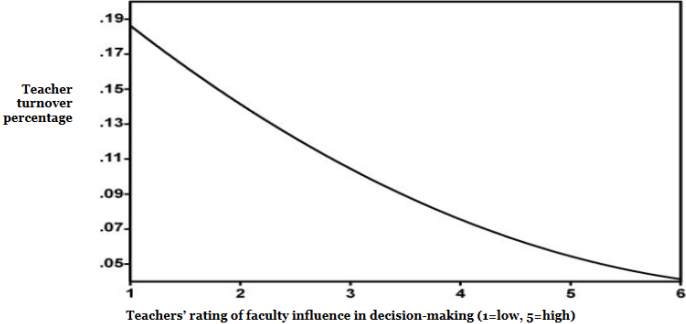
Provide continuous professional development and support for teacher leaders including all components of effective professional learning including:

- Content-based
- Relevant
- Rigorous
- Collaborative



Why Cultivating a Culture of Teacher Engagement in Decision Making Matters

Figure 2: Effects of Faculty Decision-making Influence on Teacher Turnover¹⁵



Model Principal Supervisor Professional Standards

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