

# Teacher Leadership Toolkit: Teachers

Teacher Leadership for Teachers



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:**

- **Principals: Growing and Sustaining Your Teacher Leaders**
- **Central Office: Encouraging and Supporting Principals and 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.

# Teacher Guidance Document

## The Role of Teacher Leaders

### Why are teacher leaders essential?

Teacher leaders:

- Strengthen the teaching profession and increase teacher retention
- Influence school operations without necessarily entering administration
- Serve as a catalyst for change in schools and build a culture of trust
- Support the growth of other teachers by sharing expertise and promoting collaboration
- Increase the quality of instruction and improve student achievement

Teacher leaders are frequently characterized by the following traits:

- Trustworthy
- Active listener
- Decision maker
- Mediator
- Life-long learner

### Examples of Teacher Leadership include but are not limited to the following:

- An experienced teacher who serves as a mentor
- A teacher who has experienced success and shares data in his/her Professional Learning Community (PLC) meeting each week about those successes and how they were accomplished
- A teacher who models teaching techniques or strategies to others (high school students, college students, student teachers) in a variety of settings
- A teacher who serves on a long-term committee or is part of an organized group that suggests or makes decisions for a department, school, or district
- A teacher who serves as a department chair, a grade-level or subject-area leader, or a team leader
- A teacher who is not in a formal position, but because of his or her positive influence and demeanor, influences others
- A teacher who facilitates meaningful conversations and collaboration among staff and administrators
- A teacher who seeks additional opportunities for professional growth to support student learning

- A teacher who guides others in the use of data to improve student growth

Following in this toolkit are resources and guidance specifically developed to help teachers learn how to advocate for and facilitate the types of change in schools that will allow teacher leadership (their own and that of their peers) to grow and thrive. Download the toolkit to read more.

## How Teacher Leaders Advocate for and Facilitate Change

Research surrounding organizational change, particularly in educational settings, continuously points to various levels of resistance that organizational members may present (Evans; 2000; Evans, 2001), and it is often natural for these members to resist change (Evans, 2001; Hargreaves, 2005). This resistance can present substantial barriers to an educational institution—a district, an individual building, or even a grade-level hallway—thus impeding the effectiveness of the organizational members themselves. Indeed, this may have a profound impact on students’ capacities, as well, given that the foremost factor in a student’s success is the influence of an effective teacher (Bouchey, 2004; Eccles et al., 1983, Fan, 2011).

Teacher leaders, working laterally with their peers, have tremendous ability to affect change within an organization and equip their colleagues to reach their full potential as educators through addressing this human element directly through trust and purposeful relationship-building (Wagner et al., 2006). While teacher leaders are not expected to fully shoulder the weight of the responsibilities, duties, and emotions of their colleagues—truly, too great a task for any single individual—they can positively affect the capacity of their colleagues in the following ways:

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*Teacher leaders, working laterally with their peers, have tremendous ability to affect change within an organization and equip their colleagues to reach their full potential as educators.*

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**Coaching & Mentoring:** In contemporary contexts, coaching often refers to the role of the instructional coach in a formal sense, or one who makes formal observations of a teacher’s practice (Sullivan & Glanz, 2013). Teacher leaders, however, have a much broader opportunity to engage within the role of a coach through the associated actions of peer-to-peer coaching, mentorship, collegial advocacy or guidance, or through bridging collaborative relationships (Matlach, 2015; Wagner et al., 2006).

- Peer-to-peer coaching and mentorship allow teacher leaders to collaborate with both induction-level and veteran-level colleagues for the purposes of, for example, refining professional practice, exploring various research-based instructional techniques, analyzing classroom data, and trouble-shooting various classroom obstacles.

- Teacher leaders may advocate for their colleagues or guide their colleagues toward more feasible solutions as organizational shifts occur.
- Teacher leaders may effectually bridge ineffective relationships by mediating or providing additional solutions to problems through the lenses of maintaining the goals of the organization and how to best impact the lives and learning of students.

**Leading & Affecting Professional Development:** Teacher leaders have tremendous opportunities and potential to be agents of change regarding professional development initiatives within an educational organization. Research consistently supports the notion that ongoing, sustainable professional development models, such as PLCs or in-house training initiatives, are more effective for long-term teacher effectiveness than isolated professional development opportunities (Dufour, 2004; Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007; Walker-Dalhouse et al., 2009). Teacher leaders have the ability to operate within sustained professional development models to lead professional development initiatives, to model professional development outcomes in their own practices and classrooms, and to vocalize the need for targeted professional development in organizational areas of weakness. Ideally, teacher leaders may also emerge as in-house experts in particular areas, such as content-area curriculum, research-based strategies, or technology implementation, to name a few. Essentially, teacher leaders are on the forefront of professional learning within educational organizations, through both the leading of professional development and the various innovations emerging from within sustainable learning.

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*Teacher leaders have a powerful role in addressing human barriers to change within an educational organization.*

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Through coaching, mentorship, supporting collegial relationships, and supporting professional development, teacher leaders have a powerful role in addressing human barriers to change within an educational organization. Collectively, these specified actions uphold the teacher leader’s abilities and responsibilities to build capacity in others and to positively affect colleagues’ self-efficacy as instructors and as classroom leaders. Through investments into the professional practices and motivations of other building professionals by the establishment of strong collegial relationships, and through advocacy and mediation, teacher leaders can foster organizational change in clearly targeted ways by supporting those who drive an organization’s effectiveness, thus creating new norms of success within that organization (Kotter, 2007).



## Teacher Leadership Resources

The following resources are suggested for teacher leaders aspiring to both emerge as leaders within their organizations or to refine their teacher leadership practices:

ASCD Teacher Leadership Article: <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/sept07/vol65/num01/The-Many-Faces-of-Leadership.aspx>

This article explains how “teachers can find a wealth of opportunities to extend their influence beyond their own classrooms to their teaching teams, schools, and districts.”

Education Week Article: “A ‘Divergent’ Path: Tips on Becoming a Teacher Leader”  
<https://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2014/04/30/ctq-redfield-teacher-leader.html>

This article conceptualizes several baseline tips for improving personal teacher leadership skills.

Teacher Leader Model Standards:

<http://www.teacherleaderstandards.org/>

This website outlines various domains of teacher leadership in order “to codify, promote, and support teacher leadership as a vehicle for transforming schools to meet the needs of 21st-century learners.”

Teach to Lead Resource Kit:

<http://teachtolead.org/resources/>

*Teach to Lead* is an initiative supported by the U.S. Department of Education whose mission is “to provide resources, facilitate stakeholder consultation, and encourage professional collaboration to develop and amplify the work of teacher leaders.” Included in resources are practical tools for how to gauge and improve teacher leader practice, links to formal teacher leadership programs, and current research supporting the call for improved teacher leadership in our schools and districts.

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