



Teacher leaders juggle a variety of duties to implement common core standards

Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for mathematics and language arts adopted by most states add coherence and consistency to expectations for student learning that have previously been missing. While the standards are not mandated universally in the United States, as national curricula are in some other countries, the adoption of these standards ensures that all students will be expected to achieve common standards. Some critics say the standards fall short of what students should be expected to learn in K-12 schools; others worry that the standards usurp local control of education; still others wonder how these standards will be implemented and assessed. Regardless of the politics associated with the adoption and implementation of CCSS, or any national curriculum such as in Singapore, New Zealand, or Great Britain, teacher leaders have key responsibilities to ensure that high expectations for student learning translate into high-quality teaching and student learning.

These responsibilities include contributing to deepening teachers' content knowledge; expanding teachers' content-specific instructional strategies; using various forms of assessment data to diagnose, analyze, and assess students; and advocating for high standards for all students.

The success of common standards, however, depends on the quality of teaching. Teacher leaders, as both advocates of CCSS and supporters of

their implementation, work closely with their colleagues to clarify their own content knowledge related to the standards. They facilitate conversations with their colleagues to identify key concepts embedded in the standard and assess their own understanding of those concepts to identify areas in which they want to deepen or expand their knowledge, especially as the concepts relate to K-12 learning. A teacher, for example, might be a proficient writer, yet not have sufficient knowledge about how young people learn core concepts associated with effective writing or how to deconstruct those concepts to teach them to students at appropriate developmental levels.

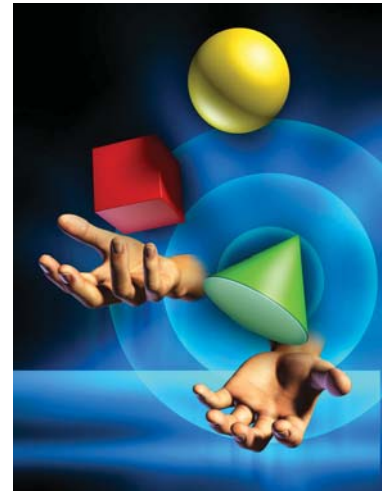
In addition to understanding the concepts within the standards, teacher leaders help teachers understand both the theoretical framework undergirding the standards and the practical, real-world applications of the standards. With this level of deep understanding, teacher leaders support their colleagues to design and use various types of formative assessments to measure students' current level of learning in regard to each standard. Then teacher leaders facilitate teamwork to design effective, logically sequenced instructional units and lessons aligned with the standards that engage students in authentic, rigorous, and personalized instruction. This means that teacher leaders facilitate learning communities that examine research on content-specific instructional strategies or determine how to apply generic, yet

research-based instructional strategies to their content areas.

This complex work requires frequent collaboration, often facilitated by teacher leaders, among teachers in grade-level, discipline-specific, or course-specific teams that meet in both horizontal and vertical configurations to develop and maintain consistency and coherence in student learning opportunities.

Additionally teacher leaders model, co-teach, and observe their colleagues and share constructive feedback and invite peer-to-peer visits and feedback sessions focused on how students respond to lessons and particular strategies. Teacher leaders facilitate cross-classroom, cross-team, and whole school sharing of successful practices so that each student receives the quality of instruction necessary for high levels of success.

In addition to working with their colleagues, teacher leaders work closely with principals to ensure intensive focus on student learning, teaching quality, and implementation of standards. Teacher leaders reinforce their princi-



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pals' high expectations for educators all and students. They contribute to the development of a standard-specific data wall that displays data about how the school's students are performing in relationship to each standard. When invited, they co-facilitate with the principal conversations about appropriate classroom and school interventions for underperforming students. They collaborate with principals about ways to restructure the school day or required meetings to focus attention on the CCSS to ensure schoolwide, vertical alignment of classroom curriculum. They co-facilitate professional development with their principals on research-based content-specific instructional strategies and design and implement a schedule of classroom visits and team meetings to support implementation of the strategies.

Teacher leaders broaden their own knowledge about CCSS and serve as communication links to their colleagues about what they are learning. They volunteer to serve as members of district or state curriculum committees, and subscribe to blogs, discussion groups, or electronic newsletters from the education agencies and professional associations to keep abreast of the challenges and developments related to standard implementation. When issues arise within their schools, they find

the appropriate forum for examining the issues and engage in constructive problem solving to address them.

Teacher leaders serve as both leaders and catalysts of change related to the CCSS. They acknowledge their professional responsibility as educators to implement the standards with integrity and to support others in doing so. When challenges related to the standards arise, they model positive attitudes and take a constructive stance by engaging in the problem solving process. As leaders among their peers, they use their commitment to student success, influence, and strong relationship with peers to engage their colleagues in sharing successful practices and contributing to the design instruction and assessment strategies to increase student achievement. Through authentic, joint work among members of a team, teacher leaders contribute to the development of a culture of continuous improvement and collective responsibility for student success.

Whether among peers or other educators or within the school's community, teacher leaders advocate for high standards that define expectations for student learning. These standards, such as those included in the CCSS or in national curricula, clarify what students should know and be able to do as a result of their K-12 education.

As an educational reform initiative, they are not a comprehensive solution to inadequacy in education. They are merely statements of expectation. It is in the implementation of these standards where they can matter, especially when they define what all students, not just those attending schools in certain postal codes, are expected to know and be able to do.

Teacher leaders expand their advocacy and support of CCSS within their communities by using natural opportunities to talk with parents and community members about their schools' success with standards implementation, the complexity of change, and the incremental results evident for students. As ambassadors for the standards, they share accurate information, invite dialogue, answer questions, and provide referrals for community members seeking specific information they do not have. They remember that, because they are viewed as a representative of the school and respected as a leader, how they speak about the standards influences how community members view the standards.

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