



Photo by JILL HARRISON BERG

Teacher leaders Marcia Riddick (left) and Evelyn Prophete discuss how to organize the skills covered in the shared leadership course.

# BOSTON SHIFTS LEARNING *into* HIGH GEAR

CERTIFICATE PROGRAM ACCELERATES  
STUDENT LEARNING BY BUILDING  
TEACHER CAPACITY

By Jill Harrison Berg, Lesley Ryan Miller, and Phomdaen Souvanna

**T**hroughout the past two decades, Boston Public Schools has seen strong, steady improvement, recently demonstrated through student gains on NAEP’s Trial Urban District Assessment in math and recognized through the award of the 2006 Broad Prize for Urban Education. Boston Superintendent Carol Johnson notes, “Today, Boston Public Schools offers the best education possible for some of our students. We have the capacity to offer the best education possible for all of our

students.”

Teacher leaders have played an important role in Boston’s improvement. As team leaders, mentors, and members of instructional leadership teams, for example, teacher leaders have helped to strengthen teaching by leading collaborative teams, supporting colleagues’ professional learning, and facilitating data-driven decision making. The Boston Teacher Leadership Certificate capitalizes on the expertise of Boston’s experienced teacher leaders to bolster the system’s capacity to accelerate learning for all students.

Since effective teaching is essential for students’ ac-

demographic growth, it only makes sense that effective teachers would be important assets to improving student learning in a school or district. Yet effective teachers are not necessarily effective in formal teacher leadership roles. Teacher leadership roles, which teachers and administrators design to contribute in a deliberate way to improved teaching and learning, require a range of knowledge and skills beyond those required for effective teaching.

The Boston Teacher Leadership Certificate program is unique from other programs that support teachers to build teacher leadership skills in three important ways. First, the courses it comprises are designed to strengthen the specific knowledge and skills needed in Boston, ensuring teachers' capacity-building efforts connect directly with district needs. Second, the certificate benefits from a partnership among the district, the local education fund, and local institutions of higher education. This collaboration enables teachers to earn graduate credits for participating in high-quality, role-relevant professional learning. Lastly, experienced teacher leaders are the designers and instructors for the certificate's core courses to ensure that the certificate meets the demands of participants' work.

#### COHERENT CONNECTION TO DISTRICT REFORM PLAN

Teacher leadership programs often leave teachers feeling "all dressed up with no place to go." Participants return to their districts feeling empowered with their new knowledge and skills, but too often no one in the district has a real understanding of what skills these teachers have that would be useful to the district.

Just as our own Boston Teacher Residency recruits and

prepares teachers for success in Boston's classrooms, we have designed the Boston Teacher Leadership Certificate to prepare teacher leaders to succeed in adding real value to Boston's reform plans. Boston's Acceleration Agenda — our five-year strategic plan for achieving proficiency, closing achievement gaps, and preparing all students for college completion and career success — includes several initiatives that are dependent on teacher leadership roles (see chart below). In designing our certificate, we analyzed five of the most critical roles to identify specific knowledge and skills required to carry out each role well. From this exercise, we realized that many of the skills were important across roles while a few were role-specific. Therefore, we designed the certificate to include a series of four courses that strengthen core teacher leadership skills that all teacher leaders need, plus a series of role-specific courses from which teachers choose, based on their role.

To ensure that the certificate would support teachers to be resources for Boston now and in the future, we reviewed teacher leadership research as well as national and local standards for teacher leadership and instructional leadership (see box on p. 34). An analysis of the standards, indicators, and key ideas in these documents helped us define four core skill areas and accompanying competencies most roles require. That is, no matter what teacher leadership role an educator holds, it is important that the teacher understand and be proficient in using data, supporting instruction, strengthening shared leadership, and enhancing and using profes-

**"This work is bringing my voice back. It's definitely putting the fire back into me and what I do."**

— *Teacher during a work session to develop courses*

#### District reform initiatives AND THE TEACHER LEADERSHIP ROLES THEY SERVE

Elements of the Acceleration Agenda	Teacher leadership roles
Multitiered interventions	<b>Service team facilitators:</b> Support cross-functional teams to increase student learning by designing a multitiered system of academic and behavioral supports.
English language learning (ELL) program expansion	<b>Language assessment team teacher leaders:</b> Support high-quality implementation of ELL policy and instructional practices.
Using data to transform instruction and School-based data teams	<b>Data-based inquiry teacher leaders:</b> Support colleagues to use information about student learning to make strong instructional decisions that lead to progress.
Retention of the strongest teachers	<b>Induction mentors and coaches:</b> Support novice teachers to become effective teachers with a commitment to the profession.
Recruitment and hiring of a qualified and diverse teaching force	<b>Boston Teacher Residency mentors:</b> Host residents in their classrooms for a year-long, full-time apprenticeship so that they can be hired with a realistic preview of the work ahead.

sional expertise (see box on p. 35). Importantly, these skill areas that comprise the four core courses of the certificate are positively associated with student achievement, from creating a data culture (Gallimore, Ermeling, Saunders, & Goldenberg, 2009; Talbert, Scharff, & Lin, 2008), to focusing on instructional quality (Cohen & Ball, 1999; Elmore, 2004), to cultivating shared leadership (Lambert, 2003; Murphy, 2005), to knowing how to access and use the knowledge base of professional knowledge (Hess, 2008). While some skills are more important for some roles than others, the courses enable the district to readily identify who has which skills. Further, teachers who successfully complete all four courses will have demonstrated to the district that they have acquired a wide range of the skills needed for current and future leadership roles.

Lastly, we collaborated with the relevant Boston Public Schools departments to review, streamline, and improve existing learning opportunities, and to design a new role-specific course for each role that did not previously include support. Some district leaders have noted that they are able to make better use of the limited hours they have for role-specific learning when they are able to rely on the core courses for developing teachers' basic leadership skills. At the same time, the conversations with Boston Public Schools departments about role-specific learning have led in some cases to more clearly defined job descriptions.

Formal roles that aim to support effective teaching should be held by those who are effective teachers. The Boston Teacher

Leadership Certificate focuses on all the skills that lie outside of effective teaching. It does not identify effective teachers, and it does not entitle anyone to a role. In fact, since there are so many teachers in Boston who already hold leadership roles and who haven't been through a formal learning program, the certificate is initially being offered to teachers who already hold formal roles in the district. The onus is on these departments to select and retain only effective teachers for these roles. However, an important part of the district's reform plan is to overhaul the teacher evaluation tool, which defines effective teaching in Boston. As the district builds its knowledge about how to identify effective teaching, we hope this information, together with the certificate, can aid Boston Public Schools departments to strengthen the strategies they use to select teachers for the district's critical reform roles.

### A UNIQUE PARTNERSHIP

The Boston Teacher Leadership Certificate is part of a larger project funded by a federal Teacher Quality Partnership Grant and designed to build a continuum of teacher preparation and professional development with a focus on high student achievement. In addition to the Boston Public Schools and Boston Teacher Residency Program, the certificate is supported by the Boston Plan for Excellence, which is Boston's public education fund, and two institutions of higher education, University of Massachusetts Boston and Wheelock College.

Each partner brings an important perspective to the table. The contribution of Boston Public Schools ensures that the work is connected to district priorities and is coordinated with the departments that oversee teacher leadership roles. Boston Teacher Residency brings the experience of designing a program that addresses Boston's needs as well as firsthand knowledge about teachers' career aspirations. They want opportunities for job differentiation, career advancement, and increased compensation without leaving the classroom, such as the roles supported by this certificate. Boston Plan for Excellence offers grounded, school-based experience from more than two decades of refining school improvement models and tools that help create conditions of excellence for every student in Boston Public Schools.

University of Massachusetts Boston, Wheelock College, and Cambridge College have supported the certificate in a variety of ways. In addition to contributing to the overall quality of the coursework through faculty participation on review panels, a core team of higher education partners has met regularly to advise on the certificate design. They have enabled the program to offer a range of options for earning graduate credit, including the opportunity for teachers to build on the credits they earn from the certificate and work toward a full Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study. The opportunity to earn credits that can lead to increased compensation is an additional motivating factor for some teachers and presents a benefit to the district,

### National and local framework on leadership

- **Teacher Leadership Skills Framework**, Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession, [www.cstp-wa.org/sites/default/files/teacher\\_leadership\\_skills\\_framework.pdf](http://www.cstp-wa.org/sites/default/files/teacher_leadership_skills_framework.pdf).
- **Model Teacher Leaders Standards** (draft), Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, <http://tlstandards.pbworks.com>.
- **Five State Teacher Leadership Consortium**, Council of Chief State School Officers, [http://events.ccsso.org/projects/Five\\_State\\_Teacher\\_Leadership\\_Consortium](http://events.ccsso.org/projects/Five_State_Teacher_Leadership_Consortium).
- **New Teacher Center Mentor Academy**, University of California, Santa Cruz, <http://newteachercenter.org/ti/menu.php?p=ma>.
- **Boston Public Schools Dimensions of Effective Teaching**, Boston Plan for Excellence, [www.bpe.org/taxonomy/term/229](http://www.bpe.org/taxonomy/term/229).
- **Professional Standards for Administrators**, Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, [www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr7.html?section=10](http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr7.html?section=10).
- **National Board Certification for Educational Leaders**, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, [www.nbpts.org/products\\_and\\_services/national\\_board\\_certifica](http://www.nbpts.org/products_and_services/national_board_certifica).
- **National Educational Technology Standards for Administrators**, International Society for Technology in Education, [www.iste.org/standards/nets-for-administrators.aspx](http://www.iste.org/standards/nets-for-administrators.aspx).

**SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES FRAMEWORK**

Core skill	Core competencies
Use data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand and analyze data.</li> <li>• Use data to inform decisions.</li> <li>• Create a culture of high expectations with data.</li> <li>• Communicate with data.</li> </ul>
Support instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand educators as adult learners.</li> <li>• Observe and analyze instruction.</li> <li>• Provide growth-oriented feedback on instruction.</li> <li>• Plan and implement effective professional learning.</li> <li>• Evaluate and adapt instructional resources.</li> </ul>
Shared leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build a collaborative learning-focused team.</li> <li>• Understand self and team as part of a system.</li> <li>• Manage a team for effectiveness.</li> </ul>
Professional expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflect on professional practice; grow as a professional.</li> <li>• Address organizational and cultural barriers to having and sharing expertise.</li> <li>• Access, interpret, and use the professional knowledge base; stay current in the field.</li> <li>• Contribute one's expertise to improve research, policy, and practice within the school or district.</li> </ul>

which compensates teachers for earning graduate credits, as it ensures that the graduate credits teachers receive are aligned with district priorities.

Other local universities, programs, and individuals support this work as well. These professors, district leaders, retired teachers and principals, and other colleagues served on our review panel, providing critical feedback and suggestions for relevant literature. By engaging such a wide-ranging group of invested individuals, the certificate benefited from a larger pool of good thinking, and the teachers who developed the courses were bolstered by a supportive professional community. One university partner even admitted, "I'm tempted to borrow things," which helped us to know that this experience offered a rich learning experience for all involved and strengthened our partnership.

**BY TEACHERS, FOR TEACHERS**

A third significant design element of the Boston Teacher Leadership Certificate is that it is developed by teachers, for teachers. Teachers traditionally have very little input into the factors that are meant to support their work: Curricula and assessments are largely mandated, most professional development is determined by the school or district, and district-level decisions are made by a school committee that includes no class-

room teachers. In our model, experienced teacher leaders design courses for their peers, deliver the courses, and comprise the advisory committee that serves as a sounding board as the work grows and evolves. Teacher involvement in every phase of development ensures that the certificate continues to meet teachers' and the district's real needs.

Roughly three dozen teacher leaders selected from across Boston's 135 schools were brought together to design the four core courses of Boston's Teacher Leadership Certificate. These practicing classroom teachers brought perspective that enabled them to keep the course focused on what their colleagues most need to know and be able to do for Boston's children. As one teacher described the work, "This work will develop professional development that will be geared toward teachers and address their real needs." Collaborating to develop the courses was also a valuable professional learning opportunity, as the teachers learned from colleagues about roles, practices, and strategies from other departments and grade levels and reflected together on the similarities and differences. For the teacher leaders who had not taught graduate-level courses before, the experience with course design helped these teachers to feel well-prepared to teach the courses to others.

There are benefits to teachers leading the courses. Teachers can make a bigger difference than traditional external professional development providers in helping colleagues improve their practice because they have a relationship and regular contact with teachers and the roles they aim to support. One course developer noted, "A lot of professional development is condescending to teachers. We're treated with disrespect. But, in this, we're going to be mindful and honor colleagues' expertise." Whenever possible, the certificate's core courses are taught by teachers, as the certificate is meant to provide an opportunity for advancement and professional renewal that does not lead teachers out of the classroom. During a work session to develop the courses, one teacher reflected, "This work is bringing my voice back. It's definitely putting the fire back into me and what I do."

Teachers also have an ongoing leadership role in the Boston Teacher Leadership Certificate. Ten teachers and two principals serve on the advisory committee, serving as a sounding board and ensuring the certificate's ongoing quality.

**ACCELERATING STUDENT LEARNING**

Boston is not alone in its urgency to accelerate learning for all children. Districts around the nation share the challenges of addressing a proficiency gap and doing a better job of preparing all children to succeed. This sense of urgency has focused

our attention on strengthening teaching and leadership. But we also have a record of success that we can build on to increase instructional leadership capacity in schools: the successful efforts of teacher leaders. The Boston Teacher Leadership Certificate capitalizes on the expertise of our experienced teacher leaders to ensure Boston's schools will have the capacity to boost district improvement. As teacher leaders strengthen their knowledge and skills for teacher leadership, they will bring new capacity to the leadership roles they hold, and contribute more effectively to accelerating learning for every student.

**REFERENCES**

**Cohen, D.K., & Ball, D.L. (1999, June).** *Instruction, capacity, and improvement* (CPRE Research Report Series No. RR-43). Philadelphia: Consortium for Policy Research in Education.

**Elmore, R. (Ed.). (2004).** *School reform from the inside out: Policy, practice, and performance*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

**Gallimore, R., Ermeling, B.A., Saunders, W.M., & Goldenberg, C. (2009, May).** Moving the learning of teaching closer to practice: Teacher education implications

of school-based inquiry teams. *The Elementary School Journal*, 109(5), 537-553.

**Hess, F. (Ed.). (2008).** *When research matters: How scholarship influences education policy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

**Lambert, L. (2003).** *Leadership capacity for lasting school improvement*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

**Murphy, J. (2005).** *Connecting teacher leadership and school improvement*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

**Talbert, J.E., Scharff, N., & Lin, W. (2008, March).** *Leading school improvement with data: A theory of action to extend the sphere of student success*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association. Available at [www.newvisions.org/sites/default/files/publications/SAM\\_EVAL\\_MARCH\\_2008.pdf](http://www.newvisions.org/sites/default/files/publications/SAM_EVAL_MARCH_2008.pdf).

Jill Harrison Berg ([jberg@bpe.org](mailto:jberg@bpe.org)) is director of the Boston Teacher Leadership Resource Center. Lesley Ryan Miller ([lryan2@boston.k12.ma.us](mailto:lryan2@boston.k12.ma.us)) is director of teacher development & advancement at Boston Public Schools. Phomdaen Souvanna is a research associate at the Boston Teacher Leadership Resource Center. ■

Over 100 Workshops by International Educators  
Facilitated professional dialogue with principals from around the world

**ICP 2011**  
**WORLD**  
**CONVENTION**

LEADING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: AN INTERNATIONAL ODYSSEY  
AUGUST 15-18, 2011 • TORONTO, CANADA

World class speakers from  
Canada, China, Finland, Ireland, Russia, United Kingdom, USA

Speakers Include  
Michael Barber, Michael Fullan, Andy Hargreaves, Jennifer James, Stephen Lewis, Roger Martin, Jim Gibbons, Avis Glaze, Elena Lenskaya, Juliette Powell, Pasi Sahlberg, Chris Spence, Chen Yukun, Junhua Zhang, Doug Keeley and Steve Paikin

ONTARIO PRINCIPALS COUNCIL  
Exemplary Leadership in Public Education

ICP2011 TORONTO CANADA

VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT [WWW.ICP2011.CA](http://WWW.ICP2011.CA) TO REGISTER