

# THE LEADING Teacher

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EVERY EDUCATOR ENGAGES IN EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING EVERY DAY SO EVERY STUDENT ACHIEVES

## CHARTING NEW CAREER PATHS FOR TEACHER LEADERS



By Anthony Armstrong

**P**ete Mazzagatti, high school teacher for Woodstown-Piles Grove Regional School District (N.J.), is busy. In addition to teaching social studies fulltime in the classroom, he was county teacher of the year for 2011-12, is one of the most active members in the county's teacher of the year organization, is active in the district's pilot dissemination of the McREL teacher evaluation model, and has just been named instructional facilitator for the 2013-14 school year, which means he's leaving the classroom at the end of the year.

According to the latest *MetLife survey of the American teacher: Challenges for school leadership*, there are many more teachers like Mazzagatti who are taking on active leadership roles. According to the survey, half of teachers (51%) already "have a leadership role in their school, such as department chair, instructional resource, teacher mentor, or

leadership team member," and 51% of teachers "are at least somewhat interested in teaching in the classroom part-time combined with other roles or responsibilities in their school or district, including 23% who are extremely or very interested in this option" (p. 5). While this indicates

that many teachers have a strong desire to participate in school leadership, 69% of teachers are not interested in the traditional career path of becoming a principal (p. 5). (See sidebar at right).

For many teachers who want to take on leadership roles but don't want to move into a principalship or leave the classroom, the career options available to them are typically limited to informal duties, such as committees, teams, building representatives, etc. However, new types of teacher leadership roles are emerging, where teachers are connecting and making contributions to the field on state, national and global scales, all while remaining in the classroom.

"In a perfect world, I would like to remain in the classroom," explained Mazzagatti. "For my instructional facilitator position next year, I will aid teachers in doing their jobs,

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### The job of principal is becoming more complex and stressful

**75%** Three-quarters of principals feel the job has become too complex.

**69%** Seven in 10 principals say the job responsibilities are not very similar to five years ago.

**59%** Job satisfaction among principals has decreased nine percentage points in less than five years, to 59% very satisfied from 68% very satisfied in 2008.

**48%** Half of principals feel under great stress several days a week.

Source: MetLife, p. 5

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so I will have an impact on the kids. But I will miss the kids. I would like to go back to the classroom eventually if a position opens up that allows me to do both.”

### A HYBRID ROLE FOR TEACHERS

As a teacher representative for New Jersey’s pilot teacher evaluation program, Mazzagatti was asked to provide information and assistance to the department of education. Mazzagatti met numerous education leaders in D.C., engaged in various projects and workshops, and brought his learning back to his district. “My district sees the benefits and pays for substitutes for me when I’m gone from the classroom,” said Mazzagatti.

The Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ) and its innovative Collaboratory are helping teacher leaders develop these

types of hybrid roles as “teacherpreneurs,” who divide time in and out of the classroom. “Previously, teacher roles have been limited to models that have been designed apart from their own creation and at best only serve their school or district,” said CTQ founder Barnett Berry, who co-authored *Teaching 2030* (2011) with a team of 12 teacherpreneurs. “The

next wave of teacher leadership is when teachers can incubate and execute bold ideas in both policy and pedagogy beyond schools, states, and even nations.” Both the concept and examples from practice are featured in the forthcoming *Teacherpreneurs*, also co-authored by Berry.

Berry recognizes that not all teachers want to be teacherpreneurs, but he feels that to solve many of the problems facing education today, teachers will need the opportunity to make their own contributions to the field that do not require leaving the classroom.

### FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Mazzagatti admits that he is fortunate to have a supportive district. Other teacher leaders are not as lucky. For some teachers, the Center for Teaching Quality offers sup-

### Blow the doors off your classroom

Video by Ryan Kinser on how to create a video learning community. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VGaPLHVmv8U&feature=youtu.be>

port by buying all or half of a teacher’s contract in order to free the teacher to work on leadership initiatives. Teachers in residence are supported full time by the center to work on their activities, while teacherpreneurs teach in the classroom for half of their day or week and then work with the center during the other half. “We don’t view our role as empowering teachers or using them for someone’s narrow reform agenda,” said Berry. “Instead, we try to open doors by connecting, readying, and mobilizing teachers.”

According to Berry, these hybrid roles require a special brand of teacher leaders, and they need the right support to fuel their own 21st-century teaching and learning reforms. One such teacher leader supported by the center’s teacherpreneur opportunities is Ryan Kinser.

Kinser, an 8th-grade English teacher in Hillsborough County, Fla., teaches in the classroom in the mornings and spends his afternoons working on various research and policy issues, with a specific focus on advancing teacher leadership. His biggest project, though, is developing video-based learning communities that allow teachers to learn from each other in well-facilitated, online spaces, with a special focus on Common Core implementation (see sidebar above).

“Being a teacherpreneur means that you have a balance of time that helps your own interests and helps those who have a vested role in you,” explained Kinser. “It is helping the district as well. Right now we are trying to recreate my role in 30 other schools over the next three years. I spend a lot of time advising on policy for district, state, and national issues; go to conferences; and talk to whoever might have interest in having teachers at the table.”

Kinser applied to be a teacherpreneur because he felt that he needed a richer and more rewarding career path that offered challenges to help him avoid stagnation. “This new role allows me to pursue a deeper skill set and make a bigger impact in the classroom. It is a great reward that is not about money. It is really about opportunities to craft new career lattices.” (See box at left.)

Unfortunately, financial grant support is a rarity for the majority of teacher leaders, so Mazzagatti and Kinser have advice for teacher leaders looking to expand their contributions to the field.

### CREATE A SUPPORTIVE CULTURE

According to Mazzagatti, teacher leaders can only develop as well as district leaders allow them to. “You can find

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Mazzagatti



Kinser

### Teacher satisfaction continues to decline

- Teachers’ satisfaction with their jobs in public schools has declined 13 percentage points since 2001, from **52%** to **39%** very satisfied, including five percentage points since last school year, to the lowest level in 25 years.
- Less satisfied teachers are more likely to be located in schools that had declines in professional development (**21%** vs. **14%**) and in time for collaboration with other teachers (**29%** vs. **16%**) in the last 12 months.

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time after school and weekends,” said Mazzagatti, “but some opportunities are beholden to what the district allows. I am very fortunate in that my district always says yes.”

The key to garnering district support, says Mazzagatti, is to clearly make the connection from the additional activities to the benefits for teachers. “I take the servant leadership approach, in that I am always looking for ways that I can serve the teachers I am trying to help,” explained Mazzagatti. “For example, I look for how I can make the connection from our Teacher-of-the-Year group to the opportunities it creates for our teachers. Those of us who approach our leadership roles that way have good responses from the district because everyone benefits.”

Increasing support for teacher contributions, for Mazzagatti, begins with district culture. “Find out where your structure and foundation are before you get started. If you look at opportunities and initiatives, and see what is right for kids and education, that is where you start for changing culture.”

### LOOK FOR IMMEDIATE OPPORTUNITIES

The easiest way to start changing culture is to look for leadership opportunities, and each small leadership role can lead to bigger roles, Mazzagatti explained. “Give your business card out to people and ask, ‘What can I do for you?’ A lot of things don’t get done because people don’t know how to ask. This is not about advancing your career as much as it is about advancing everyone’s career, advancing the school, and advancing the kids.”

Teacher roles that allow you to make yourself and your work more visible, said Mazzagatti, are such activities as academic team leader, building representative, technology mentor, district team member, etc. “Teachers can’t be afraid to get up and go. If we have the right thing in mind and it is a sound idea, the only limitations we have are what we put on ourselves,” said Mazzagatti.

Kinser shares a similar sentiment. “Start off doing the work,” he said. “It is easier when people find that your work is indispensable. Pursue projects that you are passionate about and find forums to demonstrate them. You can pitch articles to publications and contribute to virtual communities where there are options to engage with others. Find where others are plugged into opportunities and join projects that your school or district or system can’t live without. The resources will follow. Learn who district leaders are and what the hierarchy is. Figure out who are decision makers,” he said.

For Kinser, creating more opportunities for teacher leaders to expand their work beyond the classrooms means transparency, communications, and results. “Teachers need to be more willing to engage stakeholders, appreciate both sides of an equation, be solutions-oriented, and invite themselves to the table. Stakeholders hear a lot of complain-

ing and have an agenda they need to accomplish. They need to see that teachers can offer solutions and not complaints when they step out of the classroom. District leadership will be more amenable when they see workable models with student results,” according to Kinser.

### INCREASE VISIBILITY

The future of changing career paths for teacher leaders depends on visibility, said Berry. “The American people have a lot of respect for teachers as individuals, but what they don’t have is a deep understanding of the power and potential of teachers as a collective to transform learning.”

To help increase visibility, said Berry, teacher leaders can take advantage of readily available tools and channels increase the exposure of their work. “Look at the MetLife survey, where 23% of teachers are very interested in serving in a hybrid role (p. 5). This is a big number of teachers wanting to make contributions to the field. Teachers can use blogs, YouTube, and other tools to increase their visibility. They can learn and connect with other teachers in person or virtually ... it is time for teachers to no longer keep their good ideas in silos.”

### Learning Forward BELIEF

All educators have an obligation to improve their practice.

### REFERENCES

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### Learn more

#### The Center for Teaching Quality

Connect with teachers and other education stakeholders by joining the Center for Teaching Quality's free virtual community, the Collaboratory. [www.teachingquality.org/collaboratory](http://www.teachingquality.org/collaboratory)

#### 2012 MetLife teacher survey webinar

The Alliance for Excellent Education and panelists discuss the findings for policymakers and education leaders to note as they work to enable school leaders to meet increased expectations for educational outcomes. [media.all4ed.org/webinar-mar-4-2013](http://media.all4ed.org/webinar-mar-4-2013)