



Invite, invest, and unleash the potential of emerging leaders

When I think about emerging leaders, and, in particular, their connection to professional learning and school improvement, I envision three stages to propelling such leaders forward: Invite, invest, and unleash. When we do this, new leaders will have the greatest impact on advancing an organization's mission to ensure that more educators and students learn and perform at high levels.

Invite. Every educator has the potential to lead. The challenge is to identify those educators who wish to exercise that potential to contribute to education outcomes beyond the classroom.



In a Learning Forward conference session years ago, I joined other national association executives in sharing our personal leadership journeys. We remembered people who had invited us to offer our points of view, get involved in new activities, and step up to lead. Before we knew it, we were on our own

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paths toward exercising leadership in any situation.

Each of us on the panel could recite a story of someone who had recognized our potential and invited us to take advantage of a leadership opportunity. Since then, I remind myself to constantly keep an eye out for others whom I can invite to lead. Educators have so much to give, and many are just waiting to be asked.

Invest. Organizations that want to cultivate emerging leaders will benefit from establishing multiple ways to engage and support them. School systems across the country refer to these development opportunities in different ways. They may include internally created formal academies, facilitated learning communities, externally supported leadership programs, or others.

Learning Forward has graduated more than 25 cohorts of professional learning leaders from its Academy, which prepares leaders to provide vision and leadership for professional learning in their organizations. The Learning School Alliance develops new knowledge and skills among leadership teams that build collective responsibility in a school.

Unleash. As emerging leaders gain clarity about their own potential and interests, they will begin to look for ways to exercise their voices. School systems and other organizations are

smart when they think about how they want to best leverage their emerging leaders.

However, this newly unleashed leadership may result in viewpoints and demands that they did not anticipate. For example, when a school system develops a leadership program to strengthen its classroom-to-administration pipeline, it may turn out that many participants are not interested in assuming formal leadership roles; rather, they are looking for ways to share their expertise in less formal settings. Districts that recognize this conundrum early will leverage their development opportunities to prepare emerging leaders for a variety of roles.

The field of professional learning offers many paths for emerging leaders to serve. We need leaders to act as mentors for new and struggling teachers; learning facilitators to guide the cycle of improvement at the team, department, and school levels; curriculum writers and model classroom facilitators; instructional coaches to support implementation of new practices and curriculum; principal facilitators; and more.

There are many emerging leaders who are passionate about teaching and who want to serve students, the profession, and the field of professional learning. We have a responsibility to invite, invest, and unleash so that others may benefit from their leadership and we move closer to our shared goals for all students. ■