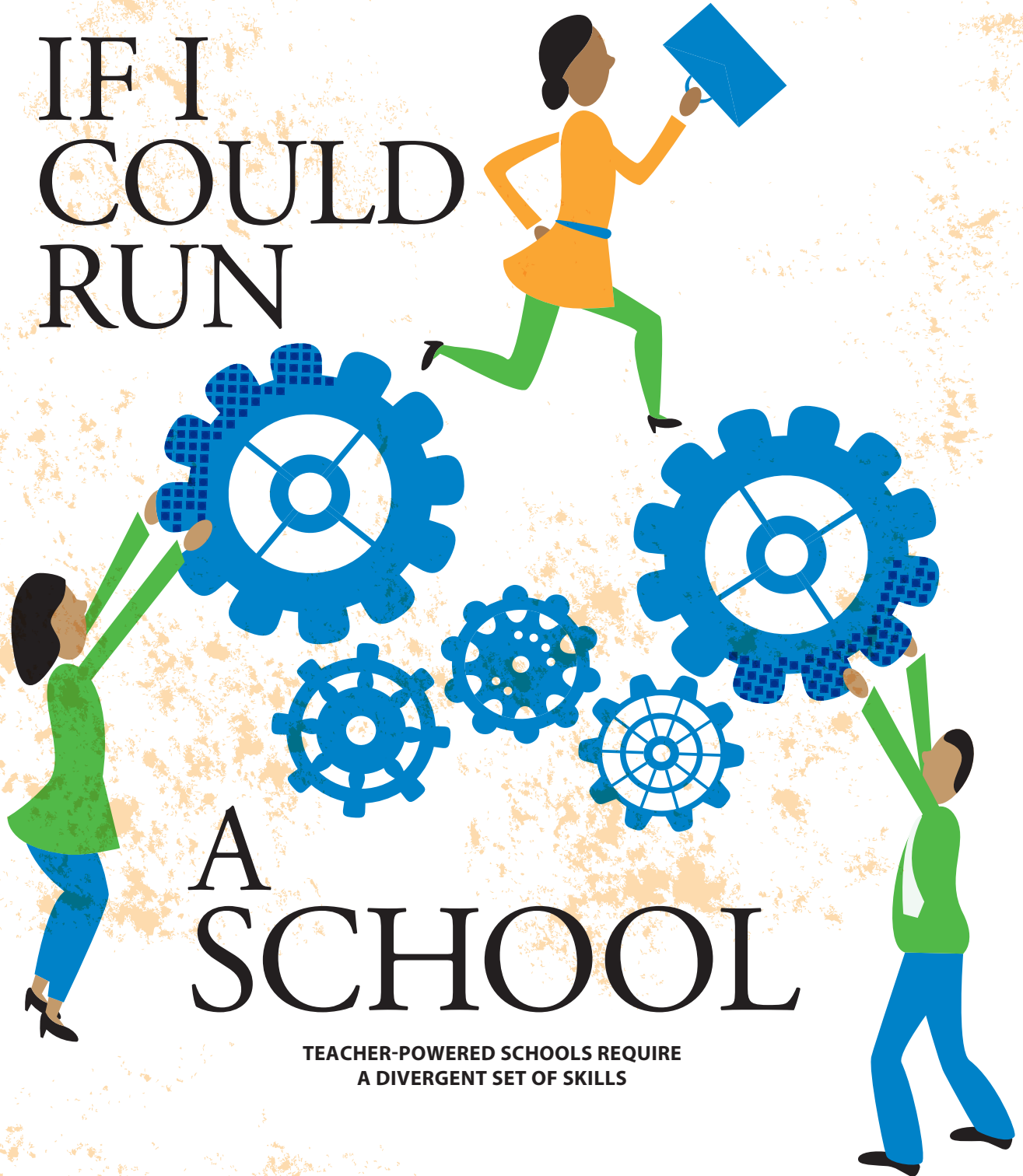


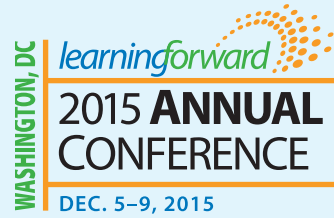
IF I COULD RUN



A SCHOOL

**TEACHER-POWERED SCHOOLS REQUIRE
A DIVERGENT SET OF SKILLS**

Learn more about teacher-powered schools at Learning Forward's Annual Conference Dec. 5-9 in Washington, D.C.



By Lori Nazareno

Every creative, dynamic, and intelligent teacher I know has played the “If I could start (or run) a school, I would ...” game. Many of these teachers finish the sentence in similar ways, with answers like:

- Have teachers involved in whole-school decision making;
- Have teachers observing, giving feedback, and evaluating one another;
- Have students engaged in activities that allow them to learn real-world skills; and
- Have everyone who has a license teach (at least a little bit).

Perhaps you are one of those teachers. If so, how would you complete that sentence?

While people at all levels of education are talking about teacher leadership, few are talking about the bold type of leadership that puts teachers in charge of whole-school success. Many current forms of teacher leadership have teachers carrying out solutions that others have created. Rarely does teacher leadership involve teachers designing and implementing their own solutions to the most pressing challenges in education today.

But this is the type of teacher leadership that is demonstrated in teacher-powered schools. In over 75 schools across the United States, teachers are creating, implementing, and leading their own whole-school solutions, taking on the monumental task of transforming schools and the profession. Many of these schools started with teams of teachers stepping up to the challenges that arose in their local contexts. Since then, the Teacher-Powered Schools Initiative — a joint effort of Education Evolving, an organization involved in school redesign, and Center for Teaching Quality — has identified many of the existing teacher-powered schools and begun to coalesce these efforts into a grassroots movement.

Teacher-powered schools vary significantly. Some have principals, while others have leadership teams; some are district schools, and some are chartered; some are elementary schools, and some are secondary. But what these schools have in common is that they are teacher-powered — places where teachers have the collective autonomy to make decisions that impact whole-school success.

Teacher-powered schools have shifted the century-old factory model of schooling to one that better aligns with the needs of 21st-century students. Today's students need to see teachers function as knowledge workers, especially if they are to become knowledge workers themselves. These

FREE GUIDES FOR TEAMS AVAILABLE

The Center for Teaching Quality and the Teacher-Powered Schools Initiative have developed a set of free discussion guides to support teams in developing some of the skills needed to successfully operate a teacher-powered school. These guides contain lessons learned from teachers in existing teacher-powered schools, tips, and discussion questions for teams to use in designing and managing teacher-powered schools. Access the guides at www.teacherpowered.org/guide.

schools support the development of knowledge workers by functioning as democracies and providing all members of the team an opportunity to actively participate in making decisions influencing the school's success. And, in exchange for collective autonomy, they accept responsibility for student outcomes and hold one another accountable to the collective commitments that impact student outcomes.

Most teachers are accustomed to operating in the traditional model of teaching and learning, so they have developed the requisite skills needed to be successful in a typical boss-worker relationship. But teacher-powered schools are different, requiring teachers to develop a divergent set of skills. Two of the most important are how to manage a school collaboratively and how to observe and evaluate one another. Traditional schools have a principal who calls the shots, making it unnecessary for teachers to do these things. But when teachers design and operate teacher-powered schools, they must learn these skills so that their students, team, and school can thrive.

Let's learn more about these important skills and see how teacher-powered teams put them into action.

COLLABORATIVE MANAGEMENT

It can be difficult for some to imagine how teachers would go about managing a school collaboratively. Hierarchical leadership structures dominate the education space and have had a major impact on how teachers view and operate in the profession. Yet many teams that design and run teacher-powered schools are able to build capacity for leadership among their colleagues, who share responsibility and accountability for school success.

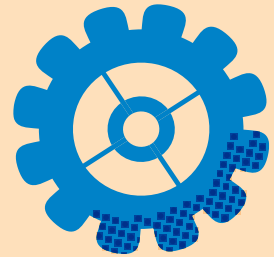
DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES

Teacher-powered schools are committed to functioning as democracies by providing all members of the team an opportunity to actively participate in making decisions influencing the school's success. When teachers design schools with a real responsibility for their success, there's no need to cultivate buy-in. Teachers own what they create.

As Carrie Bakken, a teacher at Avalon School in St. Paul, Minnesota, says, "The only power we don't have is the power to complain, because if we don't like something, we can change it for the better." Avalon was designed and has operated as a teacher-powered school since its inception. Teachers there have full autonomy to operate the school and have had success in positively impacting student learning, especially for students who have been historically underserved.

Teacher-powered teams feel strongly that collaborative management models the way most students will work in their future jobs and careers, as well as the way citizens behave in a democracy. After all, most professionals don't operate in silos like what we see in traditional models of schooling. Instead, they hone their skills as collaborators, learning to value how

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democratic decision making yields an informed result that considers the needs of the whole community.

In collaborative management scenarios, team members learn when to challenge their team and when to compromise. They recognize when to maximize individuals' strengths and minimize the team's weaknesses. They allow for individuals to cultivate new ideas for the team's benefit. They make mistakes but lean on the collective knowledge of the group to find solutions.

The Mission Hill K-8 School, a Boston Public Pilot School, is an example of a teacher-powered school using collaborative management. Jenera Williams, a teacher at the school, says, "When schoolwide things are not working, we set aside time to specifically address the concern. We lay out the concern so that everyone has the same understanding about what isn't working and our goal in the end. We brainstorm ways to work toward fixing the issue, and then we make an action plan or action steps toward that."

To learn more, see the video at: <http://learningmatters.tv/blog/on-pbs-newshour/watch-teacher-power/12568>.

In addition, when students see and hear their teachers co-creating their work environment and the policies that govern it, they learn collaborative management skills themselves. They begin to understand what active participation in a democracy looks like.

REQUISITE SKILLS

Decision making

Collaborative management and shared governance do not mean that every teacher is involved in every decision, nor do they mean that there is 100% agreement among the entire team about every issue. In order to be successful in teacher-powered schools, teachers need to develop the skills and abilities to be able to operate in a system where they make decisions — but

not all decisions, and some of those decisions may not go their way.

Key to the success of this model is absolute transparency about what decisions have been made and why. Sean Woytek, a Colorado teacher who worked in a teacher-powered school and recently became school leader of another, defined transparency and his working arrangement this way: “I can’t be involved in everything, nor do I care to be. I’m satisfied if I can sit down and either read through or talk with someone who is involved and know what occurred. I’m not satisfied with just the public display — I want to be able to know the entire process. And if I want to get involved, I want to have the ability to get involved.”

Leading from the middle or the back

Most schools today are structured so that teachers are followers and there is only one identified leader, usually the principal. Even in cases where there are official teacher leadership positions, those teachers are expected to follow the school leader and often carry out his or her vision for the school.

However, in teacher-powered schools, everyone is considered a teacher leader who makes his or her own contribution to the school’s success. This dynamic creates a need to think differently about how to morph multiple perspectives into a common vision, what it means to be a leader, and how leaders learn to lead one another. Often, teams in teacher-powered schools cultivate a strong shared purpose that is based on a collective vision of success. They then delegate some decision-making authority to various individuals and committees, who act according to the school’s shared purpose and decision-making policies.

Teachers in teacher-powered schools report that effective “leaders among leaders” in a teacher-powered school, especially those working in a principal or lead teacher position, must know how to lead from the middle or the back. These leaders shouldn’t be out in front of the group setting the agenda or making the decisions. Instead, they must step aside and facilitate the team toward collective decisions.

These leaders need to understand that people will own what they help create, so they should support the team in creating and implementing their own vision. This type of leader recognizes that collective effort is the bedrock on which the teacher-powered structure is built and is an absolute necessity for the school to function effectively and efficiently.

Strong leaders also need to resist the temptation to take charge just because district leaders will view them as bosses and seek to hold one individual accountable. Instead, they should act on behalf of their team, even if district leaders fail to understand or adapt to what teacher-powered collaborative management means.

EVALUATION

Teacher teams designing and running teacher-powered schools — many of whom have secured full or partial autonomy

to design their own evaluation policies — have long understood that teacher quality impacts student and school success. As a result, these teams have chosen to take greater responsibility and accountability for student and whole-school outcomes via teacher evaluation. Many teams choose to use the evaluation process to inform personnel decisions and identify teachers’ strengths and areas for improvement in instruction and collegial management.

EVALUATING INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE AND LEADERSHIP

Teachers’ responsibilities in teacher-powered schools include both in-class instruction and whole-school leadership. They operate on the premise that school success is as much dependent on the contributions of all personnel as it is on teachers’ instructional practices. As a result, teams with full evaluation autonomy often choose to include assessments of both instructional practice and contributions to school management/leadership.

EVALUATING INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE

Most teams design a peer observation and feedback process in a way that is primarily intended to improve teachers’ instructional practice — but also informs personnel decisions. In some cases, when the school is small, the whole team participates in the observation and evaluation process. But most of the time, a select group of colleagues serves as evaluators — such as a personnel committee trained in state evaluation laws or a team that includes all teachers from a grade level or subject area and an elected school leader.

When selected groups evaluate, they frequently gather additional feedback from a broader peer group via surveys or other rubrics that the whole team designs or chooses. Also, if one exists, teams often adapt the district’s rubric for peer review or for individual teachers. For schools that do not have district rubrics or choose not to use them, teams design and use their own.

Once all the data are gathered, the group doing the evaluation discusses teachers’ results with each individual in a private, formal meeting. For example, at the Mathematics and Science Leadership Academy in Denver, Colorado, teachers are put in teams of three and substitute teachers are hired so that they can observe each other using the district’s evaluation rubric to collect evidence of effective teaching. Once the observations are complete, the team convenes during a staff meeting to provide feedback to each other.

Based on the feedback from teammates, teachers then sets goals for improving their practice over the coming weeks. Dur-

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ing the next observation cycle, the team revisits those goals, then conducts another observation. And the cycle continues. As a result, teachers are responsible for continuous improvement of their practice that leads to improved student outcomes.

EVALUATING LEADERSHIP

Teachers in teacher-powered schools understand that, by having responsibility and accountability for school success, teacher teams *as a whole* are responsible for addressing many factors that influence student outcomes. Teams choose the curriculum, allocate the budget, select leaders, set the schedule, and more. As a result, these factors are often included in teacher evaluations.

Areas for evaluation might include teachers' work in their specific school management positions as well as their contributions to the team as a whole.

REQUISITE SKILLS

Observation

Historically, teachers have not been engaged in the process of teacher evaluation as evaluators. As a result, most have not been trained in how to conduct observations, use the instruments, and engage in the process. Thus, in a teacher-powered school, teachers need to develop these skills. As teacher evaluation systems have become more sophisticated over time, this need has amplified.

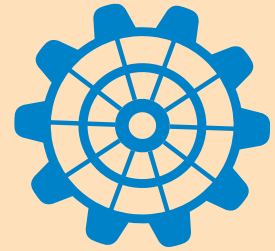
Teams in teacher-powered schools using instruments designed by others have come to realize that it is helpful to connect with state- or district-level professional learning that addresses the use of evaluation instruments. Teams who have created their own instrument and processes typically design and conduct the training themselves.

Alysia Krafel, co-founder of Chrysalis Charter School in Palo Cedro, California, says, "Observation skills must be taught to be helpful. The most useful skill is to be able to watch a lesson and nonjudgmentally take data. Data as to what students are doing, rather than making judgments, is most useful to the teacher being evaluated."

Having difficult conversations

One of the most challenging aspects of teaching in a teacher-powered school is engaging in difficult conversations with colleagues. Whether the conversation is about improving instructional practice, determining how budgets will be allocated, or any other issue that causes controversy, teachers are not accustomed to having these conversations. In the factory model of schooling, the principal handles all difficult conversations. But in teacher-powered schools where there is collective responsibility for the whole school, there is also collective responsibility to handle difficult situations. This is an area where professional learning is vital.

If a school is to be successful, everyone must get past the "culture of nice," which occurs when teachers don't want — or don't know how — to have open, honest conversations about instructional practice. The "culture of nice" can be particularly evident when there is a definite need for improvement but the teachers involved are not equipped for engaging in those types of conversations.



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Autonomy and accountability

A recent report from Education Evolving noted that 85% of the public thinks that teacher-powered schools are a good idea. And about 75% of teachers say they are eager to accept accountability for student outcomes — as long as they are given the autonomy to make decisions that impact that success (Education Evolving, 2014).

For teacher-powered schools to succeed, teachers are going to need a variety of skills that traditionally they have not used. Collaborative management requires teachers to be able to work together to make decisions, while learning how to be a leader among leaders is likely unfamiliar to most teachers. And few teachers know how to conduct evaluations of their colleagues. Professional learning that develops and strengthens those skills will help teachers lead and create teacher-powered schools.

REFERENCE

Education Evolving. (2014, May). *Teacher-powered schools: Generating lasting impact through common sense innovation.* St. Paul, MN: Author.

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