

Partners in learning:

Teacher leaders drive instructional excellence.

By Victoria Duff and M. René Islas

The 12 partnership districts in the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Supporting Effective Teaching Knowledge Development Initiative have spent the past two years building, modifying, and enhancing the roles and responsibilities of teacher leaders to strengthen the quality of school culture, improve the practice of teaching, and foster a deep commitment to professional growth. Six elements have emerged as key factors: Set the vision; identify the criteria; support leaders; communicate the work; build support; and monitor impact.

Teachers rally around writing:

Shared leadership transforms low-performing Colorado elementary.

By Dana Frazee, Kay Frunzi, and Heather Hein

In 2010, Sedalia (Colo.) Elementary was a low-performing school when principal George Boser arrived with a plan to transform the school's culture into one of high expectations and shared responsibility. Boser assembled a school leadership team, which led the development, implementation, and monitoring of the school improvement plan. Improved student results demonstrate the impact of shared leadership, and professional learning, shared leadership, and continuous improvement have become part of daily life at Sedalia.

Critical conditions:

What teacher leaders need to be effective in school.

By Jill Harrison Berg, Christina A. Bosch, and Phomdaen Souvanna

The Boston Teacher Leadership Certificate program was designed to build the leadership capacity of Boston's teachers by supporting experienced teacher leaders to design and facilitate graduate-level leadership development courses for their peers. Analyzing data from participants, program leaders identified four conditions most critical to teacher leaders' success — shared leadership, authority, trust, and time — and created discussion guides to generate focused conversations among school leadership teams.

Empowerment zone:

Coaching academy primes teachers to become instructional leaders.

By Linda Mayer

A northern New Jersey consortium created a Coaching Academy to develop coaches to work with early career teachers. The academy's goal was to build a cadre of instructional coaches who could provide increased classroom

support for teachers. Motivated by a passion to help peers succeed, a desire to gain understanding of coaching skills, and an eagerness to work outside of their home school, 40 teachers applied. At the end of the year, coaches reported increased efficacy, mutual learning, cross-pollination of school practices, and a breakdown of hierarchical barriers.

Voices of equity:

Beginning teachers are crucial partners and emerging leaders of equity education.

By Nicole West-Burns, Karen Murray, and Jennifer Watt

Beginning teachers have an opportunity to become emerging equity leaders — to make meaning of policies and act as advocates for educational equity in classrooms, schools, and boards. With that in mind, the Toronto District School Board created a professional learning module on culturally responsive and relevant classrooms. Beginning teachers engaged in a five-part collaborative inquiry that linked theory to practice. Teachers who participated reflected on their equity concerns and how to move forward as emerging leaders in equity education. From their reflections, five key insights emerged.

Turn obstacles into opportunities:

Team leaders use a skillful approach to move past barriers to learning.

By Elisa B. MacDonald

Regardless of who is leading or being led, every team seeking to improve student achievement comes up against hurdles. These hurdles generate distinct dilemmas for a team leader. No matter how much experience a team leader has, he or she is likely to be confronted with team hurdles, creating a dilemma of what to do. What distinguishes the skillful team leader from a less-effective leader is his or her approach to overcome these hurdles. This approach is rooted in the leader's values, mindset, intelligence, and skill.

Virtual school, real experience:

Simulations replicate the world of practice for aspiring principals.

By Dale Mann and Charol Shakeshaft

A web-enabled computer simulation program developed by researchers at Virginia Commonwealth University drops aspiring principals into the work of leading a virtual middle school over an academic year and then tracks their performance. The simulation presents real-world opportunities, problems, and challenges. As the pattern of a participant's decisions emerges, those choices affect the trajectory of the school: Teacher morale goes up or down, student-related metrics change, the attitudes of the principal's central office supervisors become more or less favorable.

feature



Think summer:

Early planning, teacher support boost summer learning programs.

By Daniel Browne

One of the more promising approaches to bridging the achievement gap is by expanding opportunities for learning, particularly in the summer. But what is the most effective way to build a summer learning program? A project funded by The Wallace Foundation examined summer programs in six districts to cull lessons on how to create programs that boost student achievement. The most successful programs start planning early, recruit the best teachers available, and give them the professional learning, support, and time they need to do their job well.

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Collaborative culture:

Honest conversations are the cornerstone to building a culture of excellence.

By Susan Scott and Michelle Curry

The superintendent of a small rural district in Washington searches for ways to encourage continuous feedback and open dialogue.

From the director:

Invite, invest, and unleash the potential of emerging leaders.

By Stephanie Hirsh

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.

Writing for JSD

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