Supporting Teacher Leadership in Nevada
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Teacher leadership strategies are increasingly being deployed in multiple jurisdictions across the country, with mixed results. While informal teacher leader roles have existed for decades and are a not new idea, the expectations and responsibilities of these roles vary significantly from district to district or even from school to school. Ultimately, such an inconsistent approach to teacher leadership fails to capitalize on the potential of a comprehensive approach to human capital reform, including a modernized career ladder with advanced teacher leader roles. This would allow excellent teachers to stay in the classroom while also extending their reach by tapping into their expertise to increase the overall systemic capacity for instructional leadership. When designed and implemented purposefully, a teacher leadership approach that identifies the best teachers and provides them with responsibilities that extend beyond typical classroom responsibilities can show positive effects on student learning and may encourage excellent teachers to remain in the profession. A strategic approach to teacher leadership can also be used to strengthen numerous aspects of the career continuum, by improving the quality and effectiveness of induction programs, providing peer review of instruction, or delivering on-site professional development to those who need it most.

Approaches to teacher leadership being used elsewhere have tended to adopt one of two possible definitions of a teacher leader: the first recognizes that all teachers have leadership potential and devises a system of supports to allow individual, classroom-focused leadership; and the second seeks to identify highly effective teachers and provide specialized support to a smaller number of elite teachers, placing them into a modern career ladder and building roles with responsibilities that focus on systemic improvement. If Nevada considers developing a formal teacher leadership framework, given the state’s recent history of teacher shortages, high level of teacher attrition, and the inequitable distribution of effective teachers, the latter definition would provide the state with a framework that allows for a scalable solution to some of the state’s most persistent human capital challenges.

Nevada Context
- The majority of teachers in Nevada were prepared out-of-state.
- Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) reported that for the 2016-17 academic year, 58.6 percent of statewide demand for teachers was met by program completers from NSHE institutions.
- NSHE estimates that roughly 60 to 73 percent of graduates from education programs at NSHE institutions remain in the profession after five years.

U.S. Context
- Persistent teacher shortages have become more acute in recent years, particularly in high-need areas such as special education and secondary STEM fields.
- Teacher attrition continues to be a concern, with the Learning Policy Institute estimating that six of 10 teachers who are hired are replacing teachers who left their district pre-retirement, and the National Center for Education Statistics reporting more than a 60 percent increase in the teacher attrition rate from 1991 and 2005.
- The average cost of teacher attrition per teacher is estimated at $9,000 for rural districts and $21,000 for urban districts.
- In a 2018 national survey, the group Educators for Excellence found: 95 percent of teachers believe teachers should be compensated for taking leadership roles in addition to their classroom responsibilities; 43 percent of teachers express pressure to become an administrator in order to advance their career; and 64 percent to 87 percent of teachers expressed an interest in specific teacher leader roles (i.e., professional development facilitator, instructional coach or mentor teacher).

Recent Actions in Nevada
- Recent legislative action has focused on recruitment of new teachers, such as the Teach Nevada Scholarship or recruitment programs receiving funding through the Great Teaching and Leading Fund.
State-level teacher leader initiatives include hiring a “Teacher Leader in Residence” beginning in the 2018-2019 academic year and convening an advisory group to discuss definitions of teacher leadership.

Following a targeted effort to increase the number of National Board Certified Teachers, over 150 Nevada teachers became newly board certified in 2018, including over 120 newly board certified teachers in Clark County School District.

Considerations for Future Actions

- Accelerate the state’s timeline and strategic planning for the development of a more robust career ladder that articulates explicit teacher leadership roles. Begin by adopting the Teacher Leader Model Standards as an organizational framework.
- Incentivize districts and local organizations to articulate the expectations of specific teacher leader roles and pilot the use of teacher leaders. Existing resources such as the Great Teaching and Leading Fund or state-level Title II-A funds could specifically focus on this work.
- Build new teacher leader roles into the state’s licensure framework and identify appropriate supports for those who are identified for teacher leader positions.
- Include teacher leadership in the state’s strategy to address the inequitable distribution of effective educators.

Implications of Maintaining Status Quo

- Initiatives seeking to strengthen the educator pipeline and/or address the inequitable distribution of teachers will continue to be done in piecemeal fashion, meaning they are unlikely to lead to systemic change.
- Without a modernized career ladder including teacher leader roles, teacher attrition is likely to remain high, as will the number of shortages.
- The inequitable distribution of effective teachers, with the least experienced teachers currently working in the highest need schools at a disproportionate rate, is likely to continue without a targeted strategy.

Introduction

Teacher leadership is a concept that enjoys near-universal support from a wide range of stakeholders; it is also a concept that is widely misunderstood. Teacher leadership strategies exist along a spectrum of possible approaches, and each contains its own implementation challenges. If a state views teacher leadership as a static, uniform concept and does not strategically connect teacher leadership with other educator effectiveness initiatives then it is very likely, based on the experiences of other states, that teacher leadership in Nevada will not result in meaningful change. However, if teacher leadership is piloted purposefully and scaled effectively, it may represent a solution that can bind multiple reform initiatives together and increase the total capacity of the education system.

Teacher leaders serve in numerous formal or informal roles in schools. They work as instructional coaches, data analysts, assessment specialists, parent advocates, state liaisons, action researchers, mentor teachers for novices, supervising teachers for student teachers, critical friends, group professional development facilitators, curriculum experts, department heads, school improvement team leaders, technology coaches, and policy influencers, to name only a small sample of possibilities. Adding to the ambiguity around current approaches to teacher leadership, you could easily find two teachers working as teacher leaders in different states with exactly the same title, but with very different requirements and responsibilities. Moreover, in states that do not have a coherent approach to, and strategy for, teacher leadership at the state level, it is likely that this could apply to two teachers working in the same state, or even the same school district.

As Nevada embarks on the next phase of education reform, it is useful to review the various and numerous teacher leadership models used across the country, the implications of these approaches, and the barriers inherent in each. By understanding these initial efforts by other states to install a formal teacher leadership system, Nevada will be better positioned to craft an approach that will have broad support and buy-in, while also producing a system that is scalable in the future. On the other hand, if Nevada proceeds down a path that does not account for the lessons of early adopters in other states, it is likely that a concept with tremendous potential could be implemented in a manner that
is neither scalable nor sustainable. As the central piece of a comprehensive human capital strategy, teacher leadership has the potential to address the inequitable distribution of effective educators, increase the professionalization of teaching, and create a meaningful career ladder that will attract and retain more talent into the pipeline.

This policy paper begins with a brief overview of teacher leadership, including the numerous influential organizations who have supported it (i.e., Council of Chief State School Officers, New Leaders, Learning Forward, National Network of State Teachers of the Year, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, etc.) and the framing of the concept. Next will follow a review of relevant research; although teacher leadership has a relatively small but growing research base, early studies indicate positive effects of teacher leadership on student achievement, teacher retention, and improved school culture. Next is a review of state and national efforts with large-scale teacher leadership initiatives. The paper concludes with a set of recommendations for building a sound policy framework for teacher leadership.

There are many existing resources that may be deployed to capitalize on any efforts in teacher leadership, such as Title II-A funds (at the state and district levels), the Great Teaching and Leading Fund, and the network of Regional Professional Development Programs (RPDPs). Teacher leadership has the potential to leverage multiple funding streams into a coherent approach, thus leading to more meaningful systemic change and greater efficiency. This paper supports the development of a comprehensive strategy, with teacher leadership as a central component. The primary frame of this paper is how to proceed in a manner that capitalizes on the lessons from other states, while also creating policy flexible enough to encourage innovation yet precise enough to lead to a sustainable and scalable system of supports. The state can learn from its recent experiences with the launch of the Nevada Educator Performance Framework (NEPF) and apply a different implementation model, capitalizing on and strengthening existing infrastructure without needing to start from scratch. Nevada’s past (and current) efforts in teacher leadership have been piecemeal approaches, lacking long-term objectives and connections to other initiatives, which has led to efforts that are neither scalable nor sustainable. By encouraging a more comprehensive human capital strategy with teacher leadership as a significant connective component, the state can support local efforts and provide a mechanism for disseminating promising practices at the state level, leading to systemic and enduring change.

Overview of the Issue and Review of Relevant Literature

Curtis (2013) contextualized teacher leadership initiatives across the country by stating:

When districts compensate teachers based on years of experience and credits earned, which have little to no connection to effectiveness, instead of improved student learning, they send a confusing message about what matters most and provide little opportunity for career growth or recognition of excellence, two things important to high performers (p. 1).

This central thought permeates much of the research literature in teacher leadership: treating all teachers the same is a failure of the system to capitalize on the strengths of high-performing individuals and leverage their talents toward systemic improvement. The policy advocacy group Public Impact has argued that if schools establish what they call an “opportunity culture,” schools and districts can change their practices, apply multi-classroom leadership models, and improve student learning while concurrently strengthening the teaching profession.

Teacher leadership as a concept is not new and stems from theories of distributed leadership. Angelle and DeHart (2011) argued, “schoolwide leadership capacity is built by principals continually scanning the school environment for prospective teacher leaders” (p. 156). Multiple initiatives that could be considered “teacher leadership” have been launched over the past decades in a number of states, but the purposes of the work and the problems each attempts to address vary considerably. As might be expected, this has led to mixed results from one jurisdiction to another. Before launching any work in teacher leadership, it is important to consider the numerous possibilities and align a


2 See https://opportunityculture.org for more details.
Borek proposed policy approach with a clear vision and reasonable objectives. The organization Chiefs for Change, in a 2017 review of teacher leadership cautioned:

Too many times we have seen states or districts develop ‘teacher leader’ initiatives that may or may not be clear or specific about the issues they are seeking to address or the challenges that need solving. Worse, they may be creating these opportunities just for the sake of creating them or to ‘check a box’ (p. 3).

For this reason, if Nevada wishes to encourage teacher leadership, the state will need to precisely and unambiguously assert the objectives of teacher leadership, build a plan that allows for local experimentation with strong state monitoring, and encourage the dissemination of promising practices that meet the stated objectives. As previous efforts by Nevada and other states have shown, a piecemeal approach, with teacher leadership existing on its own, disconnected from other human capital initiatives, would virtually guarantee an unsuccessful effort.

Many authors have analyzed the different definitions of “teacher leadership” that appear in research literature and Angelle and DeHart (2011) aptly noted, “Like the concept of leadership, the concept of teacher leadership is defined by the context in which it is experienced” (p. 142). There tend to be two categories of definitions that are used, one that assumes all teachers can and/or should be teacher leaders and another that suggests teacher leaders are a select number strategically drawn from the larger population. Frost (2012) advocated for the former view, stating teacher leadership, “recognizes the potential of all teachers to exercise leadership as part of their role as teacher” (p. 210). Using this as a definition would mean developing enhanced professional development opportunities that tap into the intellectual capital of all teachers. The focus of teacher leadership under this definition tends to be on the individual classroom and teacher.

Alternatively, the definition that assumes teacher leadership is intended to support a smaller number of teachers leads to an approach that deploys this select group strategically to increase the overall capacity of local education systems. One of the more commonly-used definition is provided by York-Barr and Duke (2004):

Teacher leadership is the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement (p. 287–288).

Muijs and Harris (2006) offered a similar definition: “formal leadership roles that teachers undertake that have both management and pedagogical leadership responsibilities” (p. 112). Finally, Wennner and Campbell (2017) suggested a working definition of a teacher leader as a “teacher who maintains K-12 classroom-based teaching responsibilities, while also taking on leadership responsibilities outside the classroom” (p. 140). The focus of these definitions is larger than the individual classroom, extending to the school, district, or even the education system at-large. Given the local context of Nevada, with our persistent shortages and lagging education outcomes, this definition for teacher leadership holds the most potential for systemic improvement.

When purposefully designed and implemented, a teacher leadership strategy can yield many possible benefits. Harris and Muijs (2002) reviewed the field of research in teacher leadership and listed increased collaboration amongst teachers, faster dissemination of effective instructional practices, increased teacher confidence and motivation, higher expectations from teachers, and a greater ability to innovate as positive contributions. Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) found teacher leadership had greater impact on student learning than individual leadership. In addition, researchers have analyzed the perceptions of teacher leaders, as well as the perceptions of those who worked in schools with teacher leaders, finding teacher leaders felt empowered in their schools and were able to motivate younger teachers and disseminate promising practices to colleagues (Center for Teaching Quality, 2010). Jacques, et al. (2016) concluded from their analysis of State Teachers of the Year’s perceptions of teacher leadership, “Through exposure to teacher leadership, more beginning teachers may have opportunities to observe effective teaching and improve their practice. Likewise, teacher leader roles may allow more experienced teachers to continually improve by modeling effective practices for less experienced colleagues” (p. 14). It is worth noting that these benefits were largely found
under an approach to teacher leadership that identifies a smaller number of individuals for teacher leadership opportunities. Here, the focus is on systemic improvement and teacher leaders serve an essential role, increasing capacity for instructional leadership at the local level; they connect research to practice, promote innovation, feel comfortable taking risks, and model a mindset of continuous improvement and growth (Ibid.).

While teacher leadership has been found to be beneficial when part of larger strategy with instructional leadership at the core, the research literature also contains a number of implementation challenges that must be considered when developing a plan. For example, Wenner and Campbell’s (2017) comprehensive review of modern research literature in teacher leadership described a number of themes across successful initiatives:

- Teacher leadership roles must be purposefully designed to extend beyond the individual classroom;
- Teacher leaders need some degree of decision-making authority; and
- Support is needed for teacher leaders, in the form of ongoing training, administrative support, a healthy school climate, and recognition for meeting responsibilities.

In addition, the group Chiefs for Change (2017) recommends developing a network for teacher leaders, ensuring they have ongoing support and that successful efforts do not exist in a vacuum.

If Nevada advances an approach to teacher leadership that focuses on systemic improvement, the state may consider beginning with Learning Forward’s (Killion, et al., 2017) four core components of a teacher leadership framework: 1) a commonly-accepted definition; 2) local conditions that are conducive to teacher leadership; 3) clearly-articulated dispositions for different teacher leadership roles; and 4) assessment of the impact of teacher leaders. These central features can be developed and monitored by the state, while still maintaining control at the local level to adapt teacher leader roles as the context dictates.

**Barriers to Successful Teacher Leadership**

Research in teacher leadership has identified a number of obstacles to successful implementation. According to York-Barr & Duke (2004), strategies and activities that lacked a central framework and vision tended to be unsuccessful. In addition, teacher leadership efforts do not succeed when:

- Teacher leaders’ roles are poorly defined (Johnson & Donaldson, 2007; Natale et al., 2013) or teacher leaders are marginalized and assigned insignificant tasks that do not align with their instructional expertise (Harris and Muijs, 2002);
- Clear criteria for selecting teacher leaders is missing (Johnson & Donaldson, 2007; York-Barr & Duke, 2004);
- Effective teachers are removed entirely from classroom instruction to focus on leadership activities (Public Impact, 2014);
- Insufficient time (Johnson & Donaldson, 2007; Natale et al., 2013; Thornton, 2010; York-Barr & Duke, 2004), training (Natale et al., 2013), and/or compensation (York-Barr & Duke, 2004) is provided for teacher leaders; or
- There is tension between teacher leaders and other teachers (Johnson & Donaldson, 2007; Thornton, 2010; York-Barr & Duke, 2004) or a refusal by other management to relinquish control (Harris and Muijs, 2002).

These barriers can be anticipated with sound policy. Ultimately, a teacher leadership framework in Nevada can succeed and lead to meaningful change if it begins by identifying those who are most capable of contributing, builds roles with additional responsibilities that capitalize on the identified talents of selected individuals, and ultimately rewards teacher leaders in a manner that supports an enhanced career ladder. To do this, the state will need to purposefully design an implementation plan with a strong monitoring component and a strategy for scaling successful efforts.

**Examples of Teacher Leadership Initiatives**

States have been crafting different approaches to formal teacher leadership systems over the past decade or so. For example, Louisiana recruited a group of more than one hundred Teacher Leader Advisors who serve as an extension of the State Education Agency (SEA), developing resources and providing support for a larger group of local teacher leaders across the state. With this approach, there were two levels of teacher leaders deployed; one selected by local schools and districts and another selected by the state. New Mexico also uses multiple types of teacher leaders; one person is selected to serves as a liaison to the state for one year and helps to support the larger statewide teacher
leader network, members of which are also purposefully selected by the SEA. North Dakota created a Teacher Leadership Academy to provide candidates with training, piloting the program through university/district partnerships. Maine and Oregon are implementing a more comprehensive approach, building out a formal career ladder in the licensing system with teacher leader pathways. This embeds teacher leaders within a larger human capital strategy that aligns all facets of the education profession, from recruitment and preparation through professional growth and advanced career options.

Some school districts have also attempted to develop and implement teacher leadership systems. In Denver, the most effective teachers are identified and assume teacher leadership roles focused on leading their colleagues through school improvement strategies. Washington, D.C. established the Leadership Initiative for Teachers, which attempts to recognize and retain highly effective teachers by providing additional career and leadership opportunities. Baltimore City Public Schools has built multiple career pathways, with the “Model Pathway” available to cohorts of potential teacher leaders who go “beyond his or her normal job description to accelerate student achievement, take risks, influence the practice of colleagues, support stakeholders and display excellence and high standards in building professional capacity.” Baltimore’s system includes a peer review process for selecting teacher leaders and offers up to $20,000 in additional compensation. Finally, the Boston Public Schools’ Turnaround Teacher Teams are comprised of teacher leaders who receive additional professional development and are placed in schools with the greatest needs, leading localized inquiry-based discussions to improve schoolwide reform efforts.

There are also examples of cross-state efforts to develop teacher leadership systems. The National Institute for Excellence in Teaching promotes the TAP system, which is designed around four core elements: multiple career paths; ongoing applied professional growth; instructionally focused accountability; and performance-based compensation. Master and mentor teachers in TAP are part of a school leadership, undergo a rigorous selection process, and assume additional leadership responsibilities while also remaining in the classroom. A similar approach was designed by Public Impact, whose career ladder includes 15 levels, from teacher resident to superintendent. “Multi-classroom leaders” and “team reach leaders” are a few of the new roles envisioned by Public Impact, and their focus is on effective collaboration. As with TAP, Public Impact’s career ladder allows teacher leaders to assume additional roles while also maintaining classroom teaching responsibilities. The systems-based approaches of TAP’s and Public Impact’s systems align all human capital strategies, addressing multiple components of the local education system under one common approach.

While the approaches used in other states vary, what they have in common is they all began with the question: What is the vision of, and purpose for developing, teacher leadership? For jurisdictions that are experiencing high amounts of teacher turnover, teacher leadership may be one strategy to build a career ladder and improve teacher retention. Jurisdictions who are seeking support for school- or district-based turnaround efforts may use teacher leadership to recruit cohorts of teachers who are familiar with reform efforts and incentivize them to work in high-need schools. Or, in systems where morale is low amongst teachers, teacher leadership may take the form of public recognition for the most effective teachers. Even under these three different visions, teacher leadership may still take numerous forms, depending on the local capacity, buy-in, inputs, etc.

**Recommendations**

Reviewing the different strategies to teacher leadership that have been attempted elsewhere, the range of approaches appear to exist along two spectra; the level of state involvement and the number of teachers who are eligible for teacher leader roles, represented by Figure 1 on the following page.

Given Nevada’s persistent need for systemic improvement to the teaching pipeline, and its strong tradition of local control, the recommendations that follow will not assume a one-size-fits-all approach to teacher leadership. Instead, we propose the state’s role center on incentivizing innovation, monitoring implementation, and disseminating promising practices.

Teacher leadership can be used in Nevada as one step toward solving some of the state’s more persistent teacher pipeline issues, such as low retention rates / high teacher turnover and large numbers of unfilled positions from year to year. Ideally, teacher leadership will be embedded as a central part of a larger, comprehensive human capital strategy.
Supporting Teacher Leadership in Nevada

1. Adopt the Teacher Leader Model Standards.
A first step toward the development of a meaningful approach to Teacher Leadership in Nevada is to adopt the Teacher Leader Model Standards. Developed in 2008 and updated in 2011 by a diverse group that included eleven state education agencies, ten national organizations, ten practitioners and eight higher education institutions, the Model Standards may rightly be considered the best representation of current thinking in teacher leadership, vetted by major stakeholders in the field.

The Model Standards do not specify the exact responsibilities of every possible teacher leadership role but instead outline seven domains of leadership that jurisdictions can use to anchor their work to build out a full teacher leadership framework. The seven domains are:
- Fostering a Collaborative Culture to Support Educator Development and Student Learning
- Accessing and Using Research to Improve Practice and Student Learning
- Promoting Professional Learning for Continuous Improvement
- Facilitating Improvements in Instruction and Student Learning
- Promoting the Use of Assessments and Data for School and District Improvement
- Improving Outreach and Collaboration with Families and Community
- Advocating for Student Learning and the Profession

2. Request the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) develop a timeline for incorporating teacher leadership into the state’s licensure framework.
Nevada’s current efforts in the area of teacher leadership have been minimal. Despite significant momentum elsewhere, the state has acted on two relatively low-touch efforts: convening a group to discuss a definition of teacher leadership, and hiring a teacher-leader in residence (TLIR). While convening a group may be a sound strategy, little has come out of that group to date, and—as was demonstrated in the overview section—the field has found relative consensus around definitions for

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3See http://www.teacherleaderstandards.org/standards_overview for more details
teacher leadership, which would make the group’s main charge moot. The TLIR is likewise an idea that has a solid foundation, but little to no actionable objectives accompanied the creation of the position, so the potential reach of the TLIR has not yet been realized.

While the state has not fully tapped into the potential that teacher leadership holds, there is nonetheless infrastructure in place that would help with implementation. Clark County School District has devoted resources in recent years to helping teachers achieve National Board certification, meaning there is an initial pool of potential teacher leaders to draw from. The statewide evaluation system, if supported by additional training to increase its trustworthiness and reliability of scores, is an essential element to a successful teacher leadership strategy. The need to align multiple educator initiatives into a comprehensive approach to talent management has never been stronger.

The Model Teacher Leader Standards would provide a general framework for leadership in the state. The next step would be to build out new roles in a career ladder that is framed around advanced teacher leadership opportunities. From the review of relevant literature, there are five fields in which we might expect all teacher leaders to have advanced knowledge and skills:

- Working with adult learners
- Communication skills
- An understanding of successful collaboration activities
- Knowledge of content and pedagogy
- Systems thinking

All teacher leader roles that may be imagined will require expertise in these five areas. Specific teacher leader roles will either suggest additional skills (i.e., a teacher leader serving as a Data Analyst in schools will need proficiency in assessment and evaluation) or a more specific detailing on the above domains (i.e., a Professional Development teacher leader working with teachers from a cluster of schools will need precise communication skills, specifically in the areas of presenting complex information and coaching).

3. Authorize the Nevada Department of Education (NDE), or another entity with adequate capacity, to begin defining roles of teacher leaders.

Once standards are in place, and as a state plan is being developed, there are organizations in the state who could begin to define various teacher leader roles and consider how they might be used in local schools. While NDE could also oversee these portion of the work, they may lack the capacity to do so immediately. The state has a number of entities who could partner with NDE to build out teacher leader roles, define possible qualifications for those roles, and consider issues such as the identification, selection and training of teacher leaders.

There are many possible strategies that could move this phase of the work forward. A specialized grant program, similar to the Great Teaching and Leading Fund, could be established with a focus on teacher leadership initiatives. Alternatively, specific programs and/or organizations could be identified, with each working to build out specific roles; for example, a large educator preparation program might use its expertise to define what constitutes an effective “Supervisor Teacher”, or a district with a strong induction program might describe how they select “Mentor Teachers” and build a formal role around it.

One entity that is ideally-positioned to begin identifying and refining teacher leader roles is the Nevada Institute on Teaching and Educator Preparation (NITEP). NITEP’s partnership with Paradise Elementary School provides a local site in which some initial roles, perhaps those of Mentor Teacher and Supervising Teacher, could be articulated and tested. As NITEP enters its next phase of implementation, the development of teacher leader roles aligns well with the Institute’s focus on conducting innovative research and disseminating promising practices.

4. Incentivize implementation of teacher leader roles at the local level.

Ideally, this step will happen concurrently with #3 above. As the selected entity or entities begin(s) to develop teacher leader roles, local sites should be recruited to serve as implementation sites. At this stage of implementation, the emphasis should be on collaboration between larger organizations and local schools/districts. Based on the review of research, the following guidelines are recommended...
for implementation sites:

- Alignment of teacher leadership strategies with other human capital efforts;
- Demonstration of local buy-in from teachers and leadership;
- Clear plans for identifying and deploying teacher leaders in specific roles;
- A system of support for teacher leaders; and
- An assessment plan to determine the effectiveness of efforts.

With these guidelines, the state should be able to support multiple local initiatives in teacher leadership, analyze their effectiveness, and begin considering how scalable the local strategies may be.

It is possible that multiple partners will be needed to develop a comprehensive approach to teacher leadership. For example, one organization may work on designing professional development opportunities, while another may be better-equipped to identify pilot sites. The state can build a policy framework that allows multiple streams of this work to happen simultaneously; the state can also deploy RPDPs to support this work in a manner that encourages local experimentation and ensures consistent monitoring and reporting. In this way, the state can support multiple models of teacher leadership without overreaching and requiring a simplified one-size-fits-all approach.

5. Analyze pilot information and determine how to proceed.

Teacher leadership, which holds the potential to improve multiple components of the larger education system in Nevada, is too urgent to leave unattended until the 2019 Legislative Session. If the overall strategy is not proceeding as planned, then a midcourse correction may be useful; if the strategy is finding early successes, then it may be useful to scale to additional schools and/or districts. If NDE assumes a monitoring role in teacher leadership efforts, the organization could provide updates to the legislature between sessions and recommendations based on initial efforts. At all points of implementation, a review of teacher leadership initiatives should return to the central objective of these efforts, and consider how well the objectives are being met.

The state’s teacher leadership policy framework should install the expectation of constantly analyzing and refining the deployment of teacher leaders throughout the state. The recommendations above assume a new role for NDE, one focused on monitoring, providing support, and disseminating results rather than driving and/or mandating the work itself. While the state has control of certain policy levers that can influence change—for example by building new teacher leader roles into the state’s licensure system—it would be most effective if it pulls those levers at a time when there is local support based on successful pilot efforts. The state’s overall plan around teacher leadership must be flexible and adapt as new information is received from pilot programs, granting the authority needed at the local level to utilize teacher leadership in ways that are most responsive to local needs.

Conclusion

The time has arrived for Nevada to develop a formal career ladder that supports advanced teacher leadership opportunities for highly successful teachers. Nevada is witnessing the results of maintaining the status quo: persistent teaching shortages, inequitable distribution of effective educators, and low capacity for meaningful instructional leadership at the school level. If a statewide framework for teacher leadership is properly developed, implemented and scaled, teacher leadership has the potential to increase the retention of effective teachers, improve school cultures, and improve student learning. An enhanced career ladder that explicitly focuses on increasing instructional leadership and capacity in Nevada schools will support and strengthen the teacher pipeline. Furthermore, teacher leadership – by providing incentives to exceptional teachers to stay in the classroom while assuming additional roles and responsibilities that capitalize on their strengths – can raise the status of teaching, thereby enhancing other state efforts to attract excellent teachers to the state and keeping them in the classrooms that need those teachers most.

The teacher leadership framework proposed above assumes that all may aspire to teacher leadership positions and that training must be provided to those who show the greatest potential, but it also assumes that teacher leadership opportunities as part of a new career ladder will be pursued and filled by a select group of exceptional teachers. The state can accelerate the potential of this work by learning from other jurisdictions who have embarked on similar projects, adopting the best practices in the
field such as the Model Teacher Leader Standards, incentivizing local implementation models, and scaling effective approaches in a deliberate manner. If existing resources, from the Great Teaching and Leading Fund to Title II-A funds to the network of RPDPs - are leveraged to develop teacher leadership opportunities for exceptional teachers, the state can play a leadership role at the national level while also addressing some of Nevada’s most challenging problems around attracting and retaining the best and brightest into education.

References


