

## **Supporting Teacher Leadership**

Given the day-to-day expectations and pressures under which teachers work, it is important that those teachers who take on a leadership role receive appropriate support for the important contributions that they make. Support for teacher leadership comes from a variety of sources, let us consider three of the most important of those sources.

### **1. A Collaborative and Supportive Culture**

- a. **Collegial Support:** The ongoing appreciation, encouragement, and respect, of teacher colleagues are key sources of support for teacher leadership. Teacher leadership is most effective when it is performed within a collegial and supportive school culture.
- b. **A Shared Vision of Collaboration:** Building and updating a shared school vision that emphasizes the value of teacher collaboration and teamwork facilitates and supports the work of teacher leaders. In-school leaders as well as teacher leaders can help build such a collaborative shared vision.
- c. **Teacher Teamwork:** The leadership of teacher leaders will be greatly enhanced if their colleagues and formal school administrators can work effectively and efficiently in group and team settings. Taking the time to build such capacity is also a crucial way to support teacher leadership.

### **2. In-school Leadership Support**

In-school leaders play a key role in the development of shared leadership culture in which teacher leaders feel free to make a contribution to their school. Some of the ways in-school leaders can support teacher leaders are outlined below.

- a. **Encourage and Enable Teacher Leaders:** One of the most important ways to support teacher leaders is for in-school administrators to actively encourage teachers to take on leadership roles by confidently modeling and supporting the sharing of leadership within the school. Empowering teacher leaders in such a way that they feel free to take sensible risks and learn from their mistakes has proven to be especially helpful. By enabling teacher

leaders, in-school leaders gain valuable support while facilitating the development of teacher leadership expertise.

**b. Thoughtfully Schedule Teacher Meeting Time:** Teacher leaders benefit greatly when the colleagues they are leading can readily get together and meet at suitable times during the school day in settings that facilitate teamwork. In-school leaders can play a key role in the scheduling of such time for teacher collaboration.

**c. Monitor the Workload of Teacher Leaders:**

Perhaps the most important support in-school leaders can provide is to monitor the workload that teacher leaders take on. Unfortunately, one of the most common problems teacher leaders face is that they become overloaded. Trying to ensure the leadership workload in a school is widely and wisely distributed is a significant way formal leaders can support teacher leadership. Maintaining a sustainable work-life balance is an important personal goal and leadership responsibility.

### **3. School Board Support**

School board administrators can support teacher leadership in a number of ways. Some of them are described below.

- a. **Planned Financial Support:** As noted above, the work of teacher leaders will be greatly enhanced if they and their colleagues have suitably scheduled time within school hours to collaboratively work together. It is very important to ensure that sufficient funds are available within the school board budget to support such teacher-led activities.
- b. **Capacity Building for Teacher Leaders:** Given the valuable role that effective teacher leaders play, it is important that within school and external capacity building opportunities are available for them to enhance their leadership skills. Developing a community of practice of teacher leaders within and/or across school boards has proven to be an especially effective source of capacity building.
- c. **Involvement in External Networks:** Teacher leaders gain significant benefits by becoming involved in external networks that are focused on such topics as the sharing of teaching and learning strategies, student evaluation, action-research, and the development of leadership

expertise. Face-to-face and online networks have proven to be very beneficial.

### **Selected References**

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