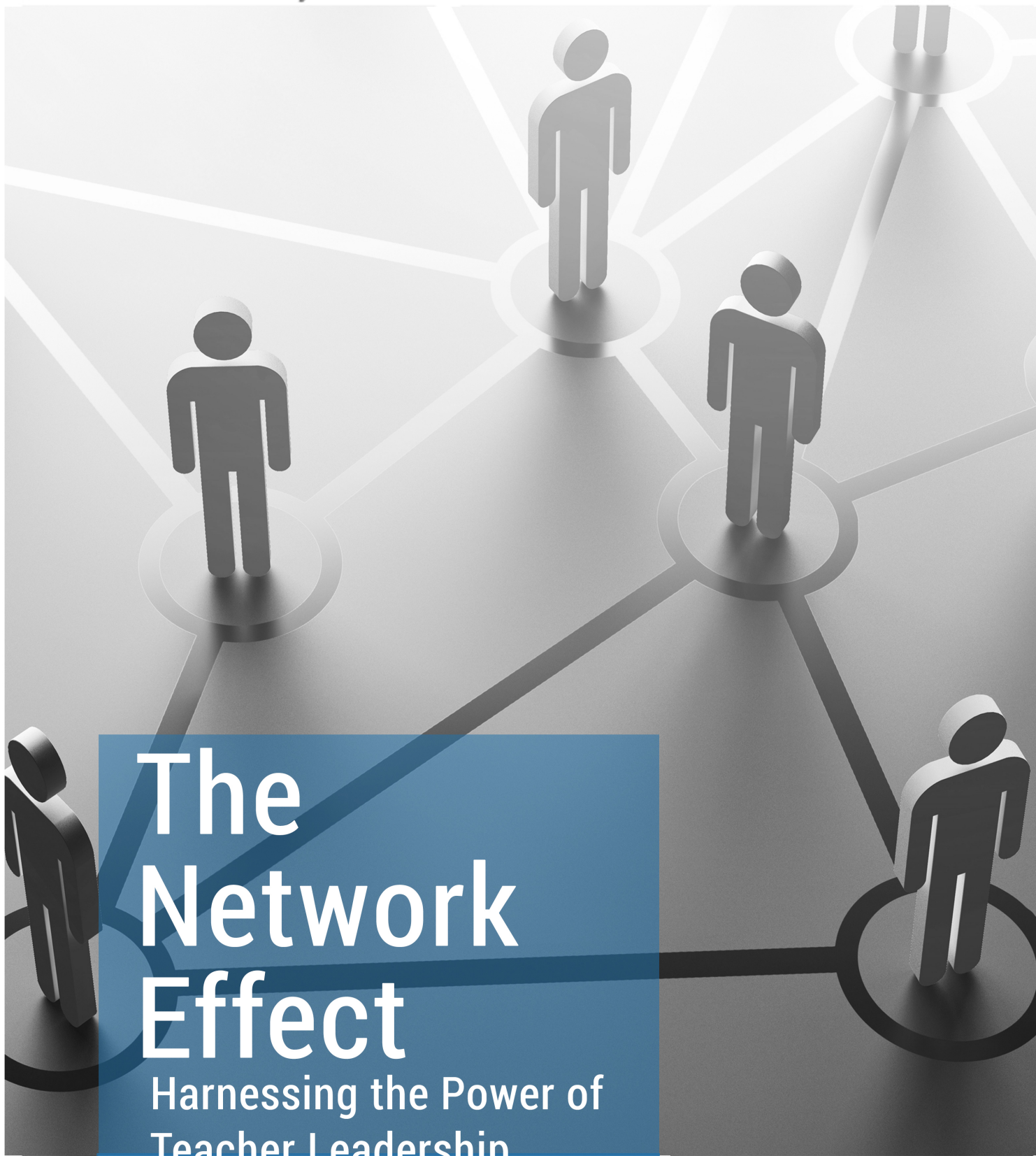


2018 February 13



The Network Effect

Harnessing the Power of Teacher Leadership Networks to Sustain Progress in Tennessee





Chiefs for Change is a nonprofit, bipartisan network of diverse state and district education Chiefs dedicated to preparing all students for today's world and tomorrow's through deeply committed leadership. Chiefs for Change advocates for policies and practices that are making a difference today for students, and builds a pipeline of talented, diverse Future Chiefs ready to lead major school systems.



THE NETWORK EFFECT: Harnessing the Power of Teacher Leadership Networks to Sustain Progress in Tennessee

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ushered in with the beginning of Race to the Top (RTTT), the last decade has brought about significant opportunities for states to undertake efforts at improving teaching and learning. In March 2010, Tennessee became one of two states to win RTTT funding and was quickly held up as a national model of innovation; with this catalyst, the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) has, for the last eight years, built a system that emphasizes the power of the most effective educators as experts and leaders whose work is central to meaningful school improvement. TDOE grounds their work in the fundamental belief that every child deserves to have an effective teacher — supported by an effective principal — every year. As in other states with successful teacher leadership and advocacy systems, Tennessee's process focuses on catalyzing change at the classroom level, by cultivating buy-in from those closest and with the most potential to improve student achievement.

This brief, the second in a series of papers on innovative and impactful teacher leadership initiatives in Chiefs for Change member states, provides an inside look at steps successful Chiefs for Change members took in revolutionizing the opportunities available for educators in their state, illustrates this work via a continuum for meaningful teacher leader engagement, and outlines three objectives of teacher leadership for state Chiefs to consider:

- 1 **Empowering and leveraging high-performing teachers to create and sustain effective education policies,**
- 2 **Building a culture of innovation and shared responsibility toward constant improvement, and**
- 3 **Using teacher leaders to address and solve critical issues or challenges at the school and district levels.**

To that end, Kevin Huffman and Candice McQueen, the two most recent Commissioners of Education in Tennessee, both Chiefs for Change members, have built a system that

- 1 **Balances urgency, fidelity of implementation, and continuous improvement**
 - Tennessee emphasizes the inherent strengths of LEA-based decision-making and works with its districts to refine and expand teacher leadership to new areas while providing supports to ensure that localities are able to improve and expand their models sustainably. In SY17–18, forty percent of the districts in Tennessee are working to establish or refine their models and opportunities for teacher leadership and advocacy.
- 2 **Creates state support for a network of networks**
 - While Tennessee has required many changes, including incentives for teacher leadership within teacher and administrator evaluations and opportunities for LEAs to take the lead in the development of various other programs, each of these streams of work is predicated on nesting communities of practice for support within broader networks. The SEA is aided in this work by various other organizations whose work also serves to create spaces for teachers to serve as leaders.
- 3 **Balances the diverse needs of different districts**
 - Tennessee's state-level support is focused on supporting districts in building custom teacher leader models that meet their individual needs through participation in the statewide Teacher Leader Network (TLN).

4 Remains “tight” on teacher leadership standards and how they are measured

- States can ensure that diverse models are accountable to a shared vision of attracting, retaining, and developing excellent educators who improve student outcomes to facilitate program evaluation.

To support this undertaking, Tennessee has used federal Title II-A funds to significant effect, leveraging a flexibility in funding offered

by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to support what has become an integral part of the way in which the state supports teachers and improves student performance. In SY17–18, the SEA transitioned to using Title II-A funding to provide this work with a consistent budget of \$160,000 annually. Districts targeted for participation through analysis of the teacher leadership elements of their strategic compensation plans are awarded \$8,000 to provide stipends and cover travel expenses to the monthly TLN meetings in Nashville for each four person district team. Prior to SY17–18, TDOE used state dollars to support this work.

INTRODUCTION

Since the start of the Race to the Top era, the bold and forward-thinking leaders of the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) have been committed to establishing a teacher leadership model that provides teachers with meaningful opportunities to develop as professionals and emphasizes improvements in educator effectiveness. Under the sustained leadership of two Chiefs for Change Members, Commissioners Kevin Huffman and Candice McQueen, Tennessee has made truly impressive progress in student achievement over the better part of the past decade, a testament to the vision for and dedication to their teacher effectiveness work. In fact, as evidence of this progress, the advancement of Tennessee’s student achievement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has been improving at the fastest rate in the nation since 2011.¹

Using the flexibility offered by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the Tennessee Department of Education has continued its commitment to the empowerment of teachers as experts capable of taking on leadership roles in advocacy, policy, curriculum, and peer mentoring and coaching at the local or state levels and codifies several opportunities for this work in their state plan. More specifically, TDOE is leveraging the versatile and innovative new uses for Title II funds included in ESSA to provide training and support to districts interested in building teacher leaders through opportunities for professional growth and continuous instructional improvement.

In this case study, Chiefs for Change (CFC) builds upon the introduction offered in [“The Case for Teacher Leaders: Elevating the Teach-](#)

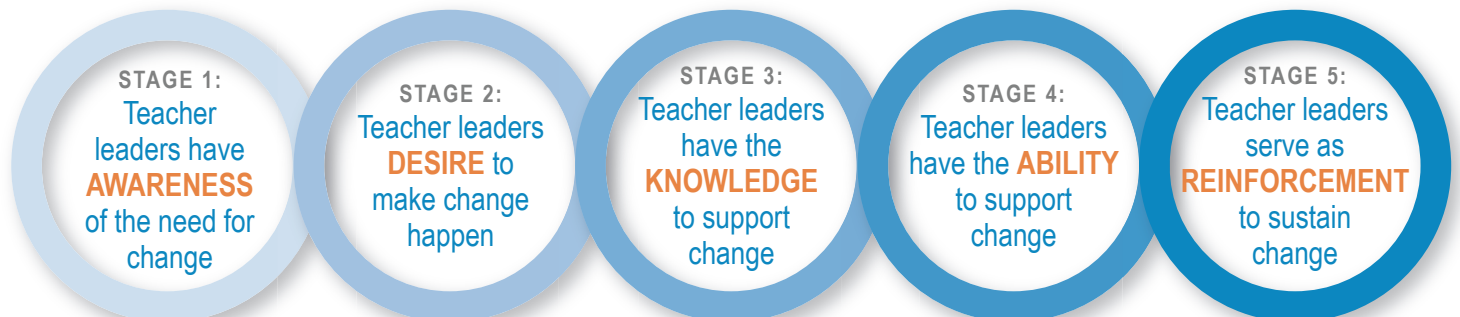
[ing Profession and Sustaining Equity and Excellence”](#) to examine the model of teacher leadership initiated by TDOE in 2013. By explaining key aspects of the model, including the state’s vision, context, logistics, scaling, and future plans, this brief — and its [companion piece on New Mexico’s work](#) — aim to inspire and equip other states and districts to build their own teacher leadership programs.

In considering how to begin teacher leadership programs for their states and districts, Chiefs should consider what conditions are necessary to scale systems that:

- 1 Empower and leverage high-performing teachers in creating and sustaining effective education policies,
- 2 Create a culture of innovation and shared responsibility toward constant improvement, and
- 3 Use teacher leaders to address and solve critical issues and challenges at the school and district levels.

Chiefs for Change shared objectives for teacher leadership and presented a five-stage Teacher Leadership and Advocacy Continuum in the introductory brief of this series. The continuum, pictured below, includes steps state education agencies (SEAs) can take in implementing models of their own and guides the development of and engagement around teacher leadership models.

THE TEACHER LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY CONTINUUM



¹ <https://www.tn.gov/education/assessment/naep.html>

Chiefs for Change developed the five-stage Teacher Leadership and Advocacy Continuum to encourage meaningful engagement all the way from classrooms to the SEA. Whereas traditional engagement efforts have been criticized for utilizing one-way channels of communication from the state department to teachers, lacking feedback loops, and being limited to time-bound and singular events, the most effective and sustainable teacher leadership models span the entire continuum from the first stage of awareness to the final stage of reinforcement with meaningful opportunities for teachers to lead and drive change.

To move fully through this continuum, Chiefs for Change recommends that SEAs consider taking the following steps in planning for design and implementation:

Know your vision and the role that teachers will play

- Have clarity about your theory of change and a transparent approach to the content, decisions, and conversations where you will seek the voice of teachers. This will inform how, when, and where you engage teachers and what related training might

entail. Teachers recognize and respond to clarity of vision and charge for their work.

Build meaningful relationships with large and small groups of educators

- Create authentic engagement. Forming deep relationships with a select group of educators creates your “kitchen cabinet” of informed and trusted advisors helping to chart a course and bring others on board.

Develop systems

- Approach engagement with disciplined systems so that every interaction is high-quality, ideas are curated and acted upon, efforts can be scaled up over time, and relationships are prioritized.

Identify metrics

- Identify meaningful measures of success to assess both short-term and long-term progress aligned to goals. Ensure your entire team is focused on these metrics and align performance management around these.

TENNESSEE’S VISION FOR TEACHER LEADERSHIP

[Tennessee’s teacher leader model](#) was spurred to fruition in 2013 by the implementation of three critical innovations made as a result of the state’s winning RTTT application. As the state shifted to more rigorous, Tennessee-specific academic content standards in math and English and language arts (ELA), began use of the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM) for teacher evaluation, and initiated [Response to Instruction and Intervention](#) (RTI²) as a means of increasing student achievement and the application of these changes occurred simultaneously, TDOE quickly recognized a need for additional training to support educators in adapting their practice to adjust to the new policies. Realizing that this demand could be met through organized networks of the most effective teachers given the opportunity to lead their peers in high-quality professional development, Tennessee’s theory of action was predicated on SEA-led professional development, followed by high-quality alignment and coherence to the state’s vision by LEAs.

Systematized in the 2013 [Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards](#) (TILS) and, following the implementation of these standards, entrenched as one of the core tenets of the [Tennessee Succeeds](#) strategic plan, teacher leadership is viewed as central to the achievement of the state’s ambitious goals around academic proficiency, literacy rates, college and career readiness, and post-secondary attainment. In naming educator support as one of the foundational pieces of the strategic plan, Tennessee affirmed its commitment to supporting local education agencies (LEAs) in differentiating teacher roles, responsibilities, and compensation.

Rather than creating a program or initiative specific to every district at the state level, the SEA instead elected to embrace a key set

of non-negotiable items and structure its model to enable LEAs to work within a set of guidelines to come up with solutions to fit their needs and match their data. The goals of Tennessee’s Teacher Leader Network include increased student achievement and growth through the development of a shared leadership structure at the school level; broader dissemination and use of effective teacher strategies through an increase in teacher collaboration, and; stronger and more positive school and district culture through the development and retention of highly effective teachers.

TDOE believes that if districts are engaged in the creation of exemplary, innovative, relevant, and sustainable teacher leader models that identify, develop, and extend the reach of teacher leaders, then districts will see results in increased teacher effectiveness and improved student learning. With this front of mind, Tennessee initially focused on a district-based model and subsequently created a network of networks at the state level that consists of forty-six select districts that use research, a comprehensive framework, and the Tennessee Teacher Leader Standards as a foundation to create unique teacher leader models within their districts.

This flexibility allowed the design of each district’s system to be run fully at the local level. With an overall emphasis on the LEA as the level from which change should be directed, including the state accountability system, it is no surprise that the LEA is the driver of many aspects of the teacher leadership work. Coupling LEA responsibility with a very intentional combination of flexibility and sustainability, Tennessee has witnessed its districts truly possessing a sense of ownership over the improvements that have been made through the Teacher Leadership Network (TLN).

The Tennessee Department of Education has partnered with Vanderbilt University to conduct program evaluation of the TLN, with the results of the first assessment to be published in early 2018; until then, the state relies on increases in the number of districts pursuing teacher leadership programming as its method for gauging interest. One metric of success, however, is a rubric, the [Teacher Leadership Self-Assessment](#), created by TDOE for teachers to

reflect on the ways in which their own practice has improved as a result of their nascent leadership skills. Moreover, this partnership will further identify and quantify the effects of teacher leadership by comparing teacher effectiveness scores from schools and districts with teacher leaders to those from districts that have not formally engaged teachers.

TENNESSEE'S THEORY OF CHANGE FOR TEACHER LEADERSHIP



With the right [standards](#) identified, TDOE set out to implement them.

Per the [Teacher Leader Network guidebook](#), the state defines a teacher leader as

“a professional educator, who through transparent practices, acts as a change agent to build capacity in self and others to increase effective educator practices and improve student learning.”

To engage and support teachers who align with this definition, the state has created a network uniting multiple, varied teacher leadership opportunities. While the state is “tight” on a prescribed set of standards for teacher leaders, its model of teacher leadership is “loose,” allowing for variation that recognizes and validates the geographic, socioeconomic, and demographic diversity of its three geographic divisions and 146 districts within Tennessee. Using this definition and these standards, the TLN was started in 2013 to unite school districts for the purpose of collaborating to create their own teacher leadership models. Since its beginning, more than two dozen LEAs have participated in this work, developing homegrown

teacher leadership programs for their teachers that emphasize student achievement and align with their district strategic plan.

With this focus on standards for teacher leaders and teacher leadership programs at the core of every decision, the SEA supports LEAs by giving them the freedom to create differentiated programs aligned to their own unique strategic and professional learning needs. TDOE has also been supportive of collaborations between LEAs and external partners that help districts meet their teacher leadership needs through education policy and advocacy work. The state’s primary role is empowering its most effective educators and it does so by deputizing districts to identify the appropriate teacher leadership pathways they want and need for their staff and students. To this end, TDOE has made this diagnosis the focus of its work with districts creating brand new teacher leadership models and provides LEAs refining and improving their initiatives various tools and supports — including communities of practice for sharing learning across districts — to advance the evolution of their district models.

Operating under such a district-centered theory of action, the goals of Tennessee’s teacher leadership work are simple: the state looks to its teacher leadership and advocacy programs to **1) increase student achievement and growth** through the development of a shared leadership structure at the school level, **2) disseminate and encourage use of effective teacher strategies** through an increase in teacher collaboration, and **3) foster stronger and more positive school and district culture** through the development and retention of highly effective teachers.

TDOE TEACHER LEADERSHIP THEORY OF CHANGE

If Districts engage in creating exemplary, innovative, relevant, and sustainable teacher leader models that identify, develop, and extend the reach of teacher leaders...

...Then Tennessee will see results in increased teacher effectiveness and improved student learning.

BUILDING TEACHER LEADERSHIP IN TENNESSEE DISTRICTS

Building off of its successful Race to the Top human capital initiatives, TDOE created the Tennessee Teacher Leader Council in fall 2013 to develop flexible teacher leadership models that could be used across the state; these models are a continuation of the state's work to develop a strong teacher and principal evaluation system, robust use of data in reporting, and efforts around compensation redesign. From its start, the Council focused on a district-specific approach, initially working with a cohort of six geographically diverse LEAs to create customized teacher leadership plans for each district that were in alignment with the teacher leadership standards adopted by the Department. Driven by conversations around standards, response to intervention (RTI), and teacher evaluation, TDOE saw teacher leadership as an opportunity to provide roles for the most effective classroom teachers to weigh in on topics impacting their work and to serve as leaders in making instructional shifts. As such, each of the teacher leadership models also addresses three critical areas of teacher professional learning, adding another layer of cohesion:

- Tennessee content standards
- TEAM, Tennessee's teacher evaluation system
- Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI²)

In contrast to other states, where districts' commitment to engaging in the work is measured through formal application, TDOE selects the LEAs with whom the SEA will work on creating teacher leadership programs by extending invitations. The state's invitation outlines the prerequisites for participation and is sent to district superintendents with strong strategic compensation plans but whose districts are in need of improvement, as well as districts contending with teacher retention challenges. In order to participate in the TLN, LEAs must commit to the following non-negotiable items:

- Select a four person vertical team to attend all seven TLN monthly meetings in Nashville
- Commit to building a comprehensive teacher leader model in all schools in the district
- Align all teacher leader roles with the Teacher Leader Model Standards
- Commit to sustaining their TLN model for multiple years through dedicated funding

TEACHER LEADERSHIP STANDARDS

DOMAIN I

Fostering a Collaborative Culture to Support Educator Development and Student Learning

DOMAIN II

Accessing and Using Research to Improve Practice and Student Achievement

DOMAIN III

Promoting Professional Learning for Continuous Improvement

DOMAIN IV

Facilitating Improvements in Instruction and Student Learning

DOMAIN V

Using Assessments and Data for School and District Improvement

DOMAIN VI

Improving Outreach and Collaboration with Families and Community

DOMAIN VII

Advocating for Student Learning and the Profession

Each district's model has a distinct design and differs in the number, variety of, and budget for the roles offered, but all are aligned to the same standards and share the common goal of providing professional learning that fosters the development of teacher leaders in their schools and maximizes their impact. For example, the following graphic shows the various models employed in a small district of 2,700 students. In this LEA, thirty-six full-time teachers across the K-12 spectrum are organized based on their strengths and the needs of their students to fill fifty-four roles in six areas; funded through federal Title II monies at a cost of \$54,000 per year, the district reevaluates needs and staffing on an annual basis. Despite the differences that exist across the coaching roles teacher leaders are asked to play, the professional development and mentoring each offers is grounded in a focus on the instructional practices that improve outcomes for students, often with a particular focus on the literacy efforts (including curricular development) Commissioner McQueen has emphasized throughout her tenure as chief.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

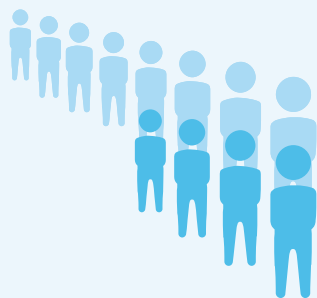
EXAMPLE OF STATE-APPROVED DISTRICT MODEL



TEACHER LEADERS

36 Positions

All Teacher Leaders are full-time teachers.



CONTENT AREA COACH

8 Positions • 6–12

INSTRUCTIONAL COACH

4 Positions • K–5

- Model lessons
- Peer review of instructional practices
- Assist teachers in the use of best practices and resources
- Facilitate creation of common assessments (6–12)
- Ensure alignment of curriculum to content and rigor of TNReady (6–12)
- Assist teachers in unpacking standards
- Facilitate PLCs and professional development



DATA COACH

6 Positions • K–12

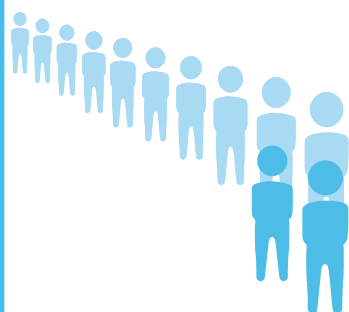
- Analyze student assessment data
- Facilitate the use of data to guide instruction
- Communicate with subject or grade level areas to compile school-wide data
- Assist teachers in unpacking standards
- Facilitate PLCs and professional development



TECHNOLOGY COACH

6 Positions • K–12

- Integrate the use of technology in instruction and coaching
- Assist teachers in locating appropriate online resources
- Assist teachers in utilizing state and district websites and software related to student data
- Assist teachers in unpacking standards
- Facilitate PLCs and professional development



CURRICULUM COACH

10 Positions • K–5

LITERACY COACH

2 Positions • 6–12

- Ensure alignment of curriculum to content and rigor of TNReady (K–5)
- Facilitate creation of common assessments (K–5)
- Assist teachers with reading and writing strategies (6–12)
- Assist teachers in embedding appropriate text and writing practices in daily instruction (6–12)
- Assist teachers in unpacking standards
- Facilitate PLCs and professional development

As the SEA continues to make the positive effects of successful teacher leadership known to LEAs and word spreads from district to district, the state encounters more demand from the local level for these programs. Once the state and a district join together to develop a model, the two embark on a seven month-long planning and design phase. While TDOE initially envisioned the teacher leadership development process as a single seven-month engagement, with more and more involvement from districts, this initial period has come to lay the foundation for optional continued involvement and guidance between the SEA and LEAs.



The initial period of district-led work focuses on development and the creation of a comprehensive teacher leader model based on a specific district's needs. During the initial phase of work, the state organizes and facilitates planning meetings where LEA leadership teams consisting of a teacher leader, principal, district instructional coach, and central office staff member receive guidance and provide their own input on what makes sense for their particular context. Each of the members of the planning meeting serves a particular role in the development of teacher leadership systems:

- The **teacher** solicits peer feedback to vet initial plans;
- The **district** creates and implements models that improve student outcomes, align with state policies and resources, and provide rich professional development to participants, and;
- The **state** publicizes teacher leadership initiatives, expands opportunities to larger numbers of teachers, shares examples of high-quality work throughout the system, and ensures scalability and sustainability of existing projects.

DISTRICT RESPONSIBILITIES

Create and implement teacher leader models that:

- Focus on improving student outcomes
- Dovetail with existing state/district initiatives and resources
- Are sensitive to a district's size, culture for collaboration, and funding resources
- Establish a rigorous, fair, and well-communicated teacher leader identification and selection process

Provide continuous professional development and support for teacher leaders including all components of effective professional learning including:

- Content-based
- Relevant
- Rigorous
- Collaborative

STATE RESPONSIBILITIES

- **Make** teacher leadership opportunities **visible and attractive** to teachers, focusing on their power to improve student outcomes
- **Embed** teacher leadership into **teacher and administrator evaluation systems**
- Provide **framework and guidance** for developing and/or refining a district teacher leader model

- **Identify and share exemplary teacher leaders and district models** to support the development, implementation, improvement, scaling, and sustainability of teacher leader models in Tennessee
- Mandate differentiated teacher compensation systems, including incentives for teacher leadership roles

Over the course of the planning meetings, the teacher, district leadership, and state work together to consider student data and needs, the district strategic plan, alignment to state standards, and the LEA's funding capacity and sustainability. Throughout this process, regional coaches selected from districts with existing, successful teacher leader models serve in an advisory role for their peers.



Once TN districts develop their models, they can subsequently enter a second phase where they closely examine their models and develop a project plan to refine them and create support tools for continuous improvement. Arising as a result of calls from educators in the classroom and their LEA leaders, the state offers a cohort model for continuing to hone the work they developed in consultation with the SEA and helps these districts during an extended period of support.

Although the framework consists of content developed with the state, in this stage, LEAs again work with regional CORE Office coaches, who, the state has found, provide a more successful delivery model given their proximity to the districts they serve. Regional coaches, a well-received additional layer of support, were added to the work by the TDOE in SY16–17 to provide districts with differentiated supports. Alongside the regional coach, districts in this second phase use problems of practice to connect with their

peers in regional meetings, where common challenges and best practices raised by the teachers experiencing these leadership opportunities on the ground can be identified and shared.

Responding to teachers' desire to earn career-enhancing credentials for their leadership work, TDOE also added a [micro-credential](#) pilot focused on updating and personalizing the professional learning all teachers must complete in order to maintain their licensure. To progress from the initial "practitioner" license to the more permanent "professional" license, teachers in Tennessee are required to complete thirty hours of professional development; following that, they must also complete sixty hours of professional development activities every six years to maintain their credentials. In 2016, sixty teachers from across the state participated in an initial trial that created mentoring relationship by pairing highly effective teachers with five to seven years of teaching experience with a novice teacher. Tasked with the joint development of personalized professional learning systems linked to competencies aligned with each novice teacher's specific instructional needs and the outcomes needed to advance student achievement, teacher pairs have a menu of options available to them to either renew or advance their teaching licensure. This pilot also aims to address the challenge the state faced in developing and retaining teachers in their first five years in the classroom by confronting the frustration at a lack of autonomy many feel and allowing teachers to own their learning. Finally, the structure and content of the pilot are aligned to the TEAM evaluation process in order to measure effectiveness on educator growth and performance; in the first year of the program, participants completed micro-credentialing activities on the three most common TEAM rubric areas for growth for novice teachers, questioning, thinking, and problem solving. The results of the first cohort will be used to make improvements and further scale the work for a broader group of teachers.

TEACHER LEADER MODEL ELEMENTS



BUILDING TEACHER LEADERSHIP BETWEEN AND BEYOND DISTRICTS



Tennessee's districts in the midst of district-led teacher leadership program development are currently at Stage 4 of the CFC model, where they provide teacher leaders with the ability to support change through peer-to-peer support and leveraged content expertise via regional coaching.

The TLN's efforts are further supported by the [Tennessee Teacher Leader Collaborative](#) (TTLC), which aims to "support the development and sustainability of exemplary and innovative teacher leader networks through curation and dissemination of important information, sharing of impactful practices, and purposeful collaboration." To achieve this goal, the TTLC provides teachers with four leadership pathways:

- 1 Advocacy**, or advocating on behalf of students, their peers, and strong education policies;
- 2 Coaching**, or facilitating improvements in instruction and learning;
- 3 Influencing**, or providing feedback on key education issues, and;
- 4 Connecting**, or improving outreach to families, community, and other stakeholders.

Co-led by the TDOE and SCORE, an independent, nonprofit, and nonpartisan advocacy and research institution, the TTLC functions as a "network of networks" to provide a structure for ongoing collaboration across the TLN and the state's other teacher leadership efforts, including those led by external organizations like Hope Street Group and Teach Plus. This helps to streamline information, ensure cross-collaboration occurs, and reduces redundancy in efforts in order to maximize impact. The TTLC also plays a crucial role in ensuring that all teachers have access to teacher leadership opportunities, even if their districts do not have independent teacher leadership models by serving as a central repository for additional external programs across the state. In addition, the TTLC offers a user-friendly [website](#) that outlines the many teacher leadership opportunities available in Tennessee and organizes regular meetings for members and stakeholders to further teacher leadership work Tennessee. Teachers interested in learning more are able to filter the information available in accordance with their desired pathway.

In addition to expanding the number of districts involved, Tennessee's district-specific approach has, since its inception, evolved into a network where support is offered by the state and organized on a regional basis and the state and districts work together to deliver effective teacher leader models. The network structure enables districts and the state to collaborate on the development of teacher leader models through their distinct and complementary roles, ensures space for the SEA's regional centers to collaborate, and provides a dedicated space for the three parties to collaborate and learn from each other as well. On top of the opportunities offered to districts in collaboration with the state, the advocacy ecosystem in Tennessee has seen an increase in the availability of leadership projects, with additional programs provided by the Office of the Governor (Governor's Teacher Cabinet), Hope Street Group ([Tennessee State Teacher Fellows](#)), Teach Plus ([Teacher-Led Professional Learning](#)) the Tennessee State Collaborative on Reforming Education (TN SCORE; [Tennessee Educator Fellowship](#)), and many others. These efforts are all coordinated through the TTLC to ensure partner organizations are working in the most effective manner toward their common goals of improving teaching and learning.

Tennessee Educator Fellowship (SCORE)

SY17–18 Participants	49
SY17–18 Applicants	N/A
Participants to Date	145
Applicants to Date	1,540

Tennessee State Teacher Fellows (Hope Street Group)

SY17–18 Participants	26
SY17–18 Applicants	61
Participants to Date	58
Applicants to Date	~300

Teacher-Led Professional Learning (Teach Plus)

Teacher Leaders to Date	33
Participants to Date	323

Tennessee Educator Fellowship

One example of the opportunities provided through the TTLC is the SCORE-led and facilitated [Tennessee Educator Fellowship](#). Started in 2014, this program offers teacher leaders the chance to serve one-year terms learning about and informing the "policies, practices, and systems that affect student achievement and educator effectiveness." These teacher leaders operate as liaisons between teachers, communities, policymakers, and advocates focused on improving education in Tennessee. For the current cohort, SCORE selected forty-nine teachers for the Educator Fellowship; since its in-

augural year, the organization has received applications from 1,540 educators and has selected 145 for participation in the program.

The members of the 2017–18 Educator Fellowship are on track to complete more than 500 advocacy activities during their tenure. With more than 300 distinct activities completed as of publication, these educators elect to focus on and advocate for issues they deem to be timely and relevant to their roles in the classroom, such as assessment, literacy, chronic absenteeism, and postsecondary readiness. Activities facilitated by these leaders range from organizing meetings with leaders and peers within their districts and disseminating information with other stakeholders to publishing op-eds in various publications and engaging in dialogue with local and state policymakers.

On July 12, 2017, the TDOE and SCORE jointly hosted the first iteration of its annual **Tennessee Teacher Leader Summit**, where 140 teacher leaders involved in the full spectrum of teacher leadership opportunities came together to discuss their experiences, learn from one another, and provide needed feedback for the ongoing development and improvement of the state’s teacher leadership model. In addition to teacher leaders facilitating presentations on their areas of expertise, SCORE and TDOE staff also organized sessions aimed at better connecting with teachers. [Feedback](#) from this initial Teacher Leader Summit lends great insight into the minds of teachers and allows the state — and other SEAs considering similar initiatives — much useful information in improving its offerings and sharpening the impact of its programs.

Tennessee State Teacher Fellows

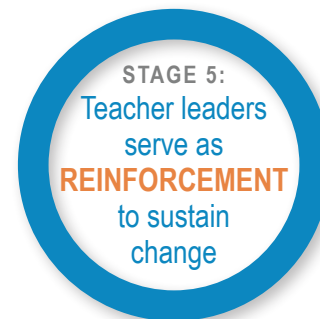
Another external leadership option is the [Tennessee State Teacher Fellows](#), a group started in 2015. Facilitated by the [Hope Street Group](#), an advocacy organization focused on strengthening economic opportunity, participants learn about education reform efforts in Tennessee and have the opportunity to meet directly with policymakers to provide input and solutions from a teacher’s perspective through a 24-month program. While the initial cohort was recruited statewide, subsequent iterations of the fellowship have done highly

targeted recruitment of teachers from specific areas of the state. Since launching, the program has received applications from nearly 300 teachers and counts thirty-two alumni fellows. In SY17–18, 61 teachers applied and 26 talented educators were selected for participation.

Teacher-Led Professional Learning

Finally, [Teach Plus](#), a national policy and advocacy organization concerned with empowering outstanding educators and amplifying teacher voice, runs a site of its [Teacher-Led Professional Learning](#) (TLPL) Program in Memphis. Through the TLPL, classroom teachers from across the Metro Nashville area are empowered as pedagogical and instructional experts to develop professional development sessions aimed at guiding their peers in building standards and content-aligned lessons, improving teacher practice, and analyzing student data.

In addition to the TLPL, Teach Plus also facilitates a similar initiative, the Teacher-Led Practice Networks (TLPN); as part of the TLPN, teacher leaders from the TLPL take the next step in their development as leaders and experts to facilitate collaborative learning sessions across LEAs.



In contrast to the previous stage (“Teacher leaders have the ability to support change”), districts revisiting their earlier work to improve upon it are in Stage 5 of the CFC continuum, having so deeply embedded leadership opportunities that teachers serve as the reinforcement to sustain change.

DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE TEACHER LEADERSHIP SYSTEMS: RESOURCES

A challenge that states face in building effective, sustainable teacher leadership models is finding ways of funding what can be costly programs. While in Tennessee, the SEA does have full-time employees who spend some of their time devoted to teacher leadership, their duties are not solely dedicated to this work, and TDOE augment this support by funding regional level coaches for LEAs. In addition, LEAs are largely responsible for funding their own initiatives. With limited financial backing to assist leadership teams developing their models, some districts build teacher leadership into their budgets using Title II-A funding, while others identify available local funding.

Moreover, Tennessee has also developed a [state policy](#) requiring that districts incorporate differentiated pay scales into their sala-

ry schedules; under this system, districts are expected to provide graduated levels of compensation that incentivize the filling of hard-to-staff positions, reward positive results on teacher evaluation systems, or addition of school-based instructional roles that increase effective educator practice. Given that these models are to be built into district salary structures, most districts support teachers engaging in leadership roles with pay scales that offer additional pay for additional responsibilities, a method of attracting and retaining effective teachers. Despite the absence of sustained funding streams for this work, the efficacy of differentiated pay policies like Tennessee’s was recently affirmed in [research](#) from Mathematica and the Institute of Education Sciences. Per the report, districts that, under the opportunity afforded by Teacher Incentive

Fund (TIF) grants, provided additional pay opportunities and other pay-for-performance bonuses saw modest increases in teacher retention and satisfaction. These increases also yielded stronger results in student outcomes on state tests than typical interventions, like as class size reduction.

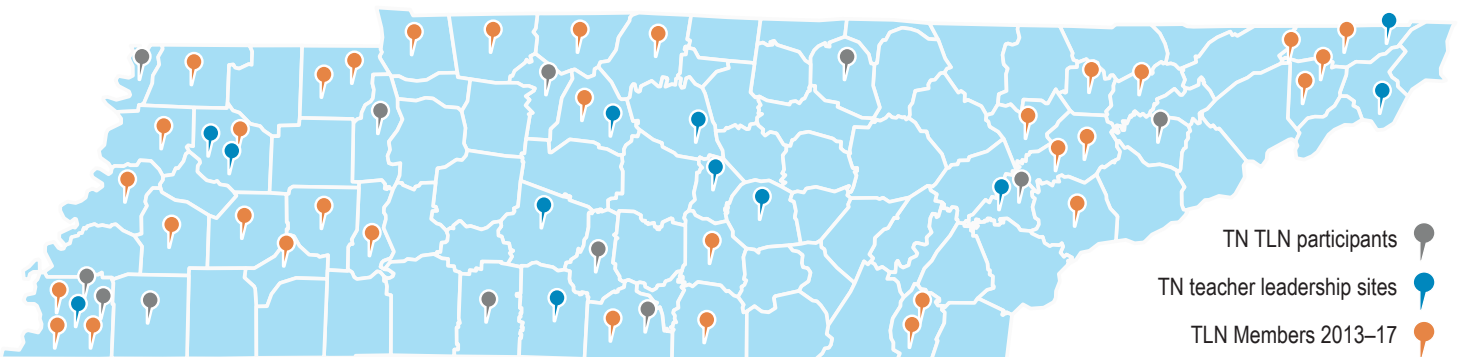
Building tools for the sharing of resources has also enabled the state to hand the reins over to districts in further developing these

programs. Although TDOE ensures that guidebooks, models, and tools are published on the [TTLC website](#), the state sees these resources as iterative and open to continuous revision and reposting as they continue to evaluate the impact of these models. In addition to including more teacher, school, and district recognition and storing and sharing a greater number of exemplars, the state would also like to build a repository of lessons learned to inform the planning and development processes for LEAs embarking on this journey.

SCALING THE TENNESSEE TEACHER LEADERSHIP MODEL

Since its inception in 2013, Tennessee's Teacher Leadership model has expanded gradually but intentionally, increasing the number of districts involved in the TLN, the number of external partners involved, and the variation in leadership opportunities offered through the TTLC. Ultimately, TDOE views the mission of the TTLC as the way in which the state can assist in creating new formal and informal teacher leader opportunities and communicating with and about existing ones. TDOE intends to continue the program for the next three to four years in order to impact the remaining eighty-seven districts that have not yet participated.

ments for this work to LEAs. One of the few it has made, however, is to incorporate teacher leadership metrics into the principal and [teacher evaluation](#) systems, signaling that school leaders are obligated to engage teachers in formal and informal decision-making. To that end, the Tennessee principal evaluation rubric contains an indicator that assesses a school leaders' ability to develop the capacity of the teachers in his or her school building through teacher leadership; similarly, the teacher evaluation rubric contains an indicator that inquires as to a teacher's engagement in the leadership activities available to them.



Beginning with just six LEA-led teacher leadership models in SY13-14, the TLN now has fifty-nine districts involved in SY17-18. One reason for this growth is the spread of evidence from participating districts indicating that their teacher leadership programs have positively impacted school culture. When other districts become aware of this improvement, they are excited to establish their own models.

Despite the controlled and purposeful growth of the TLN, it has been important to TDOE that the the SEA issue very few require-

TDOE also offers its districts the opportunity to place a financial value on teacher leadership through a [differentiated compensation](#) system and, acting under this suggestion, 109 of 146 districts utilize this option. Moreover, TDOE extends an invitation to districts willing to develop teacher leadership roles each year, engaging with established sites to facilitate peer-to-peer learning and increase teacher leader influence. Though the TLN is one strategy among many shared leadership options, the department entrusts the decision-making for this program, and others, to schools and districts.

EMPHASIZING CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

In SY16-17, the network further scaled and differentiated its supports. Recognizing that districts that conducted initial planning benefitted from continuous evaluation and refinement of their models, the SEA added a second stage for districts with existing models, as well as six regional coaches to add an additional layer of support.

For successful districts, the diagnosing of opportunities for teacher leadership leads to a living model, where the number and functions of teacher leaders are further driven by student achievement shifts or common development needs, local autonomy allows for greater specificity and higher impact, and continuous feedback leads to contextually responsive solutions.

MEASURING IMPACT AND ASSESSING RESULTS

To evaluate the work to date, TDOE has used several qualitative methods of assessing success. Per the leading indicators evident in participant surveys, teachers share that they feel they have improved their teaching practice, are more familiar with policy processes, more comfortable in reaching out to state legislators, and more apt to take advantage of additional opportunities for teacher leadership. Most powerfully, TDOE has seen evidence that, even when paying less than neighboring districts, LEAs that offer teacher leadership and advocacy programs are better able to attract and retain teachers due to the opportunities offered. Informal feedback is positive and includes people participating in multiple opportunities.

Beginning in the current academic year, TDOE will work also closely with Vanderbilt University and the [Tennessee Education Research Alliance](#) (TERA) to measure teacher evaluation scores and principal perception of teacher leadership and/or instructional practice among teacher leaders and their colleagues — this research will provide the SEA with key data on the classroom impact of teacher leaders. In addition, Vanderbilt's evaluation of the program will compare perceived teacher leader effectiveness and evaluation data across sample groups from districts with and without teacher leadership models. Although the sample size for the first year (SY17–18) will not encompass all of the participating districts, it will provide a snapshot of a representative cross-section of schools to provide a comparison, both within and outside those involved in teacher leadership work.

In addition to external program evaluation conducted by Vanderbilt University, TDOE and its individual districts have also assem-

bling other proof points to measure the impact of teacher leadership in the state. Once complete, these metrics will include:

- Teacher retention, with an emphasis on teachers in their first five years who historically leave the classroom at higher rates;
- Teacher recruitment numbers;
- Team evaluations of educator effectiveness;
- Principal evaluations, especially via an indicator of distributed leadership;
- Student and school-level data/TVAAS;
- Qualitative data surrounding school culture and climate, and;
- Teacher, parent, and student surveys.

The validity of these measures notwithstanding, the gold standard of effectiveness remains whether or not schools are observing changes in instructional practice and if teacher leaders are positively influencing the instruction of their colleagues in service of improved student outcomes. TDOE believes that the results of Vanderbilt's research on the efficacy of teacher leadership in Tennessee will attract additional districts, though scaling operations will take time as fidelity to the stages and to the standards is paramount.

THE FUTURE OF TEACHER LEADERSHIP IN TENNESSEE

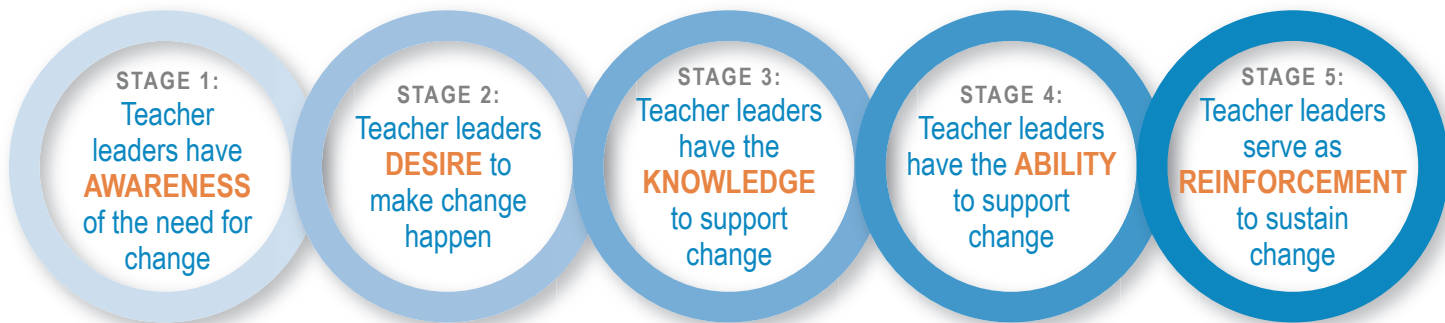
Under the sustained leadership of Chiefs for Change Member, Commissioner Candice McQueen, teacher leadership continues to progress, expanding throughout the state and modernizing and elevating the teaching profession in TN. In SY17–18, TDOE plans to add twelve additional districts to the development phase of teacher leadership models and twelve to the second phase to improve existing models.

The state also again intends to hold a Teacher Leader Summit in the summer of 2018. With the next summit expanding upon its previous lists of invitees, the SEA will extend invitations to include district teams as well as individual teacher leaders.

Another change for the current school year is the first digital publication of the Teacher Leader Guidebook, which will be transitioned to a home on a dedicated website. This plan will make the existing format of the guidebook easier to follow and allow the state to

add updates as improvements occur, allowing the newest and best thinking from districts that have seen strong results in this work to be made available to their peers across the state in real time.

In the short-term, TDOE would like for the models and lessons learned by participating LEAs to be easily accessible so that other districts considering creating their own models can understand how teacher leadership work has been done in similar areas. Eventually, TDOE hopes to add celebrations for metrics reached and interviews with districts about what they wish they had known as they were getting started to the website. Lastly, there have also been discussions about creating an online toolkit where LEAs can submit their most effective tools to assist other districts. As some LEAs newly pursue specific teacher leadership roles in schools and other LEAs invest more deeply in continuous improvement of their strategies, TDOE will continue to provide as-needed support.



LESSONS LEARNED

Reflecting on their work to date, TDOE has advice for other states looking to pursue their own teacher leadership models:

1 Balance urgency, fidelity of implementation, and continuous improvement

- Tennessee emphasizes the inherent strengths of LEA-based decision-making and works with its districts to refine and expand teacher leadership to new districts while providing supports to ensure that localities are able to improve and expand their models sustainably.

2 Create many paths oriented around a central coordinating structure

- While Tennessee has required many changes, including incentives for teacher leadership and leadership standards within teacher and administrator evaluations, and provides LEAs with the opportunity to take the lead in the development of

various other programs, each of these streams of work is predicated on a common understanding of goals.

3 Be sensitive to the diverse needs of different districts

- SEAs must consider how they can differentiate support based on district size, budget, and data capacity, among other factors, as well as how to support school and LEA strategic changes over time and how to align roles with evolving needs.

4 Remain “tight” on teacher leadership standards and how they are measured

- States should ensure that all models are accountable to a shared vision of attracting, retaining, and developing excellent educators who improve student outcomes to facilitate program evaluation.

RESOURCES

- Institute of Education Sciences/Mathematica, [Evaluation of the Teacher Incentive Fund: Final Report on Implementation and Impacts of Pay-for-Performance Across Four Years](#)
- Leading Educators, [State Leadership Toolkit](#)
- TDOE, [State ESSA Plan](#)
- TDOE, [Teacher Leader Network Guidebook](#)
- TDOE, [Teacher Leader Model Standards](#)
- TDOE, [Teacher Leadership Self-Reflection](#)
- Hope Street Group, [Tennessee Data Collection, Fall 2015](#)