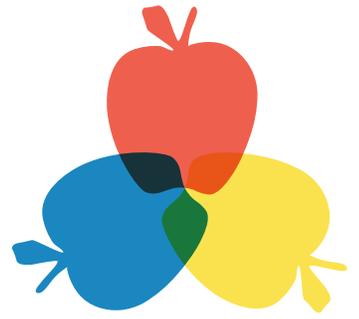# LEADING FROM THE CLASSROOM

Hybrid Roles for Teacher Leaders

Overview & Context

Traditional hierarchical school structures[1] reserve building-wide decision making power for administrative staff while relegating teacher influence to their individual classrooms. However, the higher demands put on schools and administration coupled with the ever changing needs of student populations require a reevaluation of this structure. In the face of these challenges, more schools are embracing distributive leadership models[2], thereby increasing their recognition of the untapped potential of teacher leadership. The Hybrid Teacher Leader Role is one component in establishing a distributive leadership model.

A Hybrid Teacher Leader is an effective teacher leader[3] who spends 40-60% of their contracted time in the classroom teaching students, while also performing clearly-defined roles that measurably impact student and colleague growth, development, and success.
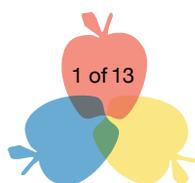

Leadership opportunities are not new to the teaching profession. Experienced teachers routinely find themselves in leadership positions such as department chair, team lead, assessment coordinator, or school leadership team member. Typical characteristics of these positions include: 1) a lack of direct correlation to or accountability for impact on student or colleague growth and 2) responsibilities that are not job-embedded and therefore must be fulfilled outside of the school day. Unlike these common teacher leadership roles, a Hybrid Teacher Leader continues to teach students while also spending a meaningful portion of their contracted school day carrying out leadership work.

The following chart delineates some of the shared attributes and differences between Hybrid Teacher Leadership Roles and common teacher leadership roles.

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[1] See glossary of terms

[2] See glossary of terms

[3] See glossary of terms

Hybrid Teacher Leader Roles	Shared Attributes	Common Teacher Leader Roles
• Job-embedded leadership responsibilities • 40-60% of contracted time in the classroom (with contracted planning time) • Remaining contracted time dedicated to leadership role • Goals directed toward positively impacting colleagues' instructional practice through collaboration during the school day, such as modeling lessons, co-teaching, and conducting observation cycles • Positively influencing the achievement of the wider student population	• Critical element to a distributive leadership model • An understanding of distributive leadership and power of change • Effectively work with adult learners • A growth mindset • Allowing professional growth opportunities while keeping effective teachers in the classroom • Goals focused on positively impacting students • Attributes delineated in the Teacher Leader Model Standards • Provide professional development to colleagues	• 100% of contracted time is spent teaching • Responsibilities are beyond the school day or require the loss of planning time, which is needed for planning, giving meaningful feedback, family communication, and other teaching responsibilities • Often supplemented with a stipend and additional contract • Managerial tasks, such as managing textbook inventory, ordering department supplies, and in-building technology support • Positively influencing achievement of a specific student population

As with much of the nation, Washington state faces a rising crisis of attrition that continues to negatively impact schools and districts both financially and in the classroom. According to the Department of Education (2017), Washington is currently experiencing teacher shortages in at least 13 subject areas. Research strongly links teacher attrition to perceived shortcomings in school leadership, such as a lack of instructional leadership, time for collaboration, and decision-making input (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Teachers leaving the profession also cite a lack of career growth opportunities as a motivating factor due to the fact that

teaching does not typically allow for leadership advancement opportunities through career lattices[4]. Instead, a teacher must make a binary career choice between teaching and expanding their leadership influence by taking on an administrative role, which takes many talented teachers away from working directly with students. The Hybrid Teacher Leader Role addresses these concerns because it gives effective teacher leaders the opportunity to continue teaching while also having a job-embedded leadership role that has a more significant influence on the policies, practices, and success of their school.

Within their role, Hybrid Teacher Leaders enjoy more decision-making potential as they work with administrators and teachers alike to bridge the gap between the needs of the classroom and the functions of the school. This approach to retaining effective teachers is strategic human capital management[5] because these leadership opportunities maximize the talents of the most effective teachers in order to realize greater returns on investment in schools. The Hybrid Teacher Leader Role can help stem attrition and is a strategy to attract more people to the profession. Through the implementation of this position, schools can capitalize more fully and sustainably on the skills, expertise, and leadership potential of effective teachers. The influence of increased teacher leadership extends past individual classrooms to positively impact entire schools through both student and colleague growth.

Recommendation 1: Intentionally establish guidelines and minimum requirements for Hybrid Teacher Leader Roles.

The Hybrid Teacher Leader (HTL) Role allows qualified teachers to continue working with students while also occupying leadership positions that expand their impact beyond their own classrooms.

Recommended Role Guidelines
• The HTL spends 40-60% of their contracted school day teaching, maintaining consistency with contract language for planning time.

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[4] See glossary of terms

[5] See glossary of terms
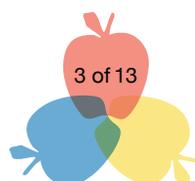
- The HTL's remaining contract time is dedicated to leadership work that impacts measurable gains in the growth, development, and success of both students and colleagues.

- The HTL's schedule must be flexible as to adapt to the needs of the building as well as the needs of student and colleague learning.

- The HTL must be granted some autonomy in order to make immediate decisions as needed while still remaining faithful to the description and responsibilities of the role.

- The HTL should not be tasked with administrative duties, such as evaluating teachers or managing student discipline.

- The HTL should have a detailed job description that specifically targets leadership work around the position's goals.

Recommended Minimum Role Requirements
- The HTL should be in at least the 6th year of their professional practice.

- The HTL must possess an understanding of and the skill set necessary to work with adult learners.

- HTLs should be effective teachers with proven track records of student growth and success based on their districts' adopted teacher evaluation systems.

- The HTL must come to the work with a growth mindset and an understanding of distributive leadership.

We recommend using this criteria from the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (2009) for determining the minimum role requirements.
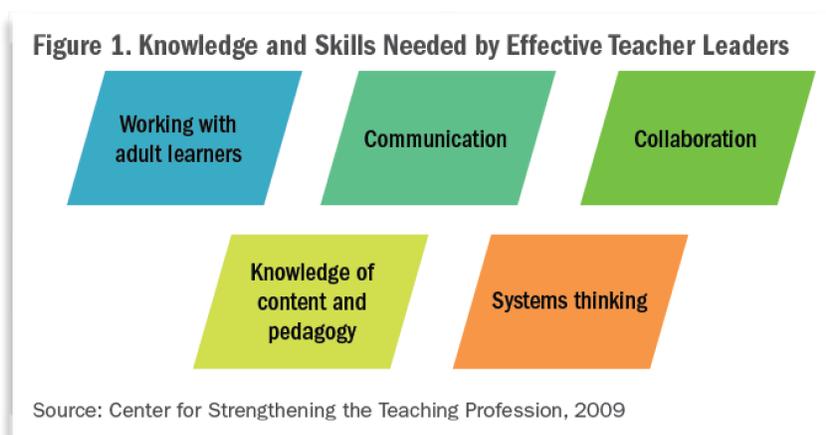

Figure 1. Knowledge and Skills Needed by Effective Teacher Leaders

Working with adult learners

Communication

Collaboration

Knowledge of content and pedagogy

Systems thinking

Source: Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession, 2009

Figure: Knowledge and Skills Needed by Effective Teacher Leaders

> **Funding Considerations**
> - Create HTL Roles within a sustainable funding model.
>
> - In addition to FTE and general financial concerns, the limitations of the physical work space must be considered as elementary, middle, and high school environments provide varying challenges to overcome.
>
> - In high-needs schools and districts, concern about space and money are the primary impediments to implementing an effective HTL program design.

Recommendation 2: Hybrid Teacher Leaders must impact student growth and foster colleagues' professional growth.

Research offers numerous examples of what a Hybrid Teacher Leader Role might look like. Whatever the work, the intent, action, and outcomes must always be able to address and answer the questions "How does this help student learning?" and "How does this improve instructional practice?"

There are multiple pathways for HTLs to positively impact educational outcomes, so while needs vary widely among schools, districts, and even different times of the year, the following are some potential common HTL responsibilities that positions can be designed around:

- Collaborative planning

- Modeling lessons

- Facilitating professional learning communities

- Participating in cycles of co-teaching units of study

- Videotaping peer instruction and mentoring through a reflective cycle focused on enhancing instructional practices

- Collecting and analyzing specific data related to student learning and sharing the results with colleagues in order to better address students' needs

- Collecting and analyzing specific data related to colleagues' instruction in order to work together to improve their practice
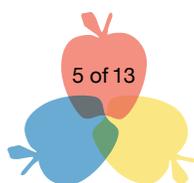
- Demonstrating measurable impact on student growth in their own classroom and others

The HTL Role does not replace existing teacher leadership roles but rather should complement them. Keeping in mind the goals of a HTL, some common leadership positions have the capacity to address these goals while others fulfill different needs within a building and therefore would not fall under a HTL Role. Some examples of these are listed in the table below.

Positions that address the goals of a HTL Role might include:	Positions that do not primarily address the goals of a HTL Role might include:
• Mentor • Instructional coach • Professional development facilitator • Professional learning community facilitator • Content area specialist • Data analyst	• Assessment coordinator • Grade level team lead • Department chair • School leadership team member • Hallway or recess supervisor • Disciplinarian • Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA)

Recommendation 3: The leadership work of the Hybrid Teacher Leader should be evaluated based on leadership standards.

All effective teachers engage in a reflective process in order to assess professional growth and impact on student learning. Because the Hybrid Teacher Leader Role combines classroom instruction and leadership responsibilities in one position, HTLs have different expectations for the leadership portion of their time. Therefore, the HTL's evaluation must appropriately and reasonably match the specific criteria of the position's two roles. For example, a HTL should not be evaluated using leadership criteria designed for administrators as the responsibilities of an administrator are not within an HTL's job description. Evaluating of the duality of a HTL Role requires additional consideration.

- Like their teacher colleagues, HTLs must be evaluated using locally bargained teacher evaluation rubrics to ensure that they are meeting the goals of the classroom instruction portion of their position.

- Evaluation of the HTL's leadership work should be aligned to teacher leadership standards.

- We recommend adopting the "Teacher Leader Model Standards" developed by the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium (2011) or the "Teacher Leadership Skills Framework" developed by the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (2009).

- The use of standards and frameworks such as these provide HTLs with the tools needed to reflect on and receive feedback pertaining to their leadership responsibilities as they ground their work in effecting positive educational outcomes for students and teachers.

The Teacher Leader Model Standards consist of seven domains describing the many dimensions of teacher leadership:

Domain I: Fostering a Collaborative Culture to Support Educator Development and Student Learning

Domain II: Accessing and Using Research to Improve Practice and Student Learning

Domain III: Promoting Professional Learning for Continuous Improvement

Domain IV: Facilitating Improvements in Instruction and Student Learning

Domain V: Promoting the Use of 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

Figure: Teacher Leader Model Standards (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2011)

Recommendation 4: Support, training, and professional development should be provided for all teacher leadership positions.

The problem of scale is an ongoing concern for many of the programs that successfully utilize Hybrid Teacher Leaders. What works in one school or district does not necessarily work in another, so it is critical to design support systems that are sustainable and effective in their particular contexts. No matter the location, there must be systemic support of all teacher leadership roles, including HTLs.

- Systemic support may be provided through a support point person at the school, district, or regional level.

- The support point person could be responsible for matters such as collecting data on the success and needs of HTLs in order to coordinate support measures like professional development and training.

- The support point person should not evaluate teacher leaders.

- Examples of the support point person's role could include but is not limited to:
    - Regional coordinator
    - District coordinator
    - Building coordinator
    - Teacher development coordinator

- Ongoing professional learning opportunities should focus on developing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of effective teacher leaders based on research-based practices, such as those offered by the "Teacher Leadership Skills Framework" from the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (2009).

Conclusion

A growing body of research indicates that distributive leadership models better address the continually changing and growing demands of students and schools in the 21st century. Additionally, teachers require improved, more heterarchical school systems[6] that encourage stronger collaborative cultures and more fulfilling leadership development in order for the profession to remain attractive. These findings call for school structures that promote roles like the Hybrid Teacher Leader. Within this role, Hybrid Teacher Leaders enjoy more decision-making potential as they work with administrators and teachers alike to bridge the gap between the needs of the classroom and the functions of the school.

The success of Hybrid Teacher Leader Roles depends on sustainable funding determined at the local level. District-level and state-level leadership should work together to provide the resources necessary to create Hybrid Teacher Leader Roles without compromising appropriate class sizes or overburdening workloads.

Schools and districts that embrace Hybrid Teacher Leader Roles more fully capitalize on their effective teachers' leadership potential and instructional expertise in order to foster growth for students and colleagues alike. Additionally, this position addresses teachers' desire for career lattices by offering job-embedded leadership opportunities. Hybrid Teacher Leader Roles improve retention and boost recruitment efforts as schools and districts can better attract and retain effective teachers by creating viable pathways for growth and development in their leadership capacity while continuing to harness their positive impact in their own classrooms. Hybrid Teacher Leader Roles bridge the gap between the classroom and decision makers, ensuring the inclusion of teacher voices to advocate for the needs of school communities.

We have written these recommendations with Washington state school and district leadership in mind; however, it is our hope that all education and policy leaders will find relevance and actionable ideas regarding Hybrid Teacher Leader Roles for their respective contexts.

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[6] See glossary of terms
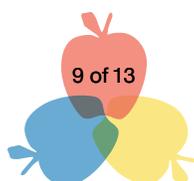
Glossary of Terms

Career lattices: Contrary to common career ladders for teachers that allow only for vertical movement, this framework allows multiple pathways for an educator to grow and develop professionally.

Distributive model: Decentralizing power and leadership responsibilities by allowing more people to exercise their influence and impact decision making within schools (see also heterarchical system).

Effective teacher: According to NNSTOY (2016), "The majority of districts/schools...based eligibility for teacher leader roles on designations of excellence from their teacher evaluation system, which included measures of student achievement or growth as the major criterion in designating eligibility." We are using the term "effective" as a qualifier for someone who is a good candidate for a Hybrid Teacher Leader Role. We suggest referring to the Teacher Leader Model Standards developed by the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium (2011) as an initial framework for attributes of effective teacher leaders. Sources such as this provide excellent suggestions for identifying effective teacher leaders; however, our research also acknowledges that it is important for school communities to tailor their criteria to identify candidates best-suited for their respective contexts.

Hierarchical system: Traditional school structure with leadership held by a few individuals "at the top."

Heterarchical system: Leadership is redistributed and roles are taken on by a greater number of stakeholders in their respective areas of expertise. Hybrid Teacher Leader Roles and common teacher leadership roles are ways to diversify voices of influence in schools and can create a better balance between hierarchy and heterarchy in educational communities.

Hybrid Teacher Leader (HTL): An effective teacher leader who spends 40-60% of their contracted time in the classroom teaching students, while also performing clearly-defined roles that measurably impact student and colleague growth, development, and success.

Human capital management: The effort to capitalize more fully and sustainably on the skills, expertise, and leadership of effective educators in order to realize greater returns on investment in schools. Managing educator talent is the process of deliberately improving educator talent—encompassing all aspects of the teacher and school leader career continuum—to optimize and leverage the workforce in the education system. Hybrid Teacher Leader Roles are one example of a strategy for managing educator talent.

Teacher leader roles: There are a variety of teacher leadership roles in different education settings. Teach+Plus' (2015) analysis tracks teacher leader roles in different education settings, which include internal opportunities for specialization, opportunities through outside organizations, and roles that restructure staffing and scheduling for improved retention within schools.

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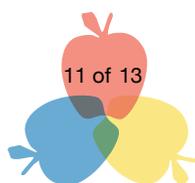
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ABOUT THE POLICY TEAM:

Our policy teams are the foundation of the TU work. Policy leaders dedicate numerous hours reading through peer reviewed research articles, opinion pieces, and published reports; reflecting on their own practices; and collaborating to engage in thoughtful analysis and debate to develop their recommendations.

Without the dedication of this team, this work would be impossible.

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We are a group of effective educators who research education issues and make policy recommendations to local and state decision makers. By developing educator capacity to become responsible leaders and advocates for equity and excellence in student achievement and the teaching profession, we can make the systemic changes our students deserve.