

## Challenge One: Professional Development

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In July 2013, the U.S. Department of Education and seven co-sponsoring organizations<sup>1</sup> convened administrators from state education agencies and school districts and leaders from state and local teacher union affiliates to address the following questions:

- *How can districts and unions create or modify collective bargaining agreements and other joint policies and structures to meet demands for professional development aimed at implementing college- and career-ready (CCR) standards?*
- *How can they identify and implement professional development that is most likely to be effective?*
- *How can they support the continuous improvement of professional development systems across time?*

After initial deliberation, the group agreed to concentrate on two separate solutions that it decided will help school districts and unions respond to these questions effectively. The first seeks to redefine teacher leadership and maximize the use and expand the reach of teacher leaders. This solution cascades into the group's second solution of establishing cross-school networks of educators to design and deliver professional learning experiences.

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<sup>1</sup> Convening co-sponsors included the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the National Education Association (NEA), the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS), the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), the National School Boards Association (NSBA), the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS), and the U.S. Department of Education (ED).

The solutions group agreed that, pursued individually or simultaneously, one or both of these solutions can help districts and unions use professional development, as delivered by teacher leaders and/or cross-school networks, to help students meet the demands of CCR standards.

**SOLUTION 1: Redefine teacher leadership and maximize the reach of teacher leaders.**

**SOLUTION 2: Establish cross-school networks of educators to design and deliver professional learning experiences based on common interests and sets of needs – such as specific instructional shifts or grade and/or subject focus areas.**

The brief offers a close look at the first and second solutions, while listing others the group identified but did not discuss in depth. For each of the two solutions, it examines steps necessary for implementation, describes what success might look like and identifies possible barriers to success, all as envisioned by the solutions group.

### Solution 1: Redefine Teacher Leadership and Maximize the Reach of Teacher Leaders

Solution one, noted the group, is about effectively positioning teachers to take on additional leadership roles so they can reach and help other educators, and, in turn, improve student learning.

While teacher leaders have existed as an integral part of the teaching and learning landscape for some time, the solutions group suggested the role be redefined to sharpen its focus. For instance, the redefined role

should clearly specify that teacher leaders work to develop other colleagues and as a result should be experts on adult learning and group facilitation. According to solutions group members, these teacher leaders should also be masters of specific content, such as English language arts or science. In these roles, teacher leaders could coach colleagues or lead professional learning in groups.

Redefining the role, emphasized the solutions group, means articulating multiple paths to the teacher leader position. “One single, linear pathway would be insufficient,” suggested several of the solutions group members. Given the multitude of school-based professional development needs and potential roles, flexibility in the model will be needed across a school district. Prospective candidates could either apply or volunteer for the position or work to advance on career pathway systems that include teacher leadership.

Once selected to participate, asserted solutions group members, districts and unions should hold teacher leaders to the same performance expectations that all teachers must meet. Teacher leaders would have to demonstrate effectiveness on multiple measures, including successful outcomes on measures of student growth in her own and in her mentees’ classrooms.

Improving performance for teacher leaders would include feedback from mentees gathered through surveys over a period of time. Districts could use survey and other data – including achievement data – to gain a comprehensive understanding about performance.

Finally, agreed the solutions group, those selected for these roles should be given the time to perform this additional work and improve their craft. If not, districts should compensate teacher leaders for the time they put in after hours.

### ***Promising Solutions for Future Exploration***

In addition to discussing two solutions in depth, the group identified five additional promising solutions to enhance professional learning opportunities.

#### **Solution: Use creative approaches to expand professional development time.**

- Optimize common planning time, faculty meetings and inter-visitations for meaningful professional learning for all educators.
- Reconstruct the school day and year to enable better use of professional learning time for all educators.

#### **Solution: Create a common professional learning experience across schools.**

- Labor and management come together to identify a common professional development experience that builds a consistent understanding of the CCR standards through professional learning modules that schools can adopt and deliver.

#### **Solution: Deliver aligned professional learning that connects the CCR standards to teacher effectiveness and evaluation systems.**

- Labor and management should collaborate to coordinate and deliver this aligned professional learning.

#### **Solution: Evaluate the effectiveness of professional learning and create a “seal of approval” based on key criteria.**

- Labor and management jointly evaluate programs and create a “seal of approval” for those that pass muster.

#### **Solution: Conduct joint visitation and coaching of sites in need of support.**

- Labor and management co-visit sites in need of support and design professional development together and in collaboration with sites.

## What Steps Are Necessary To Redefine and Maximize the Reach of Teacher Leaders?

The solutions group identified steps that a school or district might take to redefine teacher leadership and launch a teacher leadership program.

The first step, suggested the solutions group, is for district and union leadership to gain an understanding of the local, state and national teacher leadership landscape. For instance, they should determine what types of teacher leadership programs already exist locally or in their own and in other states. They should do their best to determine if these programs are having an impact on student learning. Such programs, the solutions group imagined, might offer inspiration and structural guidance for the design of their own programs.

Once district and union leadership understand the teacher leadership landscape, posited the solutions group, it is positioned to begin jointly designing the program. Initially, it is important that district and union leadership establish a set of clear goals that guide the teacher leadership program. These goals should be used to create a “vision of success,” noted the group.

Next, offered the solutions group, district and union leaders should define the standards candidates must meet to become teacher leaders and the credentialing process they will undergo to demonstrate they have met the standards.

An agreement, perhaps through a Memorandum of Understanding, would be necessary to articulate the program structure, expectations and other key details. Further, noted several members of the group, contract language might be necessary to codify a

career continuum that would include a teacher-leader position. Noted one member of the group, “Spelling out these details in the contract language ensures program continuity beyond leadership changes.”

Prior to fully launching the teacher leadership program, the solutions group agreed that districts might choose to pilot or phase the program in to ensure that school districts and their partner unions can take the design construction elements to scale.

## What Does Successful Implementation Look Like?

If district and union leadership work hand-in-hand to redefine and maximize the reach of teacher leaders, then, suggested the solutions group, schools and districts should expect certain indicators of success:

- All educators would be united by a shared moral imperative and collective vision of having a greater impact on student achievement.
- More decision-making would come from the bottom up, rather than top down, promoting shared responsibility and accountability.
- More teachers would visit each other’s classrooms. They would offer feedback, collaborate and develop and deliver professional learning together.
- Teachers, school leaders and other educators would own their professional learning. They would take advantage of established career lattices that provide upward mobility.
- Teachers, school leaders and other educators would take risks and be more innovative. They would look at ways to collect and analyze more meaningful data to identify student strengths and weaknesses.
- Students would be on track to graduate college- and career- ready.

## What Are Possible Barriers to Implementation?

The solutions group identified a single major barrier districts and unions must guard against when redefining teacher leadership and maximizing teacher leaders' reach: teachers simply don't have enough time to take on additional roles and responsibilities.

To address this barrier, districts must consider providing time within the school day for teachers to perform their leadership duties or paying stipends for teachers to execute the same in addition to a full load of teacher responsibilities.

## Solution 2: Cross-School Networks of Educators Designing and Delivering Professional Learning Experiences

The group's second solution calls for the creation of cross-school networks of educators to design and deliver professional learning experiences based on a common interests and specific needs such as instructional "shifts" or grade and subject focus.

Ultimately, suggested the solutions group, labor and management should determine jointly the network design and structure. This includes addressing accountability, identifying necessary supports and determining a process for designing and building the network so that it most effectively meets the developmental needs of teachers and other educators.

The process for designing, building and launching the network should begin with an individual needs assessment designed by labor and management, posited the solutions group. But, members of the group suggested, this process should be informed by instructional needs identified by district evaluation

systems and other measures of educator effectiveness. The networks would then design professional development opportunities to meet educator needs as self-identified or determined by educator effectiveness metrics and then deliver to individuals or collectives.

The solutions group suggested that the union and school district should unabashedly support the networks in a united front and design them for maximum flexibility so that they can be bold and innovative and engage in experimental approaches to professional development. At the same time, labor and management should design an accountability system for the networks to increase the likelihood that they will be successful.

## What Steps Are Necessary to Implement Cross-School Networks?

The solutions group identified six steps that labor and management can take to implement cross-school networks aimed at delivering high-quality professional learning necessary to support implementation of new standards.

As an initial step, the solutions group recommended that labor and management jointly identify the design and expectations of the networks. This includes non-negotiable design elements to which both parties agree. These could include the size of the network and the frequency at which they meet.

Once management and labor design the network and establish expectations for it, they should begin the process of evaluating how the district uses existing professional learning time and then carve out specific time for educators to work with the network on the professional development activities it designs, suggested solutions group members. Both, noted the solutions group, must commit to prioritizing time for professional learning.

Next, offered the solutions group, labor and management should conduct a needs assessment survey. The purpose of the survey would be to identify specific development needs of educators and use that information to inform the focus of the professional learning network.

After the district conducts the needs assessment, labor and management can work together to identify educators whom they can train to implement the network, which would include how to develop and implement feedback loops to inform the work and accountability for the network.

Finally, the solutions group suggested that labor and management revisit the various measures of educator effectiveness, including the evaluation frameworks, and the results of these measures to ensure they reflect and support professional learning as directed by the newly established networks.

## What Does Successful Implementation Look Like?

Solution group members suggested that evidence of success could include the following:

The district would begin reviewing the various measures of educator effectiveness, such as the evaluation systems, to identify professional development needs of educators.

Great teachers and other educators would populate the networks and design and deliver high- quality professional learning.

There would be, as evidence of labor-management collaboration, contract language or a memorandum of understanding that addresses the design parameters and expectations for the networks.

Finally, the group posited that after one year of implementation, there would be in the field a strong demand for network support of educators.

## What Are Possible Barriers to Implementation?

The solutions group identified six barriers that could make it difficult to implement professional learning networks:

1. **Hesitance to shift control to teachers.** The creation of networks requires a shift of control to teachers. Thus, central office, unions and site administrators must be prepared to give up their traditional control of professional learning.
2. **Diffuse as opposed to coordinated messaging.** Labor and Management must commit to using the same messages when it comes to discussing the network. This will ensure that all parties receive consistent information and understand the purpose of the network. At the outset, labor and management should agree to clear processes for developing communication messages and methods of delivering those messages.
3. **A lack of time.** While the networks proposed by the solutions group are not new, especially when it comes to implementation of the CCR standards, districts, members suggested, rarely give them and the teachers they support time to lead or participate in them.
4. **Professional learning networks or professional learning communities do not have great reputations among teachers.** There seems to be a misunderstanding among the teacher corps about the purpose professional learning networks or professional learning communities. Responding to what they believe to be “initiative fatigue,” teachers often do not participate in

them. Unions and school districts must demonstrate that the network efforts will result in increased student achievement.

5. **Resistance to team participation.** Today, solutions group members suggested, some teachers would prefer to work alone or do not have the skills necessary for group participation. Lack of interest, the absence of immediate results and lack of time exacerbates these challenges. Districts and unions can offer support and training to prepare teachers for service in the network.

## Reflections from the Convening

### Co-sponsors

Effective teachers and principals are career-long learners. Effective schools and districts are learning communities where teachers and principals individually and collaboratively continuously reflect on and improve their practice. Such communities of practice thrive when there is structured time for collaborative work informed by a rich array of data and access to internal and external expertise. We must take seriously the need to evaluate the efficacy of professional development so that we can more methodically improve it, channeling our investments into activities and supports that make a difference. From induction for novice teachers designed to accelerate their growth and development, to replicating the practices of the most accomplished teachers, professional development is a critical lever of improvement. Educators must develop greater competency in using professional development. And all stakeholders—parents, teachers, school boards, superintendents and administrators, business leaders, and community members—must take responsibility for the academic and social well-being of the students in our charge and engage in the strong, consistent, and sustained collaboration critical to making improvement possible.

### ***A Word about This Brief***

In late July 2013, as an extension to its 2011 and 2012 convenings to maximize labor-management collaboration, the U.S. Department of Education, in partnership with numerous national organizations, hosted state and local education leaders at GE Foundation’s *Summer Conference for Educators*. Specifically, convening organizers asked participants to consider how structures and systems of collaborative labor relations—including collective bargaining and other agreements, joint committees and structures, and policies and practices—could be harnessed to better support teachers and leaders in implementing college- and career-ready (CCR) standards. Convening organizers grouped participants in one of five teams each charged to consider one of five distinct CCR standards implementation challenges: *Professional Development*, *Instructional Teamwork*, *Access to Quality Instruction in High-Need Schools*, *Student Time* and *Curricular and Instructional Materials*.

This brief represents the best thinking of the *Professional Development* solutions group, which investigated the following questions:

- *How can districts and unions create or modify collective bargaining agreements and other joint policies and structures to meet demand for professional development aimed at implementing CCR standards?*
- *How can they identify and implement professional development that is most likely to be effective?*
- *How can they support the continuous improvement of professional development systems across time?*