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## PROFESSIONAL OPINION

# Fostering true teacher leadership

How cultivating teacher leaders can help strengthen a school

By: Pamela Roggeman

As it does for many families, local school district quality played a primary role in our real estate choice.

But open-enrollment demanded research. My spouse and I have 35 years of teaching experience between us, so we devised a plan. On one day we scheduled five interviews with five [principals](#) from five schools. One essential question drove our discussions: What is your teacher turnover rate?

We did not base this question on formal research; rather, experience had taught us what we knew to be true: Great school leaders keep great teachers.



[Pamela Roggeman, a high school English teacher for 17 years, is now the academic dean for the College of Education at University of Phoenix.](#)

By 2020, American public schools will need more than 440,000 new teachers. One effort to address this need is to

retain good teachers.

Perhaps insight into retaining good teachers can be gleaned from why teachers leave a building. The National Center for Education Statistics found teachers leave because they lack:

- Opportunities for professional advancement



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- Recognition and support from administrators/managers
- Autonomy or control over own work
- Influence over workplace policies and practices

In short, these teachers wanted to have influence in the schools, but formal leadership roles in K12 schools are limited. Like teachers, building principals face ever-expanding responsibilities.

If many teachers leave because they perceive leadership opportunities lacking, why do some building leaders still fail to empower teachers to lead?

## Key competencies

Most principals can identify the teachers in their building who are respected by their peers, who are continuous learners and who positively influence key stakeholders. Commonly, these are the teachers chosen to serve on school committees. It is a delicate balance between empowering a teacher and burdening one.

In some schools, small groups of teachers take on a specific challenge, devise a plan to address it, carry out the plan, and then evaluate its success.

One middle school principal has handed over professional development to his staff. Another Phoenix district has empowered a middle school staff to rotate administration of the building among departments. There is no principal.

## Cultivating leaders

Successful teacher leadership does not just happen. The ever-growing pedagogy of teacher leadership lends insight into cultivating effective leaders.

The Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium outlines seven domain-specific competencies of effective teacher leaders at building and district levels. They include:

- Accessing and using research to improve practice and student learning
- Promoting professional learning for continuous improvement
- Promoting the use of assessments and data for school and districtwide improvement
- Improving outreach and collaboration with families and community.

This work also defines the competency and the functions a teacher leader. Using the research of teacher leadership pedagogy, the National Institute for School Leadership's formal curriculum for cultivating teacher leadership includes the following competencies:

- Strategic thinker

- Instructional leader
- Team leader
- Visionary
- Data master
- Coach and mentor
- Driver of change

What both of these works demonstrate are the vast and diverse leadership needs that face K12 schools.

At University of Phoenix, teacher leadership principles are threaded throughout teacher preparation and advanced degree programs.

This immersion creates a leadership culture for students and encourages them to bring these principles into their own classrooms, schools, and districts.

The learning environment in today’s K12 schools—and new assessments and standards such as Common Core—demand teacher leaders who are empowered to affect change in their schools.

As business management guru Tom Peters said, “Leaders don’t create followers, they create more leaders.” Great principals recognize this, and the success of K12 schools relies on it.

*Pamela Roggeman, a high school English teacher for 17 years, is now the academic dean for the College of Education at University of Phoenix.*

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