



## *Retaining Personnel*

# ENHANCING PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP

## Description

**Promoting professional leadership** is a strategy that involves formally or informally recognizing individuals who influence, mobilize, and guide personnel in their school or district and in the field itself (Danielson, 2006; Center on Great Teachers and Leaders [GTL Center], 2019). These leaders often take on duties in addition to their current role to improve instructional practice in schools. **Formal professional leadership** requires the implementation of structures and programs that recognize, incentivize, compensate, and encourage leadership roles.

## Overview

**Formal endorsements of teacher leadership have been found to contribute to teacher retention and improved student outcomes** in general education (OSEP Summit Retain Panel, 2020). Teacher leaders can be called *content experts, professional development leads, lead or master teachers, peer observers, mentors or coaches, cooperating teachers, teach to lead/special initiative team members, community of practice participants, and teachers on special assignment* (GTL Center, 2019). It is important to clearly define teacher leadership roles to address retention goals directly and promote sustainable organizational improvement (GTL Center, 2019). **Special educators** often take on a variety of informal leadership roles in their instructional setting. Unlike many of their general education counterparts, they often are not formally designated as **teacher leaders**. Creative funding strategies are sometimes used to address this, which often involve reallocating resources that are already available to prioritize compensating teacher leaders with appropriate pay and formal acknowledgement in position titles (OSEP Summit Retain Panel, 2020). Typically, local and State education agencies (LEAs and SEAs) are responsible for establishing systems for teachers to become recognized as teacher leaders (Kraemer, 2016). States can be powerful partners for districts and schools that are implementing teacher leadership systems (GTL Center, 2019).

## Research Findings

There is a positive link between personnel leadership opportunities and job satisfaction and retention (Wixom, 2016).

- **Successful teacher leadership initiatives center on collaboration between administrators and teachers**, with administrators increasingly delegating decision-making responsibilities as the teachers amplify their leadership capacities (GTL Center, 2019; Hunzicker, 2017; Kraemer, 2016).
- Teachers in schools with strong teacher leaders have reported a **reduction in role confusion and ambiguity**. This is especially important in the field of special education, as role ambiguity is one of the main causes of special educator attrition (Rock et al., 2016).
- While the strategy of fostering teacher leaders has been widely adopted to support the retention of general educators, **little research exists on the need and experiences of teacher leaders within special education** (Bagley & Tang, 2018) and **related service** professions.

## Exemplars

- [Indiana Teacher Leaders Bootcamp](#). This program focuses on helping Indiana develop and retain high-quality educators across the State by creating a pathway for practicing teachers to grow into teacher leaders. Although not specifically targeted at special education, this bootcamp has many special educator participants.
- [District of Columbia's Leadership Initiative for Teachers \(LIFT\)](#). This program includes a five-stage career ladder aimed at retaining teachers in high-need areas, including special education, by providing high-performing teachers with opportunities for career advancement while remaining in their roles inside the classroom. Each stage of the career ladder involves additional leadership responsibilities and compensation, and at the culmination the participants assume a teacher leader role and are referred to as *expert teachers*.
- [Opportunity Culture](#). In this program, teachers' roles are restructured so that the teachers can serve as teacher leaders and extend their reach to more students—for additional pay but still within existing school-level budgets. Opportunity Culture has been adopted in 37 districts across the country, and evidence shows that this strategy has led to improved teacher retention in the participating schools (Opportunity Culture, 2020).

(Additional exemplars can be found on the [Attract, Prepare, Retain resource page](#).)

# KEY IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

## Critical Components for Success

*(Lists are not sequential)*

### Setting the Stage

- Formalized leadership roles that support retention require systems of career advancement. Implementing these roles cannot be done without increasing teacher leader compensation. It is important to strategically reallocate existing funds and budgets (OSEP Summit Retain Panel, 2020).
- Establish goals for your teacher leadership initiative and articulate the rationale.

### Initial Start-Up

- Clearly define formal teacher leadership roles and responsibilities within your school or district. Refer to Resource 2 in the *Teacher Leadership Toolkit 2.0* (GTL Center, 2019) as a starting point.
- Ensure that these roles and responsibilities are effectively communicated within your school or district.

### Continuous Improvement

- Identify new data sources to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.
- Locate funding opportunities to expand teacher leadership and career advancement programs.
- Collect data to analyze the impact of teacher leadership programs on special education teacher retention.
- Collect data on special education teachers' perceptions of opportunities for attaining a leadership role or for career advancement as well as their perceptions of current roles and responsibilities.
- Engage former candidates and their administrators to identify gaps in retention strategies that can be addressed through increased career advancement structures and formally defined leadership opportunities.

### Leveraging Successes

- Identify partners.
- Ensure that States, LEAs, and SEAs participate in the development of formalized teacher leadership strategies.
- Share success stories.
- Collaborate with other institutions that incorporate teacher leadership into their retention programs to share lessons learned and areas for improvement.

## Related Services

Related service professions commonly require an advanced degree for entry into the field (e.g., master's, PhD) as well as more intensive clinical experience than provided by traditional teacher preparation programs. As a result, some LEAs may opt to provide a higher base salary to differentiate the experience level that related service providers have upon entry into the field. This can help recognize personnel as experts from the onset of their careers. When staff feel valued, they are more likely to stay (OSEP Summit Retain Panel, 2020).

Incentivizing leadership roles across personnel may require creative allocation of funds. Salary increases help roles remain competitive and increase retention. [Minneapolis Public Schools](#) in Minnesota is an example of a district that financially recognized speech-language pathologists (SLPs) for obtaining of a certificate of clinical competence from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). Prior to the recognition, SLPs were not monetarily incentivized, while classroom teachers were recognized for national certification. For more examples of ways LEAs have found to provide monetary rewards and salary increases for school-based SLPs, refer to ASHA's guide to [Increasing Salaries in Schools](#) (ASHA, n.d.).

### Critical Components for Success (Continued)

- Determine the feasibility of sustaining and/or scaling up teacher leadership structures.
- Develop guidance, resources, and tools.

## Early Childhood

It is difficult to retain early childhood personnel because **salaries are generally low**. Often, personnel who serve younger children (i.e., early interventionists) are paid less than their counterparts (Austin, Edwards, Chavez, & Marcy, 2019.) Additionally, early childhood personnel of color are especially underpaid. This has significant implications for efforts to diversify the early education workforce, maintain quality services, and increase retention. Personnel with adequate training may seek new positions where they can apply their skills, continue to grow, and are acknowledged formally for the leadership roles they undertake. Creative strategies such as the **reallocation of existing funds** may benefit those who accept extra work by **recognizing they are compensated in both title and pay** (OSEP Summit Retain Panel, 2020). School leaders also can incentivize leadership by **funding professional memberships or annual licensing**. Funding may vary across the early education workforce; Head Start, for example, would rely on Federal funds while another childcare center might rely on parent fees (Austin, Edwards, Chavez, & Marcy, 2019).

## Stakeholder Spotlight

- **Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Teams.** While implementation varies, educational settings across the nation are implementing an MTSS framework to proactively and preventatively support students. MTSS implementation leverages a team to examine LEA, school, and student data with the goal of reducing poor academic, social, and behavioral outcomes. This team approach may require additional training in evidence-based practices, validated intervention programs, formal progress monitoring, and data literacy. For personnel who demonstrate knowledge and expertise in MTSS, teams may consider formalizing team leadership roles or offering additional compensation (e.g., stipends or honoraria) for efforts above and beyond contract hours.

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