

## What You Need To Know About:

# Differentiating School Roles and Responsibilities

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### The Bottom Line

Enabling educators to move into differentiated school roles and responsibilities helps **retain** excellent teachers and **leverage their skills**. Leverage may be accomplished through jobs that involve taking on more students or more challenging groups of students, through working with other teachers to improve teaching effectiveness, or through taking on a greater role in school or district decision-making. The concept of leverage suggests that expert teachers playing these roles often accomplish more for less, enabling increased investment in such roles. How much districts should invest in these roles—through a combination of extra compensation, release time, or other perks—should take into account the role’s economic value as well as its impact on student achievement. Roles and responsibilities should align with the district’s Instructional Theory of Action, and school designs (i.e., staffing plans and schedules) must be structured to incorporate and leverage these different roles.

**Definition:** School roles may take a variety of forms, but all capitalize on what Public Impact calls a “reach effect”: the increased percentage of students that excellent teachers reach in the course of their work. Possible models include:<sup>32</sup>

1. Excellent teachers taking on increased class sizes.
2. Excellent teachers specializing in high-priority subjects or instructional tasks that have the greatest impact on student learning.
3. Excellent teachers taking on the highest-priority students.

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4. Time-technology swaps that rely on students’ rotation between personalized digital learning and exposure to an excellent teacher.
5. Excellent teachers assuming instructional leadership roles that allow them to manage a team of other teachers.
6. Excellent teachers taking on the mentorship of novice teachers.
7. Excellent teachers taking on responsibilities that allow them to capitalize on specific content knowledge or expertise that may be non-instructional (e.g., curriculum development).
8. Excellent teachers taking on a greater role in school or district decision-making.

A combination of the above models might be considered to achieve maximum leverage.

### Current Conditions

- Districts across the country have implemented specialized roles for teachers to varying degrees in the form of mentors, department heads, and team leaders. The structure of compensation varies across districts. Often, though, these

opportunities have not been fully integrated into the district's overall career-path approach or strategies for delivering instruction and improving teaching effectiveness. Without integration, some of the challenges that arise include:

- **Lack of diversity of roles.** Contrary to the multiplicity of possibilities suggested above, in most districts, the only career path available to a teacher is the role of supporting other teachers.
- **Lack of authority and accountability.** Districts do not place teachers in positions where they are truly able to influence and be accountable for student learning.
- **Non-selectivity.** New roles are allocated based on self-nomination or seniority, rather than on teaching expertise and real competencies needed to be effective.
- **Lack of sustainability.** Not enough attention is given to how new roles can be economically sustained by reallocating resources as advancing teachers take on roles played by other teachers, specialists, or administrators.
- Examples of innovative initiatives that systematically rely on compensation to attract and retain excellent teachers in school roles, and that have strong evidence of student learning gains, include:
  - ***Teach Plus T3 program*** — This program is focused in schools where teams of highly effective teachers work together at priority schools and comprise at least one quarter of the total faculty. Over 50% of the team works with high-priority students at the school, such as those with special education needs. These teachers take on specialized roles to extend their reach in the school, receiving ongoing

training and expert coaching. Additional school-level factors, such as a successful and experienced principal and timely access to student data, help these teacher teams work effectively. Each T3 teacher's base salary is supplemented by an additional \$6,000 per year in recognition of the additional time and responsibility the role requires, and they receive high recognition as well as professional development.<sup>33</sup>

**Creating opportunities for higher-leverage roles could improve retention, as cross-sector workplace research shows a positive relationship between an employee's ability to advance within a career and personal motivation to improve the quality of his or her work.**

- ***Teacher Advancement Program (TAP)*** — Schools implementing TAP recruit mentor teachers (earning an additional \$5,000 to \$12,000) and master teachers (earning \$10,000 to \$12,000) who support teams of teachers throughout their schools. They take on additional responsibility and authority, work an extended school year, and are held to a higher performance standard.<sup>34</sup>
- ***Rocketship Education*** — This charter school network of seven schools in California has implemented a hybrid-learning model where students spend part of the day learning digitally in labs monitored by paraprofessionals. This frees up teachers' time to work with students exclusively as subject specialists in one-on-one or small-group settings. This

model capitalizes on teachers' focused areas of expertise and reaches more students with a smaller teaching staff. Rocketship consistently offers teachers above-market salaries, enhancing their ability to attract and retain effective teachers.<sup>35</sup>

## What We Know

- Creating opportunities for higher-leverage roles could improve retention, as cross-sector workplace research shows a positive relationship between an employee's ability to advance within a career and personal motivation to improve the quality of his or her work.<sup>36</sup> What's more, the 2006 Towers Perrin Global Workforce Study found that career advancement opportunity is one of the top drivers that attract employees in 15 out of 16 countries surveyed.<sup>37</sup>
  - Research shows that successful teacher teaming is directly linked to higher student achievement: "Students showed higher gains in math achievement when their teachers reported frequent conversations with their peers that centered on math, and when there was a feeling of trust or closeness among teachers... Even low-ability teachers can perform as well as teachers of average ability if they have strong social capital."<sup>38</sup>
  - Teachers who take on roles of specialized expertise in a grade and/or subject may increase their effectiveness. Recent studies have found that elementary educators who teach both English and math are not equally effective in both subjects. If those teachers specialize in the stronger subject, they would substantially increase student achievement.<sup>39</sup>
  - Teachers who act as effective coaches and managers of teacher teams have an important impact on student learning. Research shows that effective coaches facilitate professional collaboration and regularly inform school leaders on teacher and student progress; student outcomes improve through the course of their support to other teachers.<sup>40</sup> Quality classroom observation-based evaluation, made possible through coaching, has also been shown to help mid-career teachers improve their instructional practice and improve student learning gains.<sup>41</sup>
- Accountability is central to the successful implementation of school roles. These roles should be designed to ensure that teachers who fill them meet rigorous selection criteria specific to the role. While these selection criteria will often include performance level as a teacher, in most cases teachers will need additional skill sets, such as leadership competencies, to play the leveraged role. Missouri's Career Ladder Program, the longest standing career pathways program in the country, has taken teacher seniority and strictly observation-based evaluations into account in advancement decisions since 1987. Based on analyses of 10 years of student achievement data, a district's participation in the program has not resulted in meaningful increases in student achievement.<sup>42</sup> In contrast, the inclusion of student achievement data in a teacher's eligibility for Arizona's Career Ladder Program has resulted in significantly higher performance among participating schools.<sup>43</sup>

## Cross-Sector Connections

- Career advancement in the military is rooted in specialized roles, which come with higher compensation. Base salary for a First Lieutenant, for example, is \$38,500. Advancement to Captain, possible during one's third year, increases salary to \$54,100.<sup>44</sup>
- Specialized career pathways in nursing involve applying specific skill sets and taking on additional responsibilities. For example, a Certified

Nurse Anesthetist may earn \$156,032 and a Certified Nurse Midwife may earn \$91,242—both significant increases over a registered nurse’s average annual salary of \$68,610.<sup>45</sup>

**Effective school roles depend on the right person taking on additional responsibilities. Rigorous selection criteria should exist to ensure the best match between the teacher and the nature of the role.**

## Implications for Design

- School roles that emphasize instructional leadership will assist schools in creating the working conditions needed to support teacher teams and novice teachers, and will further extend the influence of excellent educators.<sup>46</sup>
- Districts should design a variety of roles that enable teachers with diverse strengths and interests to contribute.
- Effective school roles depend on the right person taking on additional responsibilities. Rigorous selection criteria should exist to ensure the best match between the teacher and the nature of the role.
- The right amount of funding to direct toward specialized roles and responsibilities is difficult to determine because it may take several forms and vary from role to role. Teachers who take on these types of roles may be compensated with additional pay or through non-monetary means such as reduced class load.
- The total cost of all monetary and non-monetary rewards should be taken into account when determining the fiscal sustainability of the compensation structure. Ideally, new roles are designed in ways that generate enough savings

to pay for their costs (e.g., by reducing the number of instructional specialists needed across a district, redirecting dollars from full-time administrative or coaching positions, or enabling teams to employ paraprofessionals).

- Accountability for improved student outcomes should guide decisions about whether teachers maintain their advanced standing and elevated pay and whether or not to continue funding a particular school role. Rather than removing excellent teachers from accountability for individual student outcomes, roles should be designed to increase their responsibilities in return for added authority, compensation, and non-monetary rewards.
- Roles and responsibilities may be structured in a way that distributes school leadership beyond the principal and the APs, and may allow for the principal to relinquish some responsibilities so as to focus more on others. This could lead to the district refining the strengths or characteristics that it looks for in a principal.

## Essential Readings

*This memo relied heavily on Public Impact’s research on extending the reach of excellent educators:*

Public Impact’s Opportunity Culture: <http://opportunityculture.org/reach>

*Examples of successful implementation of specialized school roles include the following:*

Teach Plus’ T3 program: <http://www.teach-plus.org/page/t3-8.html>

The Teacher Advancement Program: <http://www.tapsystem.org/policyresearch/policyresearch.taf?page=outcomes>

## End Notes *Differentiating School Roles and Responsibilities*

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