Teacher Leadership Means Using Teachers’ Knowledge to Inform Decision-Making

According to Mr. John McCrann, a New York City high school math teacher and opinion blogger for Education Week, “The power of teacher leadership lies in the idea that teachers can recognize a problem in the course of their interactions in the classroom and use this knowledge to impact school or district policy. It is a process that must start in the classroom and then expand outward.”

He adds, “Valuing teacher leadership means valuing teachers. The obvious next step from ‘here’s a group of people who has unique and useful knowledge’ is ‘let’s find ways for them to use this knowledge to help us make our schools better.’ How do we do that? Teacher leadership.”

This national movement has local roots as well. CTA is currently partnering with the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE) and the National Board Resource Center at Stanford University (NBRC) to demonstrate how educator-driven professional development will benefit all schools and all students.

Supported by a three-year grant from like-minded foundations, CTA’s Instructional Leadership Corps (ILC) has grown in its second year to include 280 outstanding practitioners and school administrators from throughout California.

The ILC is a three-year project to build a statewide network of accomplished classroom teachers and other education leaders who provide professional development to assist California public school educators in the implementation of the new California Standards in English Language Arts/English Language Development, Mathematics and Science.

As part of their outreach, a Teachers Teaching Teachers event, centered on Professional Development around the Common Core Instructional Shifts, was held at Cal State Fullerton University on Saturday, September 26th. It was promoted as a day of educator empowerment, networking and working together to build professional capital and attracted teachers from the five local counties; Orange, Los Angeles, San Bernardino, San Diego and Riverside.

One week later, ILC members and other outstanding teachers in Yolo County organized a one-day Yolo Instructional Leadership Conference. This teacher-driven event at Harper Middle School in Davis was attended by hundreds of educators. They were engaged in teacher-led workshops that veered from Next Generation Science Standards to Using Current Events to Integrate Common Core to Five Ways to Shift to Student-Centered Learning.

The all-day Saturday event offered professional development pay to participating educators, as well as college credit through CSU Chico. The response was enthusiastic and validated the belief that teacher-led professional development best meets the needs of today’s educators.
Capturing the Spark: Energizing Teaching and Schools

Palo Alto High School English teacher David Cohen is a dedicated educator. What else would you call someone who takes a year-long leave of absence from their job to visit outstanding teachers in their workplaces all over the state of California? David, who is a member of the IFT South Bay Teacher Think Tank, explains in his own words why he undertook such a mission.

“I want to take readers inside some great classrooms and schools throughout California. Maybe you’ve heard discouraging news, observed some acrimonious debates and political battles about education; it’s easy to become frustrated and disengaged, to feel powerless. But in recent years, through contact with hundreds of teacher leaders all over California, I've emerged optimistic and energized."

David is back in his own classroom this year as he completes his book, Capturing the Spark. He believes the stories he has collected will help change the narrative about public schools.

He writes, “I’ve met inspirational teachers up and down the state – dedicated and creative, insightful and curious, wise and open-minded, always focused on improving their ability to meet the needs of children. I want to bring their great work to the attention of a broad audience, and share ideas about how we can all make a difference in the quality of teaching and learning at some level.”

What makes great teaching possible? What are the obstacles to creativity, innovation, and excellence – and how do teachers and schools overcome the obstacles? What keeps them going? How many ways are there to be a ‘great teacher’? Do we all agree about what we want to see in excellent teaching and high-performing schools?”

Cohen writes that there are “incredible strengths that most of us bring to the profession, ones we’re inclined to apply in a constant effort to improve our craft and help more students have better learning experiences. To the extent that schools are not meeting the needs of all children, I find it troubling that teachers are often looked at as part of the problem rather than as the lynchpin of any reasonable solution.”

David helped establish the Accomplished California Teachers (ACT) leadership network in 2008. Their mission is to amplify teacher voice in educational policy, research, and public forums, while providing members with resources and support to become more effective leaders at every level – from their department or school right on up to state and national initiatives. They have published two policy reports on teaching in California and have organized a variety of events. ACT is an Affiliated Network of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

The CTA Institute for Teaching (IFT) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. IFT supports strength-based teacher driven change in school communities across California. Please contact IFT at 619-683-3990 or at contact@teacherdrivenchange.org