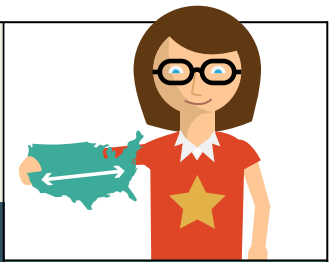


LEADING EDUCATORS

EMPOWERING TEACHER-LEADERS TO EXTEND THEIR REACH BY LEADING TEAMS

AN OPPORTUNITY CULTURE
CASE STUDY



SPRING 2013 VIEW

Reach Models in Use

- ★ Multi-Classroom Leadership

Fact File

- ★ Two-year fellowship program connects highly effective teachers with leadership opportunities in schools
- ★ 106 fellows serve more than 18,000 students in greater New Orleans and Kansas City regions
- ★ Leading Educators' growth plans: To support 390 fellows by 2014; to expand the fellowship to 10 regions by 2016, supporting 720 fellows; and to provide consulting to sites on strategies that leverage teacher-leaders, such as recruitment, selection, and retention, along with evaluation, professional development, and teacher leadership
- ★ Year One results (2011–12): Program leaders report that students taught by teams led by Leading Educators fellows achieved five times more improvement on state standardized tests than their district counterparts in Kansas City, and 12 times more than their counterparts across the districts they serve in New Orleans



SUMMARY

Leading Educators works with schools and districts to maximize the leadership development of highly effective teachers. It aims to bolster the talent pipeline by identifying and training strong potential teacher-leaders and, in turn, increasing student achievement and developing teachers on its fellows' teams.

The organization's leaders believe that retaining high-quality teacher-leaders and expanding their impact will increase student achievement enough to close gaps in high-need schools. Since 2011, Leading Educators has run a two-year fellowship in Kansas City and New Orleans for proven excellent teachers.

To become a fellow, teachers must have taught for at least two years, shown outstanding student achievement results, and demonstrated the core beliefs and mindsets of strong mid-level leaders. Their school district or CMO must commit to placing the fellow in a role in which he or she leads a team of other teachers to meet the fellow's standards of excellence; teaches students; and facilitates a teaching team's collaboration and planning. As a result, Leading Educators is giving excellent teachers the chance to extend their reach through approaches that resemble the Opportunity Culture initiative's **Multi-Classroom Leadership** model.

Leading Educators' fellows are spread out over 65 schools in Kansas City and New Orleans, with the first group of Washington, D.C., fellows joining the program in 2013. Of its current fellows and alumni, 98 percent serve high-needs populations. Fellows participate in a weeklong intensive summer training, followed by workshops and individualized leadership coaching throughout the school year. Fellows also join peer problem-solving groups and visit schools with a record of closing achievement gaps. These activities culminate in yearlong

projects that focus on leading other teachers and raising student achievement, designed and implemented by fellows to meet their schools' needs.

"Highly effective teacher-leaders create better support for both classroom teachers and school leaders," says Chong-Hao Fu, chief program officer at Leading Educators. "In developing their own skills, our teacher-leaders directly impact not only their own students but also the students of every teacher with whom they work. Their work cultivates a school culture based on high expectations for academics and learning behaviors."

How have Leading Educators fellows and their students fared? In 2011–12, the program's first year, students taught by teams led by fellows achieved five times more improvement on state standardized tests than their district peers in Kansas City, and 12 times more than their peers in the New Orleans districts served by fellows. Fellows produce better outcomes immediately while strengthening the pipeline of capable school leaders. While many fellows remain as teachers, more than half have been promoted since starting their fellowships, and 23 percent of fellowship alumni are now principals or assistant principals. Few paid opportunities to advance while remaining in the classroom were available at the time of this case study.

To illustrate how the program equips teacher-leaders to extend their reach beyond one classroom, we take an in-depth look at the experience of one fellow, Anna Lavelly, a fifth-grade teacher and the "looping chair" of a fourth- and fifth-grade team at [Edwardsville Elementary](#) in Edwardsville, KS.

ONE TEACHER'S STORY: LEADING OTHER TEACHERS TO EXTRAORDINARY GAINS

Anna Lavelly, now in her second year as a Leading Educators fellow, became a "looping chair" in 2012–13. Teachers "loop" by staying with a set of students for two or more grade levels, and then returning to the grade from the first year of the cycle and starting again. In her leadership role as looping chair, Lavelly works with a group of 60 to 80 students and two or three other teachers on her team, covering all subjects. She leads all of her team's planning meetings, monthly professional learning community meetings, monthly "learning walks," and, occasionally, all-staff meetings or professional development sessions.

Becoming a Teacher-Leader

Lavelly has been at Edwardsville for five years. "In my mind, I'm still a beginner teacher," she says—though her student results suggest a wealth of experience: 100 percent of her students achieved proficiency on the state exams in reading and math in 2011–12; those students were at 88 percent in 2009–10.

Lavelly began "looping" with a fourth-grade class, moving up with those students to fifth grade. After teaching fifth grade last year, she remained as a fifth-grade teacher this year, working with a new looping team. She has been on a schoolwide leadership team since her second year of teaching, made up of a teacher from each grade, the three looping chairs, a few specialists, and the principal.

In 2011, as her district began a new professional development (PD) initiative, Edwardsville's principal, Aaron Miller, asked Lavelly to lead some of the PD sessions at the school, and she began meeting with the administrative team to discuss staff development. Impressed by Lavelly's work on the PD initiative and her dedication to

raising her students' achievement, Miller gave her a Leading Educators pamphlet when the fellowship moved into the Kansas City region—and she was intrigued.

"I was very interested in how, as a teacher with a small sphere of influence—your team, your teachers—you could *grow* and become more of a visible face and part of the staff," Lavelly says.

According to Lavelly, Miller was "looking for someone showing best practices instructionally in the classroom, always staying connected and up to date on things like using technology, differentiation. [He] was looking for someone not afraid to really rally a group of people together for the best interests of the students, and encourage everyone in this collaborative process. I'm pretty outspoken."

Tara Tamburello, a former Kansas City educator with a decade of teaching experience, serves as Lavelly's Leading Educators coach. She joined Leading Educators to expand her own impact beyond her classroom. In her current position, Tamburello supports nearly 20 fellows, including Lavelly. "Anna came highly recommended by her principal as a rising teacher-leader in her school," Tamburello says. "Originally, she didn't have an official leadership role. But she was carving out her own leadership and sphere of influence."

Leading Educators selected Lavelly, Tamburello says, based on her student achievement results and because she was "starting to step up, reaching out, working with other teachers, looking for things she could do outside the classroom that would affect the school as a whole."

Reaching More Students with Excellent Teaching

As astonishing as Lavelly's 100-percent proficiency results were in her own classroom, she has seen impressive results working with the

team she came to lead—and for many more students than she could teach alone (see “Anna Lavelly: Leading Educators to Excellence”).

How did that happen?

Lavelly says it starts with high expectations—for herself, her team, and her students.

“In my first three years here, I kept hearing the words ‘pass the state assessment.’ With the rest of the school, I set that as my goal. Last year, one of things I started realizing, and bringing back to my team, was that these are really *low* expectations. If you’re setting a goal, that’s what you’re going to get. That truly is what led to our 70-percent grade achieving in the top two categories.”

Lavelly reset her goals from “meets standards” to a higher bar after a Leading Educators school visit to Houston. “After visiting high-performing schools, Anna realized that ‘meets standards’ is not where they set their bar,” Tamburello says. “Meeting standards, while good, is not great, and she wanted her team to be great.”

“I set my expectations so high, but I always think there’s more that can be done,” Lavelly says. “I can sometimes be a very black-and-white teacher. If I think something’s really important, teachers will say 80 percent is good. My goal? 100 percent. If you expect a lot, you get a lot.”

And that led to what she calls her greatest success: a set of classrooms proficient in both math and reading—including students in special education and English language learners.

Lavelly could not have achieved this kind of result by teaching all the students herself all the time. Her secret was motivating her team members and helping them meet this high bar. The key is encouraging them, she says, and building a “we” culture. “If you walked into a team meeting, here’s what you’d see: It’s in my class-

I set my expectations so high, but I always think there’s more that can be done. — Anna Lavelly

room, not a conference room. We sit in a circle or semicircle, to build that collaborative feel.”

“One of Anna’s strengths,” Tamburello says, “is understanding the value of bringing everyone to the table, and validating where they are, before pushing them. As a result, Anna has had a huge impact on the adult culture.”

Last year, Lavelly was the main facilitator of fifth-grade team meetings and the manager of student data, helping the team discuss results from assessments, set goals, and create strategies to meet those goals. For example, she and her team placed students in flexible, leveled groups based on the previous year’s state assessment results, benchmark tests, and formal and informal classroom assessments. The team’s teachers took on different roles and student groupings in math, rotating the leveled groups each quarter. Although teachers taught the same lesson and standard, Lavelly provided lesson plans and support that gave them differentiation options for the students in their groups.

Lavelly also helped the looping team make the best use of their planning sessions every week, adding sessions as needed. She estimates that the team of four spent about six hours each week in



Anna Lavelly Leading Educators to Excellence

- * 93 percent of her looping team’s students were proficient on the 2011–12 state reading exam, up from 80 percent of those students the previous year
- * 99 percent of her looping team’s students were proficient on the 2011–12 state math exam, up from 82 percent of those students the previous year
- * 70 percent of her looping team’s students ranked in the top two achievement categories on the 2011–12 state math exam (“exceeds” and “exemplary”), up from 52 percent of those students the previous year

Now people are saying, “we want *more*, we like this, we’re growing from this.” That’s my greatest success. — Anna Lavelly

such meetings, which she would open with team-building and success stories from the week, before discussing curriculum concerns and the latest student results data.

“We looked at *all* students together as a grade level, not as ‘my students, your students,’” Lavelly says, and helped one another settle on improvement strategies and prioritize the work.

This year, she also enlisted two others on the team to share the data workload.

“Anna brings her team together,” Tamburello says. “They talk collectively about how instruction is going, what decisions they need to make with data.”

Lavelly provides more support at the looping team meetings. For example, she may start with a quick presentation of a new teaching strategy or tool, then lead her team through guided practice. During a recent book study of Doug Lemov’s *Teach Like a Champion*, Lavelly explained the strategies introduced in the book and gave time for her team to practice the skills through role-playing. She ensures follow-up through a check-in with the teachers, an observation of a teacher implementing the strategy, or an “exit ticket” that prompts teachers to respond to what they’ve learned before leaving the meeting.

She also provides informal coaching support to other novice or struggling teachers, who may ask her to observe them and give feedback.

“We did not have a culture of feedback here,” she says bluntly. “If you had your formal evaluation every three years or so, that would be your only feedback. We don’t have an instructional coach. There was no really regular feedback. By my second, third, and fourth years, so many people were saying, ‘I don’t know what I’m doing right or wrong.’”

Lavelly has been attempting to change that culture. For example, she might approach a teacher struggling with guided reading and offer to meet with her to target areas for improvement. “One of the ways I’ve been able to impact staff culture, which has trickled down to students, is giving feedback, allowing teachers to explore strengths and build on them. I always tell people I’m working with, ‘if we don’t give each other feedback and help each other grow, then who is?’ That’s the culture I’m trying to build here.”

By helping other teachers, Lavelly realized, she is extending her reach to more students. “It’s not that I’m not helping students; they may not be *my* students in *my* room—they’re just a different group of students.”

But she found it a struggle in the first year to help teachers respond well to feedback, development, and teacher leadership.

She learned that she needed to gain teachers’ trust, partly by staying humble, as she brought to the school what she learned through her Leading Educators fellowship.

“I stepped into this leadership role in a way that was showing my staff that I do realize I’m still a new teacher, I’m not bringing these things back because I’m telling you what to do. I took the approach of *we*, learning and growing together. That trust was able to be built, and the buy-in and culture strengthened this year.”

As an example, Lavelly offers the “learning walks” that the school formerly did just once a year, which she refined and uses monthly. On a schedule she creates, the teachers in a grade come together during a planning time. During the walks, small groups of teachers will observe a classroom for about 10 minutes, looking for evidence of something Lavelly has advised them to focus on. They then write “two glows and one grow”—praises and a suggestion for improvement—for the observed teacher, building a culture of celebration.

At the beginning, teachers felt “judged and shut their door. Now, people are saying, ‘we want *more*, we like this, we’re growing from this.’ That’s my greatest success.”

And, Tamburello says, because of the strong 2011–12 results achieved by students taught by her team, “Anna’s realizing the impact her leadership can have on student achievement. Her focus is on continuing to close the achievement gap, and she’ll be able to do it at a larger scale through leading others.”

What Leading Educators Provides

The Leading Educators fellowship includes intensive training sessions in summer and monthly ones throughout the school year; peer discussion groups; individual support from coaches who are former educators themselves; and visits to high-performing schools, all aimed at developing teacher-leaders in four areas: core beliefs and mindsets, management of self and others, cultural leadership, and instructional leadership. In Kansas City, the fellows share one lead coach, one full-time coach, and one part-time coach. Each teacher-leader designs a yearlong project for his or her school to significantly raise student achievement and develop other teachers’ ability to do so.

Lavelly has nothing but praise for the program.

“I tell [everyone at] Leading Educators all the time that I believe in the organization *so much*. I truly believe it changed and reinvigorated everything I believe about teaching,” she says. “The impact of Leading Educators on me is huge, huge, huge. They have given

me confidence, tools, and resources. . . . A lot of things they show us—it's not rocket science. But they provide the support."

Tamburello's coaching pushes her to improve, Lavelly says. "I love helping other people grow, but at the same time, I don't want to stop growing myself. Leading Educators helps me to continue doing that."

Tamburello sees that growth. "What the program has helped Anna to do is to become more focused on how she can set goals, plan for investing others in those goals, and lead a team towards accomplishing those goals," she says. "These teacher-leaders did not start their leadership on day one. They've already been on this leadership journey. Leading Educators has hopefully accelerated that growth for them, so that as they continue after Leading Educators, they are more empowered and knowledgeable through their experience."

Lavelly has enjoyed the program even more in its second year, because her school added two fellows. Led by Lavelly and the principal, the new fellows helped more of the staff appreciate their efforts and built a strong trust and culture. "The culture has completely transformed this year. I have a lot more roles and a lot more influence [as a looping chair]."

As the fellowship program expands, Leading Educators is helping schools create an Opportunity Culture for all teachers. By helping districts benefit from the leadership potential of great teacher-leaders like Anna Lavelly for intense, two-year periods, Leading Educators may inspire districts to change roles and build a culture of feedback for all teachers, benefitting staff and students alike.

Retaining Teacher-Leaders Like Anna Lavelly

As much as Lavelly has appreciated her experience and success in the past two years, she struggles with the lack of opportunities beyond the fellowship to continue leading other teachers without leaving the classroom, and the lack of extra pay for her weightier workload and leadership role.

Lavelly finds herself uncertain of what she wants next in her job. "When I first went into education, I was insistent that I'd be a teacher forever. At the time, I didn't even know I'd transform into a leader. I just knew I wanted to come and teach. Over the last couple of years, people have asked me if I'd ever be a coach [or] principal, and I [have enrolled] in a program for a master's in supervision and administration. I did decide that I should pursue this additional degree just to leave the doors open for myself."

But Lavelly firmly declares that managerial and clerical work as an administrator—not working directly with students—holds no appeal. She loves what she does, and just wishes teaching offered the same financial opportunities as school administration.

"It is hard looking at the amount of work and planning I put

in, and comparing that with administration, or another role, and thinking of the compensation and pay difference."

With more pay, coming from sustainable funding and not temporary grants, could she imagine herself staying in her current role? To that, she firmly declares "yes!" That's why paying teacher-leaders more, sustainably, lies at the heart of an Opportunity Culture.

With a career path that would allow her to continue leading other teachers without leaving the classroom, and better pay, "this would be the *ideal* position for me," Lavelly says.

As Leading Educators expands its work to new geographies, a key focus will be on helping schools and districts create sustainable, paid leadership opportunities for its leaders, enabling them to advance in their careers while remaining teachers.

Learn More about Leading Educators

[Leading Educators](#)

[Leading Educators Fact Sheet](#)

[Leading Educators 2012 Annual Report](#)

Learn More about Extending the Reach of Excellent Teachers and Creating an Opportunity Culture

FOR AN OVERVIEW:

VISIT  www.OpportunityCulture.org

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WATCH  [our video](#)

FOR MORE ON THE MODEL designed by Public Impact that is most closely related to what Leading Educators fellows are implementing in schools:

VISIT  [Multi-Classroom Leadership](#)

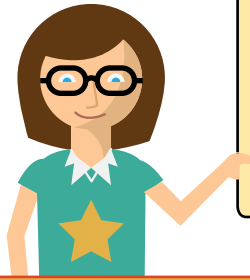
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Does This Example Fulfill the Reach Extension Principles of an Opportunity Culture?



Reach Extension Principles	Anne Lavelly's Role in Edwardsville	
Reach more children successfully with excellent teachers.	✓	Lavelly reaches far more students than a conventional teaching role would allow. She serves as a “looping chair,” leading a team of two to three other teachers to take full responsibility for all 60 to 80 students in a grade level.
Pay excellent teachers more for reaching more children successfully.	✗	Lavelly's role does not come with additional compensation. She reports that the chance to earn more while remaining a teacher would make her more likely to stay in the classroom.
Achieve permanent financial sustainability , keeping post-transition costs within the budgets available from regular per-pupil funding sources.	N/A	If the district paid excellent looping chairs more, it could fund that extra compensation out of existing budgets by using Opportunity Culture models.
Include roles for other educators that enable solid performers both to learn from excellent peers and to contribute to excellent outcomes for children.	✓	Teachers on Lavelly's team take on roles and student groups that enable them to excel. Lavelly helps the team improve by creating lesson plans, providing constant feedback, and engaging in about six hours per week of joint planning and PD with the team.
Identify the adult who is accountable for each student's outcomes , and clarify what people, technology, and other resources (s)he is empowered to choose and manage.	✗	Lavelly feels accountable for the whole pod of students taught by her looping team. The district could formalize this accountability by linking all of a pod's student results to the looping chair's official evaluation.

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