

## UNTAPPED

# TRANSFORMING TEACHER LEADERSHIP TO HELP STUDENTS SUCCEED

For more information, read the full report: *Untapped: Transforming Teacher Leadership to Help Students Succeed*

## What District and Charter Leaders Can Do to Transform Teacher Leadership

Across the education field, there is unusual consensus that strong teacher leaders are key to improving our nation's schools. Unfortunately, clear expectations for what teacher leaders should do, and strategies to prepare them to do it, are few and far between. A recent survey found that while 86 percent of urban school districts have teacher leader roles, only 32 percent offered specialized training for teachers stepping into those roles.<sup>1</sup>

Assigning teachers to leadership roles without quality training does a double disservice: It takes teaching time away from the educators best prepared to accelerate student learning, and then fails to equip them with the skills they need to lead colleagues to similar success.

The neglected state of teacher leaders is regrettable because we know that with the right support, they can immediately boost academic performance in their schools. Data from the first two years of New Leaders' Emerging Leaders Program (ELP)—a program that provides job-embedded training and coaching to teacher leaders—indicate that even while still in training, almost three quarters of participants were able to increase student learning across the classrooms they supervised.

Developing strong and effective teacher leaders who can guide their colleagues to success should be central to any school improvement strategy, but it requires far more planning and support than it currently receives.

### Here are five steps district and charter leaders can take today to unleash the untapped potential of teacher leadership:

- 1. Prioritize building teacher leadership capacity and provide support for principals to achieve this goal.**
  - Provide high-quality professional development and ongoing support for principals to build leadership culture and capacity of their staff.
  - Create opportunities for principals to share best practices for building strong leadership pipelines. For example, convene meetings or establish cohorts.
- 2. Expand pathways to teacher leadership positions.**
  - Work with principals to identify current and future leadership needs at the school and district level, and help them design incremental, job-embedded development opportunities to build relevant skills and expertise among aspiring teacher leaders.
- 3. Work with principals to provide meaningful professional development for teacher leaders.**
  - Provide professional development on new academic standards that includes a focus on teacher collaboration and leadership.
  - Require principals to include opportunities for teacher leaders to practice and receive feedback on specific leadership strategies as part of existing professional development plans.
  - Steer principals towards high-quality training that empowers teacher leaders to model and coach colleagues' instruction.
- 4. Ensure collectively bargained agreements support teacher leadership.**
  - Build awareness of and interest in leadership opportunities among teachers, school staff, and union representatives.
  - Define and secure appropriate flexibility for teachers to assume meaningful leadership responsibilities.
  - Establish and communicate clear expectations for teachers who take on leadership roles.
- 5. Share best practices for leadership training and practice.**
  - Reach out to district and network leaders with similar leadership goals, and share experiences and lessons learned at conferences, in journals, or through virtual communities and platforms.

<sup>1</sup> Council of Great City Schools. (2015, April.) Assistant principals and teacher leaders in America's Great City Schools. Presented at the Wallace Foundation Principal Pipeline Initiative Convening, New York, NY.