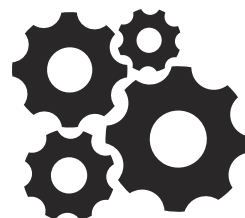# teacher-powered **practices**

How teacher teams collaboratively lead and create student-centered schools.

teacher-powered schools

Table of Contents

We want to share our sincere appreciation for the many schools and educators who graciously offered their time, expertise, and perspectives to this publication. Thank you.

Introduction

What is teacher-powered? We get asked this question a lot. Teacher-powered is our language for educator teams that have autonomy and authority to make final decisions at their school site in areas impacting student success. Teacher-led, professional partnerships, collaborative leadership—these are other similar terms. To better understand teacher-powered, we look at these three areas:

1. The team's autonomy arrangement[1];
2. Which of the 15 areas of autonomy[2] the team uses; and
3. The practices teams use to implement their autonomies—which is the focus of this publication.

There is no one way to do or be teacher-powered. We know of approximately 150 teacher-powered schools[3] around the country and estimate that there are upward of 200 who use this type of governance model. There are also over 75 teacher-powered teams in various stages of development or working on converting their existing school to teacher-powered. Each of these teams does teacher-powered *differently* because each team has the authority to create unique student-centered learning environments for their students. This isn't a model that can be replicated; rather, it has guiding principles that help teams design leadership structures that best meet the needs of their staff and their students.

1   https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/arrangements
2   https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/autonomies
3   https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory

15 Areas of Teacher Autonomy

1. Selecting colleagues
2. Transferring and/or terminating colleagues
3. Evaluating colleagues
4. Setting staff pattern (including size of staff; allocation of personnel among teaching and other positions)
5. Selecting leaders
6. Determining budget
7. Determining compensation, including leaders
8. Determining learning program and learning materials (including teaching methods, curriculum, and levels of technology)
9. Setting the schedule (of classes; of school hours; length of school year)
10. Setting school-level policies (including disciplinary protocol, homework, etc.)
11. Determining tenure policy (if any)
12. Determining professional development
13. Determining whether to take, when to take, and how much to count district/EMO/authorizer assessments
14. Assessing school performance according to multiple measures (not only a mean proficiency score)
15. Determining work hours

We've previously written extensively and created resources about the guiding principles (*Trusting Teachers With School Success*[4], Discussion Starters, Steps Guide, etc.). *Trusting Teachers* illustrates how teacher-powered teams emulate high-performing organizations. Not only do these teacher-powered teams create high-performing structures, they also have a high-performing mindset which contributes to creating successful schools for students and teachers. Dr. Michael Wriston, an expert on leadership and high-performing teams, writes, "High performing culture is a 'mind-set'—with accompanying and reinforcing habits, practices and routines—about how to optimally engage one's human resources in order to optimize long-term team/organizational performance".[5] **This guide focuses on *how* innovative teachers are radically changing the ways schools are designed and run. The *how* here are the common practices, structures, and processes teacher-powered teams design and use daily.**

Each team must decide for themselves how to implement the teacher-powered principles in a way that works best for their students and their staff. This will look different at every site and will change and evolve over the years as the staff come and go, as students and communities change, and as the team improves their leadership skills. Our purpose here is to identify these common practices, ground them in the current collaborative leadership literature, illustrate them with examples from teacher-powered schools, and provide a framework for relevant resources and professional development for teacher-powered teams for the next few years.

Of course the biggest question around teacher-powered schools is "How does this type of governance model impact student learning, and does it improve student achievement?" While more research needs to be done—and is currently being done—on the nuances of this question, current research is a resounding yes. Collaborative leadership researcher Peter DeWitt writes, "The reason that collective efficacy has become such an important focus for school leaders and teachers is simple. It can have a marked positive impact on student learning. It's important to understand, however, that collective efficacy doesn't just happen, especially in schools that are beset by low morale and top-down mandates. It requires a great deal of trust, which must be built over time, and an intentional effort by educators to buck the status quo."[6] Teacher-powered governance *is* collective efficacy in action.

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4   Farris-Berg, Kim and Ed Dirkswager, with Amy Junge. 2012. *Trusting Teachers With School Success*. Jossey-Bass.
5   Wriston, Michael J. 2007. "Creating a High-Performance Culture." Organization Development Journal, Spring.
6   DeWitt, Peter. 2019. "High Powered Teams." ACSD online Vol. 76, pgs. 31-35. http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/jul19/vol76/num09/How-Collective-Teacher-Efficacy-Develops.aspx

Professor Richard Ingersoll, a leading education researcher at the University of Pennsylvania, studied data from almost one million teachers and 25,000 schools. His report, *School Leadership, Teachers' Roles in Decisionmaking, and Student Achievement*, showed that when teachers have leadership roles not only in instruction but other school policy areas like discipline, data showed more than 20% higher test results in ELA and math for students (Ingersoll, Sirinides, Dougherty, 2017).[7] Similarly, John Shindler's school climate research also echoes these results. Described in *Exploring the School Climate--Student Achievement Connection: Making Sense of Why the First Precedes the Second*, schools that had collaborative and empowering environments for teachers had higher student achievement rates than those that were collegial or, worse, competitive.[8]

About This Guide

This guide is for educators working in teacher-powered schools or actively moving their teams toward teacher-powered governance—*and* for researchers and other supporters looking to better understand how teacher-powered schools work.

This guide identifies nine common practices used at teacher-powered schools, describes them in detail, lists different ways we have observed these done at school sites, and includes case studies from teacher-powered teams who describe what the practice looks like at their own site. You will also find a survey for your team to use to evaluate your own practices in these areas and to prioritize practices your team would like to improve on. Finally, we share helpful resources, partner organizations, and opportunities for growth in these areas.

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7   Ingersoll, Richard, et al. 2017. "School Leadership, Teachers' Roles in Decisionmaking, and Student Achievement."

8   Jones, Albert and John Shindler. *Exploring the School Climate -- Student Achievement Connection: Making Sense of Why the First Precedes the Second*, http://web.calstatela.edu/centers/schoolclimate/assessment/#system_comparison

Teacher-Powered Practices

As we work to better understand what it means to be teacher-powered it is helpful to describe what we observe in teacher-powered schools. These nine practices are built on the research and identified practices in *Trusting Teachers With School Success: What Happens When Teachers Call the Shots*[9], expanded on by our team of Teacher-Powered Ambassadors based off of their own extensive leadership work at their school sites, and our interviews and site visits with over 120 teacher-powered schools over the last 10 years. These practices are not final or static, they will continue to evolve as teams create new and innovative ways to lead their schools.

1. Keep Students at the Center of Decision-Making

2. Meaningfully Involve Families and Communities

3. Honor Student Voice and Choice

4. Cultivate a Collaborative Culture

5. Embrace Transparency in Decision-Making

6. Create Shared Leadership Structures

7. Reimagine and Rotate Leadership Positions

8. Engage in Peer Observation

9. Take On a Learner Mindset

9   https://www.teacherpowered.org/trustingteachers/contents

1. Keep Students at the Center of Decision-Making

Almost universally, teachers go into the profession because they want to make a difference in students' lives. Unfortunately, one of the driving factors in why so many teachers leave is because they are not treated as professionals or valued for their experience and knowledge.[10] Good teachers want to do what is best for their students; their intention is to educate students and equip them to move on to the next grade and to life better prepared academically, socially, and emotionally. Educators are invested in their craft, and a huge source of frustration comes when the system, structures, or policies prevent them from being able to make the best decisions for their students.

Teacher-powered structures flip this traditional hierarchy and put teachers, those working most closely with students, in charge of decisions impacting student success. At each school we have interviewed, visited, and talked with this is a consistent theme. **Teams consistently keep their shared purpose in mind and focus on what is best for their students and community.** This impacts how teams implement the autonomies they have secured.

Keeping students at the center of decision-making is best practice for all adults in any school building, but this is not always a common practice in reality. As we work today to create equitable student-centered learning environments, teacher-powered teams lead the way by modeling the power of consistently putting students first and having structures and practices that allow them to do this. Alan Blankstein and Pedro Noguera write in *Excellence through Equity,* "When there is a *mutual accountability* and a shared commitment to the common goal of meeting the needs of all students among all stakeholders, schools can begin to realize the goal of excellence through equity."[11]

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10   Ingersoll, Richard. 2007. "Short on Power, Long on Responsibility". 65.
11   Blankstein, Alan and Pedro Noguera. 2016. *Excellence Through Equity*. ASCD.

THE HOW: In practice, what does this look like?

Each community is unique. Even schools that are close geographically, that may even share the same campus, have student communities with different needs. What works best for one school might not be the best choice for another. Teacher-powered teams have an intentional practice of grounding each decision, big or small, in their co-created and identified shared purpose. For some teams that means reading their shared purpose before all staff meetings, for others it means assigning one person on staff to intentionally remind people about their shared purpose before big decisions. **When faced with hard decisions, challenging situations, and controversial options, these teams consistently reframe the question and the conversation back to what is best for the students at our school.** Whatever way teams do this, they take the words off the page and put students at the center of all of their decisions.

Below are examples of what this looks like across multiple autonomy areas.

- Teams may decide to have a late start because research shows teenagers need more sleep.
- Teams may choose to have a minimum days two days per week to allow students to have after-school internships and teachers to have collaboration time.
- Teams may decide to offer a self-directed, project-based learning program and allow students to earn credits for classes outside of their district's scope and sequence.
- Teams may decide to use technology to allow students to move at their own individual pace.
- Teams may offer credit outside of traditional classes, for example PE credit when students track their steps, miles, and heart rate walking or riding bikes to school.
- Teams may make budget choices that makes the most sense for all students instead of splitting money equally among departments, for example funding science equipment one year and then another year focusing on new computers.

SCHOOL STORIES

Here you will find examples of this practice from three teacher-powered teams. Remember that each school uses this practice differently depending on what works best for their team and their students.

[Social Justice Humanitas Academy](#)[12], Los Angeles, CA
By principal and founding teacher Jeff Austin

The most in-depth conversation about our shared purpose comes when we review the Elect-to-Work Agreement (EWA) every year, which is part of our Pilot School program. While there is a subcommittee of our Governing Council who actually carries out the process, every teacher has input. Teachers have the opportunity to share electronically their feedback about each section of the EWA and are encouraged to attend the Governing Council meetings where discussions are held. With the EWA people are literally and figuratively signing onto the vision and mission, so we ask that each teacher considers that in their decision to sign. The challenge is that new teachers are not present for that part of the process at first, so we are essentially asking them to sign onto the shared purpose without having had input. We are required to have the EWA approved long before hiring for the next year so there is not much we can do about that. To account for this, we make the explanation of our vision a big part of the interview process and are starting to do more to work regularly with new teachers to support their development within the shared purpose.

There are other times in the year when we see the need to build morale by revisiting the shared purpose. We might have a staff Council, or have an outside facilitator lead us in team building, or even set aside time to work with individual students. People see that we are always thinking about the vision and mission when making quick decisions.

[Unlocking Children's Potential Charter Schools](#)[13] (UCP),
Orlando, FL
By director Anna O'Connor-Morin

UCP of Central Florida has been a non-profit agency for more than 60 years. UCP Charter Schools is one facet of the agency's work and has developed into a consortium of charter schools across three central Florida school districts. Charter schools began almost two decades ago in Florida, as an opportunity to create schools to serve students in unique ways with specific focus that would stimulate the educational needs of all types of students. UCP recognized the need to develop inclusive schools for students to maximize their learning potential with high expectations at the very beginning of the charter school movement. UCP Charter Schools have been built with a focus in art integration, technology integration, and project-based learning.

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12   https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/social-justice-humanitas-academy
13   https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/ucp-bailes-school

Students at any one of our seven campuses (PK-12) are given opportunities to learn and grow with a customized approach that meets a student where they are and scaffolds their instructional needs with individualized attention and focus. Students who need to go beyond the basics of a grade-level expectation can move deeper; students who need intervention supports will receive them within the classroom with their peers.

The faculty, staff, and team at UCP CS exceed staffing instructional support ratios in classrooms and with training that goes above and beyond a traditional school setting. More than structure and skills, the UCP CS team members have a passion for teaching and learning that surpasses the expectations in our education climate today. Students in our schools want to come to school because learning is fun, and the atmosphere is "what great things can we accomplish today", every day. In addition to passion, the culture in our schools is truly attached to a philosophical belief that students can and will achieve great things when given great opportunities.

There are legal requirements around the state and nation regarding inclusion and students with disabilities, however it is truly the belief that students can and will achieve in inclusive settings that sets our school system apart from others. It's not those "kids over there", it's not "that one classroom on the opposite side of the building". It's the mission and vision to customize and maximize learning potential for every student. Students who are gifted and talented sit alongside students with significant support needs. Students who are neurotypical sit next to students with intervention instructional needs. All of our students make learning gains each year that are celebrated, but more importantly all of our students learn that one day they can work with peers regardless of race, religion, disability or non-disabled status. The teaching and learning process is focused on the whole student, not the exceptionality that any one student may be facing. UCP CS works with the data-driven instructional components in similar ways to all schools in America, however, the analysis of the data and ability to move students into smaller instructional groups is part of the intentional design to maximize learning opportunities every day, for every student.

The community-based experience for our families and stakeholders is unique in central Florida as our schools are very small in comparison to traditional schools. The access and daily interactions that are created to support the learning environment for all of our students creates a superior education option in central Florida. Our consortium of schools works tirelessly to raise not only the achievement bar for our students academically, but also socially through living the practice of inclusive education.

Wildlands School[14], Fall Creek, WI
By advisor Liz Seubert

The vision to create Wildlands School included the opportunity to build a school experience from the ground up, and the ability to make decisions collectively as a teacher team. Wildlands staff members were given the opportunity to be self-directed and autonomous with the budget, administrative services, staffing selection, curriculum, school schedule, and support services. Our rationale for these autonomies has always been focused on student and community needs. Our staff was trusted to build a new and different school culture. This was the catalyst for creating a school where students were at the center of all aspects.

The focus on leadership, team building, and a culture of community is by design—our design. This not only applies to our students, but also our staff. We model innovation, collaboration, learning from failure, and being held accountable daily. We have ownership. We build authentic relationships, trust each other, and remember the reason why we started this school in the first place: our students.

Empowering teachers and students to become self-directed learners is a challenge best met by creating an authentic learning culture instead of just a teaching culture. At Wildlands we believe students are empowered when shown that learning can happen anywhere and at anytime. We take small and large-scale trips together, make community service a central value, purchase supplies for student projects whenever necessary, provide lots of local adventure-based days, and create an environment where students are challenged and need to work together in and out of the classroom. This model of learning is possible because our staff has the autonomy to set our schedule, allocate funds for these experiences in our budget, and determine curriculum goals. We also work together to create authentic assessments for our students and each other. We established a trusted, collective group that is invested in providing opportunities for teachers and students to be heard, be involved, be connected, find relevance, and play an important role in our school.

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14 https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/wildlands-school

2. Meaningfully Involve Families and Communities

Teacher-powered teams actively seek out and engage families and community members in designing and leading the school. Many teacher-powered schools are also community schools[15] precisely because community schools embrace collaborative leadership as part of their model and are committed to serving the whole child. A 2017 report from the Institute for Education Leadership states, "Community schools are the kind of public schools that families want and children deserve… Where students have a voice in what their school looks like; where families are respected and engaged; where neighbors gather; where the wisdom and assets of the community are respected; and where students, families, neighbors, and community partners work with school staff to shape the school's priorities."[16]

Meaningfully involving students, families, and communities goes beyond asking for their opinions. **It means intentionally involving them in the design process, actively encouraging families and community organizations to be on campus and involved in student activities, and valuing families as experts in their larger communities.** Researchers Eric Toshalis and Michael Nakkula describe how this practice often goes against the status quo: "Accordingly, being student centered in teaching and using student voice to direct at least some of the activity in schools may require educators, administrators, and policymakers to advocate for a reform agenda that challenges current standardizing practices. In doing so, it is crucial that educational resources be allocated in ways that maximize impact, especially when time and money are at a premium."[17] Teacher-powered teams are willing to take on these challenges in order to give all stakeholders more meaningful roles at their schools.

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15   http://www.communityschools.org/default.aspx
16   Community Schools: A Whole Child Framework for School Improvement, 2017. Institute for Educational Leadership.
17   Toshalis, Eric and Michael Nakkula. 2012. "Motivation, Engagement, and Student Voice." Jobs for the Future.

THE HOW: In practice, what does this look like?

This practice is embedded both in the structures of teacher-powered schools and in their cultures. On paper it looks like opportunities for families and community organizations to serve on committees and teams with students and staff. It may mean regularly scheduled activities during non-school hours where the physical building is used for adult education, community trainings, or social services. It can also look like mentors for students and community leaders co-leading projects with teachers. Teacher-powered teams also find ways to engage parents who work long or non-traditional hours, opening school on the weekend for conferences, and offering phone or video conferencing options.

Beyond formal ways for students, families, and communities to be involved, teacher-powered teams create welcoming environments where everyone is treated as a valuable member of the larger school community. It is the big things and the little things that make a difference. Teacher-powered collaborative cultures extend beyond the educators and include collaboration with all stakeholders in order to best serve all students.

Below are examples of what this looks like across multiple autonomy areas.
- Teams may devote time and funds for home visits, encouraging parent participation in some projects, and internships allowing students to gain credit while working to better their own communities.
- Teams may decide to adopt a year-round schedule or adjust daily start and end times to better meet the needs of the students and community.
- Teams may advance a bilingual and bicultural program that is different from the district's standard language immersion.
- Teams may decide to use a community schools model to meet the needs of the whole community, including offering medical and dental services, opening their campuses after school hours for activities and adult education, and providing social services connections.

SCHOOL STORIES

Here you will find examples of this practice from two teacher-powered teams. Remember that each school uses this practice differently depending on what works best for their team and their students.

[Academia de Lenguaje y Bellas Artes](#)[18] (ALBA), Milwaukee, WI
By co-founder and co-leader Brenda Martinez

Sixteen years ago when we were getting ready to open the doors to our school, we met with our newly established parent group. They were our founders, charter holders, PTO, Governing Board, and partners in this new journey to improve education for bilingual students on Milwaukee's south side. At this meeting we went through a laundry list of topics with uniforms being a pivotal moment in the balancing of the powers of the school.

As educators creating a school for students to experience and express themselves through the arts, we believed uniforms were the embodiment of conformity the antithesis of creativity. The parents on the other hand believed that uniforms created pride in the school and maintained a cultural aspect from their education in Latin American countries. Setting aside our beliefs about uniforms stifling self expression, we came to consensus with parents and set a follow up date for a uniform fashion show to choose colors and patterns.

The first location for ALBA school was temporary. For one of the potential future locations, three of the staff members met with the architects and facility planners to choose components for a new school building. As the time drew near to discuss the actual move to the new building, a wrench was thrown into the plan—which required we switch from a K-5 school to K-8. During the critical discussions about moving and increasing grade levels, one founding parent's voice rang out above the others saying, "Why are we moving for new chairs and desks if it means we have to change everything about our school?" Once the parents in the whole school meeting heard the parent say that, there was an overwhelming vote to remain in the first location until the district could find somewhere else for us to go. As staff we give parents the opportunities to express their opinions and make deciding votes on policy and, in this case, location. In Spanish this is known as *voz y voto*.

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18   https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/academia-de-lenguaje-y-bellas-artes-alba

[Math and Science Leadership Academy](https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/mathematics-and-science-leadership-academy)[19] (MSLA), Denver, CO
By co-lead teacher Blaire Ritchie

At the Math and Science Leadership Academy we believe it is incredibly important to include our stakeholders in decision-making processes by regularly soliciting authentic feedback. We have a number of teams and committees with student, parent, and family representatives—as many schools do. For MSLA, I think the most important aspect of engaging families is truly *listening* to feedback and *acting* on it in a timely manner. Demonstrating to stakeholders that their voices matter even in the most minor decisions builds trust and buy-in to engage their voices in more major decisions. For example, when we listen to and act on feedback for minor decisions like food and decorations details for a family night, we build rapport to engage in more challenging decisions like budget cuts or programming decisions. We work to not only build initial trust, but also maintain this trust by consistently listening to and acting on the feedback we receive.

Our parents are involved in our Collaborative School Committee (CSC). We choose our CSC by nomination (self or other) and a voting process open to all MSLA parents. This committee is comprised of the two lead teachers, one non-lead teacher, three parents, and one community member. The CSC is annually tasked with taking our enrollment projections and budget allocation and determining how those dollars are spent. Specifically, they determine programming for the number of ELA-E sections (homerooms taught primarily in English), ELA-S sections (homerooms taught primarily in Spanish), special offerings, and math and literacy intervention FTE. The team gathers input from MSLA teachers and staff, but the decision is made by the CSC. This often includes reducing and/or adding positions, based on needs. Because we are such a small school, our offerings do change from year to year, which calls for a strong CSC for these decisions.

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19   https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/mathematics-and-science-leadership-academy

3. Honor Student Voice and Choice

As more and more programs have moved toward personalized learning, there has been a positive shift to include students in designing their own education. Teacher-powered teams have been doing this for decades because they understand the benefits of meaningfully including student voice and giving students choices in their learning. These teams actively hold up student voice and choice in designing learning and making school decisions.

In their work on student motivation and engagement, Eric Toshalis and Michael Nakkula write, "To learn something deeply, students need to internalize it and make it their own. To be able to use that learning and influence issues that matter to them, students need to participate substantively: They need to practice leading in contexts that provide autonomy, agency, and the personalized attention of caring adults. Therefore, student voice activities revolve around the development and application of individual students' skills, ideas, and connections to others, which make the learning inspired in such programs profoundly student centered."[20]

The type of learning Toshalis and Nakkula describe occurs intentionally, deeply, and regularly in teacher-powered schools. **Many teacher-powered educators start teacher-powered schools because they want to create these type of student-centered learning environments for their students and they are unable to at their current school.** Governance models that give teachers more authority and autonomy (pilot programs, innovation zones, charters, etc.) attract innovative and entrepreneurial educators looking to meet their students' needs in unconventional ways. Student voice and choice is a good example of something once considered highly innovative that has found its way into more mainstream programs.

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20   Toshalis, Eric and Michael Nakkula. 2012. "Motivation, Engagement, and Student Voice". Jobs for the Future.

THE HOW: In practice, what does this look like?

At the middle and high school levels this practice can look like self-directed, project-based learning where students research and design their own projects based on what credits or standards they need to meet. Some schools use a modified project-based curriculum where students do this for part of the year or only in certain subjects. Student voice and choice extends beyond learning programs to other areas such as school policies where students help set *and* enforce community norms. Many teacher-powered teams have flexible seating arrangements in classrooms or provide students their own individual work spaces in a larger central area where students plan their day, checking in with their advisor to make sure they are making progress.

In elementary school, student voice and choice is still a consistent teacher-powered practice, in age-appropriate ways. Many teams allow students freedom of movement, choice in ways to show content mastery, and avenues for students to express their opinions on everything from school activities to their experiences with their teachers. Student-led conferences and community presentations are common practices at all grades, giving students the opportunity to own their learning and be able to describe it to an audience.

Below are examples of what this looks like across multiple autonomy areas.

- Teams may include students in a branch of school governance, such as assembly, where students create, debate, and pass school proposals that are then taken to the teacher team for approval.
- Teams may have students contribute to the teacher evaluation process, collecting their experiences as part of 360 degree evaluation.
- Teams may include students on the hiring committee, encouraging them to be part of the design process as well as the interview, observation, and final decision.
- Teams may allow students freedom of movement, including flexible seating arrangements, open access to restrooms, water bottles, and quiet spaces.
- Teams may choose project-based learning programs and units, allowing students to design learning in areas they are passionate about.

SCHOOL STORIES

Here you will find examples of this practice from three teacher-powered teams. Remember that each school uses this practice differently depending on what works best for their team and their students.

Boston Day and Evening Academy[21] (BDEA), Boston, MA
By teacher Jennie Hallisey

BDEA has a motto: "Students First". Whenever we make decisions regarding specific systems, or individual student needs, it is always with the student's best interests in mind. However, nothing demonstrates these two words more prominently than how we actually include those same students in our decision-making, from the day-to-day, to the overall function of the systems that make the school tick.

Student Voice is a voluntary group of students who meet regularly and is BDEA's version of student council. This group meets once a week and is advised by two to three staff members, including our Head of School. These meetings are open to everyone, with students invited to talk about "issues" together and, if necessary, the group will make recommendations that could bring about positive changes within school. Policies such as dress code and where to take the school trip at the end of the year are just a few examples of what *Student Voice* does.

In our curriculum—in a Humanities course called "Law and Ethics"—students learn about processes and systems by which our society makes changes. For the final course project, students select a policy or issue within our school community that needs examination. Students study the history of this policy, research other examples of how the topic is dealt with outside our school, and makes recommendations for change. Such issues that have had an impact on our school include an improvement in our school lunches, student opinions on the school's response to chronic poor attendance, and how to respond to students who attend school under the influence.

Another significant example of how BDEA includes our student voice and choice is in our hiring process. When we hire new members of our staff, from teachers, to administrators, or support staff, we always have a student panel participate in the final round of interviews. In the first round of interviews, it is a committee of staff members that select the best candidates for the position, and who are "worthy" to meet our students. It's a special conversation when we discuss the candidates with students because it not only demonstrates our trust in the students but it also reveals how much these students care about who is working in their school. This process is a true demonstration of student ownership in their education.

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21   https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/boston-day-and-evening-academy

[Cornerstone Academy for Social Action Middle School](https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/cornerstone-academy-social-action-middle-school)[22] (CASA), New York, NY
By teacher Fran Rossillo

At CASA students are at the center of everything we do. This is manifested in the family atmosphere that permeates the halls and classrooms. Students know that they are welcome and that we are a family. Our staff get to know our students and their families and become familiar with any difficulties or dynamics that need to be addressed. When constructing classes we consider academic ability, social dynamics, and learning styles and try to place students with peers and teachers that are compatible.

Students are given choice in selecting electives that interest them. These electives are led by teachers and staff who are assigned based on their expressed interest in teaching or facilitating the course. Some examples include coding, hip hop, scrapbooking and art exploration. After-school activities are also based on student interest and input. All students have "Advisory" built into their schedules. Advisory is led by teachers and staff who are given the freedom to run the advisory as works best for their group. No two advisory classes look alike. Some become talking circles, some focus on conflict resolution and social dynamics, others focus on academic support. Many encompass more than one model in order to address students' needs and choice.

A distinctive feature of CASA is "Community Circle" where we come together to celebrate and support one another. There are presentations from students which might include sharing written work or showcasing their dancing and acting ability. Community Circle concludes with public apologies and shout-outs. Students and staff have the opportunity to recognize others for overcoming a difficulty, making improvements, and meeting personal milestones. Students are encouraged to reflect upon their performance and behavior and make apologies where appropriate. This allows students to take ownership of their conduct make a commitment to improve with the support of the community. At CASA we are a family. The heart of any family is the children. At CASA our students know that. They feel that. We live it every day.

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22   https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/cornerstone-academy-social-action-middle-school

Escuela Verde[23] (EV), Milwaukee, WI
By advisor Zaynab Baalbaki

Escuela Verde is a public charter high school located in Milwaukee, WI. Our school values are social justice, peace, and ecology. Escuela Verde is not only a school that utilizes all 15 forms of teacher-powered autonomies, but also can be defined as a student-powered school. Student voice is central to the operations of the school. Students have many opportunities to direct their individual experiences at EV, from choosing their own advisor for the year to more foundational choices like restorative justice.

Students have autonomy and power at EV in many forms, three ways students get to practice and utilize their power at school is through projects/workshops, town halls and through restorative justice.

Students who enroll at EV are deciding to integrate into a different model of education. Students take a course to help them with this transition, Transitional Seminar. It is through this seminar that students learn about the project process and project-based learning which is the instructional foundation of EV. Students earn credit by creating projects that they are interested in, they are captains of their educational ship and can steer it in any direction. Essentially, each student is graduating with a curriculum that is unique and meaningful to them. Similarly, students sign up for workshops that advisors lead, they are able to decide which ones they want to attend. This is based on what they need credit in since the students always have access to their credit. They are knowledgeable about what credit they still need. Furthermore, once a student is confident in their transition into EV and comfortable leading, they are welcomed to lead a workshop for their peers. Seniors will often do this as part of their senior thesis since each student is required to have three action items and many opt to teach their peers.

Another example of student-powered democracy at EV is though townhalls. Townhall is a time for staff and students to gather and talk about the highlights of the school. Additionally, students are welcome to present issues to the student body and propose solutions. Once the townhall is over the students receive a survey to vote on the solution they would like to see implemented.

Lastly, students are integral to climate building at school through our restorative justice practice. Students are involved in Circle Keepers which is a group of students who facilitate circles for their peers. The Circle Keepers are present for issues between students and also for support circles when a student has trouble completing work. The Circle Keepers serve as liaisons to the student body and staff. Escuela Verde has utilized the circle process in their advisory times having weekly circles in efforts to normalize circle practices and have a school-wide culture shift regarding circle practices.

All these are examples of how student-powered spaces are essential to the daily expectations at Escuela Verde. It is through the student-powered initiatives that makes it easier to be a teacher-powered school.

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23   https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/escuela-verde

4. Cultivate a Collaborative Culture

Teacher-powered teams go above and beyond to create an honest, collaborative culture of ownership and teamwork. "Collaboration among educators is critical, not just because working with other teachers is a nice thing to do and it makes school a more pleasant place to be. In fact, it turns out that high-performing schools—similar to high-performing businesses— organize people to take advantage of each other's knowledge and skills and create a set of common, coherent practices so that the whole is far greater than the sum of the parts."[24] These teams prioritize collaboration, learn collaborative skills, practice and refine these skills, and address the inevitable tensions that arise when working with other humans.

Investing in these collaborative practices not only creates better working conditions for teachers, but models this skill to students and leads to better learning environments for students. **These teachers use the collaborative practices they utilize with their colleagues and apply them in their classrooms.** This creates a positive cycle of building on colleagues' ideas, try out new teaching methods and lessons, and encouraging students to do the same. "Employees in high-performance organizations responded favorably to...having an open, trusting, and collaborative environment, which lends itself to the ability to be innovative...feeling that their input and point of view are valued, and they are encouraged to come up with new and better ways of doing things. The culture in high-performance organizations fosters a certain level of risk-taking...There seems to be an understanding that innovative ideas can spring from all levels of the organization and that having a mix of employees with different styles and strengths is a breeding ground for developing innovative products."[25] Modeling collaborative culture and practices teaches students valuable 21st century skills to take on to college and careers.

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24   Darling-Hammond, Linda. 2017. *Empowered Educators*. Jossey-Bass.
25   Joseph, Claire. Fall 2008. "High-Performance Norms: What Distinguishes the Best from the Rest?"

THE HOW: In practice what does this look like?

Collaboration can look and sound differently depending on the group. It often means intentionally planning time…time to discuss, time to design, time to try new things. Time is a valuable resource, and is often in short supply. Collaborative teams know that if they don't create time and space for collaboration it won't happen authentically.

It also means that teams create space, both physical and mental space for their colleagues to gather, debrief, and plan. Some have actual collaboration rooms, some plan retreat time on or even better off campus, others make the best of their limited space and time and carve out extra minutes in weekly meetings for collaboration time. Teams also use protocols that help them work through conflicts such as COIN conversations or create their own process like Avalon's Communication and Mediation flow chart. Beyond these scheduled opportunities, teacher-powered teams engage in informal collaboration throughout the day. Co-teaching, leading projects together, debriefing over lunch or coffee. All of this contributes to the overall collaborative culture.

Below are examples of what this looks like across multiple autonomy areas.

- Teams may design structures that require collaboration across subject areas and grade levels.
- Teams may co-teach regularly, co-lead projects, or partner with a colleague when leading student activities.
- Teams may develop processes that value collaboration and diverse experiences when designing school elements and implementing programs.
- Teams may designate time and funds for regular retreat time off campus and over multiple days to engage in team building, trust, and shared experiences.
- Teams may use restorative justice practices for staff conflict, restoring trust and community norms to their team.

SCHOOL STORIES

Here you will find examples of this practice from three teacher-powered teams. Remember that each school uses this practice differently depending on what works best for their team and their students.

[School for Examining Essential Questions of Sustainability](26) (SEEQS), Honolulu, HI
By founder and school leader Buffy Cushman-Patz

A specific practice that works really well for us at SEEQS is to have a running, collaborative, digital agenda for all of our faculty meetings and PD to help facilitate our live, face to face meeting. Our norm is to sit in a circle when we meet. We all have our computers with us and opened up to the shared digital (Google) document that has the minute-by-minute agenda planned out, with hyperlinks that everyone can access. It's a live document that everyone can contribute to (ahead of time or during the meeting) and it also serves as an archive of our discussion topics, major points raised, relevant related documents, etc.

Sometimes folks end up using the comment feature to have a side conversation that can be followed up on later. Each meeting starts with a greeting and sharing (morning meeting style, like we do with students in advisory), sometimes an activity, before we get into the meat of the meeting. We also review our co-created faculty norms before each meeting, and we use a "community ball" as our talking piece as we move through the agenda. Each meeting ends with "housekeeping" which is actually done silently because everyone records their announcements in the shared documents and we just read them to ourselves (because it's faster), and then recording plus/deltas on the meeting in our live document. There's also a section to include suggestions for future meeting topics.

[Another Course to College](27) (ACC), Boston, MA
By founding teacher Robert Comeau

Another Course to College (ACC) is a Boston pilot school, a structure that gives us union protections along with a range of autonomies from district control. Those autonomies are spelled out in our Election to Work Agreement (EWA), and upon our formation, teachers and administration forged a document that balanced autonomy with accountability. I have taught English to seniors at ACC for 20 years, and I was there when we transformed from a two-year program to a four-year pilot high school. Thanks to our current leadership, we have strong collaborations between teachers, our administrator and the district; our own building in Hyde Park; more dialogue across disciplines and grade levels; and emerging work on becoming an anti-racist institution.

26   https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/seeqs
27   https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/another-course-college

At our foundation, our EWA sought to blend autonomy and accountability. Over time, we've worked to build a culture of collaboration and a work ethic for going above and beyond. We're a small school, and that means extra work for staff members, but we have a culture where people volunteer to serve in roles that fit them, to solve problems that they recognize, and to "un-volunteer" when overwhelmed or when work doesn't match their strengths or interests. As we have grown as a school, we have worked to build internal accountability among the teaching staff, and to bridge individual autonomies with a collective culture of rigor, nurture, support and collaboration.

We have become an inclusion school without tracking, with Honors options within classes, and serve more students who have special needs and who are English language learners. We have shifted our practices along with our student population, and our department has embarked on a new survey on what we're asking students to read, and at what pace. We're also asking each other questions on assessments, homework, supports and accountability, and having conversations about building internal accountability between students. As a school, we have asked teachers to share their most cognitively demanding task in a term, and in their mid year exam, and to measure its demand according to a rubric we adapted. Just as in our department work, we saw that as a school, when we examine what we're doing individually and collectively, we saw improvement in what teachers self-reported, in this case, in increased cognitive demand of assessments. That was supported by peers looking at each teacher's chosen assessment together, and collaborating on accurate rubric scores. We've done the same thing by looking at text complexity in each class, and saw similar improvements in rigor.

Our school has also experimented with models of peer evaluation and development, which continue to evolve. Next year, we will embark on a survey of anti-racist practices, within our classrooms, and as an institution. We have learned over the years that authentic collaboration for accountable growth is a rewarding challenge, one that we need to renew continuously, and will improve imperfectly. With internal accountability, we better see our own and each other's strengths and challenges, and are working to inhabit that space with vulnerability, integrity and hope.

[Souderton Charter School Collaborative](https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/souderton-charter-school-collaborative)[28], Souderton, PA
By teacher Julie Cook

As described in our charter, the Souderton Charter School Collaborative's mission is to provide an experiential, individualized education that includes parent and community partnerships. The founders envisioned the school would achieve its mission through a collaborative leadership model. Organized in teams, co-teaching enables teachers to collaborate throughout the day. In addition, both administrators and teachers participate in professional development teams. These teams are organized around "Five Strands of Leadership": (1) The Leadership/Organizational Development Teams are responsible for facility management; budget; district, state, and school board communication; compliance; and hiring. (2) The Instructional Coordination Teams oversee data analysis, special education, English language learners, and specialist coordination. (3) Professional Development teams provide PDS (professional development systems, i.e., professional learning communities) oversight, curriculum coordination, peer coaching, and best practices investigations. (4) Those serving in the Community strand are responsible for much of our outreach and community building, including service learning, social-emotional learning, community partnerships, evening collaboration nights, Saturday workdays, and more. (5) Finally, the school has adopted a number of Initiatives; this group has launched design thinking, Common Core Standards implementation, a resiliency effort, and more. Through this governance structure, the school is able to work toward meeting the goals of its mission and charter.

Another important team at SCSC is the Collaboration Committee, which is a voluntary team of faculty members who collaborate to make school-wide decisions. These decisions include facets of all five strands. Although all administrators and teacher-leaders participate in multiple "PDS" teams, this Collaboration Committee includes many interested faculty members. There is a process for adding agenda items, including a reference to the mission of the school. Time and sensitivity are also included. The agenda includes a section for note-taking so that those who are unable to attend can also understand information shared. The group has agreed to a "fist-to-three" decision-making process that helps streamline group decision-making. After members propose an actionable course, the members indicate their agreement. A "fist" indicates a "no" vote. A "one" indicates that the voter has reservations and would like to be heard or would like to ask clarifying questions. A "two" indicates a "yes" vote. A "three" indicates a "yes" vote, with an agreement to also work to make the proposal a reality.

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28 https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/souderton-charter-school-collaborative

SCSC has five strands of Professional Development Systems (PDS); these are teams of teachers, directors, coordinators, coaches, board members, and/or parent groups who support the mission of the school. They include the following:

- Leadership: Facility Management, Budget, District/State/Board Liaisons, Compliance, Hiring, etc.
- Instructional Coordination: Data Analysis, Special Education, ELL, Specialist Coordination, etc.
- Professional Development: PDS (Professional Learning Communities) Oversight, Curriculum Coordination, Peer Coaching, Best Practices, etc.
- Community: Service Learning, Social Emotional Learning, Community Partnerships and Outreach, Evening Collaboration Nights, Saturday Work Days, etc.
- Initiatives: Shared Visions, Design Thinking, Common Core Standards Implementation, Resiliency, etc.

5. Embrace Transparency in Decision-Making

Transparency and trust are essential at successful teacher-powered schools. Transparency in all areas big and small contributes to trust in each other and the overall model of decision-making. Often at schools, areas that aren't traditionally transparent, for example budgeting, are done by the principal. At teacher-powered schools these areas are open to all teachers which allows everyone to better understand how and why decisions are being made. Many teams choose to use committees (budgeting, personnel, curriculum, etc) to spread out the workload and then these committees report back to the whole group. Decision-making done in committees is documented for transparency. For important decisions impacting the whole group there is often time for discussion and feedback from the larger group before final decisions are made. This not only creates more buy in, but allows teams to debate and build consensus.

Other professional groups such as doctors and lawyers have long used self-governing models. By examining those models teacher-powered teams can learn valuable lessons in what makes those professional partnerships successful. In reflecting on physician partnerships, Mitchell Kusy, Louellen Essex, and Thomas Marr sum up the role of transparency on collaboration: "Fostering collaboration by promoting cooperative goals and building trust, and strengthening people by sharing information and power and increasing their discretion and visibility."[29]

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29   Kusy, Mitchell et al. 1995. "No Longer a Solo Practice: How Physician Leaders Lead." The Physician Executive. 21: 11-15.

THE HOW: In practice what does this look like?

Teams prioritize being transparent with each other through shared documents, co-created agendas, and when possible open spaces designed for collaboration. **This practice is one that permeates the culture of the school.** Open door policies, personal accountability, being willing to talk through hard topics and ask challenging questions contribute to overall transparency. Many teams have protocols such as Fist to Five[30] that have everyone vote on issues before making decisions. Some teams have found it helpful to bring in outside facilitators to coach them through some of these issues.

Below are examples of what this looks like across multiple autonomy areas.

- Teams may decide use transparency in budgeting to spend more money on a certain grade level or department one year with the understanding that this benefits all students, such as buying new science lab equipment. The next year, they may do something entirely different.
- Teams may have shared folders, databases, and documents where all team members have access to agendas, notes, budgets, proposals, etc and are encouraged to regularly check in on these, add to them, and ask questions.
- Teams may encourage each other to spend informal time in each others' classrooms.
- Teams may have procedures to clear up interpersonal tensions, agreements not to gossip or talk about decisions outside of meetings.
- Teams may have procedures that give members opportunities to voice concerns and if not voiced, then publicly support the team's decision.

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30   https://www.teacherpowered.org/guide/resources/fist-five-voting-and-consensus-process

SCHOOL STORIES

Here you will find examples of this practice from three teacher-powered teams. Remember that each school uses this practice differently depending on what works best for their team and their students.

[Augsburg Fairview Academy](#)[31], Minneapolis, MN
By Executive Director Heidi E. Anderson

At Augsburg Fairview Academy, we embrace transparency in a number of ways: fostering a foundation of openness, fostering growth mindset, and improving intercultural communication. First, we believe that all information able to be shared, should be available to all staff. Staff meeting, partnership, school board, and committee minutes are always available in Google Drive and easily accessible. The free-flow of information is critical to empowering teacher and staff leaders to take ownership of our school community. All meetings are open, according to open meeting law, and all staff are invited to attend. Second, we believe in fostering a growth mindset. A school culture where teachers are provided opportunities to try new things and make mistakes allows teachers the leverage to explore new methods and approaches.

Teachers grow together through peer observations and reflect on practices that are working or could be improved prior to a formal administrative evaluation. Teacher Round Table is a teacher led learning opportunity that occurs twice per month for teachers to come together with the administrator, reflect, and explore topics they are passionate about. Finally, improving intercultural communication is a key to embracing transparency. Learning how we communicate as individuals and how others communicate reduces conflict and increases productivity and teamwork. Communication is the key to transparency and building trust among all staff members. Open and honest dialogue among all staff gives the opportunity to voice frustrations, problem solve together, and improve relationships between teachers, staff, and administration.

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31 https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/augsburg-fairview-academy

FRANCINE DELANY
New School For Children

Francine Delany New School For Children[32], Asheville, NC
By teacher Jessica Roberts

Francine Delany is a teacher powered public charter in Asheville, NC. We are in our 22nd year of operation. We are a small school with one class per grade and 180 students K-8.

Francine Delany is fully governed by teachers. We use a collaborative team structure as our governance model. Francine Delany has a small group of teachers representing all grade spans who sit on the Executive Council. This group acts as the principal of the school. We share this responsibility through a rotating schedule so that every full time teacher has an opportunity to serve on this team. This team guides our staff meeting agendas, initiates staff evaluations, takes care of parent and teacher concerns/grievances, and student discipline/management and support. We report to the Directorate (all staff) each week at our Directorate meetings. We share minutes from the Executive Council meetings through a shared Google doc.

Teachers at Francine Delany all take on administrative roles each year. We chair and facilitate committees, parent groups, problem solving teams, school improvement team and sit as non voting members on the Board of Directors. We ensure transparency within all of these teams by collaboratively creating agendas, using protocols to guide discussion and data analysis and share minutes from these teams and groups on our shared Google drive. We strive to have representation from all grade spans on most of our teams/groups and create space at our weekly staff meetings to share minutes from all team meetings.

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32   https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/francine-delany-new-school-children

[UCLA Community School](https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/ucla-community-school-ucs)[33], Los Angeles, CA
By coordinator Rebekah Kang

UCLA Community School is a K-12 public school located in Los Angeles, California serving approximately 1000 students. The original design team consisting of UCLA professors and administrators, teachers, and community members envisioned a school that would be an innovative model for public education. This meant that our practice would be transparent and open to fellow coworkers, parents, community members, and to the public at large. Once the school opened, we quickly realized that if we wanted to share our practice with others, then every aspect of our school—from what happens in the classroom to what happens in team meetings—needed to be transparent.

As we embraced transparency, we found many benefits:
- Increased level of trust amongst colleagues
- Genuine collaboration to improve learning programs and schools
- A true sense of teamwork amongst teachers, staff, and community members
- A strong culture of professional learning

How did we embrace and enact a culture of transparency? These simple and practical actions ensure that our practice is open:
- Start with the classroom: We actively encourage parents, community members, teachers to observe classrooms. Whenever we hire new teachers, we tell them that our practice is open, so they should not be surprised to see visitors.
- Co-create agendas: Facilitators send out agenda items to the team before the meetings, so team members can provide input and prepare for the meeting.
- Consistently maintain meeting notes: This seems obvious, but it requires discipline and organization to ensure that meeting notes are kept and decisions are documented. Transparency is usually broken when team members feel that decisions made from previous meetings were not honored. Meeting notes ensure that decisions are transparent and honored.

These simple practices are the first steps to building a culture of transparency that can lead to trust, collaboration, and improvement for teaching and learning.

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33   https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/ucla-community-school-ucs

6. Create Shared Leadership Structures

Shared leadership structures are one of the defining characteristics of teacher-powered schools. These teams value checks and balances and want to include teachers in a wide variety of teacher leadership roles. This ensures that diverse experiences and opinions are present for all decisions. One practice that sets teacher-powered schools apart from more traditional schools that encourage teacher voice and leadership are these shared leadership structures. When teams create structures that include teachers at each level of leadership it becomes part of their processes and culture. Instead of just encouraging teacher leadership, it makes it an integral part of their school system.

Similar to other high performing organizations, schools use shared leadership structures to fully empower their teacher team at every level. This leads to a more engaged staff willing to take accountability for their decisions. "Empowering teams have proved useful for many organizations as they increase ownership, provide an opportunity for developing new skills, increase the overall interest in projects, and otherwise facilitate decision-making where the work is being done".[34] Every program and initiative needs the often discussed "buy-in" of the people doing the work. Teacher-powered takes this concept to the highest levels by creating ownership of decisions because the teachers are actually making them.

The success of shared leadership structures depends both on the structure itself (does it work for the team of teachers currently using it?) and the relationships of the people in those roles. Teacher-powered teams nurture the relationships as well as support the actual roles supporting James Spillane's observation in his *Distributed Leadership* book: "A distributed perspective offers an alternative way of thinking about leadership in schools by foregrounding leadership practice and by suggesting that leadership practice is constructed in the interactions between leaders, followers, and their situations."[35]

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34   Jackson, Bruce and Susan R. Madsen. 2005. "Common Factors of High Performance Teams." Utah Valley State College.
35   Spillane, James P. 2006. *Distributed Leadership.* Jossey-Bass

THE HOW: In practice what does this look like?

Most often this practice looks like democratic decision-making and representation where teams value the collective decisions over individual decisions. Shared leadership structures occur with small teams of less than five teachers or large teams with over fifty teachers. No matter the staff size there are clear pathways of accountability and communication which are communicated to parents and community members to avoid questions around, "who is in charge here?" Importantly, teams that use shared leadership structures model democratic practices to their students and often include students in their shared leadership decisions. For sample school leadership charts from a variety of schools please see our Steps Guide at https://www.teacherpowered.org/guide/storming/leadership.

Below are examples of what this looks like across multiple autonomy areas.

- Teams divide up responsibilities and decision-making among committees, departments, grade levels, and/or teams with each group accountable to the whole team.
- Teams vote on leadership positions including school leader, committee leaders, grade level teams.
- Teams create structures where all teachers serve on some leadership committee and then these groups report back to the whole team for final decisions.
- Teams divide up administrative tasks traditionally completed by a principal to allow all school leaders to teach regularly or have an advisory.
- Teams have an expectation that each member will serve on at least two leadership committees or take on one larger leadership role.

SCHOOL STORIES

Here you will find examples of this practice from three teacher-powered teams. Remember that each school uses this practice differently depending on what works best for their team and their students.

AVALON SCHOOL [Avalon School](https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/avalon)[36], St. Paul MN
By advisor and program coordinator Carrie Bakken

Since its inception, Avalon operates as a teacher collaborative governance model. There are two important components of this model. First, Avalon School board operates as a teacher majority board and teachers participate in shared decision-making. Avalon has a nine-member board with five teachers, two community members, and two parents. The board members have diverse employment backgrounds that include legal, finance, managerial, and development experience. Because Avalon operates as a Teacher Collaborative, no single staff member has the sole authority regarding the management of the school including personnel, financial management, curriculum, testing, and enrollment. No one person holds the authority to make decisions without the team. While this may sometimes prove difficult, it does empower salaried teachers and translates into high teacher retention and significant ownership and accountability for the school program.

The second component is that all teaching staff members assume some administrative duties. By the beginning of 2005, however, Avalon created part-time Teacher/Program Coordinator positions to meet the increased administrative and operational demands of running a school. These teachers increased the percentage of their time spent on administrative duties and decreased the percentage of time spent with students, yet they have no increase in authority or decision-making power.

BOSTON TEACHERS UNION SCHOOL RESPECT • RESPONSIBILITY • RIGOR [The Boston Teachers Union School](https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/boston-teachers-union-school)[37], Boston, MA
By teacher Taryn Snyder

The Boston Teachers Union School was built on the idea of shared leadership and democratically running a school. In the first 2-3 years of existence, Simmons University provided ample support and coaching through Jill Taylor and Roberta Kelly. Jill and Roberta helped our founding teachers to create decision-making buckets and document how we were making the decisions and which category they fall into (designated teacher decisions, autonomous committee decisions, consultative committee decisions, or full faculty decisions).

36   https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/avalon
37   https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/boston-teachers-union-school

Along with the decision-making categories, creating and refining our committee structure and workload has also been an integral part of our shared leadership model. Now in 2019, we have four committees that essentially govern the school: Shared Leadership Committee, School Culture and Climate Committee, Instructional Leadership Committee, and the Anti-Bias Anti-Racist Committee. All faculty members are expected to participate on one committee. Committees meet once a month during our Thursday PD time (which is compensated) and at least one other time during the month. When the needs arise for more short-term teams (e.g. hiring, budget, scheduling, etc.), faculty members volunteer and Shared Leadership Committee creates the team keeping representation from all parts of the school in mind. Our Thursday afternoon faculty meetings are a major piece of our shared leadership model as well. This is the time during which we have all faculty present to review and revise school processes and protocols, look at data and student work, participate in shared learning opportunities, and further grow and define our shared leadership model.

The Urban Assembly School for Green Careers[38] (UAGC), New York, NY
By principal Madeleine Ciliotta-Young

At UAGC, we believe in supporting teachers who innovate, collaborate and lead. A significant portion of our school staff serve as teacher leaders in one capacity or another and a significant portion of the school's budget is set aside to ensure this happens. As a part of their responsibilities, teachers monitor progress on jobs and collaborate with an administrator on a regular basis through a 1:1 structure. As a part of the process, leads implement 360° of feedback (from administrators, peers, students and self assessment) against the posted job criteria. Lead positions also regularly meet through the Steering Committee to align responsibilities and ensure thorough communication on school-wide initiatives.

Lead positions consist of Curriculum Lead, Professional Development Lead, Recruitment Lead, Data Lead, Assessment Lead, Behavior Lead, Student Activities Lead, Testing Coordinator and Department Leads. Through these responsibilities and positions, teachers are able to make decisions on assessment criteria, grading policy, school calendar and events, school marketing, professional development offerings, behavior intervention structures and many others. The glue that holds the positions together is the theories that under-gird the pedagogy and school structure. All innovations, initiatives and projects that stem from these lead positions are to better live out the school's core values within the framework of the school's research based pedagogy.

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38   https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/urban-assembly-school-green-careers
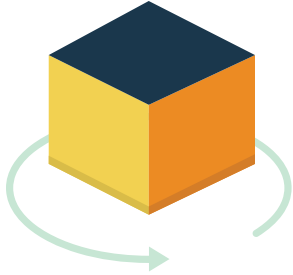
7. Reimagine and Rotate Leadership Positions

It is widely acknowledged that our education system is struggling to keep up with the needs of today's students. Moving away from industrial era ideas about bosses and workers allows teacher-powered teams to better govern and run schools to meet the modern needs of students. These teams are doing what renowned social scientist Margaret Wheatley describes in *Leadership and the New Science*: "Our concept of organizations is moving away from the mechanistic creations that flourished in the age of bureaucracy. We now speak in earnest of more fluid, organic structures, of boundaryless and seamless organizations. We are beginning to recognize organizations as whole systems, constructing them as 'learning organizations' or as 'organic' and noticing that people exhibit self-organizing capacity."[39] **Once the structure evolves, the roles people play in the structure also evolve** allowing people to grow beyond traditional roles and learn new skills that improve the overall school community.

As teacher-powered teams grow and evolve one of the most important issues that comes up is sustainability. How do teams continue their teacher-poweredness when founders or key leaders retire or move on? Rotating leadership positions is one answer to this inevitable problem. **Rotating leadership positions also helps diffuse power and builds understanding of each position's unique responsibilities.** When teachers have served in a variety of positions this helps everyone see the bigger picture beyond their own classrooms, subjects, and interests.

When teacher leaders rotate positions this makes the school team stronger. Spillane writes, "Leadership is a system of practice made up a collection of interacting component parts in relationships of interdependence in which the group has distinct properties over and above the individuals who make it up."[40] This works for small staffs and helps to lessen the impact when a colleague leaves the school and for larger teams so multiple people know and understand how to be leaders in a variety of areas.

39   Wheatley, Margaret J. 2006. *Leadership and the New Science.* Berrett-Koehler.
40   Spillane, James P. 2006. *Distributed Leadership.* Jossey-Bass.

THE HOW: In practice what does this look like?

This practice is often connected to the previous one of shared leadership structures. Here, teams recognize that institutional knowledge needs to be spread amongst themselves for long-term sustainability. Teams take turns filling key roles to build the collective leadership capacity of the whole group. Some teams have term limits for committees, positions, and roles. Others are more informal and have a cultural expectation that teachers will rotate on and off their leadership roles and train others.

Roles differ at each school. Some teams embrace a completely flat leadership structure, others' organizational charts look more traditional but the accountability doesn't take hierarchical pathways. For example, a team may have a site administrator, but that administrator is first accountable to the collective teacher team, not an external entity. At most teacher-powered schools that have administrators, the administrator either shares that role with a co-leader, takes on some teaching assignments, or leads an advisory. Teachers also take on a wide range of administrative or leadership tasks contributing to the distributed leadership model. This includes attending district meetings, coordinating state, district, and authorizer testing, creating budget proposals, ensuring compliance for special education laws, and much more.

It is also important to note that at many teacher-powered sites students take on roles beyond the normal student activities and student leadership. Students often serve on hiring committees designing questions, interviewing candidates, observing lessons, and helping to make the final decision. Students also lead restorative justice programs, research and plan off campus trips and events, and leading community engagement activities.

Below are examples of what this looks like across multiple autonomy areas.

- Teams pair veteran and newer teachers on committees to transfer institutional knowledge and cultural expectations with each member serving multi-year limited time on each committee. Each year some teachers roll off current committee assignments and new members join.
- Teams encourage multiple teachers to get their administrative credentials so those tasks requiring an administrator can be rotated among a group of teachers; or invest funds to train teachers to do administrative tasks such as budget, special education oversight, or evaluation without the intention or expectation that these teachers will become administrators.
- Teams invest in budget and human resource training for a variety of team members to ensure the school is compliant with state and federal funding and HR laws.
- Teams have term limits for committees, leadership positions, and teams.
- Teams may train students to be part of school decision-making and provide opportunities for them to observe and participate in democratic decision-making at the site level.
- Teams may embrace non-traditional duties for administrators, teachers, and students for example teachers taking on administrative duties and administrators teaching classes and leading advisories.

SCHOOL STORIES

Here you will find examples of this practice from three teacher-powered teams. Remember that each school uses this practice differently depending on what works best for their team and their students.

[Reiche Community School](https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/howard-c-reiche-community-school)[41], Portland, ME
By teacher David Briley

Reiche Community School has a leadership practice that cultivates new leadership while also keeping the growth and talent of previous leaders to maintain the strength of their autonomies. Reiche has been teacher-powered without a principal since 2010. We have three lead teachers that help share the administrative role. Two of the teacher leaders are released for half of the day to be a teacher/coach and half of the day to handle operational issues. Often when a principal leaves a school, they take many aspects of the school culture and initiatives with them. However, when one of the Teacher Leaders rolls off of their Teacher Leader position the model promotes them staying at the school in another position. For example, Kevin Brewster, one of the original Lead Teachers is now back in the classroom as a kindergarten teacher, but his knowledge base stays at the school, and with it the school culture moves forward.

In addition, every member of the staff serves on one of four committees, for which there are two co-chairs. The co-chairs along with the lead teachers make up the leadership team. Committee co-chairs roll off every two years so now many staff members have not only served on the leadership team, but their expertise and leadership is still in the school even when they have left that position. For example, a former co-chair of the Enrichment committee now brings their lens to the Climate committee, or still stays in the Enrichment committee with the knowledge of decisions made in the past. Every teacher feels like they have a voice and a pathway to leadership, and the retention of leadership helps to boost and maintain the climate of the school. Not so coincidentally, we have the highest teacher retention rate in the district.

41   https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/howard-c-reiche-community-school

[School of Social Justice](https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/school-social-justice)[42], Los Angeles, CA
By teacher Jonathan Tam

The School of Social Justice, like other Los Angeles Pilot Schools, has a democratic leadership structure that allows for teachers, community partners, and students to take part in different aspects of the school's inner workings. At the foundation of the school is its Governing Board, which is comprised of parents, students, teachers, and administrators. Each member of the school's Governing Board is elected to the position and the board is largely responsible for decisions related to hiring, finances, and the implementation of programs at the school. Working very closely with the school's Governing Board is the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), which is comprised of teachers from each content area, the school's instructional coach, representatives from different community partnerships as well as its Assistant Principal and Principal. The ILT makes the bulk of the instructional decisions at the school from coordinating the professional development schedule to implementing effective school-wide instructional practices.

Whereas only some teachers participate in the school's Governing Board and/or ILT, each teacher (based on preference) joins one of three pilot committees: Positive and Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Parent and Community Empowerment, and Operations. These committees allow teachers to lead beyond the classroom in ways that help provide a whole-student approach to learning. The responsibilities of each committee will vary from year to year based on the committee's direction—but some of the more recent endeavors of the committees include intervening through behavior contracts, parent and community culture nights, as well as changes in the bell schedule for supplementary school programming including college classes and Social Justice Action Assemblies.
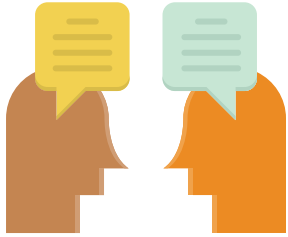
[Woods Learning Center](https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/woods-learning-center)[43], Casper, WY
By Deyonne Jackson

At Woods Learning Center, 15 staff members (10 grade level teachers, one tutor, two special education teachers, one librarian and one administrative manager) make up the administrative team. The team divides the duties typically done by a principal among the team depending on strengths and interests. The administrative manager attends district principal meetings along with a certified teacher. Each certified staff member on the administrative team rotates through the district level principals' meeting. A sign-up sheet is distributed at the beginning of the year and a certified staff member signs-up to join the administrative manager. The administrative manager and teacher take notes and participate in district conversations and then shares information at the administrative team meeting at Woods Learning Center. Along with district principal meetings there are also district middle level alignment and principal cohort professional development meetings. One or two staff members volunteer to attend these for the year and rotate annually.

42   https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/school-social-justice
43   https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/woods-learning-center

8. Engage in Peer Observation

Teacher evaluation is one of the fifteen autonomies, however not all teacher-powered teams want or have secured this specific autonomy. Even at teacher-powered schools without teacher evaluation autonomy, almost all teams engage in the practice of peer observation. Teaching is an art, one that good teachers are continually tweaking and finding ways to improve. An important part of this professional growth is peer observation, mentoring, and coaching. Instead of observation having negative connotations, in teacher-powered schools teachers welcome this practice as one that allows them to learn and grow, whether they are the one being observed or the one observing.

Education thought leader Linda Darling-Hammond describes this well. "A major part of teachers' ongoing professional learning takes place as they develop, in collaboration with their colleagues, the specific lessons and assessment tools they will use in the classroom."[44] Teaching isn't meant to be done in isolation. The siloed classroom doesn't allow teachers to learn from each other or draw on the strength of their colleagues. Teacher-powered teams recognize this and intentionally design practices that allow them to collaborate on teaching as well as leading their schools.

Leadership inside and outside the classroom benefits from mentors and coaching, both of which are used in peer observation models. Wriston writes, "Implementing leadership development programs that emphasize a coaching style of leadership have proven effective in helping to create and strengthen accountability...[Components include]: 1) Encouragement; 2) Mentoring; 3) Confrontation."[45] Peer observation benefits students and teachers.

44   Darling-Hammond, Linda. 2012. "Creating a comprehensive system for evaluating and supporting effective teaching." Stanford, CA. Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education.
45   Wriston, Michael J. 2007. "Creating a High-Performance Culture." Organization Development Journal, Spring.

THE HOW: In practice what does this look like?

Teams are dedicated to improving their craft and learning from each other, through spending time in each other's classrooms and discussing challenges. Often this is informal at teacher-powered schools. Teachers wander in and out of each others' classrooms so often that students aren't distracted by the presence of other adults, it is just part of their normal day. This informal open classroom mentality allows for a general sense of the different teacher styles, lessons, and practices each teacher at the school has.

Peer observation also takes a more structured approach where teams have small cohorts or partners. In these groups they identify areas they want to improve in or students that may be struggling in their class. Timelines, pre and post meetings, and training in specific observation strategies help facilitate a smooth process. Some teams also pair teachers with coaches or mentors, especially for newer staff members.

Below are examples of what this looks like across multiple autonomy areas.
- Teams may have teachers share classrooms. At the middle and high school levels this may mean they alternate teaching periods with leadership or prep periods and spend time in their shared classroom regularly, not formally observing but having a regular presence.
- Teams may have small cohorts to observe each other, often at these sites the school administrator is part of a cohort as a member of the team for probationary teachers.
- Teams may adopt "open door" policies where teachers are encouraged to regularly spend time in each other's classroom, including prep periods, and provide informal feedback.
- Teams that are able to design the physical space of their schools may opt to put in walls of windows to have open classrooms where noise is contained but teaching and learning is easily observed.
- Teams may have regular time at staff meetings to discuss classroom management challenges, lessons that didn't go well, or students they are concerned about and invite colleagues to observe them and offer feedback.
- Teams may choose to have a person or committee trained in handling personnel issues, such as due process and maintaining confidentiality. This committee is accountable to the larger team of teachers without having to break personnel confidentiality laws.
- Teams may use partial autonomy when they can choose to engage in peer evaluations, but need the signature of an administrator to meet district and state requirements.

SCHOOL STORIES

Here you will find examples of this practice from three teacher-powered teams. Remember that each school uses this practice differently depending on what works best for their team and their students.

Chrysalis Charter School[46], Palo Cedro, CA
By principal Irene Salter

At Chrysalis we've slowly been evolving a peer mentoring program. It started with me asking teachers to choose a "cohort" based on self-identified strengths and weaknesses (via a Danielson rating). The "cohort" of 2-3 teacher peers could help each other with their self-identified strengths and weaknesses throughout the year. The following year we added a half-day sub for each teacher so that cohorts could observe one another or use that time to collaborate in other ways.

Peer observation is especially important for us with new teachers. A less than ideal experience with a new teacher prompted the teachers to create a better way of ensuring regular mentoring of teachers new to us. Now we include the following in each new teachers' contract:

> *As a teacher new to Chrysalis, you will be hired on a probationary basis. You will be assigned mentors to help in different areas. Chrysalis teachers will make observations in your classroom. There will be a first review meeting in mid-September, the second one in December (or earlier if needed) and a third one in February where the other co-op members will decide whether to offer you a contract for the following year.*

Mission Hill K-8 School[47], Boston, MA
From their co-created Peer Review Handbook

Effective peer review begins by creating a climate of trust and collaboration. Creating such a climate means opening up your classroom or work space to colleagues, knowing one another's teaching or practice, and mentoring or being mentored toward best practice. We have created a system of ongoing peer review that includes, but is not limited to, the following examples of engagement: class or work space visits, videotaping, sharing and critiquing narrative reports, public presentations, child studies, and curriculum shares. Each staff member has at least one selected peer as an evaluator and one person selected by the Peer Review coordinator. Although each staff member is assigned a Peer Review team, contributions to support, acknowledge and improve one another as educators and colleagues is to be expected from everyone.

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46 https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/chrysalis-charter-school
47 https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/mission-hill-k-8-school

Ongoing opportunities exist for support to meet prescriptions, seek understanding of expectations and facilitate conversation among the Peer Review team if needed. House meetings, Age Pair team meetings, Action Team meetings and Critical Friends are examples of such supports. Peer Review teams will share results of observations and feedback annually at the Winter retreat. This is also an opportunity for advisement for the evaluating team or evaluatee. We feel this process is authentic and effective. We believe those in the best position to evaluate educators are other educators who are engaged in the same work.

More information about Mission Hill's peer evaluation process can be found at: https://www.teacherpowered.org/guide/resources/mission-hill-k-8-school-jamaica-plain-ma-peer-evaluation-process

Tri-County Early College[48], Murphy, NC
By teacher Adam Haigler

Tri-County Early College has a Professional Learning Community (currently called, "Curriculum Planning Group,") comprised of all teachers, the principal and the guidance counselor, that convenes twice a week. This meeting has become one of the most essential parts of our school's model because it has allowed us to push forward many initiatives, co-plan, manage student interventions, and frame/debrief group rounds protocols. By carving out the time and space for these meetings, our students have benefited immeasurably from a consistent pedagogical and philosophical framework schoolwide.

One of the ways we accomplish this is to visit each other's classrooms very frequently. We use a peer rounds protocol that frames the experience with questions that the host teacher has about their practice. It could be, "How often do students ask each other questions" or "What percentage of students are engaged at any given time in my room?" An important part of the process that keeps it a safe, non-evaluative environment, is that the observing teacher is watching students, not commenting on the effectiveness of the teaching, so that the host teacher can then use student data to improve their practice. This is a stark contrast to the most frequent visits teachers get in their classrooms from administrators who are explicitly evaluating them on the abilities. The observer will then become the host later in the week, then the two will debrief the observations at the next Curriculum Planning Group meeting. In addition to these formal observations, we also co-teach at least five classes a week, which allows us to see each other teach and learn from what we observe.

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48   https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/tri-county-early-college
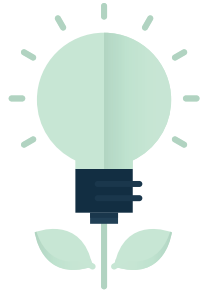
9. Take On a Learner Mindset

Teacher-powered teams see themselves as lifelong learners and model this to their students. Wheatley, describes how continual learning and growth in organizations with strong leadership comes about from engaging together as part of a collective identity. "It is important to note that the motivation for individual change is not in response to a boss's demand or a personal need for self-improvement. A larger context has emerged because of this collaborative process, and it is this context that motivates people to change."[49] Teacher-powered teams embrace this mentality. While they take seriously their curricular expertise, they maintain a learner mindset investing time in improving their skills as teacher leaders as well as their content knowledge.

According to Peter Senge who studies learning organizations, one of the key characteristics of productive organizations is that they see themselves as continually learning.[50] He writes, "Learning organizations are organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together."[51] This is what occurs at teacher-powered schools.

When teachers embrace a learner mentality they are able to model for students how to work through frustrations, setbacks, and not knowing the answers. Educator and collaborative leadership coach Elena Aguilar writes, "I aspire to build educational organizations that are *places of learning* for *everyone* within them to meet the needs of all children… The rate of change in our world has never been faster; this holds true for the rate of change in schools. The only way to navigate this change is to learn how to understand it and adapt. Successful adaptation comes from learning."[52] Aguilar sums up well the type of sites teacher-powered teams design and build when they have the autonomy and practices to create their schools.

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49   Wheatley, Margaret J. 2006. *Leadership and the New Science.* Berrett-Koehler.
50   Senge, P. M. 2006. *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. Broadway Business.
51   Senge, P. M. 2010. *.The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization: First edition.* Random House.
52   Aguilar, Elena. 2016. *The Art of Coaching Teams*. Jossey-Bass.

THE HOW: In practice what does this look like?

Teams actively engage in learning and improving themselves, including expanding content knowledge, developing leadership skills, and practicing self care. For some teams this means teacher-led professional development designed by and for their own colleagues. Many teams also realize when they need skills that are outside of their own expertise and reach out for coaching, mentoring, or workshops from other educators or teams. For many teacher-powered teams who have been doing this work for a long time it means partnering with another veteran team to really dive deep into the unique challenges teacher-powered teams face.

Time is always a valuable resource, and teacher-powered teams know that learning and growth flourish when there is dedicated time to discuss, reflect, and engage with all stakeholders. Planning for this process is part of how these teams prioritize their learner mentality and model the value of continuous improvement for students.

Self-care is an important area for all educators, and teacher-powered teams take this seriously. Learning to name their limitations, taking time away from school, and encouraging each other with kindness, smiles, and thoughtfulness go a long way to keep people working at their best.

Below are examples of what this looks like across multiple autonomy areas.
- Teams may hire for skills outside of the classroom that contribute to their overall competence as a team.
- Teams do not necessarily see themselves as the expert in the classroom, but are open to learning from students and colleagues.
- Teams invest in training to run meetings efficiently, and effectively, facilitate challenging conversations around social justice, data, or inequities, and plan time for reflection.
- Teams intentionally create time and space for self care including encouraging colleagues to name their limitations, respecting differences in life stages and commitments, and covering for team members who need leaves from committee or leadership work.
- Teams visit other schools, mentor other teams, and engage in regular networking with teacher-powered teams facing similar challenges and opportunities.
- Teams plan for regular reflection and conversation time to support their learner mindsets. Sometimes this takes place in yearly or semester retreats, sometimes it is built into professional development time or monthly staff meeting time.

SCHOOL STORIES

Here you will find examples of this practice from three teacher-powered teams. Remember that each school uses this practice differently depending on what works best for their team and their students.

[Minnesota New Country School](#)[53], Henderson, MN
By advisor Aaron Grimm

When our founder and administrator retired after 20 years of leading our school we needed to come up with a way to get all the work done that she did (and some work that we didn't even realize she did). Our team sees ourselves as learners alongside our students and this was an opportunity to learn new skills to govern our site. We discussed heavily and finally came up with an idea to run the school by committees that would then report to the school board. Since the inception of this idea, the committees have had to become more and more accountable for their goals, plans and work completed. This structure also allows us to prioritize work and aim efforts toward long-term, academic and non-academic goals. We allow movement on teams/committees once per year at our May staff retreat. Here is a breakdown of teams:

- Professional Development Teams (PDP): Teams are focused on students, both academic and non-academic (think whole child). Teams include: *Math, Arts & Literature, Project Based Learning, Health & Wellness, High School/ Elementary Connections, Supporting Students Together (focused on Intervention).*

- Site Based Management Teams (SBM): Teams are focused on strategic planning/goals. Includes: Personnel, Finance, Outreach, Career/Future/Technology Education, Transportation, Building, Assessment, Q-Comp, Nutrition & Composting

We have learned these best practices for our team:

- All teams must elect a lead and a secretary. The lead is responsible for leadership of the group and tracking progress toward goals. The secretary takes notes for every meeting and shares highlights with the school board by the first Monday of the month.

- PDP teams must meet for 45 minutes every week and establish a regular, predictable meeting time (example would be Tuesdays after school at 3:30 p.m.); staff members are required to serve on at least one PDP team.

- SBM teams meet at least monthly (and as needed) during our Early Outs. These meetings are scheduled during All Staff Meetings to prevent conflicts. Staff can serve on up to two SBM teams.

- No matter the role at MNCS (teacher, para, etc.) we value your input and ask for your help in making our school successful.

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53   https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/minnesota-new-country-school

The Renaissance Charter School[54], New York, NY
By principal Stacey Gauthier

At The Renaissance Charter School we believe that we work smarter and more effectively when all constituencies have a voice in decision-making. As such our organizational structure is designed to facilitate this deep level of collaboration and discussion. Our Board of Trustees has both an elected teacher and elected parent representative. Additionally, other educators, an appointed teacher, an alumni and community members are also represented. Our Collaborative School Governance Committee is comprised of administrators, teachers, non-pedagogical staff, students and parents who meet regularly to address, create and implement action plans for a variety of school issues. Last year, this group looked at how we can improve our outreach and communication to new high school students and families. It also invested a considerable amount of time reviewing our charter goals and looking at our school wellness plan and what we could do to continue to improve upon our healthy school-wide initiatives. Teachers and staff also work in grade level and subject discipline clusters and these groups often include administrative support personnel.

All school-wide initiatives are discussed in topic-specific groups that are comprised of the people who will be part of implementing the plan. Again, this can include a variety of stakeholders. At Renaissance, we strive to be a place where leadership is distributed and decisions are made by a collective group of people. While this may take more time, in the end, we are confident this approach will have a better outcome than any top down approach would.

Washtenaw Alliance for Virtual Education[55] (WAVE), Ypsilanti, MI
By advisor Sarah Giddings

When we created WAVE and embraced the teacher-led structure, we agreed to work as a team to identify key initiatives of professional learning that would enhance the program we all helped to create and sustain. To support this agreement, we meet weekly as a central staff around three key identified areas: student & staff social-emotional learning & support, curriculum development, and embracing equity and social justice. We also meet monthly with our entire staff (full & part-time remote staff) about these topics and other areas under these areas that we have identified along the way. We commit to a professional learning budget and all staff can attend any professional learning opportunity that they can show aligns to our team-identified areas for both student and staff development. We also thought it was important for our own learning and self-care to have an entire week in the summer that is totally committed to our own professional learning.

Most of our professional learning is led by our teacher leaders at our school, but we do reach out to outside professionals if as a team we decided that we need external supports. We try to make sure any external presenters develop into a cooperative partnership for our school and more often than not uses a "train-the-trainers" model with any subsequent work. This makes sure we continue developing our staff as teacher leaders.

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54   https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/renaissance-charter-school
55   https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/washtenaw-alliance-virtual-education-wave

Team Resources

You have read about teacher-powered practices, now what? Like all schools, there are probably areas your team already excels at and other areas your team could use some improvement in. Or maybe your team is just beginning to explore teacher-powered and wants to start implementing one or more of the practices.

1. **Team Survey**: First, start with a team survey. We've included one in the Appendix and a link to a Google form. Make a copy of the Google form and then adjust the language as appropriate to fit your team. We encourage you to take this in a team meeting and immediately review the results (transparency). Either a couple practices will emerge as consensus choices, or if not that is a good topic for discussion as to why the wide range of opinions. Next step is to find a team to lead staff development in these areas.

2. **Practices Resources**: Once you have identified the practice(s) your team wants to work on start gathering resources and connections. Below are good places to start:

   a. Teacher-Powered Schools Inventory[56]: Reach out to other schools either listed in this guide or that you already know. If geographically possible, plan a visit or invite some of their team members to your school for a meeting. Ask if they'd be willing to mentor your team in this area. Perhaps there is something they are working on as well that you could mentor them in. If your schools are far away from each other trying video conferencing (Zoom has a free version that works well), or ask them to share ways they were able to excel in this area.

   a. Steps Guide for Creating a Teacher-Powered School[57]: This free online guide has over 300 resources with links and descriptions. The best place to start for teacher-powered practices are in the storming and forming sections. There is also a search feature you can use to locate resources on specific topics.

   a. Collaborative Micro-Credentials[58]: These eight micro-credentials were developed by CTQ and overlap with the nine identified teacher-powered practices here. These are best done as a team or a committee where your team can engage with the curriculum together.

   a. Discussion Starters and Guides[59]: If you haven't seen these already, take a close look at the eight specific discussion starters and guide for administrators at teacher-powered schools. Each of these is designed with discussion questions to be completed as a team.

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56   https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/list
57   https://www.teacherpowered.org/guide
58   https://www.teacherpowered.org/micro-credentials
59   https://www.teacherpowered.org/starters

a. [Next Generation Learning Challenges Tools](#)[60]: "The value of MyWays lies in the rich discussions, collaborative development, and transformative culture-building it can catalyze within your school or district. The MyWays Toolkit will help your community define success and align your learning and assessment designs to the MyWays Student Success Framework."

a. [Bright Morning](#)[61]: This site offers free and paid resources based on Elena Aguilar's work coaching teachers and teams. "Our work transforms schools into equitable places of learning where every child gets whatever they need, every day, in order to be successful and to thrive. Process matters. The journey is the destination. Therefore, we lead processes of creation and transformation that honor and nurture all of those involved."

a. [Community Tool Box](#)[62]: "Collaborative leadership is really defined by a process, rather than by what leaders do. It has much in common with both servant leadership and transformational leadership. It starts, according to David Chrislip and Carl Larson, in Collaborative Leadership, from the premise that '...if you bring the appropriate people together in constructive ways with good information, they will create authentic visions and strategies for addressing the shared concerns of the organization or community.'"

b. [Adaptive Schools](#)[63] Seminars: Some high performing teacher-powered teams use adaptive practices, first learned in the seminars described on this website, to improve their collaborative practices. The "7 norms of collaboration" help teams determine and uphold norms regarding how long people can speak, how the agenda is followed, when a decision is in a "dialogue" (learning) phase versus when it is in the "discussion" phase (decision-making), and more.

Find ways to implement these nine practices in big ways and small. This is not a one and done activity. **Practices thrive when they are done consistently and become habit.** Set aside regular time to check in on your team's progress and development in these areas.

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60 https://myways.nextgenlearning.org/tools
61 https://brightmorningteam.com/
62 https://ctb.ku.edu/en
63 https://www.thinkingcollaborative.com/seminars/adaptive-schools-seminars/

Conclusion

Teacher-powered schools are full of innovative educators, equipped with autonomy and authority to make the best decisions for their students. **Teacher-powered is both the autonomy to collectively make decisions in specific areas and the practices used to implement these autonomies.** As the many examples illustrate, the *how* of teacher-powered differs across teams, but by looking carefully we see patterns and common practices emerge. The intention of this guide is to both better understand these common practices and to use them as a blueprint to better support teacher-powered educators.

These teams are continually evolving and adapting to their students, their communities, and their own internal staff dynamics. They need professional development specifically tailored to the type of governance structures and collaborative leadership models they use. Some of these resources are already available, and some need to be created.

Teacher-Powered Schools is qualified to help in these ways:

- Resources on the Teacher-Powered website[64], including a Steps Guide to Creating a Teacher-Powered School, a Site Guide for Visiting a Teacher-Powered School, Discussion Starters on eight topics, and a Guide for Site Administrators
- Coaching by Teacher-Powered Staff and Ambassadors
- Teacher-Powered Regional Network events, activities, and local resources
- Teacher-Powered Schools National Conferences
- Teacher-Powered Modules for team training in autonomies, shared purpose, shared leadership, personnel, and peer observation/evaluation
- Teacher-Powered regional and national newsletters to keep up to date with resources as we develop them as well as school stories, blogs, and teacher-powered opportunities
- Introductions, connections, and recommendations of educators, schools, and organizations to reach out to for your specific needs.
- Have a question or don't know where to start? Email Amy Junge at amy@educationevolving.org.

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64 https://www.teacherpowered.org

We also collaborate with other organizations that provide excellent services and support for teacher-powered teams for example:

- American Federation of Teachers
- Boston Teachers Union
- The Center for Powerful Public Schools
- The Center for Teaching Quality
- The Coalition for Community Schools
- Coalition for Essential Schools
- The Coalition of Public Independent Charter Schools
- EdVisions Inc.
- Innovative Schools Network
- Learning Forward
- The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards
- National Educators Association
- Next Generation Learning Challenges
- Teach Plus
- UCLA Center for Community Schooling
- United Federation of Teachers

Finally, teacher-powered is designed to be done as a team, not just at a school site, but a team of connected educators across the nation. **Join our Teacher-Powered Schools Network.**[65] We have a national network of teacher-powered educators as well as regional networks in Los Angeles, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. These leaders are transforming education through innovative leadership practices from the ground up. The solutions to our education challenges are coming from within our profession, **be part of the journey.**

teacher-
powered
schools

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65   https://www.teacherpowered.org/networks

Appendix
Teacher-Powered Practices Survey

After reading through the descriptions of the nine identified teacher-powered practices, please rate your collective team's use of each practice. An online version of this survey is available here: https://forms.gle/bfuenwziNJbjChNi9

0-5 Scale

0: Our team does not use this practice
1: We do a poor job of implementing this practice
2: We are inconsistent with this practice
3: We do a decent job with this practice
4: We do well at this practice
5: We excel at this and could mentor other teams in this area

1. Keep Students at the Center of Decision-Making: 0   1   2   3   4   5

2. Meaningfully Involve Families and Communities: 0   1   2   3   4   5

3. Honor Student Voice and Choice: 0   1   2   3   4   5

4. Cultivate a Collaborative Culture: 0   1   2   3   4   5

5. Embrace Transparency in Decision-Making: 0   1   2   3   4   5

6. Create Shared Leadership Structures: 0   1   2   3   4   5

7. Reimagine and Rotate Leadership Positions: 0   1   2   3   4   5

8. Engage in Peer Observation: 0   1   2   3   4   5

9. Take On a Learner Mindset: 0   1   2   3   4   5

Short Answer Section

1. Identify two areas you would like to see your team improve in.

_____

2. Would you like to help lead professional learning in these areas (perhaps identifying resources, other teams that do this well, coordinating training for your team)?

_____

3. Any observations related to these nine practices that you would like to share here?

_____

_____