

# THE ROLE OF SUPERINTENDENTS IN SUPPORTING TEACHER LEADERSHIP\*

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## Abstract

This paper documents a study of the role of superintendents in fostering and enabling the growth of teacher leadership. It is presented in two parts. The first part was designed to study teacher leadership programs in select universities in Michigan in which professors of educational administration described the extent to which the concept of teacher leadership is included in administrative training programs at their universities. The second part of the study reviewed the perceptions of a select group of educators who had either been trained as teacher leaders (Galileo Academy) or were administrators in buildings with trained teacher leaders (Galileo Consortium) as to the role of superintendents in fostering this concept. The study used qualitative and quantitative measures, in survey form. This paper presents the preliminary data, which suggest that universities are beginning to include teacher leadership as a unit of study, and superintendents are seen as key figures in the transformation to utilizing teacher leadership.



NOTE: This module has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and sanctioned by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a scholarly contribution to the knowledge base in educational administration.

## 1 Introduction

The authors readily recognize that this is a preliminary study. Since so little exists in the literature about the role of superintendents in encouraging teacher leadership, we attempted to determine through some

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representative data gathering whether we would find enough substance to warrant a more ambitious effort on a larger scale. In a sense it may be viewed as a study whether to study.

We begin with some background about the origins and justifications of the evolution of teacher leadership. We then discuss a mini-study of administrative preparation programs in Michigan as to whether they are including the study of teacher leadership in their administrative training course content.

The core of our study gathers data from a group of teachers who participated in a rigorous two-year leadership development program called the Galileo Academy and a group of administrators from the districts involved in the academy program, herein referred to as the Galileo consortium. This program began almost 12 years ago with significant funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and contributions from the participating school districts. The most reliable data on this subject seemed likely to come from teachers who had been trained as teacher leaders and who, at least in some instances, had a substantial amount of experience operating in this role, however defined in each district.

We conclude with some decisions about the viability of a larger and more substantial study.

## 2 The Origins of Teacher Leadership

Teacher leadership as a concept has been expanding for almost a generation (Barth, 1990; Hart, 1995). Interest in this topic can be attributed to a number of sources. The following are among the most important:

- There was a growth of research studies in the 1980s that showed that individual school buildings are the most promising focus for fostering instructional improvement (Goodlad, 1983).
- This growth of concern for studying the individual school building led to a growing focus on the importance of the principal's leadership in enhancing student learning in the building. Superintendents came to realize that they could not achieve high level learning goals in all buildings in a district unless all principals were skilled at their craft as well as free to bring their special gifts to decisions about how to move a school forward. The literature on the principal as instructional leader exploded (Duke, 1987; Danielson, 2006; Lambert, 1995; Wagner et al., 2006; Wasley, 1992) and the literature about teacher leadership was not far behind (Angelle, 2007; Crowther, 2002; Danielson, 2006; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 200; Lieberman and Miller, 2004; Murphy, 2005; York-Barr & Duke, 2005).
- The national interest in accountability as measured through achievement tests in core subject areas made school administration a high stakes position. Though the principal might be expected to be the instructional leader in the building, no principal could be expected to be an expert in all core content areas plus newer teaching strategies and techniques, including the rapidly growing areas of technology. Brown (2008) affirmed, "Given the expanded roles and responsibilities of principals, it is crucial that district and school administration cultivate teachers to successfully share leadership responsibilities" (p. 29).
- Educators have a long history of trying to differentiate roles for teachers, especially away from either/or choices: one must choose either to be a teacher or an administrator. Differentiation has been seen as a way to add a career ladder for classroom teachers so they could take on more responsibility as they grow in knowledge and skills yet still keep a hand the classroom, where their abilities are clearly recognized. Thus, the movement from some teachers having defined leadership roles (mentors, department heads, instructional specialist and the like) to lots of teachers having leadership responsibilities has not been a precedent-breaking change.
- Private businesses had come to realize that it was cheaper to fix a product's weaknesses while it came through the assembly line than it was to take apart a finished product when problems were discovered at the end of the manufacturing process and make changes at that point. This realization led to more authority for workers on the assembly line to stop the manufacturing process as soon as problems were discovered.
- Larger companies realized that success for their products was likely when there was a combination of standardization and innovation. A McDonald's hamburger needed to taste the same wherever it was served in the world. However, some additional menu items might appeal to citizens of certain

geographic areas while not others. Regional leaders had to have the freedom to experiment with menu items at their sites if the company was to avoid blandness. A natural consequence of this attempt to give local leaders freedom to innovate was the growth of interest in site-based budgeting and site-based decision-making. The core assumption is that people at the point of delivery know the special needs of a market. The concept was easily extrapolated to school districts. Two of the three authors of this paper worked in a school district that ran the gamut from one school with a majority of free and reduced price lunches to a school across town from which many students were expected to attend some of the state's and nation's most prestigious institutions of higher education. The needs of both types of schools could not be satisfied in identical fashion.

In summary, distributing responsibility to lower levels of the hierarchy enabled the organization to draw on the knowledge, talents and skills of a much larger cadre of staff than was possible when decision-making responsibility was reserved for those at the top of the chain of command.

In addition to the natural evolution of the concept of teacher leadership as a result of changes within society as noted above, there is also an intellectual justification of the importance of expanding leadership within an organization.

Perhaps no concept has so quickly caught the imagination of today's leaders as the notion of systems thinking. Superintendents have realized that in order to achieve today's high standards of learning for all students, an outcome never before asked of schools, it is necessary to consider all the elements that impact that learning: teacher skill sets, curriculum design, classroom organization, presentation methodology, principal behaviors, and other factors. And these are only the internal factors that impact learning. External factors such as parent and child physical and mental health, family economic circumstances, adult family relationships and other factors also impact the child's learning. No one school leader, whether at the district or building level, would be able to gather, evaluate and apply all of this information in a coherent manner. A task this large requires the involvement of everyone in decision-making if a school organization is to achieve the goal held out by Peter Senge (1990) of creating a learning organization, "an organization this is continually expanding its capacity to create its future." Perhaps the foremost organizational theorist of the 20th Century, Peter Drucker, articulated this same notion around this time (1992): "Every enterprise has to become a learning institution {and} a teaching institution. Organizations that build in continuous learning in jobs will dominate the 21st Century" (p.108).

Another prominent writer of the present generation, Margaret Wheatley (1992), has noted that there are basic principles of science that can lead us to reconceiving the best organizational pattern for a successful organization. She notes "a business that focuses on its core competencies identifies itself as a portfolio of skills rather than as a portfolio of business units"(p. 93). One could readily substitute the word "classrooms" for the words "business units." If, she argues, everyone in the organization accepts the "simple governing principles: guiding visions, strong values, organizational beliefs – the few rules individuals can use to shape their own behavior..." then all individuals in the system can be given the freedom to lead through their "sometimes chaotic-looking meanderings" (p. 13).

### 3 The Definition of Teacher Leadership

No widely recognized definition of the expression "teacher leadership" has taken hold in the profession. This concept can refer to a very informal request of one or more teachers to play a role in some program or activity in which they are known to have a particular interest and/or skill to a very formal delegation of responsibilities with accompanying title and possibly increased compensation. Different definitions abound:

- Influencing and engaging colleagues toward improved practice (Wasley, 1992).
- Leading within and beyond the classroom, identifying with and contributing to a community of teacher learners and leaders and influencing others toward improved educational practice (Moyer and Katzenmeyer, 2001).
- Mobilizing and energizing others with the goal of improving the school's performance of its critical responsibilities related to teaching and learning (Danielson, 2006).

Katsenmeyer and Moller (2001) have identified the continuum of spheres of influence that teacher leaders might be selected to operate in within the school:

- Unlimited options for leadership or formal leadership positions
- Classroom functions or administrative functions
- Focus on teaching and learning or focus on organizational issues
- Personal accountability for results or full administrative accountability
- Teachers as reflective practitioners or teachers as technician.

## 4 The Superintendent and Teacher Leadership

One fact is clear: a principal can delegate authority for the completion of a task to a staff member but not responsibility for the task's completion in satisfactory manner, at least as far as most superiors are concerned.

The likelihood that a principal will be enthusiastic about using the knowledge and skills of the teaching staff in leadership positions in the high stakes environment of a modern school tends to depend on several factors:

- The extent to which a principal has been trained in the concept of teacher leadership in a principal preparation program.
- The extent to which district officials embrace the concept of teacher leadership and encourage its support.
- The extent that the teacher union embraces the concept of teacher leadership as well as the concept of teacher leadership that it favors?

All of these issues deserve further exploration. However, the purpose of this paper is to discuss to what extent the chief administrative official of the district, the school superintendent, is likely to influence principals in expanding their commitment to teacher leadership and so the other topics will not be addressed.

It is a first principle of management that an organization must be aligned in certain key areas if it is to operate harmoniously and successfully (Davis, Hellervik, Gebelin, Shead, & Skube 1992; Vancil, 1975). The chief executive of a publicly traded or governmental unit must want what the policy making board wants or chaos is guaranteed. A chief executive cannot achieve the goals to which he or she is committed unless leaders at all levels of the organization are concentrated on those goals and working toward them. These notions have always been true. What has been a new issue in recent years, as illustrated in the earlier part of this piece, is the complexity of the challenges faced by private industry in a global economy and the seemingly impossible task of assuring success for all students for education by 2013-14.

A good example of the challenging task facing school districts and the impatience that accompanies calls for superior student achievement comes from the state of Mississippi, where the governor recently signed legislation that will terminate the positions of school superintendents if their districts are determined to be "underperforming" two years in a row (McNeil, 2008).

We have noted earlier the changed role of building principals from building and staff manager to instructional leader. There is additional literature we can cite in addition to the citations given earlier in the paper (Danzig, A. B. et al. (2007); McEwen, S. K., 1998; Nelson, B. S., 2005; Webster, W. S., 1994) regarding this transformation of role; the literature is almost limitless. Clearly the growth of this instructional responsibility for principals has moved in symmetry with the growth of teacher leadership. Reaching out to teacher leaders has given principals more minds, hearts and hands to address the complex task of improving learning for everyone. In effect leadership has evolved from a personal characteristic to an organizational one (Hart, 1995), from an individual function to a collective function (Elmore, 2003).

There are studies that point to the superintendent's role in encouraging instructional leadership on the part of the principal (Schlechty, 2002) and a few that mention the role of superintendents in fostering teacher leadership. One study of a successful school district notes, "When districts work to develop principals as chief learning officers, the district is creating leaders of leaders. This evolution of leadership roles help[s]

the district establish leadership as a distributed responsibility with teachers” (Ash & Persall, 2000, p. 17). In describing the superintendent of a Clifton, New York school district who has drawn their approbation (who is one of the co-authors it would seem), Spanneut and Ford note that the superintendent encourages principals to “grow people” (p.29). Principals discuss teacher leadership at administrative leadership team meetings and are sent to National Staff Development meetings for three major reasons:

- To learn to be instructional leaders
- To learn how to develop PLCs
- To foster teacher leadership

One relatively recent textbook on the superintendency (King, 1999) spoke of the need for district leaders to “listen to the voice of teachers and other staff members” (p.22), but did not mention the concept of teacher leadership as a vehicle for that purpose. White (2007) refers to the a recent study by Waters and Marzano (2006) for the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (MCREL) group that has found “a substantial and positive relationship between district-level leadership and student achievement when the superintendent, district office staff, and school board members do the ‘right work’ in the ‘right way.’” White suggests that superintendents do that “by sharing the leadership role with boards, administrators, and teachers” (p.58).

These positive studies of superintendents playing an important role in fostering teacher leadership seem few in number. On the contrary, it is not hard to imagine situations where superintendents are worse than indifferent to teacher leadership and frustrate the expansion of the role of teachers as leaders, but documentation is difficult to come by. Superintendents who fear loss of control may insist that teacher leaders, if they have any role at all in significant events, especially those outside the teacher’s classroom, be limited in their responsibilities. School boards that hold their superintendents on a “short leash” may, intentionally or not, discourage the diffusion of authority that enables an organization to utilize the full range of its talent pool. Though books about the superintendency and about superintendent/ school board relations are replete with anecdotes about such unhealthy relationships between boards and superintendents, studies looking at the negative effects of superintendent behavior on the expansion of teacher leadership just do not seem to exist.

However, there is a whole area of related research that we have not investigated. We refer to the topic of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). By definition, a PLC seeks to energize the whole staff into taking responsibility for student learning and to share concepts, techniques, and, perhaps most important, responsibility for the success of all students. DuFour and Eaker (1998) identify the core concepts in their conception of a PLC:

- Shared mission, vision and values
- Collective inquiry
- Collaborative teams
- Action orientation and experimentation
- Continuous improvement
- Results orientation (pp.25-29)

For purposes of this study, the researchers utilized the PLC concepts as defined by Shirley Hord of the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (2004).

These dimensions include supportive and shared leadership, collective learning and its application, shared values and vision, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice.

Almost by definition it is impossible to have “shared mission, vision and values” and “collaborative teams” without a designing a school where leadership is decentralized. Though we conclude that districts where superintendents either promote or support PLCs are, by definition, places where the district leader is inevitably promoting teacher leadership, we looked at a narrow body of literature, the specific role of the superintendent in fostering or at least supporting teacher leadership.

## 5 Method of the Study

This paper documents a study of two parts. The first part was designed to study the various educational leadership programs in six universities in Michigan. The second part of the study reviewed the perceptions of stakeholders in the Galileo Consortium, including academy participants and other leaders in consortium districts.

In Part I of the study a convenient sample of professors attending a state meeting was asked to indicate whether and to what extent students in administrative training programs in their institutions are exposed to the concept of teacher leadership. We did not attempt to ascertain the specific content of the curriculum.

Part II of the study involved a survey that was mailed to teachers and educational leaders after being field-tested with a group of teacher leaders who carefully reviewed each question and gave suggestions for word choice and demographic variables. This study had both numeric and open-ended questions. We developed the survey to ascertain what superintendent behaviors contributed to the enhancement of, or acted as a barrier to the development of teacher leadership in a district. The survey questions were based on the research and literature base about teacher leadership (Crowther, 2002; Danielson, 2006; Lambert, 1995; Lieberman & Miller, 2004; Moyer & Katzenmeyer, 2001). Specifically, we were interested in knowing how educators perceive the extent of the general barriers to teacher leadership with particular emphasis on discovering how superintendent words and actions influenced teacher leadership. We were also interested in determining what, if any, of the relationships with various constituencies would promote teacher leadership. Finally, we wanted to ask a question that mirrored the language of the ISLLC (Interstate School Licensure Consortium); namely, what were the variables of knowledge, skills, and dispositions of superintendents that would enhance teacher leadership. Additionally, participants were encouraged to contribute comments concerning the promotion of teacher leadership.

Part II of the study had four sections on the survey. Section I consisted of demographic information in which respondents identified their district and position they held. Section II of the survey asked respondents to rate the extent of the barriers of teacher leadership from most (5) to least (1) significant. An additional column, DK, was listed for a “don’t know” response. Section III asked respondents to rate the extent of the support that superintendents provide for principals to develop teacher leadership in the schools according to the following scale: 5- most significant, to 1- least significant. Section III also asked respondents to rate the extent of importance of the relationships of the superintendent with seven constituent groups, ranging from the Board of Education to the union. Section IV was the open-ended section, asking respondents to comment on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are needed by superintendents to enhance or maximize teacher leadership. The final, open-ended question allowed for participants to add additional comments about the superintendent’s role in promoting teacher leadership.

The surveys for Part II of this study were mailed to stakeholders in the Galileo Consortium, including teacher leaders, central office administrators, building leaders, union representatives, or superintendents. All respondents were guaranteed anonymity for their responses. Of those 39 individuals who returned surveys, 39% were present or former Galileo Leaders, 23% were central office administrators, 21% were elementary principals 8% were middle school principals and 5% were high school principals. Therefore, the results of this survey represent what a select group of Galileo leaders think, as opposed to the other leaders in their districts. However, this paper is preliminary, both in terms of the data that are reported, and the conclusions that can be drawn from a select audience and incomplete survey response.

## 6 Results of the Study

### Part I of the Study

The results of the first part of the study involved an informal survey of select university professors who indicated that the concepts regarding teacher leadership have emerged as part of their formal study, although explanations for the type of exposure and involvement were not ascertained. The informal survey results were as follows: Six university representatives responded to our brief questionnaire, four public institutions and two private institutions. There were no significant differences in their responses. The questions and

range of responses were as follows:

1. To what extent does your faculty accept the notion that the concept of teacher leadership should be part of the training of future school leaders? Four of the six respondents indicated that it was accepted to some extent and two saw it as a significant topic.
  2. Does the concept of teacher leadership appear anywhere in the syllabi of courses in school administration/leadership offered by your school? Four indicated that it was and two said that it was not.
  3. Does your program promote the concept of a “leaderful” school in which the principals and superintendent seek to involve all staff, teachers and other staff, in building programs and activities for which they may have responsibility and/or for which they have helpful knowledge/skill? All six responded affirmatively.
  4. Is there a particular definition of teacher leadership that your department promotes in training administrative leaders? Two indicated that there was, while four said there was no such definition. (Though definitions used by the university for teacher leadership were requested, none was given.)
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1. Does your program encourage potential leaders to delegate authority but maintain responsibility, thereby enabling teachers to accept leadership authority without fear of absorbing administrative responsibility? There were five yes responses and one no.
  2. Is teacher leadership a focused subject for administrative students in their internship experiences? There were two affirmative and four negative responses.

Finally, respondents were asked to identify the extent to which the following topics were covered in their programs:

1. Promoting cultural change to embrace teacher leadership. Three saw this as important, one saw it as significant and the other two responded that it was either not covered in their program or insignificant.
2. Discussing situations and cases where teacher leadership has been successful. Three saw this as an important topic, one responded that it was significant, and two regarded it as an insignificant topic.
3. Seeking to expose students to schools where teacher leadership is successful practice. Two respondents saw this as an important part of their programs, one felt that it was an insignificant part, and three reported that it was not included.

We assume from the comments made on a survey form and in conversations afterward that the following were included in one or more curricula:

- Knowledge of the concept of teacher leadership
- The importance of developing teacher leaders in the modern school environment (as outlined earlier in this paper).
- The need to work with the union, if there is one, to assure cooperation and collaboration as the definition of teacher leadership evolves in the district.
- The reality that it will be necessary to continually adjust plans to establish a teacher leadership program in response to progress and setbacks.

We make no claims for these data. We reasoned that one of the first places that embryonic administrators might be wisely exposed to the concept of teacher leadership was in administrative preparation program. Our informal survey suggests that the concept of teacher leader is recognized as an important one in some administrator/leader training programs and not others.

#### Part II of the Study

The responses from the second part of this study were calculated by using SPSS, determining the mean, frequency, standard deviation, and percent of each response. Additional comments were typed verbatim for review of themes and issues that were important to the participants. Both numeric and non-numeric responses are included in this paper.

The survey asked three primary questions: one asked participants to rank the extent of barriers to developing teacher leadership, one asked about the importance of superintendents' behaviors in supporting principals, and one asked about the importance of relationships of the superintendent with various constituencies. The questions and high and low mean scores for responses are included below for review:

1. Which of the items below do you see as the most significant barriers to developing teacher leadership?

High mean score- 3.67. Lack of understanding about what teacher leadership includes.

Low mean score- 2.82. Lack of district administrative support.

The respondents answered that the lack understanding of the concepts about teacher leadership were most important as a barrier to developing teacher leadership, although it is interesting to note that the mean score (3.67) was closer to a four on a five point scale, (five being the most significant of the possible responses). The responses for this question were largely clustered around the middle of the possible responses, signifying that they are neither most significant nor least significant. The mean scores of respondents did not report that any of the barriers listed were the "most significant" as barriers to developing teacher leadership.

2. Which of the items below do you regard as the most significant superintendent behaviors in supporting principals who are committed to developing teacher leadership in their schools?

Respondents were asked which superintendent behaviors are most important in supporting teacher leadership. It was clear that all behaviors were deemed important since all mean scores were 3.9 and above. In order to determine which superintendent behaviors are perceived as most important, we calculated the percentages of positive responses (either a 4 or a 5) for questions 9-19. Table 1. shows the comparative importance of these closely associated behaviors. This information becomes important with regard to professional training of future superintendents.

Table 1. Comparative importance of superintendent behaviors

Essential Behaviors	
Promotes a collaborative community	87%
Emphasizes expectation for teacher leadership	82%
Works with union and board of education to remove barriers	82%
Aligns system to support teacher leadership	80%
Provides support and recognition	80%
Important Behaviors	
Supports growth focused professional evaluation	77%
Committed to professional learning	75%
Minimizes hoop jumping	72 %
Desirable Behaviors	
Takes risks	69 %
Provides opportunity for site autonomy	64%
Supports leadership styles	62%
Gets things done	62%

Table 1

3. Evaluate the importance of each of the superintendent's relationships listed below as they relate to the promotion of teacher leadership.

High mean score- 4.79. Relationship with the teachers and building administrators

Low mean scores- 3.66. Relationship with the Board of Education and relationship with community.



Once again, the respondents felt that all the variables were important. In this question, the responses about relationships with teachers and building administrators received the highest means, which is understandable, given the nature of developing teachers as leaders in the school district. In short, all relationships of superintendents were determined to be important.

Section IV contained the open-ended questions. The answers revealed an array of responses for knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for promoting teacher leadership in the districts. Some responses are summarized here for review according to the most prevalent response for each category.

Knowledge:

- Knowledge about research, curriculum, best practices, modeling learning
- Knowledge about system change, supporting change
- Knowledge about teacher leadership and learning communities
- Knowledge about how to involve and engage others

Skills:

- Skilled in people skills, ability to collaborate and nurture talent
- Skilled in listening, communicating, organizing time
- Skilled in relationships with the larger community, communicating about teacher leadership
- Skilled in promoting teacher leadership
- Skilled in managing timelines and pressures of the job; delegating

Dispositions:

- Show a willingness to share power and accept diverse opinions
- Show a willingness to listen, delegate, and follow through on details
- Show a willingness to support teacher leadership, give teachers professional development, and resources
- Show a willingness to listen and put relationships as a priority
- Show a willingness to allow teachers to question and lead the way
- Show a willingness to put students' needs as priority
- Show a willingness to model trust and integrity

Other selected comments- verbatim:

- "Superintendents must lead by example. He/she cannot be too 'hands-off' from solving building/district barriers to teacher leadership. There must be a strong expectation that teacher leadership will be developed in each school and intervention when the building administrator has not embraced this role."
- "Building trust within the organization is so vital to so many things. In these troubled economic times, trust would play the leading role in helping folks with change. Unfortunately, it seems to be the first thing violated when change takes place. Trust must remain at the forefront no matter what happens."
- "The superintendent should recognize and be able to identify teacher leaders. The superintendent's job is huge, yet knowing your resources is important to district success."
- "Teacher leadership is promoted and grown with the superintendent's recognition of and continuing support for teacher initiatives at the district level alone in conjunction and support with the local education association."
- "This is obvious, but they must walk the talk. It's not enough to say they believe in teacher leadership or to understand it, they must begin to DO! They must realize it takes a lot of time to develop leaders and work towards the goal, slowly and by celebrating small steps! They must also build relationships with teacher leaders – not just depend on building administrators. And they must model and expect this of other administrators."
- "What does a leader focus on, celebrate, assess and measure? Keep the main thing the main thing long enough to change behaviors, attitudes and make systemic change!"

## 7 Implications

The results of this preliminary study confirm what the literature states about teacher leadership; namely, that district leaders are crucial to the success of promoting teachers as leaders within the district. These data, while representative of what a small and select group of trained teacher leaders think, align with the literature about the importance of a variety of knowledge, skills, and dispositions of building and district leaders who carefully place teacher leadership front and center among the various district initiatives. The results from this brief study suggest that trust matters, as do relationships, especially relationships with teachers. The teachers are clearly watching for the congruence between what is espoused and what is championed by their superintendents.

This study also suggests the importance of the knowledge base of superintendents, that they are expected to be strong instructional leaders, conversant with information about educational best practice, and the process of change. The comments from respondents revealed the importance of “staying the ground” with regard to following through on change efforts when things became difficult. Superintendents need to carefully navigate the political white waters of change, while communicating to all the stakeholders. Consistency is important to the teachers who are watching for follow through on behalf of district leaders.

The knowledge, skills, and dispositions listed by the respondents in this survey also align with the literature about change in PLCs. Specifically, the respondents outlined what they perceive would make a difference to them relative to promoting teacher leadership, and the themes centered around trust, advocacy and support, vision, and consistency of action on the part of superintendents. These comments directly support the research on PLCs (Hord, 2004; Hord & Sommers, 2008; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001, 2006). Personal factors matter in the development of teacher empowerment and shared decision making; this is not about an announcement of a new job description or delineation on a flow chart. Superintendents must tend to the personal issues in transitions.

Because teacher leadership is a key construct in the implementation of PLC principles, we have merged the literature from the two fields and concluded that what is offered as advice for PLCs would benefit the districts that are attempting to develop teacher leadership practices. Likewise, knowledge from research and best practice literature about the leadership for building principals and PLCs would serve superintendents well

## 8 Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Study

This paper began by suggesting that this is “a study whether to study.” In other words, initially the authors were not convinced that studying the role of the superintendents in supporting teacher leadership would be as important as the role of building principal. After reviewing the literature and reviewing the results of our preliminary two-part study, it is clear that this is indeed a topic worth studying. We conclude that the leadership of superintendents plays a fundamental role in creating organizations in which both authority and responsibility for student achievement can be distributed and shared. It is the superintendent who is uniquely positioned to “develop principals as chief learning officers” who are “leaders of leaders” (Ash & Persall, 2000, p. 17).

It is the superintendent who, in the words of one of the survey respondents, “must lead by example. He/she cannot be too ‘hands off’ from solving building/district barriers to teacher leadership. There must be a strong expectation the teacher leadership will be developed in each school and intervention when the building administrator has not embraced this role.”

While there is emerging support in the literature for the superintendent’s role in supporting teacher leadership, the data from our study does not provide adequate insight into the specific superintendent roles or relationships that support teacher leadership. Further study is needed to determine the relative importance of roles and relationships. The pilot study seems to suggest that all of the behaviors and relationships listed in the survey were of relative equal importance. It might be noted that when everything is seen as important, nothing is important!

A similar lack of specificity is evident in the responses from faculty members from the six colleges and

universities who responded to questions about the role of teacher leadership in their administrator preparation programs. All indicated that it was included but were unclear about how it is defined and included in their programs. Further, it is not clear that superintendent preparation programs address the values, dispositions and competencies associated with collaborative leadership in general and teacher leadership in particular.

Further study is needed to address the following:

1. To what extent do teachers and administrators understand the barriers to teacher leadership? While most respondents cited time and understanding as major barriers, there was less attention to behavioral and cultural change.
2. Superintendent behaviors need further clarification. Are all of the behaviors mentioned in the survey really equally important to fostering teacher leadership? How can we be more specific about what each of the behaviors looks like?
3. Much more information is needed about the impact of superintendent relationships in supporting teacher leadership. The role of the board of education needs further study as well.
4. Differences in perceptions were difficult to identify in the small sample used in the preliminary study. We need to know if various stakeholder groups see the superintendent's role differently.
5. How is teacher leadership currently specifically addressed in the curriculum of university administrator preparation programs?

The next stages of this study will include modifying the survey instrument to provide more information about the relative importance of superintendent roles and relationships, surveying teachers and administrators beyond the Galileo Consortium in Southeast Michigan, and conducting individual interviews and focus group sessions with selected survey respondents.

The potential significance of this study is noted by Shirley Hord (2004) who asks, "Assuming we find the means to nurture democracies in schools, how do we train and retrain principals, superintendents, and other district personnel to let go of the reins and allow these democracies to flourish?" (p.4). A new vision for democratic participation in schools would mean that leaders will lead powerfully when they distribute leadership. Leading organizations is no longer a solo act. Leaders, in this new and expanded definition, are part of the community, and organizations are seen as living entities, a system of interconnected parts. Superintendents who understand this concept and are willing to embrace its principles become partners in creating new possibilities in the districts they serve.

This study should shed some light on the institutional commitments that must be made if teacher leadership is to become a reality. A follow-up study will be particularly useful to practicing administrators seeking broader ownership for student achievement and for professors preparing administrators to lead such schools.

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