

Developing Teacher Leaders in CTE

By Christine Holecek, Kandace Beckham and Donna McKethan

Administrators play a critical role in cultivating an environment that allows teacher leaders to emerge and thrive. One invaluable skill an administrator should possess is the ability to identify individuals who are teacher leaders. Career and technical education (CTE) teachers help prepare students for successful careers through rigorous academic and work-based learning programs. CTE teachers are filling the pipeline with the future workforce of our nation. We must invest in our CTE teachers if we expect them to cultivate our future workforce.

The first step in the process for administrators to determine teacher leaders is to pinpoint which role teacher leaders will fill—formal or informal. Formal roles are often sought out by individuals who are motivated to become leaders, and they

do so by choice. Administrators should support these teachers and encourage them to formally apply and complete the selection process. Unfortunately for these individuals, it usually means leaving the classroom to pursue those roles.

Informal teacher leaders emerge because of their personality—their charisma, appeal and ability to captivate an audience. They serve as role models for others. They earn respect from their peers because of their love for students, teaching and learning. These leaders do not want to leave their classrooms. Attributes that make a good teacher leader are the same that make a good teacher—persuasiveness, open-mindedness, flexibility, confidence and expertise in their field.

To grow and inspire teacher leaders, administrators should focus on three key objectives: building leadership skills, pro-

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viding a passionate mentor, and affording the opportunity to meet in a professional learning community (PLC).

Simon Sinek's (2011) *Start with the Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* describes the transition from the need to feel safe in an organization to helping inspire employees to become leaders within one. Sinek's insight into organizational leadership helps administrators become inspired and subsequently compelled to inspire others. The best administrators foster trust and the spirit of cooperation.

Building Leadership Skills

Once an administrator identifies leadership potential in teachers, he or she must find an opportunity to help them build collaboration, facilitation and planning skills. Administrators can delegate tasks or projects to help develop these particular skills.

Collaboration

Collaboration skills demonstrate that an individual is able to work effectively and respectfully with teams. These skills also include the flexibility and the willingness to make the necessary compromises in accomplishing common goals, as well as understanding the value of individual contributions. Collaboration includes building and maintaining relationships with other teachers, staff and business and community partners.

Amanda Necessary, CTE director for Belton ISD in Belton, Texas, uses advisory board meetings as a way to foster collaboration skills with her teacher leaders. For example, a partnership between the Construction Technology teacher and advisory

board member, MW Builders, has led to a mutually beneficial relationship that supports students. Not only does the business partner provide hands-on training, but the business has also supported the Skills USA team with the tools and training to be competitive at the state and national levels. As a result of this partnership, two of the team members who have now graduated are participating in internships with the company and pursuing degrees in the construction field.

Facilitation

A facilitator helps shape and guide the process of working together in groups to achieve stated goals and objectives. Facilitation skills can be honed by preparing for and conducting department meetings, school board presentations or advisory board meetings. As these teacher leaders develop their facilitation skills, they will be better able to move through the meeting agendas, as well as other logistics, and keep everyone on task.

Planning

Planning skills allow teachers to look ahead and accomplish goals, and goal-setting is the number one key to planning. Strategic planning skills include creating mission and vision; using data to ensure student success; diagnosing problems by finding their root causes; evaluating and comparing action plans; communicating; and implementing and monitoring actions. Planning includes time management, meeting management, project management and workspace organization.

Ashley Canuteson, Midway ISD director of College and Career Readiness in Wood-

way, Texas, utilizes her teacher leaders to help with an annual college and career event called Junior Round-Up. This is a unique event for 11th-grade students that provides a half day of college/career exploration through breakout sessions. College partners are available to talk to students about topics such as admissions, financial aid, living away from home, study skills, etc. Career partners form career panels that are grouped by similar career pathways that align to the program of study. Students get to hear about “a day in the life” of a variety of job types while also learning about the education and experience required for those jobs.

A CTE team plans the event, but teacher leaders are the backbone of its success. Teachers facilitate each session to lay the groundwork for what students should look/listen for and how this will help them in planning next steps toward life and career goals. This also gives teacher leaders the opportunity to work with college and career partners and form relationships that last long after the event is over. These relationships often lead to guest speaking and job site visits, etc.

Mentorship

The second key to success is partnering teacher leaders with a passionate mentor. A mentor may be formally assigned or he or she could be a colleague on the campus. Besides being passionate, a successful mentor is respectful, trustworthy, empathetic, collaborative, willing to challenge and creates a sense of safety. The mentor must also possess what we like to call “celebration” skills which are necessary because he or she must be there to celebrate



the small success, as well as the big ones. Mentors must be genuinely happy when their teacher leaders succeed.

Case Study: Greater Waco

Advanced Health Care Academy

Mentorship is a phenomenal way to help foster the growth of potential teacher leaders. With that in mind, the academy assigned a mentor to three Health Science Technology teachers who had come directly from the clinical setting, having little to no teaching experience. The mentor met with all three teachers weekly for the first 12 weeks of school, bi-weekly for the next 12 weeks and once monthly for the remaining 12 weeks.

The mentor's first goal was to help the teachers feel comfortable in their new roles; this job was very different from what they had previously been doing. Listening to teachers and evaluating their needs were of the utmost importance if the mentor was going to equip them with the knowledge and skills needed to reach optimal success in the classroom. Based on the

needs of the teachers, the mentor set up professional development training in areas where the teachers felt they needed assistance, such as classroom management and technology use in the classroom.

The mentor also conducted four classroom observations throughout the school year, providing specific feedback to both teachers and the campus administrators, which was used to ensure the support and return of these teachers to the classroom. The classroom observations were used in a manner that fostered growth by identifying strengths and weaknesses. This allowed the teachers to explore various avenues that would help ensure they were equipped with the information needed to reach their maximum potential in the classroom.

During face-to-face meetings, the mentor assisted teachers in a number of ways. Lesson planning was at the top of the list, as this can be a cumbersome task for many first-year teachers, especially for those who may be teaching courses with

minimal textbook resources. While engaging in lesson planning, the teachers were able to identify what types of activities would be most appropriate for their students and ensure each day's lesson would provide sufficient instruction to fill the class period.

This process led to further discussion regarding classroom management and student behavior. It was vital that the teachers understood that classroom management comes before the teaching. If a classroom is out of control, teaching cannot occur. Helping teachers understand the difference between classroom management and student discipline was also a part of the many conversations that ultimately led to further discussion about the importance of communication with campus administrators.

The mentor also took this meeting time to impart support and guidance. As often seen with first-year teachers, there are many days they feel either inadequate in the job or out of their comfort zone.

In some cases, this could lead to them leaving the classroom indefinitely. The mentor's job was to provide support and find ways to lessen the feeling of failure on the bad days. Encouragement was a key component every step of the way.

The mentor monitored teacher leaders' progress and communicated it to campus and district administrators through face-to-face meetings and periodic reports that outlined commendations, recommendations, considerations and areas of concern. Anonymous teacher satisfaction surveys were given to the teachers at the end of the school year, and the results of those surveys were used in the final report submitted to the district. This allowed administrators to continue enhancing the program and offering support to the teachers.

The mentoring meetings left the teachers with a sense of accomplishment and belonging on the campus. Based on the results of the teacher satisfaction surveys, all teachers indicated that they felt their supervisors promoted an atmosphere of teamwork, administrators communicated effectively and respected each other's opinions and ideas, and they felt pride in working for the district. One teacher commented, "I love sharing my passion and teaching future health care workers."

Professional Learning Communities and Vertical Alignment

The third key to success in developing teacher leaders is participation in a PLC. PLCs have several goals. First, they should promote vertical alignment activities. Vertical alignment teams focus on building a solid curricular foundation. PLCs should also help participants raise academic standards and ensure that they are conducting appropriate assessments. PLCs foster teacher leadership, along with their active involvement and deep commitment to school improvement efforts.

Russell Porterfield, CTE director for Copperas Cove ISD in Copperas Cove, Texas, groups his CTE teachers into a PLC. He identifies potential teacher leaders within the PLC and has them work with advisory board members from their corresponding career cluster to create vertical alignment documents. The business partners help provide the seamless pathway from classroom to career.

Teacher leaders become most effective when they are focused on the success of their students and their journey through the education process. The PLC vertical alignment teams help focus on career pathways and programs of study with the ultimate goal of students entering a career. CTE teachers who focus on career pathways help ensure students have entry and exit ramps along the highway of college, careers and beyond. Therefore, PLCs benefit teachers just as much as they do students.

Conclusion

Developing teacher leaders is an investment that pays off with high dividends. An investment of time and the development of thoughtful processes in the areas of leadership development, mentorship and professional learning communities focused on vertical alignment will ensure successful teacher leaders in CTE. Administrators need to keep an eye out for potential leaders and use these tools to foster their growth. Ultimately, these efforts will lead to richer learning opportunities for the teachers and for students in their CTE programs. **Tech**

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Sinek, S. (2011). *Start with why: How great leaders inspire everyone to take action*. New York, NY: Penguin.

ACTE's CareerTech VISION 2016

Join Christine Holecek, Kandace Beckham and Donna McKethan for their informative session, "How to Develop Teacher Leaders in CTE" at ACTE's CareerTech VISION. Session attendees will learn timely information in the areas of mentorships, externships and vertical alignment teaming as it relates to building leadership skills for teachers. Find out more about this not-to-be-missed event at

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