The WERA Educational Journal

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About This Issue

This issue of the WERA Educational Journal (WEJ) has four papers related to district efforts to improve student learning and one review of books related to highly capable students.

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We encourage members and others to consider submitting interesting papers for publishing in upcoming issues of the WEJ. See the Call for Papers below for more information about this topic.

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Director of Assessment/Program Evaluation, Mukilteo School District

Call for Papers for the WERA Educational Journal (WEJ)

We are seeking papers and other submissions for the May 2017 issue of the *WERA Educational Journal*. The WEJ is a collection of peer-reviewed academic papers, professional reports, research reviews, book reviews, essays, and commentaries of general significance and interest to the Northwest education research and practitioner community. The WEJ is issued twice a year (November and May). Papers for the May 2017 issue are due January 15, 2017.

Topics in the WEJ cover a wide range of areas of educational research and related disciplines. These include but are not limited to issues related to the topics listed below.

- Early childhood education
- Curriculum and instruction
- State and national standards
- Professional development
- Special populations (e.g., gifted, ELLs, students with disabilities)
- Assessment results covering various content areas

- Early warning indicators
- Social and emotional issues
- School and district effectiveness
- Teacher and principal evaluation
- Education finance and policy
- Educational technology
- Educational leadership

Papers should be of interest to a wide range of educators in the Northwest. Condensed versions of dissertations and theses that are reader-friendly are encouraged. For more information about the WEJ and its submissions, see the Submission Guidelines posted on the WERA website. If you have questions about the process or about possible submissions, please email Pete Bylsma, the WEJ editor, at WEJeditor@gmail.com or his work email at bylsmapj@mukilteo.wednet.edu.

The Role of a District Teacher Leadership Program in Supporting School and District Improvement Initiatives

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Distributed leadership and collaboration was the focus of one district's investment in teacher leadership as a way to improve instruction and better serve a changing student population. The district's five-year teacher leadership initiative became a vehicle to introduce new programs, recognize the expertise of teachers, and provide teacher leaders with opportunities to be involved in implementing changes in their classroom, school and district. This study examined the school and district impact of the program in developing teachers' leadership skills and the ways in which teachers subsequently engaged in school and district leadership activities.

Perspectives on Teacher Leadership

Enhancing and supporting teacher leadership has been a focus in many districts for several decades. Partially in response to the ever-increasing expectation that principals ensure instructional guidance and support is provided, a variety of forms of distributed leadership have emerged (Murphy, Smylie, Mayrowetz & Louis, 2009; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Some research examining distributed leadership found that shared leadership has a greater impact on student learning than individual leadership (Louis, et al., 2010). Teacher leadership can positively impact teacher and student learning in a number of ways, including (1) increase a school or district's capacity for instructional improvement, (2) broaden and deepen participation in planning and decision-making about improvement strategies, (3) model best practices, and (4) foster collegiality and social capital (Danielson, 2007; Crowther, Kaagen, Ferguson & Hann, 2002; Smylie & Denny, 1990). That said, successful implementation of distributed leadership is somewhat dependent on the principal's capacity to adapt to the newly defined nature of their own leadership work, and to build the supports, trust, and opportunities necessary to foster the leadership work of teachers (Murphy, 2005; Murphy, Smylie, Mayrowetz, & Louis, 2009).

Ways of thinking about teacher leadership have evolved over time, resulting in a wide variety of forms of teacher leadership, both formal and informal (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Inherent in the role of a teacher leader is the expectation that teacher leaders will collaborate with others, thereby increasing intellectual and social capital (Nappi, 2014). This collaboration may take place at multiple levels within the system, including within grade levels, departments, and/or professional learning communities, or occur across school and district contexts. Ronfeldt et al. (2015) found that student achievement gains were greater in schools with stronger collaborative environments and in classrooms where teachers were strong collaborators in their instructional teams. Certain conditions known to foster productive teacher leadership include the support of principals and the adequate provision of time and resources to support the work.

Methods and Study Context

This study employed a concurrent mixed-methods research design with both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analyses (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010). To corroborate research findings and to provide diverse perspectives, we included multiple outcome measures and gathered data from a variety of sources. The research questions include:

1) How has a five-year districtwide teacher leadership initiative supported teacher leaders' professional knowledge and skills, and student learning goals, as well as school and district improvement initiatives?

2) To what extent has the initiative impacted teachers' roles and responsibilities and in the district*?*

This study was situated in the Auburn School District, a rapidly changing suburban district that encompasses a 62 square mile area in Western Washington. The district serves approximately 15,000 students, of whom 55 percent receive free or reduced-price meals, 55 percent are students of color, and 15 percent participate in the transitional bilingual program.

In 2010, the Auburn School District partnered with the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (CSTP), a Washington state non-profit, to provide training and support for the Auburn Teacher Leadership Academy (ATLA). Approximately 50 teachers each year participated in a year-long cohort-based program (2-3 teachers from each school). Approximately 250 teachers completed the training over the first five years (about 30% of the district's teachers). CSTP developed a Teacher Leadership Skills Framework that has formed the basis for their professional training of teachers. Using the CSTP framework, teacher leadership is defined as "the knowledge, skills and dispositions demonstrated by teachers who positively impact student learning by influencing, adults, formally and informally, beyond individual classrooms" (CSTP, 2009). The cohort met for four days in the summer prior to the school year, and then over the course of the school year to learn leadership skills such as working with adult learners, building relationships through communication, facilitating collaborative work, strengthening knowledge of content and pedagogy, and systems-level thinking in decision making.

Data Sources, Data Collection and Analysis

The primary qualitative strategy involved semi-structured interviews, focus groups and document analyses. The main quantitative work involved analyzing data derived from surveys and state datasets.

Interviews and Focus Groups. Interviews provided a detailed understanding of how participants experienced the program. The interviews also served as a platform for developing or adapting survey measures. Site visits were conducted on five separate days over nine months during the 2015-16 school year. Individual interviews were conducted with 16 teachers and 13 administrators. Additionally, 5 focus groups were conducted, organized by school level. A total of 10 teachers and 8 administrators participated in focus groups. A total of 47 employees of the district (representing 19 of 22 schools) were involved in interviews and focus groups.

Surveys. A second strategy involved the design and deployment of online surveys for school staff. The surveys were designed in consultation with the district and were deployed Autumn 2015. Survey data included factors such as the extent and nature of participation, assessment of school-wide impacts, instructional and leadership practices implemented, and satisfaction with the leadership training. A total of 102 certificated teaching staff responded to the teacher survey, yielding a response rate of 47 percent. Respondents were distributed across all five years of cohorts, with slightly higher response rates from Cohorts 1 and 4. A total of 24 administrators responded to a separate survey, a response rate of 63 percent. Respondents represented 22 of 24 the district's schools.

A variety of archival source materials were collected to offer information pertinent to the research questions, especially with regard to the organization and focus of professional development, such as five years of ATLA session agendas based on the Teacher Leadership Skills Framework, demographic information about students and staff, and the leadership efforts aimed at addressing student learning needs.

Findings

Like many districts in recent years, Auburn has faced substantial changes in education policy and practice while addressing increasing enrollments and changing student demographics. The Auburn Teacher Leadership Academy was established with a vision to build capacity for teacher leaders to better support a changing student population through active participation in instructional improvement efforts. Professional learning communities (PLCs) became an entry point to support the changes and collaboration was a way to collectively improve. A district administrator

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explained, "Grounded in the strategic plan was a belief in collaboration as the way for us to get better together, and that we're stronger as a team than any of us individually…We knew to be able to do collaboration well, we need to be able to develop some leaders at the building level other than the principal… What is it that we can do to help empower teachers to be able to lead their colleagues in collaboration to ultimately increase student learning?" ATLA became a vehicle for messaging and introducing new initiatives, recognizing the expertise of teachers, and providing teacher leaders with the opportunity to be involved in implementing changes.

In order for teachers to play a more active and influential leadership role with their colleagues, the training focused on developing specific knowledge and skills essential to teacher leadership based on the Teacher Leadership Skills Framework developed by CSTP. The training began by helping teachers shift how they viewed themselves as leaders. Analysis of the data identified four major themes: (1) development of teacher leadership knowledge and skills, (2) intersection of teacher leadership with school and district initiatives, (3) teacher leaders' changing roles and responsibilities, and (4) trade-offs and tensions.

Development of Teacher Leadership Knowledge and Skills

As part of this initiative, the district sought to move toward a culture where teacher leaders could collectively engage at multiple levels of the system. Essential to this process was teachers' gaining the *confidence to lead* and permission to take reasonable risks. For some teacher participants, risk taking was a new way of viewing their professional activities. A high school teacher explained, "The most memorable [aspect of the ATLA training] for me is just the impression that it's okay to put yourself out there and it's okay to take a risk. It's okay to utilize the skills that you have for the betterment of the school and the kids. I can do more to help the kids if I get involved in leadership… and training other staff, and just as much as I can in helping them in the classroom." Reasonable risk-taking was a theme echoed by district leaders who noted that it was OK to make some mistakes – because that too, is learning – as long as staff "fail forward, fail fast," which meant to make adjustments quickly and then move on. The vast majority of teachers surveyed (88%) and 100 percent of Auburn administrators either strongly or somewhat agreed that ATLA increased participants' self-confidence as a teacher leader.

Based on survey and interview data, a central outcome was learning to *work more effectively with other adults*. A district level administrator explained the rationale for this focus: "We all knew how to teach, but we didn't know how to teach adults. ATLA really brought that idea, 'How do we work with adults, maximize their strengths? How do you have those tough conversations?'" Interview data indicated that a recent district initiative had rolled out less smoothly in some buildings, resulting in the need for increased professional conversations and adjustments going forward. ATLA teachers indicated that the training provided a means for them to productively engage with their colleagues, particularly during this time.

Training activities included examples of different work styles, such as task-driven versus more relational orientations. A teacher explained how this understanding helped in working with colleagues: "…you are really task driven and that's why. I want to socialize and make sure everybody's comfortable and happy and okay. That's how come sometimes we butt heads. It's not a personal thing… It's interesting tapping into different people's personalities…. It's building on what strengths they have to bring to the table." Another teacher described an activity that involved physically locating themselves in a line with others, based on whether they considered themselves primarily a big picture thinker or more detail-oriented. A teacher explained, "That has helped me a little bit to think about where I see other staff members, where I see how they deal with their anxiety. If someone's a detailed person, they need to know everything if they're unsure of something, if they feel like they're in the dark. That's kind of helped me think [about how to work together]."

Participants described using protocols to model and practice how to have a difficult conversation. A middle school teacher explained, "…practicing those protocols, and again, just what do you do if you're in a meeting when nobody

wants to participate? Again, these are all adults. They are paid to be here and that's their job, but it's just they're still upset and hurt about those shifts, so how to work with that." An elementary teacher admitted her own weakness in being a talker and not a very good listener. After the training, her PLC team created protocols that they stick to religiously: "We have agendas that we stick to. We have a certain amount of time that each one of us is allowed to talk. It all came from ATLA. We make decisions whether or not certain conversations should be sidelined. We set our priorities. We give ourselves time limits. We wrap up with a, 'How do you think that went?'"

Other strategies for working with adults were mentioned by participants and included key words like "norms of collaboration" and "assume positive intent." A high school teacher explained, "I think ATLA did give me the confidence to be able to work with others in that other [more accepting] style." The confidence to take risks in working with their colleagues also opened up opportunities for teachers to engage with the district in new ways.

District leaders were intentionally visible and involved with the program over the five years. In particular, the former superintendent would design and lead a portion of the learning on the day when the *systems level thinking* was discussed. A district level administrator explained: "He engaged with teachers. They could ask questions. He could give kind of his vision, 'Hey, while you're here, this is what we're thinking. This is why we're doing it,' and [he] always did a great job of explaining the systems piece. 'Here's what we're doing in elementary, here's why. Here's what you're seeing in middle school, here's why. Here's what we're hoping will happen.'"

A middle school teacher explained how the systems level training had given her confidence in working with staff across the district: "Part of the ATLA structure is learning how to navigate systems as far as who do you talk to, to get certain things done? Especially as teachers, we're so used to talking to maybe other teachers and directing students, but [not] navigating outside of that." For some teachers it also created new connections to the district office which supported teacher leadership activities and expanded their access to resources. The survey data also confirm this finding: 83 percent of ATLA teachers agreed, either somewhat or strongly, that the ATLA training equipped them to use systems-level thinking in decision-making. Ninety-two percent of principals agreed that teachers had improved in their ability to use systems-level thinking in decision making as a result of the ATLA training.

The training also *expanded teacher networks*. Most teachers valued the collaboration with others that they might not normally come into contact with, and enjoyed bouncing ideas off of their colleagues. The notion that training supported collaboration with other teachers across the district was one of the items teachers mostly strongly agreed with (53% strongly agreed, 34% somewhat), and most principals agreed that the training had broadened teachers' network of colleagues (58% strongly, 42% somewhat agreed) and improved their ability to collaborate with other teachers (46% strongly and 50% somewhat agreed). CSTP trainers sought to prepare activities that actively engaged teacher participants and were immediately applicable to their school contexts, such that teachers could call to mind specific program activities, in some cases five years after the training. Table 1 summarizes teacher perspective on some survey items.

Table 1: Extent of teacher agreement with statements about ATLA training (n=102)

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Was directly applicable to my work as a teacher	2%	9%	33%	56%
Supported collaboration with other teachers across the district	2%	8%	34%	53%
Helped me communicate more effectively with my colleagues	1%	8%	44%	46%
Included enough time to think carefully about and try new ideas	0%	11%	43%	46%
Recognized and built on individual teachers' knowledge and experience	0%	6%	50%	44%
Included opportunities to work productively with other staff in my school	1%	17%	39%	43%
Improved my ability to use assessments to inform my instructional practice	4%	17%	52%	26%

Intersection of Teacher Leadership with School and District Initiatives

The teacher leadership initiative intersected with a variety of district and school improvement policies and practices during this time period. For some teachers, engagement in leadership activities had a profound effect on their *perspective of how decisions are made* within a school. A middle school principal described changes he has seen in his teachers: "I've seen teachers do a complete one eighty after going through ATLA because they understand, I think, the leadership side of things.... What people want and what's best for the school is not always in line; and also they understand that sometimes leadership and change takes time… I've seen people change and be more supportive of slow change and of a process and of coming with solutions rather than just complaints." Another middle school principal described how the training has helped teachers become decision-makers: "It's empowering teachers to be a decision-maker within the building, to come with ideas, to have reasons for those ideas. I think it's helped with just the dynamics of my building, you know the way that people get along, the way that people work together, the way that they are willing to share ideas. It's been powerful, it's taken a lot off of my plate." The training provided an organic process for many teachers to become part of a larger leadership effort to support student learning. Survey responses support that a majority of ATLA teachers felt they had a voice in decision-making at their school and that leadership roles were shared among teachers and administrators (see Table 2).

Table 2: Extent of teacher agreement about impact on decision making, leadership and collaboration (n=102)

ATLA has helped my school be a place where…	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Teachers have a voice in decision-making	8%	13%	48%	29%
Leadership roles are shared among teachers and administrators	5%	17%	47%	29%
Teachers collaborate	4%	10%	56%	28%

When asked to provide specific examples of a leadership step taken as a result of ATLA training, teachers described new roles they have taken on, including those of instructional specialist, department chair, PLC facilitator, and trainers in professional development activities. Teachers also mentioned assisting others with technology and the use of data. Other ATLA teachers described leading a book club to help build staff community and climate. Respondents

also described using active listening skills and improved ability to engage productively in difficult conversations among colleagues, including conflict resolution. Two such examples described by teachers are provided below:

> "I feel more equipped to tackle difficult conversations in my PLC with my team. I better understand how to approach differences, in a non-emotional way, and guide the dialog so that our conversation stays productive and working towards a solution."

> "I have become more involved with the facilitating of data. I was good at using data for myself. But now I try to help others see how they can use data to improve their students. I encourage them to share ideas, I try to be more of a mentor."

Administrators echoed many of the examples provided by teachers, and described ways in which teachers facilitated meetings or presented to colleagues in various professional development settings. While ATLA teachers were not required to take on a particular teacher leadership activity or role, many teachers did return their schools and shared in front of their colleagues what they had learned. An ATLA teacher explained how her principal continues to support continued professional growth in this area: "Each cohort that is currently in the training, our principal will meet with us and ask, 'You are learning things at ATLA. What do you want to practice at the building level so you can put those leadership skills into practice?' In part, that's how I started doing a few little in-services when I was doing ATLA, and I've done more since then." A middle school principal provided examples of the application of the skills and knowledge learned in the school: "Every single year of ATLA so far, the people have come back and said, 'We just did this in ATLA today. I want to do it at our staff retreat in August.' Every year we started our retreat with something from ATLA and our teachers present and it's been successful." Another middle school principal talked about a building focus on peer-to-peer leadership opportunities and the role ATLA teachers have played: "Lots of people stepped up for that. To have people come into the room to observe them teach or go into someone else's room and model some instruction. That's been powerful."

Collaboration in PLCs. Professional collaboration is a key element of the ATLA framework. From the beginning, the district had envisioned PLCs as a place where teachers could work together to support a broader group of students across grades within schools. Since principals typically are not able to regularly attend PLCs and grade level meetings, teacher leaders could be supported and empowered to lead this work. Many PLCs and other grade level groups in Auburn schools appear to function quite productively, with ATLA teachers leading and supporting the work. Describing activities at a district waiver day last fall, an elementary teacher noted how the ATLA training informed their work: "We together came up with team goals. … We submitted our lesson plans, submitted our observations, we created and wrote out two weeks' worth of math so that we are saying the exact same things to our children at the same time and we also took our whole ELA block, rearranged it, assigned things that we are going to do, and this was all within a course of four hours... I don't believe that had I not been through this [ATLA] I could have developed the skills to work with these people as well as I have."

Nevertheless, challenges remain within some PLCs. An elementary teacher who had recently changed schools candidly described the differences between the PLCs in the two schools and said: "I believe that our district is working towards the kind of collaboration that we have at my school. I am not sure they have achieved it." A teacher responding to the survey wrote, "The district and school provide time for collaboration, but often control it to the extent that teachers can't get done the important work of planning curriculum and instruction. There is only so much looking at data that needs to be done."

Prompting Changes in Instructional Practices. Eighty-five percent of ATLA teachers surveyed indicated that the program had led them to make changes in their teaching, and data from interviews support these findings. Themes that emerged from the interview data included working with student data and strategies for engaging students. In some cases, the group skills learned in the ATLA training could be applied to work with students. A teacher

described a mantra attributed to ATLA of "classroom, neighbor, hallway, building" as a way to think about teacher leadership activities which start with one's own classroom and move outward throughout the building.

Engagement with student data was frequently mentioned by participants as a takeaway from the training, as in this example: "As far as working with students, again I think the first thing that comes to mind is just how we look at data with students." An elementary principal described how one of her grade levels wasn't doing very well on the MAP assessments at the time: "So they started to implement a lot of the seven strategies of assessment [from the ATLA training]. I bought the book for everybody else on the team, so everyone would have their own book, and their own tools and materials…and they've seen a dramatic improvement. Their team is much more cohesive. They are all on the same page, they are moving forward collectively so it was a real positive experience, especially for that team."

Prompting Professional Conversations. For some principals and ATLA teachers, the training provided an opportunity for different kinds of professional conversations. Principals who were able to attend the last hour of the ATLA training together with their teachers mentioned the richness of the conversations, as described by this middle school principal: "What I think they really loved about ATLA is that hour that we're invited to come meet with them at the end of each meeting; and its super valuable to me… Every time I go, they don't have anything earth-shattering for me, but they're like, 'So we talked about this today, what does that look like in our building?' So they're learning things that are kind of behind the scenes in our building." Others, such as this elementary principal, found conversations with teachers enriched when they returned to the building:

> "The real strength [of ATLA] has been in the conversations once we get back to the building where we talk about different things they want to implement, or different resources that now they've learned through ATLA and we might need in the building. Then we would go out and buy those different resources, or they would go hear of a great book in ATLA…and I've gone and purchased those books for my staff, or we set up professional development opportunities."

Teacher leadership conversations such as these helped frame building discussions around instructional practices.

Principals' Perspectives on Distributed Leadership. Some principals viewed ATLA as an opportunity to shift teachers' understanding of leadership from a focus on the individual building leader to a shared leadership effort. Two such examples by elementary principals are provided below:

> "The point being is that the distributed leadership ... I prefer [the term] "shared leadership," it means that our building can continue ... regardless of the fact the demands have been added to all schools and all systems that we are able to continue to progress, as oppose to bog down, in the midst of that… it's one of the things that makes me feel most fulfilled in what we do, as a building. Knowing that: (a) I'm not alone and I'm sharing the work and the celebrations and the burdens and all those pieces, and (b) they are phenomenal at what they do, so they're growing and our staff grows as a product of that."

> "I am able to distribute that leadership… like with the PBIS [Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports]. I sit on the committee but I'm not the one who's having to drive that… We are going into our SIP [School Improvement Plan] revisions, it's the same thing. Like ATLA teacher leaders are the chairs, and so they run those meetings, they motivate the staff. I'm just overseeing it, which helps a lot with the evaluations, and things that I have to do. Principals' times are getting just crunch, crunch, crunch. So if you can have those building leaders who can address some of those concerns, it also helps the staff because they are seeing that things get done… Here, we can kind of hand things off to some of the motivated leaders who can make a big difference in our building."

ATLA supported school and district initiatives through messaging beyond that of a single principal or a district leader. The training was intended to provide an organic process for teachers to become part of a larger leadership effort to support student learning. It should be noted that there was a minority opinion among a few principals who did not see a connection between school and district initiatives and the ATLA initiative.

Differences Across the District. Professional development initiatives often play out quite differently across schools depending on the school level, composition of the student body, the teacher workforce and the school's leadership capacity. The ATLA initiative is no different in this regard. While many ATLA teachers found immediate opportunities to use their training, others did not. A survey respondent wrote, "I feel that there should be a better way for ATLA members to bring their learning back to the schools. There was no set time for us to do so and it wound up not directly happening." A middle school teacher explained, "We learned a lot but then if you're not in one of those specific leadership positions, you don't get the chance to use them." An elementary teacher described her situation this way: "…once I went through [ATLA] and I went back to my school and I didn't have a whole lot of luck getting buy in from that. I actually did kind of just let it go for a while. We actually tried some of the exercises in our PLC's and things like that, but we didn't have a lot of success."

Auburn schools had similar numbers of ATLA teachers trained across the five year years, but leadership opportunities varied by school and by level. The survey data reveals some differences by school level on items related to the district sharing leadership, tapping expertise and modeling practices, with elementary teachers holding overall more positive views. Another aspect of this experience was the way in which ATLA teachers in specialist roles found it challenging at times to find support, encouragement and opportunities to utilize their training and skills.

Teacher Leaders' Changing Roles and Responsibilities

Over four-fifths (85%) of teachers surveyed agreed that ATLA encouraged them to pursue *new teacher leadership opportunities*, but most weren't interested in leaving the classroom to take on formal leadership roles. Thirty percent reported that they currently have a role with significant teacher leadership responsibilities. As a middle school ATLA teacher explained, she enjoyed being able to be able "to lead, guide and be an agent of change and innovation within the building without having some sort of formal leadership role." She continued, "I figured out a long time ago after dabbling in formal leadership in those roles, that's not where I want to be. I want to be with kids."

One of the areas where ATLA teachers appear to have expanded their leadership participation has been serving on school and district committees and other collaborative work. An elementary principal described the ways in which collaboration has increased among ATLA trained teachers: "Almost all of them, I can't think of an exception to that, become engaged in district level committees, curriculum design, summer work, item writing, curriculum creation." A high school teacher discussed his views of teacher leadership opportunities: "I think teacher leadership sort of feels more like [I am] an ambassador… I've been to more district trainings. I understand what an administrator wants, but I'm working with teachers. …you fully have a bigger picture, perhaps, of what the goals of the district are. And then you can, again, in a lot of informal ways, help bring others along."

ATLA was not designed to be a leadership pipeline from teaching to administrative positions, although a few staff transitioned to formal leadership positions. Using state databases, we found 15 individuals (6% of participants) who changed assignments during the first five years, including positions as district administrators, principals or assistant principals or district instructional support positions. More than four-fifths (85%) of teachers surveyed agreed that the program encouraged them to pursue new teacher leadership opportunities, but most weren't interested in leaving the classroom to take on other formal leadership roles.

The ATLA training supported the work of individual teacher leaders in their classrooms and in their schools, as well as provided opportunities for collaborative work at different levels of the system. However, given the substantial commitment of time and resources, ATLA training was not without tensions and trade-offs.

Tensions and Trade-offs

As with any districtwide improvement initiative, ATLA has experienced some implementation challenges. These challenges included addressing time constraints, improving the applicability of ATLA training to meet the needs of diverse learners and supporting administrators in understanding how best to support teacher leaders. Each of these issues is discussed below.

Time. ATLA created space and opportunities for teachers to develop their leadership skills, but the time commitment for the training was arguably the greatest challenge. Both teachers and principals expressed concerns about teachers leaving their classrooms multiple times across the year. A secondary principal articulated the time concern on behalf of his teachers: "Some teachers don't want to be out of the classroom. So when you're asking a teacher to make the sacrifice of being out their classroom, that's probably the biggest challenge... There are some teachers that said, 'I don't want to do it because I don't want to be out of the classroom,' but I would say the ones that participated in it appreciated the process, and some of them definitely grew and took on additional leadership roles."

Some principals expressed their own concerns about pulling teachers out of the building. A principal in a high poverty school talked about the needs of his students when a good teacher is absent from the classroom: "Kids in demographics similar to ours really struggle with change. When they go from having this really awesome person that cares about them and knows everything about them, because that's the kind of person that they are, to anything other than that, it not only can destroy that day, but potentially the week. And recovering from that is a difficult thing for them."

This concern was compounded by an ongoing shortage of substitutes needed to replace teachers who attended the training. Training days sometimes added extra work for administrators when a lack of substitutes meant finding staff to cover for ATLA teachers or sometimes covering the teachers' classrooms themselves. An administrator's response on the survey simply said: "The only concern I have is the lack of sub teachers on the days of ATLA training."

Administrators frequently mentioned that they wanted ATLA meetings to be held outside of the school day. An elementary principal articulated the concern this way: "The number one thing they should change going forward, or could have changed in the past is; not pulling your best people out of your building during the school day…. Eight to nine times a year that your kids are either with a substitute teacher instead of one of the best people in your building or they are divided into a bunch of other classes because you couldn't even get a sub. A sub crisis and shortages, that's an issue I think should be wrestled with." Auburn staff weren't able to offer any easy solutions to the time and substitute issues. Several suggested meeting after school hours and compensating teachers for their time. Others acknowledged that this would limit who would be able to participate.

Work with Diverse Student Populations. An increasingly diverse student population has amplified the need for skills in cultural competency and ways to address the achievement gap. Working with diverse student populations is one area where interviews and survey findings suggest that for some, the ATLA training was not as helpful. Twenty-one percent of administrators surveyed somewhat disagreed that the training empowered teachers to initiate equity-driven changes. An elementary principal shared: "I think we really still need to have that focus on quality educational practice. How to meet our diverse populations, and that doesn't just mean our ethnic diversity, or our linguistic diversity. It really means we've got to include our poverty diversity, and really focusing on best practices

on teaching." When asked about whether the training helped teachers support diverse learners in his building, an elementary principal replied, "I would simply say that it's increased their awareness and they've grown as advocates for minority populations. But I can't point to a specific behavior outcome that I see in what they do, in relationship to that." A middle school principal of a diverse school added: "I don't know what kind of an impact it has had on that...I think the things they learned in there could certainly be used for that, but I don't know that there's ever been that direct connection made."

Nearly a third of teachers indicated that learning about ways to address the achievement gap (31%) or meet the needs of students from diverse cultural backgrounds (22%) was not adequately addressed by the training. An ATLA teacher explained: "I think the one thing that really just sticks out is I would really love to see us do a little more with diversity training. I mean I think we need to have conversations about race. We need to have conversations about celebrating differences and being accepting of everybody's differences."

Training for School Leaders. The majority of Auburn teachers who participated in ATLA training felt well supported and were encouraged to pursue new opportunities. However, both teachers and administrators mentioned that some principals might benefit from training or suggestions on how to more effectively utilize the skills and talents of their teacher leaders. This might reflect the need for principals to consider and prioritize their work with teacher leaders in new ways. One principal expressed regret that he hadn't done more to follow up with ATLA teachers after the training. He explained that in retrospect he could have had them help facilitate the professional development at the beginning of the year and plan throughout the year, and participate to a greater extent in the alignment of the instruction work. Tapping in to the resources that teacher leaders have to offer can lighten the load, and principals may benefit from training and ideas for how to maximize those opportunities.

Discussion

This district model for teacher leadership provides an innovative case in which to examine the complex nature of distributed teacher leadership and its relationship to supporting learning. One of the strengths of the model has been the local discretion given to buildings and teachers to consider how to apply the training within their unique context. This strategy encouraged teachers to step out of their comfort zone but also to further develop their own unique skillset. This worked well for most, and worked even better when the training was tied in to other school and district initiatives, as a middle school principal explained: "We have all these pieces. How can we make this thing connect to what's going on now and bring all the pieces together? That would be something that I would want to see. I love the program. I think it's great. I just think if we can tie into some of the key pieces they we're doing right now, that would be awesome."

Teachers and administrators also found value in setting aside time to debrief from the training. There is great value when those opportunities can be structured soon after the training while the experiences are still fresh in teachers' minds, as explained by this principal: "We really are just focused on what are you learning, what's the most important learning from this, what can we apply immediately, something we can put on the back burner, what can we use to leverage our staff and our students to be more successful either way? …I think teachers would appreciate it too, having that solid time with the principal's undivided attention to really hear their goals and their ideas for helping our school succeed."

In conclusion, the ATLA training provided opportunities for teachers to develop their leadership skills over a sustained period of time and provided meaningful connections to instructional practice, relationships with colleagues and engagement with school and district improvement initiatives. However, as prior studies have found, the work of teacher leadership is challenging and may be dependent on principal capacity to engage in the work, and a sustained commitment of time and resources.

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