

Shared Leadership in Berea

FOR
TEACHERS
SCHOOLS
DISTRICTS



Practicing
Equity and Ethics



Building Relationships
and Partnerships



Fostering
Collaborative Culture



Advancing Instruction
and Student Learning



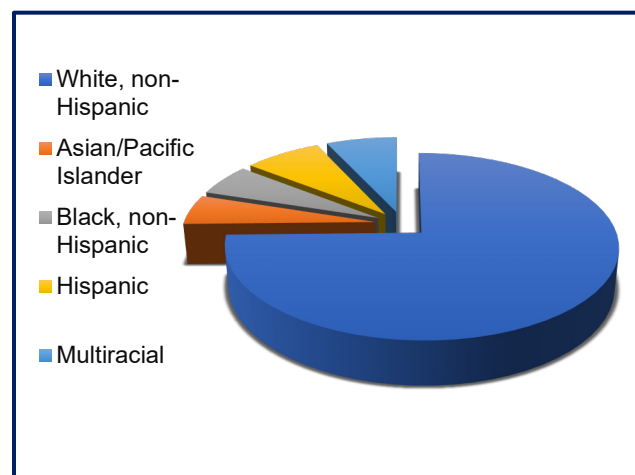
Driving
Initiatives

Key Lessons from Berea City School District

- *The complementary perspectives of district leaders, the union, parent-teacher association, and teachers are mutually respected.*
- *The school day is structured for teacher teams to have common planning time.*
- *Informal teacher leaders are given release time, national professional development opportunities and some paid curriculum writing hours to execute programming.*
- *District professional development activities have brought in external presenters as well as highlighted internal subject matter experts.*
- *Professional development activities have been credited with an increase of equity-mindedness, awareness of student issues with mobility and sound practice to serve all students.*

Introduction

Berea has championed and embraced teacher leadership as a lever to adjust to an ever-changing educational landscape that has included school mergers and demographic changes in the community. Located to serve Berea, Brook Park, and Middleburg Heights—three older suburbs close to Cleveland, Ohio, the Berea City School District has 469 educators serving almost 6,000 students. Educational services for these students are provided at 7 different buildings. The district has one high school (grades 9–12), one middle school (grades 5–8), four elementary schools (grades K–4), and a specialized school on the campus of Guidestone, as well as an extensive preschool program and extended childcare program. Nearly one-third (32.6%) of Berea’s enrollment are students who are at an economic disadvantage. Approximately 16.6 percent of students have a disability. White, non-Hispanic students make up 74.5 percent of the student body. Hispanic students are 7.5 percent of the





student body, followed by 6.9 percent who are Multiracial; 5.6 percent who are Black, non-Hispanic; and 5.3 percent who are Asian/Pacific Islander.¹

Berea’s approach to teacher leadership was co-created by district administrators, teachers and union leaders. Beginning in 2008, following on the heels of key developments including curriculum development with the Ohio Learning Standards movement and new district leadership in academic affairs, there was a need to build a new system that cultivated teacher leadership capacity and shared accountability. By 2014, a strategic conference, hosted by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) in St. Louis, helped Berea refine its instructional leadership approach to reflect a labor management partnership to support current school reform strategies.

Cultural Approach

Berea’s culture of teacher leadership is rooted in shared leadership. “The district gives their vision and we take the reins and run with it,” said a teacher leader. “The leaders in the district give the 1,000-foot view and their knowledge on what works for kids. They listen to teachers on what we see, what kids need, and what they are capable of.”

The complementary perspectives of district leaders and teachers are mutually respected. Various interviewees commented on a healthy working relationship between the district administration and its union, the Berea Federation of Teachers. Teachers credit both district-initiated and union-led professional development for growth in teacher leadership.

Berea staff members also acknowledged that the district’s culture may be distinct at the building level or in teacher teams. Some building level culture has been affected by school consolidations including the merger of high schools in 2013, the restructuring of middle schools in 2017 and an impending new elementary building. Multiple interviewees, however, cited building level, department, or grade cultures that encouraged teacher leadership and provided space for teachers to take initiative. “Our principal does not shut down ideas and he is open,” stated a teacher leader. “No’ is not in his vocabulary in that sense.”

Teacher leaders also find ways to leverage cultural guideposts presented in strategic language or professional development to reinforce a productive culture at the classroom level and in teacher teams. “When the professional development that the whole building does is impactful, it helps me lead, especially

“They listen to teachers on what we see, what kids need, and what they are capable of.”

¹ State of Ohio District Report Card, 2017-2018.



with some of the more sluggish members of my department,” a teacher leader stated.

The culture at all levels seemed to be open to constructive criticism. Several interviewees spoke of reinforcing accountability to the needs of students, organizational goals and working collectively. One formal teacher leader talked about how she was trying to address a negative attitude of another formal teacher leader. “I don’t want to hear ‘but,’” the teacher leader stated, referring to the need for teacher leaders to lead with a “can do” attitude. “Focus on why it is going to work and what the positive is.”

Structural Approach

The aforementioned feedback loops in the Berea culture are facilitated by its instructional leadership organization. Berea has established an instructional leadership approach that aligns the various levels of leadership to advance teaching and learning. While the multi-tiered structure has similarities to the teacher, building and district level teams in the Ohio Improvement Process, it is a distinct structure focused on instruction. To complement the instructional approach, other mechanisms exist to address non-instructional priorities. For instance, the high school has both a building instructional leadership team and a building leadership committee focused on school climate and non-curriculum items.

Closest to the students, teacher-based teams (TBTs) organized by grade level, subject area or course serve as professional learning communities. The school day is structured for these teams to have common planning time. Formal teacher leaders, who receive supplemental pay, lead grade-level or subject-level teams. In the middle school, formal teacher leaders support a group of teachers across subjects who share a cohort of students within the school.

Berea has continued to refine the description of department and grade-level teacher leaders. They deliberately redesigned the positions to be “instructional leaders” instead of “chairpersons.” “We wanted to move away from educators as managers to educators as leaders and embed more in the school day,” stated a district administrator. The instructional leader positions were also redesigned to provide less supplemental pay than the previous chairperson responsibilities. In the high school, informal teacher leaders who do not have contractual responsibilities currently facilitate course-based TBTs.

The TBTs, regardless of unit, are a conduit to informal teacher leadership opportunities. Teachers spoke of sharing practices, modeling work, reviewing data and disseminating research in their TBTs, which have flexibility in their operations. One TBT leader shared, “One of the things about the TBT, I expected there would be mandates from above at first, but there are no mandates. I can bring to the table what is going on and what we do on our own. I can set an agenda that works.”



On a school-wide level, there are building instructional leadership teams (BILTs) that include administrators and teacher leaders focused on teaching and learning in the building. The BILT focuses on consistency within the building and gaining supports and resources for the TBTs. The BILT can also advocate and communicate with the district instructional leadership team.

The district instructional leadership team (DILT) sets instructional goals, procedures, and direction aligned to the district’s strategic plan. The DILT is co-facilitated by the Berea Federation of Teachers and the Academic Affairs department. Teacher leaders participate in DILT meetings as a part of their overarching responsibilities as formal leaders at the building or teacher-based team level. No additional compensation is given for DILT participation. “We didn’t want to pay people just for participation in DILT,” said an administrator. “If you want to motivate change, you will want to do this.” Figure 1 illustrates Berea’s Instructional Leadership Organization.

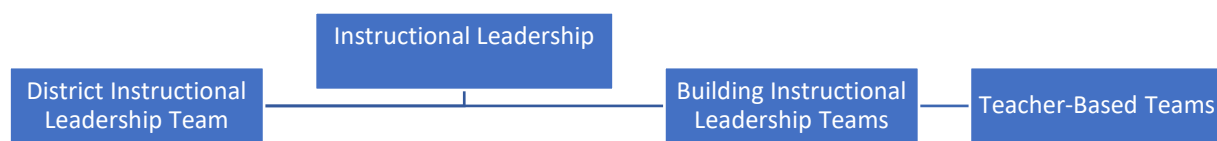


Figure 1: Berea City School District Instructional Leadership Organization

As a complement to the nested teams, the Instructional Leadership Advisory Council (ILAC) is a representative group charged with making recommendations to the superintendent on curricular and instructional items such as the curriculum revision cycle, district-wide instructional programs and criteria for selecting instructional materials. The ILAC consists of principals and teachers from each building, DILT members and a board member serving in an advisory capacity.

While many teacher leadership positions are tied to the instructional leadership organization as illustrated above, additional formal and informal teacher leadership roles exist. Berea has an administrative intern program; these are contractual positions for teachers to shadow building or district administration as it relates to teaching and learning. Instructional coaches for technology and core academic areas are available to support learning in the classroom.

Project-based teacher leaders are also present in the district. Program coordinators, such as the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)² coordinator, may receive a reduced course load or supplemental pay to design and coordinate programs. Berea has several teachers taking on informal roles to plan and execute initiatives. One such example is the working group for LINK Crew, which organizes high school students to serve as ambassadors to the incoming

² Advancement Via Individual Determination is a college readiness program to help at-risk students develop the skills they need to go to and be successful in college.



class of 9th-graders. Involved teachers are given release time, national professional development opportunities and some paid curriculum writing hours to execute the LINK Crew.

As districts grow and adapt to the needs of its learners, its design of teacher leadership roles may need to be revisited. One teacher leader spoke of this evolution as a coach for underperforming teachers: “When I was helping struggling teachers, in the first year, I didn’t get compensation. Then I was asked to continue to do it. I started logging time, and they recognized that they wanted me to keep doing it. In the following year, they found a way to compensate me for my time and have it classified in the contract.”

Fostering Collaborative Culture

Teacher leaders in Berea foster collaborative culture through listening to peers and facilitating shared decision-making in TBTs, according to the teacher leaders and non-leaders we interviewed. “A lot of what I do is listen to my team and work together to make decisions,” stated a team-based teacher leader. “If I identify an area of concern, we work it out together.”

“A lot of the kids are doing better than they were because we can do things as a team.”

When asked how teacher leaders address contrarians or underperforming team members, many teacher leaders offered a collaborative approach to engaging their peers. “My TBT is difficult,” mentioned a team leader. “I use modeling ... I bring in sample essays from my class—one that is good and one that is bad. I ask them to show us some of their students’ work next time. So, when I talk to their students and know their class is trailing, it helps to have that information for conversations.”

What is done to foster collaboration may be different based on the building and grade levels. A teacher leader in an elementary school created a staff prize box for teachers to cash in rewards for assisting other teachers and going the extra mile. They have teachers pick a prize on video and show it during the school morning announcements so students can also see teachers being recognized.

A teacher leader responded to a question about what professional development may be most helpful for a teacher leader beyond their traditional role as a teacher by saying, “Collaboration—we are all in this together. We have to focus on student learning and collaborate, whether it is through a professional development webinar, a book study or a lesson study.”



Advancing Instruction and Learning

Teacher leaders echoed their role of fostering collaboration among teachers to serve the learning needs of specific students. A few teacher leaders mentioned engagement of teachers and administrators with the entry of students during the middle of the school year or aiding a student who may be demonstrating challenges across multiple classes. “A lot of the kids are doing better than they were because we can do things as a team,” a team teacher leader asserted.

Berea teacher leaders are also contributing to the professional development of their peers to advance instruction. Coaches, such as instructional technology coaches, are providing individualized and team support. The use of data, including retrieval and formatting of data on individual student performance and data digs in school or district data, was mentioned by several coaches to support academic performance.

District professional development activities have brought in external presenters as well as highlighted internal subject matter experts. “The district has said that the best people to teach our teachers are our teachers,” said a teacher. “It has been really well received and it helps to have the relationship for ongoing follow-up to connect to resources after training.” Teachers who provide formal professional development get a standard hourly compensation for preparation and facilitation of professional development sessions. At least one teacher noted, however, a desire to have more mini-professional development sessions in the middle of year that may help teachers address issues in real time or in the current context, compared to learning practices at the beginning of the school year or waiting for a district in-service day.

Berea has also been involved in the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Educational Research and Dissemination program, which helps unions build the capacity of teachers to deliver research-based training. This train-the-trainer method is used to connect educators to research and effective practice.

There was significant participation in the program when Berea started, but participation has declined in recent years. An interviewee attributed the decrease in participation to the fact that teachers are no longer compensated for attending the training. “As with all extrinsic rewards,” she stated, “when the money goes away, you may not have built a sustainable program.”

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Berea teacher leaders have also connected with resources in their region to improve learning. Berea participates in the First Ring Leadership Academy to engage districts on the outskirts of Cleveland in learning and sharing effective practices, particularly to serve a diverse, highly mobile student population.



Driving Initiatives

With school consolidations, new facilities and other strategic changes, the ground to cultivate teacher leadership through initiatives is fertile in Berea. Teacher leaders in the re-organized middle school have been active in framing the approach to middle education. Many have attended conferences on middle education and actively participated in revamping instruction and learning.

With new 9th- and 10th-grade classes from the dismantling of the previous junior high structure joining the high school, teachers have been the primary coordinators in the LINK CREW, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YrFIWioXFig>, from design to execution. It required the teacher leaders to be in charge of the first days of school and prepare student leaders to welcome and orient the new 9th- and 10th-grade classes. The LINK CREW coordinators appreciated the opportunity to drive this project, which had impact school wide and required significant allocation of resources. The project also built camaraderie. “We have a group where everyone is committed and has a unique talent,” said one of the coordinators. “At the end of the day, we get down to work. We like each other and respect each other. There are some intrinsic rewards. Yesterday, we had a student speak about LINK CREW. She was a student who had not been really involved in school. She talked about how LINK CREW changed her life.”

Teacher leaders also drive and direct initiatives at the district level. A teacher leader discussed providing critical feedback to the district, stating, “At a district meeting, we were discussing technology and data management. I said that this is going to be a lot more work for us. They came back and said let’s see how we can simplify this. It is important for them to get that feedback beforehand instead of trying the initiative and it not getting off the ground because they are getting pushback/resistance.”

Practicing Equity and Ethics

Participation in the First Ring Leadership Academy and other professional development activities has been credited with an increase of equity-mindedness, awareness of student issues with mobility and sound practice to serve all students. Other district activities and programs have been working to emphasize the complete needs of all students. “Every teacher leader needs to look at the whole child,” stressed a teacher leader. “The district can support you, but if you as a leader aren’t looking at whole child, you aren’t leading.”

Teacher leaders also shared experiences of championing questions of ethics and equity with their fellow staff members and building awareness. “Some colleagues were complaining about how things were and how kids were,” shared a teacher leader. “I went to her one-on-one about it. She later thanked me for it and said, ‘Sometimes I get sucked into things. I appreciate you



coming to me and saying it bothered you because it should bother me because we do have great kids here.”

Equity in access to teacher leadership opportunities is important to staff in Berea. “You have to be really intentional in making that effort,” stated an administrator. “In making a decision, sometimes you are taking risks for someone who does not have the same capacity as others... but sometimes we pick people who no one would ever pick. People are pleasantly surprised that people rise from where they started. We need to figure out how we access under-resourced staff members and give them opportunities.”

Several teachers suggested that more young teachers be engaged in teacher leadership opportunities. One teacher who has held a variety of formal and informal leadership roles in the district shared how he was tapped early and asked to get involved in AFT professional development; he hopes that other early career teachers are directly approached to encourage their participation in training and chances to lead.

Building Relationships and Partnerships

As a teacher leader discussed how she coaches struggling teachers, she explained the importance of relationships. “I am dealing with the same experience as a teacher who is struggling. I am not removed from the situation; I can give her help,” she explained. She continued, “I build a relationship and get them to buy in. It is peer-to-peer. It is not evaluative.” Berea teacher leaders consistently talked about building healthy relationships with colleagues in their roles as formal or informal leaders.

How teacher leaders engage parents beyond the role of a traditional teacher was less consistent. Although some teacher leaders acknowledge parent engagement as an area of improvement, other teachers provided examples of going the extra mile to build relationships with parents and families. Some ideas included having a new student welcome breakfast or an event for families that enroll in the middle of the school year, to getting the teacher team to use a common assignment calendar for parents to access.

“When you get the right combination of teacher leaders, you can totally change a building over time.”

Berea’s Parent Teacher Association (PTA) is piloting a new parent engagement strategy that initiated policy change and the development of a Parent Engagement Committee led by parents, community members, teachers and administration. This initiative is in its early stages. “We are in trust-building mode and are working on collaboration,” a PTA member stated. “We want to partner with teachers, and we know their days are full and challenging.”



A coach spoke about engaging parents and community members at the building level. In working with the school leadership team, parent seminars and family breakfasts are offered throughout the year to promote literacy and learning. A therapy dog, Chance, attends school each Friday as well as these special events to promote engagement. The coach stated, “We have a great turnout and share ways that parents can help their children be more engaged in reading and math.” The coach also works with local libraries and community organizations to coordinate a summer reading program that supports students and families.

Concluding Thoughts

As the largest and most diverse of the five districts participating in the teacher leadership case study, Berea City Schools has created an instructional leadership organization for teacher leadership to thrive, and in turn teacher leadership has aided the adaptation to change. This change has been in the form of merged schools, restructured grades within buildings, and a changing student body as the community changes over time. Berea has also tapped into the resources outside the district, from the AFT to the First Ring Leadership Academy, to support growth in teachers as leaders.

“When you get the right combination of teacher leaders, you can totally change a building over time,” stated a Berea teacher leader. Other interviewees in Berea might also add that the right combination of teacher leaders can change a district—all for the better.

About the Teacher Leadership Case Study

The Ohio Department of Education, in collaboration with C H Smith & Associates, conducted case studies on teacher leadership in five Ohio school districts in 2019. A convenience sample of several teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders in multiple building and district roles was drawn for each district. From the sample, an individual or group interview was requested in order to capture information about promising practices in teacher leadership and understand how components of Ohio’s Teacher Leadership Framework are in effect throughout the state.