

The Waynesville Way

FOR
TEACHERS
SCHOOLS
DISTRICTS



Practicing
Equity and Ethics



Building Relationships
and Partnerships



Fostering
Collaborative Culture



Advancing Instruction
and Student Learning



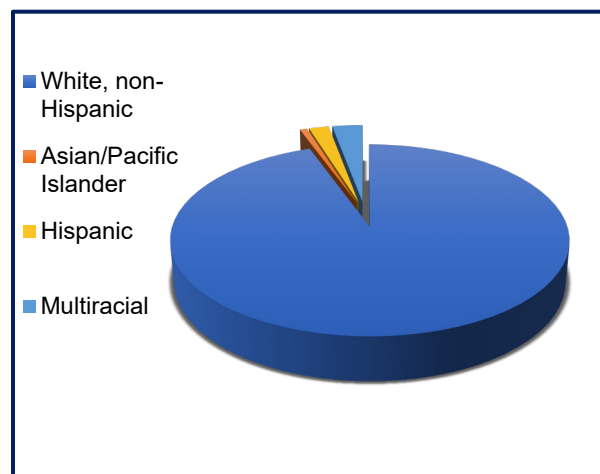
Driving
Initiatives

Key Lessons from Wayne Local Schools

- *Wayne Local redeveloped its teacher leadership structures to include a joint collaboration of the high school and middle school, and created subject matter instructional leaders that serve 6th-12th grade.*
- *Wayne Local schools have a strong sense of shared responsibility that starts at the top.*
- *There are no formal leadership roles at the elementary level; teachers are engaged in distributed leadership through various committees and professional learning communities.*
- *Common planning periods accommodate teamwork and meeting time for teachers to work beyond their individual classrooms.*
- *The district established formal teacher leadership roles in the Gifted Coordinator, Testing Coordinator, and Senior Options Coordinator, who have a reduced or no teaching load.*

Introduction

Wayne Local schools, nestled in Waynesville in southwest Ohio, have a culture of shared leadership with teachers as an important component. The district has 105 educators. The student body of 1,393 enrollees is predominantly White, non-Hispanic (93.8%), with the rest being Multiracial (2.9%), Hispanic (1.9%), and Asian/Pacific Islander (0.7%). The district population is 16.7 percent economically disadvantaged and has 9.1 percent of students who have a disability. The district has one high school, one middle school and one elementary school.





Wayne Local has established a “Waynesville Way” with a culture and structure to grow teacher leadership.

Cultural Approach

Wayne Local schools has a problem-solving culture and a strong sense of shared responsibility that starts at the top. “We are all going to wear a lot of hats. No one wears a single hat. I am the superintendent and had to serve as transportation director for a time to manage costs,” the district superintendent said. “I needed to model that for everyone else... I do not hear people say, ‘that’s not in my job description’ in Waynesville.”

The district has engaged more teachers in formal and informal teacher leadership. Teacher leadership roles, such as instructional leaders and a gifted coordinator, have been created to address student needs. Teachers may be engaged in committees or special projects without a formal role to bring ideas into fruition. “All of these ideas we brought to administration were ‘yes, yes, yes, go, make it happen. I think that’s in the right direction,’” stated a teacher leader.

Administration is also promoting a culture of providing honest feedback and rooting decisions in data. Crucial conversations on everything from teacher recognition to student performance are hallmarks of the culture.

Similarly, the district is cultivating leadership among a variety of personalities and styles. “I think they’re finding new opportunities for a variety of people to get involved in leadership, not just the people who have the most Type A personality,” a teacher shared.

Structural Approach

Wayne Local has developed and reformed its teacher leadership structures in recent years. In the last year, a joint collaboration of the high school and middle school has created subject matter instructional leader positions that serve 6th-12th grade. This approach aids in academic alignment and builds district cohesion as they anticipate a merger of the middle and high schools into 7th-12th grade after construction of a new school building is complete. The administrative team developed a [job description](#) and called for applications. Administrators then interviewed and selected instructional leaders if multiple teachers applied for an instructional leader position. Previously, only the high school was served by formal teacher leadership positions.



In the elementary school, the approach differs. “We don’t have formal teacher leadership [roles] in elementary,” stated an administrator. “The teachers referenced the history of people being given responsibility, and it was not clear about roles and it was not done carefully.” However, teachers are engaged in distributed leadership through various committees and professional learning communities at the elementary level. Common planning periods accommodate teamwork and meeting time for teachers to work beyond their individual classrooms.

The district has also established teacher leadership roles in the Gifted Coordinator, Testing Coordinator, and Senior Options Coordinator positions. These staff members have a reduced or no teaching load but work integrally to improve classroom instruction and student learning across the district.

In structuring teacher leadership opportunities, particularly formal roles, the importance of supporting teachers in taking on leadership was highlighted. “It’s not just putting them in the position and giving them the title,” noted a participant in an administrative team meeting. “It has got to be a commitment to coaching them through the process and developing a constant support.” Principals saw their role in interacting with teacher leaders as aiding in implementing projects and understanding the work of teacher teams.

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Informally, the district structure allows for individuals to initiate projects and take on various responsibilities.

Fostering Collaborative Culture

As the district has rolled out the formal instructional leaders in grades 6-12, these teacher leaders shared their techniques for fostering collaboration in these new teams. One instructional leader shared how he structures the agenda and shares it among the group for input, stating, “This is *our* agenda, not *my* agenda.” Another instructional leader mentioned her approach of rotating the meeting location among teacher classrooms to encourage people to share their instructional practices and feel more comfortable contributing to the group. She also encourages teachers in the subject matter area to visit each other’s classrooms across buildings and shares classroom schedules to facilitate visits and common planning.

As the district has worked to reinforce collaborative opportunities between the middle and high school, instructional leaders also shared examples of expanding that collaboration to understand curriculum and instruction at the elementary level. One instructional leader held a subject area meeting with all three grade levels to build rapport and explore curriculum



alignment from all sides, and not just setting expectations for the lower grades to produce prepared students for the upper grades.

Collaboration is not limited within a subject. Grade level team meetings foster interdisciplinary collaboration. Teacher leaders in Wayne Local also shared examples of working across disciplines, including science experiments in physical education classes and lesson planning around themes between social studies and English. “People are genuinely interested in each other’s work and lessons, to the extent that they’re willing to help and be a part,” noted a teacher leader. “Students are hearing it from every classroom versus just the singular class.”

Teacher leaders and non-certificated leaders who support the three instructional buildings in the district are uniquely positioned to bolster collaboration. “I’m able to bring information across classrooms as I’m immersed in the classroom,” noted a non-administrative leader. “Part of my role is to help that cohesiveness since I have the opportunity to be in all three places.”

Multiple teachers referenced fostering collaboration through engaging in small group professional development or instructional coaching versus large group situations. For these leaders, the intimate groups allow for a more focused discussion and minimize disengagement of peers. One teacher talked about the professional development opportunities to visit other districts: “I think those where you’re able to do it at a more intimate level, one-on-one or a small group, you get a little bit more out of it because you can’t just stare around ...” Another teacher leader shared an example of how she coaches peers in the districts with a preference for a smaller setting.

Advancing Instruction and Learning

The collaborative culture allows for robust sharing of instructional practices to advance learning. A veteran teacher pointed out how newer teachers are taking the lead in demonstrating use of technology and leading their seasoned colleagues in adapting technology tools. The teacher stated, “Instead of ‘Put away your phones, you can’t have those out,’ it is now ‘Pull out your phones, let’s do this.’” Teacher leaders with a specialized focused, such as the gifted coordinator and the English Learner specialist, are entrenched in research and connect to external professional development that they share with other teachers. Teacher-led professional development is occurring in the district.



In thinking beyond their own classrooms, teacher leaders may not only share but also relinquish items for the greater good of student learning. A teacher talked about deciding not to cover a specific book in her class so another grade level could teach it. “I wanted to set the example even though I feel like I can kill a unit on that,” she said. “I could see it being taught, especially to advanced students, at a younger age. If I set that tone, maybe more people would be willing to let things move down so advanced students aren’t stagnating.”

Interviews also revealed intricacies in navigating the delivery of coaching and critical feedback from teacher leaders to peer teachers to advance student learning. Some teacher leaders made clear distinctions between sharing instructional practices and providing critical feedback directly to peers, particularly if the other teachers did not solicit feedback. A few of the teachers interviewed acknowledged their desire for more professional development to aid in dealing with change, as well as better coaching peers, particularly in providing feedback so that teachers, including resident educators, are more receptive to their support. A teacher leader talked about moving from directly critiquing to co-teaching a class with a teacher. “My next step is to teach the same class alongside the teacher so that I can have a more peer-to-peer relationship instead of looking from the outside in,” the teacher stated. “Hopefully it’s more of a collaborative effort and less of a directive.”

Teachers are also highly involved in the use of data to advance instruction and learning. This not only includes looking at state test data but also social emotional data on students. Teachers are encouraged to look deeply at various assessment results. “Value added systems now give predictive data, but we were doing predictive data before that information became available,” stated an administrator. “Teachers had to predict how many students would fall into different [proficiency] categories and then that helped them address needs... Many teachers are spot-on in predicting results. Waynesville digs deeply into data.”

Driving Initiatives

Administration is intentional about engaging teachers in driving initiatives and decision-making beyond their classroom. “Under our newer administrators,” said a teacher leader, “there is more collaboration and more thinking outside the box.” The administrators often ask teachers, even



Figure 1. Image from Wayne Local Schools Social Media
Source: Facebook page of Superintendent Pat Dubbs



those without formal teacher leader roles, to take on projects. As an example, a principal asked teachers to take the lead in designing a pre-professional internship experience for students.

The Wayne Local administrators were noted for soliciting and incorporating teacher voice. “When there’s going to be a change,” a teacher leader stated, “before we make that change, the principal has everybody’s viewpoint, and she’ll make the tough decision if it has to come to that. But a lot of times [before the change is in effect], she’s got everybody onboard.”

“There are opportunities in different capacities...”

Teacher involvement in the hiring process of new professionals to the districts was mentioned in several interviews. “When we had an opening in the department,” shared a teacher leader, “I was able to be instrumental in helping choose the person because we need the new hire to be professional, solid, on the team, on the same page, and melding with everybody else.”

While most of the examples garnered in the interviews showed teacher leaders responding to administrator calls to lead initiatives, there were general references to teachers generating and subsequently leading projects or taking personal initiative to study the work of districts to determine their application in Wayne Local.

Practicing Equity and Ethics

Interviewees asserted that the opportunity to lead as a teacher was equitable. The open call and review process for the selection of instructional leaders was evidence of equal access. However, equal opportunity was not restricted to formal leadership opportunities. As a teacher leader stated, “There are opportunities in different capacities—whether it’s teaching students or teaching teachers how to teach students, whether it’s learning strategies, whether it’s heading social committees or developing new programs or new initiatives.”

There were also references to equity-minded teacher leadership, particularly in making sure all students succeed and are pushed to the best of their abilities. While the district’s English learner population is small, the English learning paraprofessional takes on work beyond the classroom to build relationships with families to support greater student success and bring multicultural learning experiences to all students.

A few interviewees noted character elements that aid in effective teacher leadership. “One of the best things is pointing people in the right direction and not just telling

“Being in the same room and having discussions among teachers increases how well we know the students.”



them or handing them the solution,” a teacher leader said. Another teacher highlighted the importance of dependability and follow-through for teachers who take on leadership roles. “If there's this change happening and you say we're going to do this, then you don't show up, you don't work any hours, and you're not there, it's putting lipstick on a pig.” Another teacher leader mentioned that teacher leaders should hold themselves to a higher standard in understanding that they represent the district internally and externally via their role.

Building Relationships

As a small district, interactions among all staff are common. Teacher leaders reported being able to communicate directly with each other to facilitate teaching and learning. However, various teacher leaders have taken extra efforts to boost internal relationships. One teacher, as a part of the “warm and fuzzy committee,” has programmed a daily positive email to go to staff members. Teacher leaders also mentioned coordinating social functions among peers to build camaraderie. In addition, some of the teachers that we interviewed live in the community and connect with a variety of district stakeholders outside of the school setting.

“The school is the hub of the entire town,” said one teacher. This sentiment was echoed by other interviewees. This dynamic impacts how teachers lead. The teacher connection with the community outside of school helps build a rapport with students and families. They can also partner with community assets for learning and special projects. A non-certificated employee works part-time doing communication for the Wayne Local school district and part-time as executive director of the local chamber.

The community bonds are used to strengthen instruction and learning. For example, Wayne has a teacher released from the classroom to serve as the Senior Options coordinator to arrange internships, work experience, and community service for 12th graders. The downside, on occasion, however, is that the tight-knit community may mean that parents or community members may go straight to a school board member when they are concerned about a relatively minor issue with a teacher, particularly with extracurricular coaches.

Conclusions

Wayne Local has established a solid foundation for teacher leadership in its structure and its culture. Deliberately restructuring formal teacher leadership roles has advanced a culture that supports teachers taking initiative in order to help students.

When asked how teacher leadership is impacting the district, a teacher leader said, “Being in the same room and having discussions among teachers increases how well we know the students. Then we are better able to prepare for the next group of students or individualize instruction for the needs of students.”



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.