

# Delaware Educator Compensation and Careers: Educator Working Groups Round 1

## Key Findings

Tuesday, September 30, 2014 and Wednesday, October 1, 2014

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### Overview

On Tuesday, September 30 and Wednesday, October 1, educators throughout Delaware (including teachers, school leaders, and central office personnel) were invited to participate in a series of working group discussions in order to inform the design of the educator career ladder and compensation system.

During these sessions, participants received information regarding the design process, an overview of the career ladder structure, and shared their input regarding key design questions. Specifically, the participants discussed the following topics:

- Background and context for this work, including an overview of the visioning conversations to-date that have served as the foundation for this process and an overview of Senate Bill 254.
- Information regarding the proposed career ladder framework, including an overview of the framework's levels, the pace of progression through the system, and the vision for formal Teacher Leadership and Senior Teacher Leadership roles.
- Their experience with existing teacher leadership roles, including what works and what doesn't work. Educators also had the opportunity to discuss the types of teacher leadership roles they think are needed across the state in order to have an impact on student learning.
- The significant milestones in a teacher's career based on their personal experience and the experience of their colleagues, including when educators should have access to EPER and formal leadership roles, when educators should hit specific levels within the system, and what they believe the titles for each level should be.

Through these working group sessions, a total of 130 educators had the opportunity to receive this information and provide their input regarding key design questions. During the session, the educators were broken into small groups in order to ensure they had the chance to have a detailed discussion and ample opportunities to share their perspective. For more information regarding the feedback obtained, please see the section below.

### Key Findings

- **There is very little consistency in the way teacher leadership roles are currently implemented across the state.** Due to the lack of definition and oversight, existing teacher leadership roles are implemented to varying degrees of success. While a role may be very effective in one district context, it can be equally ineffective in another. When asked which teacher leadership roles are deemed to be "ineffective", educators often cited teacher leadership roles that call for the completion of administrative and clerical duties (e.g., ordering books and supplies), organizing community events (e.g., staff picnic, school events), or serving as a liaison between the administrative team and the teaching staff. Additionally, while some coaching roles have full release time from their classroom duties, in many districts it is unclear how these coaches or team leaders are spending their time and how they are impacting student learning or teacher development. While the majority of educators agree that the teacher leadership roles should be driven by the local context and needs, they stated that there is a need for more consistency and accountability across the state. Furthermore, they would like a distinction to be made between "true" teacher leadership roles versus clerical roles or community building roles that are also important to the school community but have a different type of impact.

- The teacher leadership responsibilities currently valued by educators include support in the areas of instruction, curriculum, assessment development, mentorship of novice and struggling teachers, professional development, shared decision-making, and education policy.** Many educators were excited at the prospect of having high performing educators serve as a model of effective instruction within their school. For example, the teacher leader’s classroom could serve as a “model classroom” for teachers to observe. Alternatively, high performing teachers could observe a lesson and provide the teacher with feedback, co-teach lessons in order to model specific instructional strategies, or serve as a thought partner for teachers as they work through day-to-day instructional challenges. Teacher leaders could also provide their peers with support in developing new skills that are important to their success in the classroom and in the profession (e.g., instructional technology, data driven instruction, classroom management, time management, etc.). Throughout the years, many teachers have had a positive experience with mentorship programs and believe that Teacher Leaders and Senior Teacher Leaders could serve as strong mentors for novice or struggling teachers in order to ensure they receive support and development early in their career, ultimately growing and supporting Delaware’s internal educator talent. In one discussion, teachers even suggested pairing first year teachers with Senior Teacher Leaders so that they complete an “internship” prior to taking on their own classroom. Many educators were also excited at the idea of having teacher leaders inform school-, district-, and state-level policy by creating distributed leadership and shared decision-making models or having a teacher leader work with the Department of Education and other policy makers.
- While there was a lot of discussion regarding each person’s career progression, overall, educators were supportive of the years at which teachers would hit key milestones under the new system.** Throughout the discussion, educators grappled with the need to create a state-level system that was relevant to all new educators. This discussion was complicated by the fact that many educators believe that a teacher’s professional development and growth is highly individual and largely dependent on the person’s individual skills, professional background, experiences, and local context. After much debate, overall, most educators agreed that year 3 was a significant milestone in their career. Additionally, while there was some discussion about when a teacher should access formal teacher leadership roles (for example, at year 8 versus year 10), ultimately, the majority of educators felt that a teacher’s years of experience alone are not enough to determine whether someone is effective and a good fit for teacher leadership. As a result, it was concluded that years of experience should serve as a guide as opposed to the ultimate criteria used to select teacher leaders. Additionally, many educators stated the need for the true professional development of teacher leaders in order to ensure they are equipped with the skills and knowledge they need in order to lead their peers effectively. It is important to note that there were many questions regarding which measures and qualifications would be used to determine whether someone should progress through the system, including whether advanced degrees should be included.
- While many educators understand the need to protect novice teachers from additional responsibilities during their first year in the classroom, ultimately, they felt that this should be a local decision.** After reflecting on their own personal experiences and the experience of their peers, many educators agreed that novice teachers need to be protected from additional responsibilities and felt that first year teachers should be focusing on developing their craft. However, there was also overwhelming feedback that these extra-curricular opportunities provide an educator with the opportunity to become a part of the school community, develop connections with students and their colleagues, and contribute to a student’s social and emotional development. In many instances, they felt these opportunities were key to the engagement of the novice educator. Ultimately, the majority of educators agreed that there needs to be some discretion in the number and types of EPER roles first year teachers are given so that they have the time to focus on their instructional skills; however, ultimately, this is a decision to be made at the local level based on their schools’ needs and the educators’ skills and abilities.
- Educators were overwhelmingly supportive of teacher leadership roles that allow teacher leaders to keep “a foot in the classroom” by maintaining significant classroom responsibilities.** Many educators lamented losing excellent teachers to administrative positions simply due to the fact that this is the only opportunity for advancement under today’s system. As a result, many educators were in support of creating leadership opportunities that provide a high performing teacher the opportunity to remain in the classroom while developing their leadership skillset and contributing to the development and support of their peers. By maintaining classroom responsibilities, many educators felt a teacher leader could keep their instructional

skills sharp and gain credibility with the teachers they lead because they would be aware of the day-to-day challenges teachers may encounter within the school. Additionally, they felt teacher leaders who are close to the classroom would have a better understanding of what their school-based needs are and how they could best provide support to teachers and students.

- **Time and again, educators cited the need for clear selection criteria and a selection process in order to ensure that teachers leaders have the opportunity to apply, are the best fit for the role, and maintain credibility with their peers.** Currently, the teacher leader selection process is not well defined or transparent. While some districts have implemented a robust selection process for their leadership roles, many districts have not. As a result, teachers often do not have an opportunity to apply for teacher leadership roles and are not aware of the selection criteria required to attain the role. Furthermore, teacher leaders selected by their principals often lack credibility with their peers, while principals are criticized for picking “their favorite teacher”. Throughout these discussions, many educators made the point that just because an educator is effective with students, that does not mean that they will be effective in leading their peers and that as a result, a selection process should be in place in order to ensure the teacher leader candidate has the necessary skills and experience in order to be successful in the role.
- **While there were questions regarding the implementation approach and cost, the majority of educators believe teacher leaders need time during the school day in order to fulfill their leadership responsibilities.** While there were many questions regarding the implementation approach (e.g., the school schedule, what this could look like in an elementary school setting, the impact on class sizes or the school’s culture, and the funding formula), the majority of educators felt that teacher leaders need the time to fulfill these additional responsibilities if they are to do meaningful leadership work. In fact, some districts already have this type of approach in place for their teacher leaders. For example, in some districts, a teacher leader may teach four out of five classes, class sizes may have been marginally increased in order to give teacher leaders release time, or the school schedule was changed to accommodate the teacher leader’s schedule. For schools that would have trouble implementing release time, some alternatives suggested included having teacher leaders complete their leadership responsibilities during the summer or creating a co-teaching structure that would allow a teacher leader to step out of the classroom as necessary.
- **While many teachers are in favor of term limits, others had concerns regarding the volatility in educators’ base salaries.** At the moment, many teachers don’t have an opportunity to take on a leadership role because existing teacher leadership roles are filled by an educator for an indefinite amount of time. As a result, many educators were in favor of term limits that would provide other educators the opportunity to fulfill these responsibilities. However, others expressed concern with the type of salary volatility they would experience if they were only allowed to fill a teacher leadership role for a specific number of years before being forced to leave that position on the career ladder.
- **Some educators had questions and concerns regarding the allocation and availability of these teacher leadership roles across the state.** Currently, teacher leadership roles are not equally distributed so a teacher in one district may have more opportunities for leadership than a teacher in another district. Furthermore, large high schools may require more support from teacher leaders than small elementary schools. As a result of these considerations, many educators have questions and concerns regarding the approach that would be used to allocate these roles across the state.
- **A number of groups discussed what accountability will look like for these teacher leadership roles in order to ensure that they are obtaining outcomes.** Many educators cited the need for oversight and accountability in order to ensure these teacher leadership roles are implemented consistently, are effective, and are contributing to student learning. As a result, many had questions regarding the teacher leader evaluation process and state-level oversight for implementation.
- **There was significant concern about how the model will recognize and reward excellent educators who choose to stay in the classroom and are not interested in filling a leadership role.** While many educators felt this model would be a move in the right direction and a good approach for future generations of educators, many career educators were concerned about the message this model sent to teachers who are interested in staying in the classroom teaching students. Specifically, there were questions about how

these teachers would be recognized and rewarded, what salary progression would look like for someone who doesn't want to take on a leadership role outside of the classroom, and whether their compensation would "top out" at year 8.

## Conclusion

Overall, the Educator Working Group sessions were an effective method of obtaining feedback from educators and many educators welcomed the opportunity to participate in future discussions. Throughout the design process, there will be additional opportunities for engagement, including:

- **In-person town hall sessions:**
  - October 27, 2014 – Sussex County (2 sessions)
  - October 28, 2014 – Kent County
  - October 29, 2014 – New Castle County
- **Educator Work Groups Round 2:**
  - November 3
  - November 10
- **Public comment during the upcoming CAECC meetings**

For more information regarding the Educator Working Group sessions or the information in this memo, please contact Ryan Fennerty ([Ryan.Fennerty@state.de.us](mailto:Ryan.Fennerty@state.de.us)) or Donna Johnson ([Donna.Johnson@doe.k12.de.us](mailto:Donna.Johnson@doe.k12.de.us)).