SCHOOL LEADERSHIP COUNTS

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP FOR STUDENT SUCCESS
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Teachers and school leaders have long been recognized as the most important school-based factors in raising student achievement. But what is it that makes these groups and individuals so influential? It may seem straightforward, but a strong, significant focus on teaching and learning is key. More specifically, effective schools almost consistently share a common theme—they emphasize key elements of “instructional leadership.”

While the importance and impact of school and teacher leadership has been widely understood by policymakers and practitioners, the field has lacked a comprehensive, research-based analysis to identify and quantify the specific elements of school and teacher leadership that increase student achievement.

Through a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, New Teacher Center (NTC) partnered with Dr. Richard Ingersoll of the Consortium for Policy Research in Education at the University of Pennsylvania to analyze how specific instructional school leadership and teacher leadership variables correlate to student achievement. Understanding the impact of teacher and school leaders is particularly important in high-needs districts, where achievement commonly lags and students are left behind.
The analysis was based upon survey responses from NTC’s Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning (TELL) Survey. The TELL Survey is a unique and valuable source of data on school organizational conditions and school performance in the United States. The survey collects data on an unusually wide range of measures of teaching, learning, and working conditions in schools. The TELL Survey’s multiple measures allow for the analysis of the relationships between student achievement and measures of instructional and teacher leadership.

This is the first national, representative, single dataset from the TELL Survey that unpacks the data to determine what educator and school variables correlate to student achievement. The report analyzed responses from NTC’s TELL Survey from 2011 to 2015. The analysis included data from nearly one million teachers, more than 25,000 schools, representing 16 states.
Ultimately, the analysis discovered several key findings, including:

1. Students perform better in schools with the highest levels of instructional and teacher leadership.

2. Specific elements of instructional leadership are strongly related to higher student achievement:
   - Holding teachers to high instructional standards;
   - Providing an effective school improvement team; and
   - Fostering a shared vision for the school.

3. When teachers are involved in decision-making processes related to school improvement planning and student conduct policies, students learn more.

4. Schools rarely implement the instructional and teacher leadership variables most strongly related to increased student achievement.

5. High-poverty schools often lack the instructional and teacher leadership elements that strongly relate to increased student achievement, limiting students' potential.
RECOMMENDATIONS
Given the report’s noted benefits of a balanced approach to school and teacher leadership, NTC recommends education leaders at the national, state, district, and school levels consider taking the following actions, which would be particularly impactful for students in high-needs districts:

- **Offer school leaders more opportunities so they can serve in an increased instructional leadership capacity.** For example, NTC’s School Leadership Program strategies include aligning instruction to frameworks that target the instructional core, coaching for results through effective observation, feedback and coaching cycles, and leveraging their own instructional leadership team to distribute responsibility and magnify impact.

- **Adopt policies and programs that promote school and teacher leadership, and the development of teaching and learning conditions which show the strongest connections to student success.** Again, such measures are particularly beneficial for students in high-needs districts. For example, NTC has successfully worked with districts and school leaders to identify and develop teacher mentors and instructional coaches who provide job-embedded support to teachers as they establish and implement their classroom environment.

- **Gather educator perspectives in schools, districts, and states to better understand school and teacher leadership practices.** For example, NTC’s TELL Survey and the modified Teaching and Learning Conditions Survey for smaller districts can be implemented at the state or district levels, respectively, to gather such perceptions. Then, use this information to inform and shape programs and policies, such as educator feedback structures, teacher involvement in school improvement planning, and school vision.

- **Create a system that empowers school leaders to ensure schools have an aligned instructional vision and are engaged in continuous improvement through processes and protocols that actively engage teacher leaders.** Additionally, it should allow them to focus on creating high-impact strategies to become strong instructional leaders who drive teacher development and school transformation.

- **Leverage district and state opportunities to promote increased teacher and school leadership.** For example, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires that state consolidated plans place emphasis on research-based strategies for school improvement. ESSA also allows the use of teacher survey results to be used as one of the additional measures in school accountability plans, and more than a dozen states are planning to do so.
ABOUT THE REPORT
The goal of this analysis was to identify which school and teacher leadership practices are most effective for improving student learning. Using the eleven elements of school and teacher leadership from NTC’s TELL Survey, Dr. Richard Ingersoll (UPenn), Phil Sirinides (UPenn), and Patrick Dougherty (NTC) analyzed which elements are associated with student achievement.

The analysis sought to answer four key questions:

1. What are the levels of instructional leadership in schools?
2. What is the relationship between instructional leadership and student achievement?
3. What is the role of teachers in school leadership?
4. What is the relationship between teacher leadership and student achievement?

The TELL survey asks questions across eight constructs:

- Use of Time
- Instructional Practices and Support
- School Leadership
- Teacher Leadership
- Professional Development
- Managing Student Conduct
- Facilities and Resources
- Community Support and Involvement

TELL’s rich set of multiple measures allow for the analysis of the relationships between student achievement and each of the 11 measures of instructional leadership and 8 measures of teacher leadership (below). The Survey asks specific perceptual questions about instructional school leadership and teacher leadership; responses are provided on a four-point scale, with the majority of questions having a selection of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree.

For this report Dr. Ingersoll specifically analyzed the School Leadership and Teacher Leadership constructs.
Specifically, instructional leadership variables include:

1. The faculty and leadership have a shared vision.
2. The school improvement team provides effective leadership at the school.
3. There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in this school.
4. Teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them.
5. School leadership consistently supports teachers.
6. Teachers are held to high professional standards for delivering instruction.
7. The school leadership facilitates using data to improve student learning.
8. Teacher performance is assessed objectively.
9. Teachers receive feedback that can help them improve teaching.
10. The procedures for teacher evaluation are consistent.
11. The faculty are recognized for accomplishments.
Teacher leadership variables include:

1. School improvement planning
2. Selecting instructional materials and resources
3. Devising teaching techniques
4. Setting grading and student assessment practices
5. Determining the content of in-service professional development programs
6. Establishing student discipline procedures
7. Providing input on how the school budget will be spent
8. The selection of teachers new to the school
KEY FINDINGS
Schools with higher levels of instructional leadership and teacher leadership on NTC’s TELL Survey rank higher in student achievement in both mathematics and English language arts (ELA), after controlling for school background demographic characteristics.

The survey results found that **students in schools with the highest levels of instructional and teacher leadership perform at least 10 percentage points higher in both mathematics and English language arts proficiency on their state assessments, when compared to schools with the lowest levels.**

**Instructional Leadership:** There is a clear relationship between the level of instructional leadership and student proficiency. For example, holding constant school background characteristics (at average levels of poverty, size, etc.), students in a school at the 90th percentile of instructional leadership, on average, perform at the 55th and 56th percentile in both ELA and mathematics proficiency, respectively, on their state assessment. In contrast, students in a school at the 10th percentile of instructional leadership, on average, perform at the 44th percentile in both mathematics and ELA. These differences are statistically significant (Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Instructional Leadership and Student Achievement](image-url)