**Teacher Leadership:** While schools vary greatly in the degree to which their teachers are involved in leadership, teachers taking on leadership roles is strongly associated with improvements in student achievement. Holding constant school background characteristics, students in a school at the 90th percentile of teacher leadership on average, performed at the 56th percentile in both mathematics and ELA. In contrast, students in a school at the 10th percentile of teacher leadership, on average, performed at the 45th percentile in both mathematics and ELA. These differences are statistically significant (Figure 2).

“In this era of limited resources, it is reassuring to know that our administrators can connect individual elements of the school leadership questions and student achievement to help focus on strategies that will raise achievement for all students, by ensuring access and opportunity to engage in high quality, rigorous instruction and activities that will prepare them to succeed in life.”
—Stephen L. Pruitt, Kentucky Education Commissioner

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**Figure 2. Teacher Leadership and Student Achievement**

- **MATH**
  - Lowest: 44.5
  - Low: 47
  - Average: 50
  - High: 52.8
  - Highest: 55.5

- **ELA**
  - Lowest: 45.3
  - Low: 47.4
  - Average: 49.9
  - High: 52.5
  - Highest: 55.7
While each element in both the school leadership and teacher leadership sections of NTC’s TELL Survey impact student achievement, some elements are more strongly associated with increased student achievement.

Of the 11 instructional leadership TELL elements, the three variables with the strongest relationship to achievement include:

1. **Holding teachers to high instructional standards;**
2. **Providing an effective school improvement team; and**
3. **Fostering a shared vision for the school.**

**Holding Teachers to High Instructional Standards:** The data indicate that a key element of instructional leadership that is conceptually aligned with enhanced accountability—holding teachers to high instructional standards—is more strongly related to higher student achievement. For every unit difference (on the four-unit TELL Survey scale)\(^1\) in the degree to which teachers were perceived to be held to high instructional standards, there was a 21-percentile difference in the school’s mathematics proficiency ranking and a 18-percentile difference in the school’s ELA proficiency ranking.

\(^1\) Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
Over the past decade, there has been a significant effort to strengthen teaching through more robust evaluation and support systems. These systems envision principals primarily as instructional leaders, having ownership and responsibility for cultivating and assessing the quality of classroom instruction within schools. The degree to which school leaders are afforded the time, development, or resources to truly serve in an instructional capacity that benefits teachers, and thereby students, is often minimal.

**Providing an Effective School Improvement Team and Fostering a Shared Vision for the School:** The data also indicate that two additional elements of instructional leadership correlated with enhanced teacher authority and leadership—providing an effective administrator-teacher school improvement team (a 14-percentile difference in math and a 13-percentile difference in ELA), and fostering a shared vision amongst faculty and administration for the school (a 12-percentile difference in math and a 11-percentile difference in ELA)—are also more strongly related to higher student achievement. Additionally, the data show that schools are far more likely to implement high teacher standards than they are to have effective school improvement teams or a shared vision.

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

Teacher leadership is also strongly related to student achievement. The results of the analyses clearly show that teacher leadership and the amount of influence teachers have in school decision-making processes are significantly related to student achievement. This is true both for mathematics and ELA (Figure 2).
Among the teacher leadership dimensions with the strongest relationships to student achievement is the level of teacher involvement in:

1. School improvement planning; and
2. Establishing student conduct policies.

Schools in which faculty had a “large role” in school improvement planning ranked, on average, over 20 percentile points higher in ELA than schools where faculty had a “small” role. Overall, however, the analysis also shows that these are exactly the type of roles and inputs that teachers are less likely to have in schools across the board.

The data also suggest that school leaders who involve their teachers in student conduct policy decisions has a greater impact on student academic achievement than teacher authority over classroom instruction issues, such as selecting textbooks, choosing grading practices, and devising classroom teaching techniques. For example, a one unit (on our four-unit scale) difference in the role of teachers in establishing student conduct policies is associated with an 11-percentile difference in that school’s ranking in mathematics proficiency.

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

A focus on teaching and learning is a key component of effective teacher and school leaders. However, school leaders have a multitude of factors they must face every day: budgets, building management, schedules and more. Direct involvement in instruction has been among the least frequent activities performed by school leaders of any kind, and at any level.

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1 Large, Moderate, Small, None
A focus on teaching and learning is a key component of effective teacher and school leaders. However, school leaders have a multitude of factors they must face every day: budgets, building management, schedules and more. Direct involvement in instruction has been among the least frequent activities performed by school leaders of any kind, and at any level.

As stated earlier, there are three aspects of instructional leadership strongly associated with high student achievement. Of these three variables, schools are far more likely to implement high teacher standards (94 percent of survey respondents agree) than they are to have effective school improvement teams (58 percent) or a shared vision (57 percent).

Areas of teacher leadership that are more strongly related to achievement are least often present in schools. In only a minority of schools do teachers have a large role in two key areas. In less than half of the schools do teachers have a moderate or large role in establishing student conduct policies (36 percent) or school improvement planning (45 percent).

In general, the data indicates that teachers more often have a substantial role in decisions regarding classroom instruction, teaching techniques, and student grading, and less often have a role in school-wide decisions, both academic and non-academic in nature, such as establishing student behavior policies, school improvement planning, and determining the content of professional development programs.

High-poverty schools often lack the instructional and teacher leadership elements that strongly relate to increased student achievement, limiting students’ potential.

These new data specifically point out the gap in instructional leadership between high- and low-poverty schools. In nine of the 11 TELL survey elements of instructional leadership, faculty in high-poverty schools perceive their school is less likely to exhibit these leadership practices than their peers in low-poverty schools (see Figure 3).
High-poverty schools were found to have less support for teachers from school leaders when compared to schools with lower rates of student poverty. For example, in less than half (49 percent) of high-poverty schools did faculty report that the school’s leadership consistently supports teachers. In contrast, this was true of about 60 percent of low-poverty schools. The gap was also apparent (38 percent to 50 percent) when faculty were asked whether there is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in the school, where only 38 percent of high-poverty schools did the faculty agree there was any such atmosphere.
The data also reveal a wide range in the role of teachers in leadership across schools. Again, the most prominent differences are according to school poverty level. For five of the eight teacher leadership elements, faculty in low-poverty schools reported a larger role for faculty in leadership than in high-poverty schools. (Figure 4). For instance, in only about 9 percent of high-poverty schools do teachers have a moderate/large role in selecting new teachers; this was true for twice as many faculty members in low-poverty schools. In short, schools vary in the extent to which teachers have input into decision-making.

Figure 4. Percent of schools where faculty respond moderate or large role of teachers in school leadership, by school poverty level
CREATING A SYSTEM THAT WORKS
For the first time, we have detailed analyses connecting specific elements of both school leadership and teacher leadership to student achievement. And, the data suggest that which of these elements are implemented in a school, and the level of implementation, are strongly connected to student achievement. *These new findings confirm the work that NTC has been doing for 20 years. Supporting teachers and school leaders is a clear way to increase student achievement, and our programs collectively work to achieve these goals.*

Schools that promote both instructional leadership and teacher leadership have better performance. In short, the findings suggest that leadership counts, that good school leadership actively involves teachers in decision-making, and these practices are tied to better student achievement. Distributing leadership and focusing on increasing the overarching effectiveness of schools (i.e., creating positive school cultures and working collectively on continuous improvement) are key areas for change.

NTC’s work supporting teachers has been proven to increase the effectiveness of teachers, raise teacher retention rates, and increase student achievement. Developing school and teacher leaders are instrumental to achieving this work.

**NTC Approach to School Leadership:** NTC’s school leadership program, Achieving Leaders: Effective Schools, takes a two-pronged approach to transforming schools and systems. First, we support leaders by developing capacity through high-impact strategies most critical for school transformation. These strategies include:

1. Leveraging Instructional Leadership Teams to share responsibility and magnify impact;
2. Coaching for results through content-based feedback;
3. Aligning instruction to frameworks that target the instructional core; and
4. Creating and leveraging a peer network so principals can accelerate their learning.

Second, NTC builds the development of these skills into the day-to-day work of leaders through a focused, continuous, and schoolwide improvement process that empowers a team of teachers and leaders to transform the school.

We have unlocked the characteristics of great leadership, and education leaders can now prioritize which improvements to make, so that every child receives a great education.
As leaders enter this work with varying levels of experience and knowledge, NTC personalizes both the learning and process to meet leaders where they are and help them go where they aspire to be through specific developmental continuums. By networking leaders, this learning happens in collaboration instead of isolation and leads to coherence across schools. The impact of this tighter coherence and collaboration is substantial student success and social justice at the school level, and systems level change as districts respond to the more complicated needs of higher performing networks of schools.

These new report findings align with several aspects of NTC’s program, including developing a balanced, diversified approach to leadership, as well as a continuum of learning for teacher and school leaders.

**NTC Approach to Teacher Leadership:** NTC’s expertise in the areas of teacher mentoring, instructional coaching, and early learning coaches, has helped build teachers’ instructional practices so they can more effectively reach their students. Through on-the-job coaching and mentoring, and building capacity with district partners to continue these support programs, NTC is helping improve teaching practices and effectiveness, increase retention, and improve student achievement. Teachers who participate in our programs also learn the skills to build their profession and become involved teacher leaders.

We now have the research that proves the impact of teacher and school leaders, and we know how to do it. By building capacity among districts and building up teacher and school leaders, NTC is working to ensure every student receives an equitable, quality education from highly engaged teachers and school leaders who can truly help them achieve more.

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*In my school, teacher voice is crucial in what we do as a team. Estes Elementary’s teachers are involved in a variety of school decisions, from developing our current school-wide behavior management program, to analyzing our TELL results, and interviewing new hires. In Kentucky we are required to use our TELL data in the annual school and district improvement plans and I am held accountable for demonstrating that we use the results. This involvement of our teachers is one of the reasons why our school—at 95% free and reduced lunch—is such a high performing school.*

—Shari Flagg, Principal, Estes Elementary, Owensboro Independent, Kentucky
ABOUT NEW TEACHER CENTER

New Teacher Center (NTC) is a national non-profit organization dedicated to ending educational inequities for all students by accelerating teacher and school leader effectiveness.

Founded by teachers in 1998, NTC builds capacity within districts and district partners to drive student learning, educator effectiveness, and teacher and leadership development. We do this by providing PreK-12 teachers and school leaders with evidence-based skills and supports needed to create optimal learning environments that accelerate students’ academic and social emotional success.

NTC is improving the learning of over 2.6 million students, 35,000 teachers, and 7,500 mentors across the country.

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