



Network of State Turnaround and Improvement Leaders – Leadership Council

Thought Leadership Forum Brief: Talent Development and Opportunity Culture

July 2018

Overview

In March and April 2018, the Center on School Turnaround at WestEd continued its Thought Leadership Forum series, hosting two online forums on talent development for state education agency officials who are members of the Leadership Council of the Network of State Turnaround and Improvement Leaders. The monthly forums for 2018 are intended to build the capacity of state education agencies and regional comprehensive centers to support rapid school improvement.

The Thought Leadership Forums are developed in pairs, with each pair focused on a key issue related to supporting school turnaround. The first of the two forums features a presentation by a recognized expert in the identified area; the second forum, convened the following month, profiles a state or local education agency's work related to the topic, providing an on-the-ground example of the issue in action.

This brief summarizes the information presented in the March and April 2018 forums,¹ which addressed Opportunity Culture as a strategy to support talent development. The March presentation was by Bryan Hassel, Co-President of Public Impact. The April forum featured Denise Watts, who leads Project LIFT (Leadership & Investment for Transformation), a philanthropic initiative that is implementing an Opportunity Culture program in North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. The brief concludes with recommendations for local and state education agencies interested in further exploring Opportunity Culture.

Opportunity Culture

One of the Center on School Turnaround's four domains for successful school turnaround is talent development, which involves strategies and actions intended to identify, select, place, retain, and sustain personnel, especially teachers and school-level leaders. Critical to school improvement, educators utilize and hone their instructional and transformational leadership to build capacity in

¹ This brief draws directly from the forums, reflecting the knowledge, views, and experiences of the presenters; unless specifically indicated, the references included in this summary are those that were included in the presentations.

those they supervise by continually balancing support with accountability (Center on School Turnaround, 2017).

The term *Opportunity Culture* refers to an approach to school design based on a tiered teaching structure within a content area or across one or more grade levels in a school. It is intended to increase teacher leadership and expand the instructional impact of teachers who are recognized for the strength of their instructional practice. Public Impact measures the impact of teachers teaching in Opportunity Culture schools through student outcomes and by the number of students reached (Opportunity Culture, 2015).

Several design principles characterize the Opportunity Culture school structure:

- ◆ Reach more students with excellent teachers and their teams.
- ◆ Increase compensation for teachers who extend their impact.
- ◆ Utilize regular budgets to increase pay for teachers in leadership roles.
- ◆ Provide protected in-school time and clarity about using that time for planning, collaboration, and professional development.
- ◆ Match authority and accountability to each teacher's responsibilities.

Defined Roles

In an Opportunity Culture school, teachers work in a structure of defined roles, with specific responsibilities at each level. Multi-Classroom Leaders (MCLs) are teachers with excellent instructional practice and adult leadership responsibilities who are responsible for supporting and developing the instructional practice of a defined number of teachers (called the "teacher team") working under their guidance. MCLs interact with these teachers in several ways, including giving feedback, coaching, modeling instruction, engaging in co-planning, and modeling data analysis. MCLs also teach or co-teach some students directly and are accountable for all student results on a teacher team.

Opportunity Culture includes other teacher and support roles. Master Reach Teachers (MRTs) work in coordination with MCLs to teach increased numbers of students directly in classroom settings characterized by large class sizes. Technology, intern teachers, and para-professionals all support MRTs, allowing them to remain effective despite larger numbers of students. MRTs also assist MCLs in leading the teacher team.

In Opportunity Culture, Elementary Specialists teach only specific academic content, such as math and science or language arts and social studies. This specialization allows MCLs to focus on planning, observation, professional development, and their own direct instruction of students. Other roles include Team Teachers, who are teachers serving on a team led by an MCL, and Teacher Residents, who are aspiring teachers working full-time in a school under the leadership of an MCL for a year prior to becoming fully certified teachers.

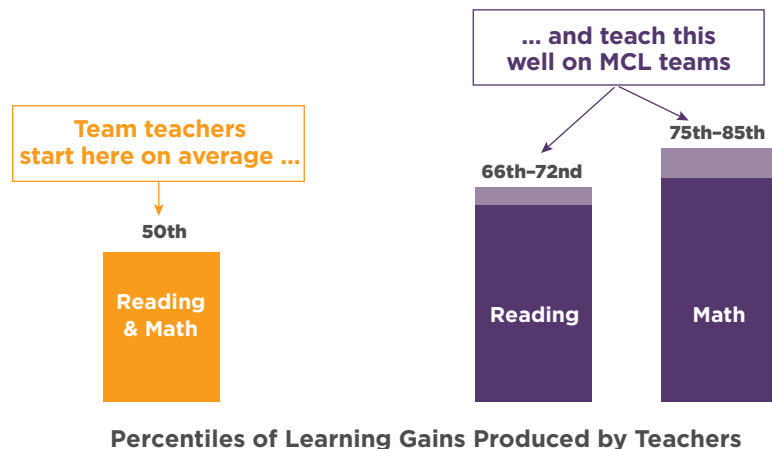
Opportunity Culture also expands the functions of the paraprofessional, renaming the position a Reach Associate (RA). According to Public Impact, RAs report to the MCLs and supervise students during digital learning, skills practice, and/or project-based learning. Paraprofessionals can also assume some administrative and student supervisory tasks, freeing teachers' time for collaboration during school hours (Dean & Hassel, 2016).

Support Strategies

In addition to redefining teacher roles, adopters of Opportunity Culture frequently adopt various support strategies to extend their instructional impact and, in part, to offset higher numbers of students that are the norm in Opportunity Culture schools. "Time-technology swaps" enable teachers to incorporate self-paced digital learning, allowing teachers to work individually with students. Teachers use face-to-face teaching for higher-order learning and personalized follow-up. Remote teaching allows MCLs to collaborate with content specialists who can provide live instruction while on-site teammates manage administrative duties or attend to specific students.

Figure 1. Percentiles of Learning Gains Produced by Teachers on MCL Teams

Strong gains for MCL teams: Teachers on MCL teams produced gains equal to top-quartile teachers in math, nearly that in reading.^a



^a Reading range based on six of seven models with statistically significant gains.

Note: The study involved 15,000 students and 300 teachers in three districts over two to three years; 74 percent of the schools involved in the study were Title I.

Source: Backes, B., & Hansen, M. (2018). *Reaching further and learning more?* Washington, DC: CALDER Center.

Impact of Opportunity Culture

According to Hassel, in the 2017-18 school year more than 150 schools in nine states were implementing Opportunity Culture, impacting more than 1,400 teachers and over 41,000 students. Collectively, teachers in an Opportunity Culture program earned more than \$3 million in additional pay as a result of serving in a designated role. Additionally, 97 percent of MCLs surveyed say they would like to see Opportunity Culture continue in their schools.

An independent study conducted by American Institutes for Research (AIR) and the Brookings Institution, found that students in Opportunity Culture schools achieved strong gains in math and reading (see Figure 1). Hassel points out that both the results and the design of this study place Opportunity Culture in tier 2, “moderate evidence,” of the evidence tiers of the Every Student Succeeds Act.

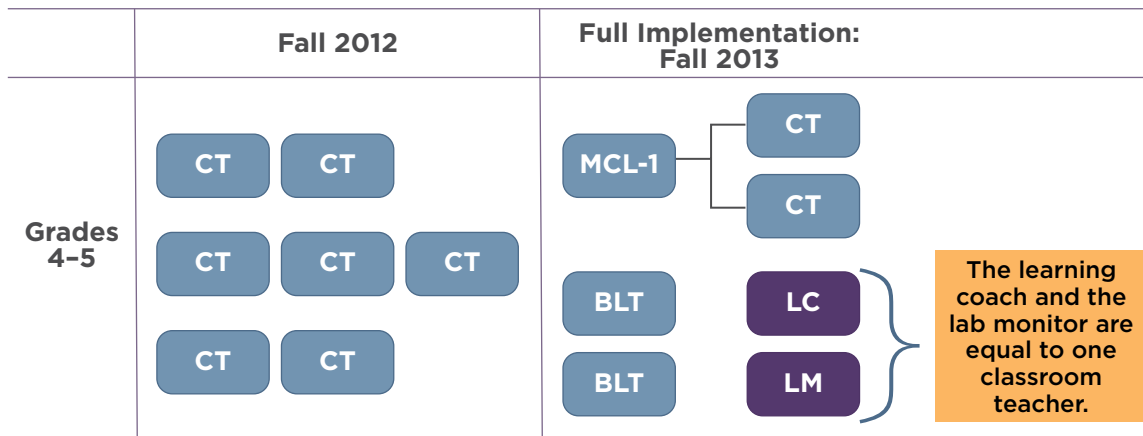
The study also suggests that Opportunity Culture schools spur schoolwide academic growth, even in classrooms not led by Opportunity Culture teachers, when they take the following actions:

- ◆ Publicize planned growth in the number of Opportunity Culture schools and roles and grow accordingly.
- ◆ Hire into other teaching positions strong Opportunity Culture applicants not initially selected for Opportunity Culture roles.
- ◆ Demonstrate the high value of coaching and collaboration.
- ◆ Allow MCLs to informally coach teachers not on their teams during early transition years.

LEA Profile: Opportunity Culture in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

For the April Thought Leadership Forum, Dr. Denise Watts presented on the work of Project LIFT (Leadership & Investment for Transformation), a public-private partnership between Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) and

Figure 2. School A Staffing Model



MENU OF STAFFING ROLES:^a

- CT: Classroom Teacher
- LC: Learning Coach
- LM: Lab Monitor
- MCL-2: Multi-Classroom Leader 2
- MCL-1: Multi-Classroom Leader 1
- TA: Teaching Assistant
- TT2: Team Teacher 2
- TT1: Team Teacher 1
- BLT: Blended Learning Teacher

^a This is a menu outlining the staffing roles that are possible when fully implementing an Opportunity Culture staffing model.

Note: This model is using the Time Technology Swap and Multi-Classroom Leadership approaches.

Charlotte’s philanthropic community. CMS is a public school district of 170 schools and over 145,000 students, with over 50 percent of students receiving free or reduced lunch. Since 2011, Project LIFT has supported the implementation of Opportunity Culture as a strategy for school improvement, starting with nine high-needs CMS schools and growing to a present count of 30 Opportunity Culture schools across the district. Watts has served as Project LIFT Director since its inception.

Watts credits the implementation of Opportunity Culture with addressing several talent development challenges, including helping CMS reduce the number of unqualified or ineffective teachers, reducing teacher turnover, focusing professional development to impact student achievement, and increasing compensation for teachers based on factors that impact student learning. Among the Opportunity Culture strategies CMS has incorporated are multi-classroom teachers as instructional leaders, elementary specialists, time-technology swaps, and remote teaching. The integration of these Opportunity Culture strategies has allowed CMS’s Opportunity Culture schools to repurpose funds from within the school budget to drive the Opportunity

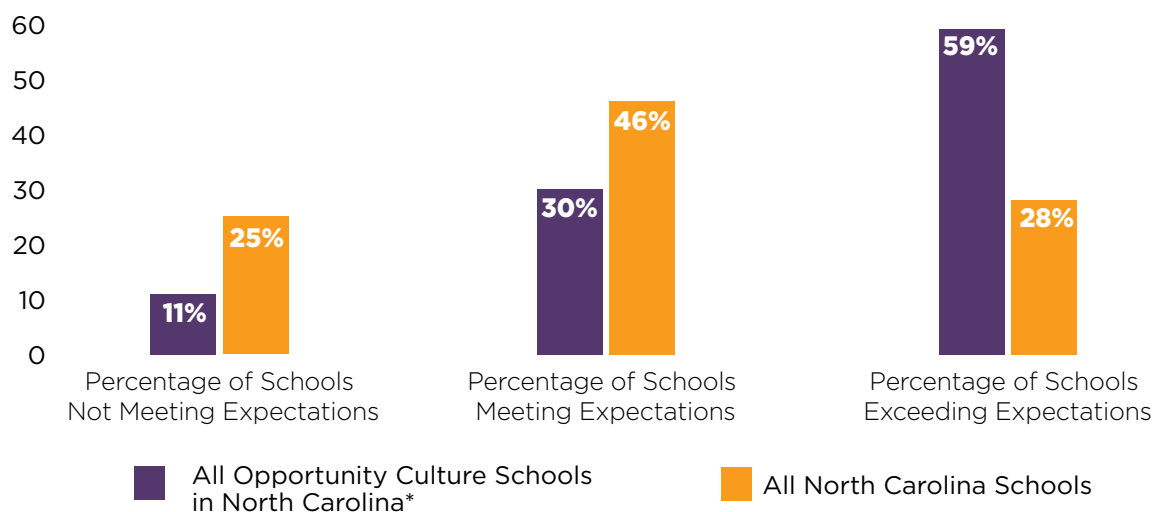
Culture teaching structure and offer increased teacher compensation based on each role.

Figure 2 shows how, in an Opportunity Culture school, seven classroom teacher (CT) positions can be repurposed into a different configuration of staffing roles, using the same amount of funds. As shown in the figure, one classroom teacher position can be repurposed into two lower-paid positions (such as a learning coach and a lab monitor). In full implementation, repurposing also results in an unused teacher position, the value of which can be used to compensate the Reach Extension teacher positions.

CMS Opportunity Culture schools were included in the AIR/Brookings study of the impact of Opportunity Culture on academic gains. CMS schools in the study demonstrated gains consistent with the overall findings. In the 2015–16 school year, Opportunity Culture schools in North Carolina outperformed other North Carolina schools, according to analysis of that year’s state accountability system student data (Figure 3).

To design and implement its Opportunity Culture while increasing teacher commitment to new practices, CMS created a district

Figure 3. Student Growth in Opportunity Culture Schools Compared to Other Schools in North Carolina, 2015-16



*Schools with grades implementing Opportunity Culture in tested grades that contribute to EVAAS growth results.

Note: All percentages do not total to 100 percent due to rounding.

Source: PowerPoint presentation by Denise Watts at April 2018 Thought Leadership Forum.

design team representing multiple stakeholder groups, including teachers. The design team originally established the vision for the initiative and continues to analyze overall success and challenges; recommend human resources, budgeting, and other district practices to support Opportunity Culture; monitor student learning data and other progress indicators; and communicate with all stakeholders about the district's Opportunity Culture design and implementation.

3. Engage in school-level needs assessments to help pre-plan for success.
4. Allow schools the authority to make design decisions within district-established parameters.
5. Communicate with stakeholders in preparation for classroom implementation.
6. Monitor and modify as needed all new staffing, roles, and strategies.

Recommendations for LEAs and SEAs

LEAs

Watts listed the following recommendations for LEAs pursuing Opportunity Culture:

1. Build commitment across schools to pursue an innovative staffing approach.
2. Determine essential district- and school-level decisions for design and implementation.

SEAs

Public Impact's Opportunity Culture Initiative and Project LIFT align closely in the recommendations they have for state education agencies interested in working with LEAs and schools to design and implement Opportunity Culture:

1. Provide funding for districts and schools to plan and execute the transition to Opportunity Culture.
 - ♦ Set a high bar for schoolwide coverage with trained turnaround leaders.

- ◆ Encourage LEAs and schools to explore various funding sources, including Title I, Title II, and state funds.
2. Help districts and schools make strategic decisions in key areas:
 - ◆ Selection process for teacher-leaders
 - ◆ Compensation levels along the career path
 - ◆ How to pay for new roles sustainably
 - ◆ How to phase in over time, if needed
 3. Provide training for teachers taking on new roles (and for principals to support them).
 4. Identify and remove policy barriers to staffing redesign, such as:
 - ◆ Funding constraints
 - ◆ Required staffing patterns
 - ◆ Rigid class-size requirements that limit flexible staffing
 - ◆ Inability to identify high-growth teachers
 5. Gather data, support learning, and foster networks to improve implementation.

Resources

Backes, B., & Hansen, M. (2018). *Reaching further and learning more?* Washington, DC: Calder Center.

Public Impact. (2015). *An Opportunity Culture for teaching and learning*. Chapel Hill, NC: Author. http://opportunityculture.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/An_Opportunity_Culture_for_Teaching_and_Learning_Introduction-Public_Impact.pdf

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