A toolkit of field-tested strategies to help teacher leaders maximize their effectiveness.

The teacher leaders who get the best results are the ones who explore the role’s full potential, but it can be a challenge to get beyond a basic understanding of the responsibilities involved. The National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) wants to make it easier.

Unleashing Teacher Leadership presents best practices and tools that teacher leaders can use to unlock their own power and drive lasting instructional improvement across schools and districts. Current and future teacher leaders will learn how to

- Examine their context as instructional experts.
- Understand their approach to leadership and how to work with other leaders in their school.
- Develop expertise in evidence-based instructional practice.
- Support the implementation of high-quality curriculum.
- Build effective learning environments and support colleagues’ efforts to do the same.
- Understand how to use data and assessment to support student learning and inform instructional practice.
- Acquire coaching skills to help build colleagues’ capacity.
- Lead effective collaboration and scale teacher effectiveness.
- Use their voice to influence decisions that affect students and fellow teachers.

Along with guidance on these practices and skills, readers will get the perspectives of teacher leaders engaged in this work and acquire dozens of NIET-developed tools they can use to unleash the power of effective teacher leadership in their own school and district.

“The most effective leaders create an environment that attracts and retains teachers by opening doors for teachers to grow their leadership skills and take on new roles. This book provides a practical guide for teachers and leaders to build their own skills and improve their students’ classroom experiences.”

—Dr. Ted Sanders, former U.S. Deputy Secretary of Education, past president of the Education Commission of the States, and previous Chief State School Officer in Nevada, Illinois, and Ohio
UNLEASHING TEACHER LEADERSHIP

A Toolkit for Ensuring Effective Instruction in Every Classroom

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Preface

In 1999, the work of the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) began. My goals at the outset were to identify teacher effectiveness as the key to effective comprehensive school reform and to put in place on the ground a system to achieve meaningful and sustained improvements in teacher practices and student learning. That year I introduced a bold new initiative called the Teacher Advancement Program (now TAP: The System for Teacher and Student Advancement). TAP was based on years of substantial research showing that the most important school-related factor affecting student achievement is the quality of the educator in the classroom. From that starting point, we developed a comprehensive system to address aspects of traditional schools that limited the opportunity for teachers to grow in their profession, be supported with relevant and daily feedback and professional development, be compensated competitively for their roles and responsibilities, and be evaluated in a fair and comprehensive manner. Hundreds of educators stepped out of their comfort zones to become leaders in this school improvement endeavor. And once the journey took hold, we began to see statistically significant growth in teacher practices and student achievement.

A key component to our success has been the focus on teacher leadership. Teacher leaders are too often an untapped resource for improving our nation's schools, yet we have seen again and again that the establishment of formal teacher leader roles elevates the profession and attracts effective educators to our schools. It is time for the importance of teacher leadership to be recognized and used by a wider audience, and for schools and districts...
to know that with strategic effort, teacher leaders will have a sustainable and substantially positive impact on educator quality and student outcomes.

Our work has developed more than 35,000 teacher leaders (and growing), who are using proven strategies and structures to improve learning and instruction for all teachers in their schools, leading to student achievement gains. We have seen in our work throughout the country that the most successful learning gains are evident in states, districts, and schools that invest in teacher leaders. A specific focus on creating formal leadership roles with clear responsibility, accountability, and authority drives improvement in teaching and learning and helps to address challenges faced by schools to maximize student learning.

Throughout this book, we share the strategies and systems that have been implemented successfully in partner schools to establish formal teacher leader roles that expand instructional leadership; provide consistent, frequent, and relevant feedback opportunities for teachers; improve the relevance and effectiveness of professional learning; and support a growing number of effective teachers. As teacher effectiveness improves, so does student learning. Indeed, great teacher leaders are about more than what they impart. They represent the fact that there can be great teachers. Legions of them. But this will happen only if we enlist the teacher leaders we do have to develop the teacher leaders we can have.

—Lowell Milken, Founder,
National Institute for Excellence in Teaching
Acknowledgments

At NIET, we could not do our work without the tens of thousands of outstanding educators leading instruction in classrooms throughout our nation. In addition, we appreciate the leaders in our partner districts and schools who elevate the role of teacher leaders. Their experiences, feedback, and outcomes inform our work on a daily basis and served as a foundation for tools and strategies we share in this book.

The guidance provided throughout the book relies on the contributions of numerous NIET team members who have worked to develop the knowledge, strategies, tools, and resources to support teacher leadership over the past two decades. Although every single team member and partner have helped add to our body of knowledge, I greatly appreciate the significant contribution of several key team members who provided extensive leadership and support in the creation of this book, including Nicole Bolen, Vicky Condalary, Lindsey Parker, Ann Shaw, and Kristan Van Hook. Finally, thank you to Tamara Schiff and Amy Wooten, who guided the development of the book from beginning to end.
Introduction

For more than two decades, the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) has partnered with thousands of teachers through TAP: The System for Teacher and Student Advancement—as well as hundreds of schools, districts, and states—implementing improvement initiatives to support and develop effective teacher leaders. Based on these experiences and outcomes, we have identified specific teacher leader practices that result in the effective scaling of high-quality instructional work in schools. Our experiences are supported by an extensive body of research that has examined the significant value of teacher leadership and the qualities that effective teacher leaders have or need. This book, Unleashing Teacher Leadership: A Toolkit for Ensuring Effective Instruction in Every Classroom, allows us to share these practices and the practical ways to use them to unlock the power of teacher leadership in your school and district.

This book is also grounded in the understanding that teacher quality is the most important within-school factor in determining student achievement. For this reason, the most critical work schools can do to support equitable outcomes for students is to make certain that every student is taught by an effective teacher. Teacher leaders provide the strongest engine for accelerating teacher effectiveness in a school setting.

As teachers grow their knowledge, skills, and practices in how to teach, students also grow. Simply put, the best path toward equity in student outcomes is effective teaching—and we need to pursue this aim at a far greater rate than we have to date. This means that teachers must develop their
abilities to provide effective instruction and develop environments that engage all learners. Teachers must also broaden their abilities to implement high-quality curriculum with fidelity and use student data to reflect on their own practice and adjust instruction. And finally, it means that teachers must be provided ongoing feedback, coaching, and professional learning embedded in their daily and weekly practices to maximize their growth in order to serve all students. We have seen the results of these practices across the nation and know that the impact of teacher leadership can be achieved in all schools.

Teacher learning supported and facilitated by expert teacher leaders creates scale and buy-in that is far greater than any other professional learning model. Unlike traditional professional development, teacher leadership uses capacity that exists within schools and districts to support sustained and ongoing growth and development of teachers that is tightly aligned with student needs and school and district goals. Teacher leaders offer support from within the school system and engage teachers in authentic learning and reflection; therefore, teachers they work with appreciate the knowledge and value of localized teacher leadership. In well-designed implementations, teachers seek out and welcome support from teacher leaders rather than be anxious or reluctant to engage in feedback cycles.

Further, teacher leadership provides attractive career opportunities for effective teachers who might otherwise leave the classroom. Having defined teacher leadership roles not only results in the retention of expert teachers who become teacher leaders themselves, but also increases the retention of teachers and school leaders who feel supported. Most important, more students benefit from having access to effective teaching and learning.

**Why This Book?**

The challenge of scaling teacher effectiveness is not due to a lack of knowledge about what works to improve instruction. It is a challenge of a lack of capacity to get the job done. Schools need more energy to fuel instructional leadership, and teacher leaders are the most obvious energy source. When viewed through this lens, it is clear that teacher leaders are the most efficient and effective resource for improving and continuously upgrading the quality and consistency of instruction in our schools. More than that, teacher leaders can be a super-fuel offering many overlapping benefits at once. They can meet the increasing demand for hybrid leadership roles in schools, expand instructional and distributed leadership in schools, coach other teachers and provide more frequent and actionable feedback, improve the relevance
and impact of professional learning, and increase teacher retention. All of these factors culminate with the acceleration of student learning.

This toolkit provides a unique opportunity for school leaders and teacher leaders to develop, hone, and support their skills. If you are a prospective or current teacher leader or someone who supports teacher leaders, this book is for you. Regardless of the formality of the role of teacher leaders in your school or district, *Unleashing Teacher Leadership* provides the guidance you need to build your leadership skills, supported by proven strategies, structures, and tools that have helped teacher leaders across the country improve instruction in their schools, leading to improved student outcomes. Throughout this book, we detail the practices that teacher leaders should engage in on a daily basis and emphasize how teacher leaders are developed, supported, and sustained. This is not easy work—it's more complicated than simply providing teachers with new titles and a far too often modest stipend—but it's work that is worth the investment given the payoff of improved student learning.

As you continue serving as a teacher leader, enter into a teacher leadership role, or advocate for creating these roles into your school, district, or state, the tools provided in this book will help you. Within each chapter, you will find examples, user-friendly tools, and an explanation of why elements of teacher leadership are vital and how best to incorporate them into your classroom and school. Our hope is to inspire existing teacher leaders and develop the next generation of teacher leaders to advance educator effectiveness and improve outcomes for all students.
References


About the Author

Joshua H. Barnett is chief executive officer of the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET), a not-for-profit organization that has trained and supported more than 30,000 teacher leaders over 20 years. He works with NIET partner districts, states, and higher education institutions to improve educator effectiveness and student learning by investing in teacher leadership as a lever for change and creating the systems and structures that enable teacher leaders to be successful. His work supports teachers to develop leadership skills, take on new leadership roles, and contribute to the improvement of teaching and learning in their school and district.

Prior to becoming CEO, Barnett served as chief operating officer and senior vice president of research and evaluation at NIET, leading the research agenda and production of evidentiary support for all initiatives and programs. He earned his doctorate in education at the University of Arkansas and served as an assistant professor of education policy at Arizona State University. His work has been published in a variety of outlets, including Educational Leadership and Issues in Teacher Education. He is the coauthor of “Learning on the Job: Teacher Evaluation Can Foster Real Growth.”
Related ASCD Resources: Teacher Leadership

At the time of publication, the following resources were available (ASCD stock numbers in parentheses).

_Adventures in Teacher Leadership: Pathways, Strategies, and Inspiration for Every Teacher_ by Rebecca Mieliozowki and Joseph Fatheeree (#118033)
_The Artisan Teaching Model for Instructional Leadership: Working Together to Transform Your School_ by Kenneth Baum and David Kruelwich (#116041)
_From Underestimated to Unstoppable: 8 Archetypes for Driving Change in the Classroom and Beyond_ by Ashley Lamb-Sinclair (#123017)
_Igniting Teacher Leadership: How do I empower my teachers to lead and learn?_ by William Sterrett (#SF116039)
_Teach, Reflect, Learn: Building Your Capacity for Success in the Classroom_ by Pete Hall and Alisa Simeral (#115040)
_Leading In Sync: Teacher Leaders and Principals Working Together for Student Learning_ by Jill Harrison Berg (#118021)
_Peer Coaching to Enrich Professional Practice, School Culture, and Student Learning_ by Pam Robbins (#115014)

For up-to-date information about ASCD resources, go to [www.ascd.org](http://www.ascd.org). You can search the complete archives of _Educational Leadership_ at [www.ascd.org/el](http://www.ascd.org/el). To contact us, send an email to member@ascd.org or call 1-800-933-2723 or 703-578-9600.