



teacher powered schools

Teacher-Powered Schools: A Mini-Anthology

Teacher-powered schools are transforming the eduscape. Teacher teams across the country have secured collective autonomy from their districts, charter authorizers, and unions to design and run their own schools.

Read more about this pioneering concept in these blog posts and articles.

FIND OUT MORE

teacherpowered.org

@teacherpowered

#teacherpowered

A PRODUCT OF



5 Ways Teacher-Powered Schools Are Transforming American Public Education

By: Kim Farris-Berg

Huffington Post Education

July 23, 2014

Reprinted with permission from the author.

www.huffingtonpost.com/kim-farrisberg-/teacher-powered-schools_b_5613420.html

In 2007, teacher Lori Nazareno and her colleagues had a crazy idea: to design and run a teacher-powered school.

Their bold vision included designing the learning program, allocating the budget, and selecting their colleagues—with teachers working collaboratively to make the school successful. Today, the Mathematics and Science Leadership Academy (MSLA) in Denver is celebrating its fifth anniversary, with full enrollment and highly satisfied teachers.

My colleagues and I have spent the past five years studying teacher-powered schools like MSLA. There are currently more than 60 schools operated by teacher teams in 15 states—with more on the way. And support for teacher-powered schools is astounding: a May 2014 report by Education Evolving found that 85% of Americans think teacher-powered schools are a good idea, while a majority of teachers want to work in one.

The growing number of these schools raises the question: Can teacher-powered schools transform American public education? My colleagues and I believe the answer is yes. Here are five ways teacher-powered schools are changing the eduscape:



Math and Science Leadership Academy,
Denver, Colorado

1. Bringing teachers and administrators together on behalf of students.

In education, accountability trickles down: federal leaders pressure states, states pressure districts, districts pressure principals, and principals pressure teachers. This sets up a culture of compliance in which all players try to meet expectations from the top—rather than working together based on what students actually need.

But teacher-powered schools change that dynamic. Teachers identify students' needs and design schools to directly meet those needs. School leaders, who are selected by teachers, work to support teacher teams' decisions—not the other way around. This can have critical impact at the district and state levels. As schools demonstrate success, they can influence district and state leaders to rethink their decision making in support of teachers' work.

2. Personalizing student and teacher learning.

Teacher-powered schools use learning time in different, innovative, and personalized ways. For example, at many schools, such as the TAGOS Leadership Academy in Janesville, Wisconsin, students design, manage, and defend their own learning activities with support from teachers. At Boston's Mission Hill K-8 School, teachers regularly meet to coach one another on better supporting the needs of individual students.

3. Embracing responsibility for school success.

In teacher-powered schools, teachers are collectively responsible for the success of their schools and students. They think beyond their own classrooms and take on an "our school" mentality. Teacher teams delight in having the authority to mentor new teachers, determine their schools' most important funding needs, and adapt learning programs as they discover what works best for their students.

And when something isn't right, teacher teams fix it. For example, teachers at San Francisco Community School modified the afterschool program to include more learning activities after parents communicated that students were getting home too late to do their homework.

4. Addressing teacher quality issues without seeking protections.

In many schools, teachers' jobs are protected by seniority and tenure. Teachers unions often seek these protections because they keep teachers from having to take responsibility for the results of decisions that are out of their control (for example, in states where teacher evaluation is based on value-added measure scores).

But in teacher-powered schools, teachers are less likely to feel that their jobs are threatened. As a result, they often take on different approaches to job protections. For instance, teachers at Avalon School in St. Paul, Minnesota and Chrysalis Charter School in Palo Cedro, California are among the teacher-powered teams who do not offer protections because teachers trust their colleagues to evaluate them fairly. These teachers have far greater control over the policies and processes affecting their schools.

5. Advancing fresh ideas about student achievement and assessment.

Teacher-powered schools tend to have a broader focus on what students should know and be able to do. They look beyond standardized tests and schools' mean proficiency scores.

As a result, teacher teams often choose tools and processes that assess student learning beyond traditional means. For example, many teacher-powered schools use The Hope Survey to assess non-academic skills that students need to be successful in work and life, such as self-efficacy and problem solving.

Teacher-powered schools are not a panacea for America's education problems. Yet the growing interest in these schools—and the solutions and alternatives they provide—shows we need to seriously explore how teacher-powered schools can be a part of our strategy to find solutions.

Let's open the door for teachers to power us forward in defining the most promising paths for K-12 improvement.

Author Bio:

Kim Farris-Berg is an independent education strategist and consultant who works with teachers and the broader education community to grow awareness, acceptance and action for teacher-powered schools in districts, unions and communities. She is lead author of *Trusting Teachers with School Success: What Happens When Teachers Call the Shots* (R&L Education 2012) and a research consultant for school redesign at Center for Teaching Quality.

Shared Power Creates School Success

By: Carrie Bakken

This article originally appeared in Education Week Teacher as part of a publishing partnership with the Center for Teaching Quality. Reprinted with permission from the author.

*Education Week Teacher
June 25, 2014*

www.blogs.edweek.org/teachers/teaching_ahead/2014/06/shared-power-creates-school-success.html

At Avalon School, a Minnesota charter school that serves 190 students in grades 6–12, the teachers control all aspects of running the school. If we try something and it doesn't work, we have the ability to change direction immediately. We create our own curriculum, develop partnerships with community organizations, and locate internships for students. In collaboration, the teachers determine all aspects of the learning program, make employment decisions, design the evaluation process, and set the budget. We also accept full accountability for our school's performance.

Avalon School easily retains 95-100 percent of our teachers every year.

With our model, Avalon School easily retains 95–100 percent of our teachers every year. With high teacher retention, we are able to establish strong relationships with each other, our students, and their families. This continuity also allows us to build on our strengths and let go of practices that do not work. We know that when we create a strategic plan, we have the personnel to implement the vision. High teacher retention is also cost effective. We don't spend time and energy on hiring and re-training teachers.

With this autonomy, we constructed a school that places student empowerment at the center. We created a collaborative community that models democracy for students daily. Students are trusted to initiate self-directed projects, mediate conflicts, solve problems, and create new rules for Avalon through the Student Congress.

With this autonomy, we constructed a school that places student empowerment at the center.

It is also important to note that many students at Avalon were either persistently truant, behind in credit, or suffered from a hardship that impacted their ability to attend school regularly in their previous schools. The majority of our students also have a diagnosed disability. Yet, there is strong evidence that Avalon's framework for governance helps students acquire positive learning skills. For example, Avalon has a significantly higher percentage of students who are proficient on math and reading state tests than the St. Paul Public Schools. Consistently, over 80 percent of our graduates attend post-secondary education following graduation.

Avalon is a powerful learning community because power is shared and nurtured. All members of the school community are involved in the decision-making and students are given a real voice in the school. Check out Avalon School in *Deeper Learning: How Eight Innovative Public Schools Are Transforming Education in the Twenty-First Century* (The New Press, 2014) by Monica Martinez and Dennis McGrath. Do teacher powered

schools provide a framework for school improvement? Yes! We provide students with meaningful learning opportunities while creating great working conditions for teachers.

Author Bio:

Carrie Bakken was hired with a team of teachers to open Avalon School in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 2001, where she is now a program coordinator and teacher. In 2012, she started and recently completed a two-year Aspen Institute Teacher Fellowship and won an Outstanding Educator in Ethics Education Award sponsored by the WEM Foundation. She is also a member of the CTQ Collaboratory. Her email is carrie@avalonschool.org.

Teachers in Charge: We Got This!

By: Kim Ursetta

This article originally appeared in Education Week Teacher as part of a publishing partnership with the Center for Teaching Quality. Reprinted with permission from the author.

*Education Week Teacher
June 24, 2014*

www.blogs.edweek.org/teachers/teaching_ahead/2014/06/teachers-in-charge-we-got-this.html

I have yet to meet a teacher who has not dreamed about what it would be like to open their own school. At the Mathematics and Science Leadership Academy in Denver, where I work, teachers are doing just that.

As the powers that be continued to blame teachers for the shortcomings in achievement, teachers' hands were tied. Many teachers did not have the power or permission to choose their own lessons, let alone make necessary adjustments to curriculum based on student outcomes. Teaching has become, in many places, a rote process where students are expected to be on the same page at the same time with hopes of demonstrating academic proficiency.

In our school, by contrast, students are engaged in their learning by teachers who center instruction around the their needs. Teachers are treated as professionals and encouraged to work together to create lessons

that engage and excite students. Thus, the challenge:

Create a school where teachers and students learn, teach, and lead. As our students would say, "We got this!"

As a result, a group of teachers in Denver, with the full support of its union, designed its own school from a blank slate. Our school is teacher-led, with no principal. We serve 300 students in kindergarten through 5th grade. Teachers control curriculum delivery, choose resources and materials, manage student conduct, and establish a positive school culture. In exchange, we embrace higher accountability and increased collaboration.



Math and Science Leadership Academy,
Denver, Colorado



Math and Science Leadership Academy,
Denver, Colorado

We implement our own peer-review process and divide the administrative roles among our teachers, who work in teams. Our students choose "passion areas" to study that are infused with mathematics and science. Parents are critical partners and volunteer daily in our classrooms. Class sizes are capped at 25 so that our students can receive more personalized learning. Technology is an integral part of daily instruction. Our students also benefit from a well-rounded curriculum including music, art, physical education, and a science laboratory. Those that have visited often report an incredible energy and excitement from teachers, parents, and students about their learning.

Our school was designed to prepare our student population, mostly at-risk students and Latinos, to compete in jobs that are yet to be discovered. After being open for only five years, our achievement is climbing and our enrollment is at capacity. At the Mathematics and Science Leadership Academy, teachers are leading the way. Can teachers be trusted to run a school? We are here to tell you, "We got this!"

Author Bio:

Kim Manning Ursetta is a National Board-certified teacher (Middle Childhood Generalist) and a kindergarten teacher ELA-S (bilingual) at the teacher-led Mathematics and Science Leadership Academy in Denver, Colorado. Kim has been involved with numerous teaching and learning committees at the local, state, and national level throughout her 20-year teaching career.

Believing is Seeing

By: Lori Nazareno

This article originally appeared in Education Week Teacher as part of a publishing partnership with the Center for Teaching Quality. Reprinted with permission from the author.

*CTQ Blogs: Divided No More
February 11, 2014*

www.teachingquality.org/content/blogs/lori-nazareno/believing-seeing

There always have been, and always will be, those who can envision a world that is significantly different than that which currently exists. Then there are those who make excuses or find numerous reasons why those things can't happen or won't work.

The people who can envision another way are those who will re-invent life and education as we know it. Those who can't...won't.

Which one are you?

Belief strengthens into experience

Have you ever played the, “If I could design a school, I would...” game? If so, how did you complete that sentence?”

I did. And that vision became reality.

As I played the “If I could...” game, I developed a deep-seated belief that schools and schooling should be different and that teachers should lead the way. Looking back now, I realize that as a result of my belief, opportunities to develop skills and abilities as a teacher leader began to come my way. The more I took advantage of those opportunities, the more opportunities presented themselves, and the better prepared I became. And this strengthened my belief.

Over time this became a cycle that fed itself; strengthened belief led to more opportunity that strengthened my belief and led to more opportunities and so on. Ultimately, this cycle led into the opportunity to design and launch the teacher-powered school, the Mathematics and Science Leadership Academy (MSLA).



Math and Science Leadership Academy, Denver, Colorado

The way it works

For everything from the smallest object to the grandest idea, all things are twice created. First they are created in your mind, then they become manifest in your experience. This concept is just as true for the pencil as it is for the system of a free public education for all. Each was first an idea (and belief) in someone’s mind. And it is this concept that set in motion all of the opportunities and experiences that ultimately resulted in the creation of MSLA.

Throughout history a wide range of individuals have taught this concept. Jesus said, “Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe you have received it and it will be yours.” Ernest Holmes tells us the “The visible is the Invisible made manifest.” And Melissa Etheridge sings, “If you think you’ll never make it, you will. If you think you’re gonna break it, you will... You are what you believe. And if you believe, then you will see, you will.”

Ultimately, what we believe on the deepest level, we create in our lives. This process creates a cycle that feeds itself. And each experience reinforces and strengthens the belief that created it.

If we believe that we are powerless, we are. If we believe that we can make a difference, we will.

Does that mean you sit idly by and wish things into being? Of course not!

So, how do you manifest the classroom, the school, the profession, or the life that you envision?

Where to start

Here are a few ideas:

- Create in your “mind’s eye” what you intend and believe that it is possible.
- Take opportunities to prepare as though whatever you intend is already available. Act “as if” whatever it is that you intend is already true.
- Pay attention, notice, and act on synchronistic events. These are way-showers to put your vision into action.
- Actively seek out opportunities to practice your skills and to actualize your intention.

Contemplation

- What do you believe about yourself both personally and professionally?
- How do those beliefs show up in your experience? How do they feed and strengthen that belief?
- What do you believe about our profession? Our students? Our schools?
- What is your vision for how schooling could improve for students?
- How might you begin to lead change in order to manifest your vision?

Author Bio:

Lori Nazareno, CTQ Teacher Leader in Residence, co-authored Steps to Creating a Teacher-Powered School with Kim Farris-Berg and previously co-founded the teacher-powered Mathematics and Science Leadership Academy (MSLA) in Denver. She blogs at Divided No More: Integrating Soul and Role (www.teachingquality.org/blogs/LoriNazareno).

**Interested in creating your own teacher-powered school?
Check out the free step-by-step guide at:**

teacherpowered.org/guide

Share strategies and resources with other like-minded educators across the country in the CTQ Collaboratory.

Join the movement.

**[teacherpowered.org
/community](http://teacherpowered.org/community)**

FOLLOW ON TWITTER

**@teacherpowered
#teacherpowered**