

Teacher-Powered Schools FAQ

Q: What is a “teacher-powered school”?

A: It’s a school inspired by students and collaboratively designed and run by a group of teachers. Teachers in teacher-powered schools secure autonomy to make decisions in a wide [array of areas](#) that influence school success, such as the learning program, budget, evaluating their colleagues, selecting personnel, and more.

Q: So basically teacher-powered schools are schools without principals?

A: No. Most teacher-powered schools do have leaders, but their roles vary. Some teacher teams select a principal, while others have a lead teacher, co-lead teachers, or a leadership committee. Frequently, the leaders are selected by—and report to—the full group of teachers, and they can also be deselected by the group. Leaders are not there to ensure teachers’ compliance to outside decisions; instead, they work to facilitate the team in carrying out their group decisions and shared purpose.

Q: Are teacher-powered schools just an idea? Or do they really exist?

A: There are more than [120 public teacher-powered schools](#) in operation in at least 18 states across the nation. They are in urban, suburban, and rural environments and serve all P-12 grade levels.

Q: Are teacher-powered schools usually charter schools?

A: No. There are public teacher-powered schools in both the charter and district sectors. In fact, many teacher groups inside districts have [signed agreements](#) with superintendents, union locals, and state education agencies that give them greater collective autonomy in exchange for accepting accountability for school success.

Q. How do teams of teachers secure the autonomy to run a teacher-powered school?

A: Teams secure autonomy in a [wide variety of ways](#). Arrangements vary with regard to level of sustainability, degree of autonomy granted to teachers, and other factors. There is no “right way” to secure autonomy. Teams consider factors such as local political climates, existing state law, openness to trying things differently (especially among state, district, and union leaders), and preferences of teachers at the school.

Q: Is decision making effective in a shared leadership model? Isn't there gridlock? How does anything get done?

A: Generally speaking, teacher-powered teams don't make every single decision as a full group—they distribute leadership. That means they select, as a group, who has the authority to make which decisions. Decision makers are accountable to the full group for making choices that are consistent with the shared purpose and goals of the team. Teams say that while [collective decision making](#) can be time consuming, the process is worth it because it creates buy-in and promotes a strong school culture.

Q: Do teacher-powered schools mean more work for teachers?

A: Running teacher-powered schools takes a lot of work—but teachers report that it is enormously rewarding. To keep their workload manageable, teachers often delegate time-consuming administrative tasks such as bookkeeping, facilities management, and so on to outside service providers or the district central office. While they may delegate the work, they maintain decision making authority in those areas.

Q: How are teacher-powered schools different from other efforts at teacher leadership?

A: Many efforts at developing teacher leadership work within the current hierarchical structure of American public education. They seek to bring “teacher voice” into a top-down policymaking and management process or to give teachers more “career pathways” within that structure. In contrast, teacher-powered schools move decision-making authority into the hands of the professionals who know students and their unique needs best—teachers.

Q: What data exist on student achievement in teacher-powered schools?

A: Teachers in teacher-powered schools often redefine what student success looks like. They explore holistic measures of student achievement beyond high-stakes testing, including the development of in-depth portfolios and comprehensive exams. Our preliminary qualitative research suggests that teacher-powered schools are very good at producing deeper learning.

Q: How do teachers and the public feel about teacher-powered schools?

A: A [2014 national survey](#) found overwhelming support for this idea. When told about the teacher-powered school model, 78 percent of teachers and 85 percent of the American public stated they were a “good idea.” Additionally, 54 percent of teachers were “very interested” in working in a teacher-powered school, and one in five teachers are ready to start implementing such a school *today*.

Q: Can the teacher-powered model occur at the department or program level?

A: Yes. “Teacher-powered” need not imply a whole school. Teams of teachers can secure decision-making authority to design and run a department or program within their district or school. Imagine, for example, teachers in a math department at a high school entering into an arrangement with their district and union in which they secure autonomy to choose curriculum, create assessments, select colleagues for that department, and set the department budget, while agreeing to be held accountable for the results.

Q: Do teachers’ unions support teacher-powered schools?

A: Both the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers are committed to raising awareness about teacher-powered schools. Many current teacher-powered schools have [Memoranda of Understanding or Elect to Work agreements](#) with their local union affiliates and school districts, which waive aspects of the existing collective-bargaining agreement and make it possible for teachers to collectively determine the working conditions in their schools. Teachers who want to “opt out” of working in a teacher-powered school go back into the district hiring pool.

Q: What resources do you recommend for educators interested in starting a teacher-powered school?

A: Visit www.teacherpowered.org! There you will find a [step-by-step guide](#) for teams designing or running a teacher-powered school, [discussion starters](#), a monthly [e-newsletter](#), an [online community](#) for asking questions and connecting with teacher-powered teams across the nation, an [inventory](#) of teacher-powered schools, and more. We also welcome you to reach out to us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and email at info@teacherpowered.org.

Q: Who are some of the pioneers of teacher-powered schools?

The Teacher-Powered Schools Initiative has assembled a cohort of [six ambassadors](#) who work to educate the public about teacher-powered schools, support teacher-powered teams, and write publicly about their experiences. Learn more about the ambassadors and read [case studies](#) about several teacher-powered schools on our website and in the book [Trusting Teachers with School Success](#).

Looking for more information about teacher-powered schools? Or, want to request an interview with a teacher-powered ambassador?

Contact info@teacherpowered.org.