A Guide for Teacher-Powered Site Administrators

Collaborative Leadership for Thriving Teams

teacher-powered schools

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Welcome to *A Guide for Teacher-Powered Site Administrators: Collaborative Leadership for Thriving Teams*. We are glad you are here! This guide is several years in the making and comes at the request of dozens of teams trying to figure out the roles of administrators in teacher-powered schools.

We know that over half of all teacher-powered schools have designated administrators, and we also know that this role is very different from what a traditional principal does at most K-12 schools. This guide is designed to address the unique opportunities and challenges in being a teacher-powered administrator.

There is not one right way to do this, and the guide draws on the expertise and experience of eight teacher-powered expert administrators from schools around the nation. Here you will learn from their knowledge and skills, as well as reflect individually and as a team on what is best for your own school.

About This Guide

After more than a decade of researching teacher-powered schools and listening to the struggles and questions of new and converting teams, we knew that the subject of administrators needed to be addressed. There is a common myth that teacher-powered schools do not have principals (see sidebar), and to be fair the name "teacher-powered" does not include principals. Principals are usually thought of as the leader of the school (as in the *one* leader of the school), **but what happens when a school has a team of leaders and the administrator is one voice on the team?**

There are many answers to that question and the best group to learn from is a group of successful teacher-powered administrators. We invited eight site administrators from outstanding teacher-powered schools around the country to join us in creating this guide. This impressive group met weekly over the summer of 2018 to write and discuss all the topics you will find here. The project was co-facilitated by Jeff Austin, principal of Social Justice Humanitas Academy in Los Angeles and a teacher-powered Ambassador, and Amy Junge, Director of Teacher-Powered Schools for Education Evolving. Read about each leader and their school starting on page 32. Better yet, reach out and connect with them!

Myth: *Teacher-powered schools don't have principals*

There is a common misconception that teacher-powered schools don't have principals. This is false! Most teacher-powered schools do indeed have a site administrator (usually called a principal, but sometimes a headmaster, school leader, or director) with an administrative credential. The difference is that at teacher-powered schools **the site administrator is accountable to the team of teachers** and often selected by this team to serve in this important leadership position. Many teacher-powered principals also teach a course or have an advisory group, and see themselves as one member of the larger team. They don't wield a veto vote, order directives, or make unilateral decisions. Rather these teacher-powered principals collaboratively lead their teams for the benefit of the students.

Who Should Use This Guide?

This guide is intended for any site administrator working at, creating, or converting to a teacher-powered governance model at their school. It is especially relevant to any administrator coming into an already established teacher-powered school or an administrator whose team wants to move to a more teacher-powered model. **Reimagining roles, unlearning traditional practices, and adjusting to a teacher-powered culture takes reflection, new skills, and time.** It is also important to formalize whatever structures and processes your team decides on in writing for clarity and transparency.

As your team continually improves, use this guide to come back to the topics and questions that are most relevant to the challenges your team is currently facing. Every teacher-powered school is in "a state of constant iteration", meaning that it is continually being adjusted and tweaked to make things work for the students and staff that are there at that moment. What worked well ten, five, or even one year ago might not work well with your current group of students, families, and staff. Personnel changes, retirements, and new teachers all change the dynamic of collaboratively led teams. It is important to acknowledge this and reevaluate each year what works well and what needs to be adjusted.
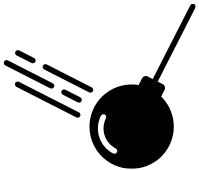
How to Use This Guide

Knowing that all educators are short on time, we've designed this guide to be concise and easy to use. Each of the seven main topics follow this basic structure after a brief introduction to the topic:

- **Reflection Questions for Individuals:** This journal-style response section is designed to get you thinking deeply about your own beliefs and experiences, and how those impact your leadership style.

- **Team Conversation Starters:** These guiding questions are meant to be discussion starters for your team. Some teams find it helpful to write down their responses, while others may use them to begin deeper conversations about issues relevant to their team.

- **Common Challenges:** Every team faces problems and teacher-powered teams often have some unique challenges that come with using this innovative governance structure. We don't have all the answers, but our collective knowledge and experience lets you know you aren't alone and offers some first steps to take to tackle these issues.

- **Tips and Tricks:** This includes best practices from experienced administrators. Learn what other teams do on a daily basis, expand what you know to be possible, and explore how to push the boundaries of collaborative leadership.

Table of Contents for the Seven Topics

Throughout the guide you will find a few "Myth-Busting" sidebars (like you saw on page 1) to help your team better understand what teacher-powered schools are and aren't. The end of the guide also has recommended resources and ways to connect with other teacher-powered administrators and teams.

Teacher-powered (www.teacherpowered.org) is a governance structure in which the team of teachers has collective autonomy to design, create, and make final decisions in areas impacting student success. Teams gain autonomy in multiple ways ranging from charter contracts, to district pilot school agreements, to MOUs with unions and districts, to state waivers, and even in some cases informally by leadership goodwill. The collaborative leadership piece also looks different at each school because the individual teams get to decide what is best for their staff and their students. No two teacher-powered schools are governed identically. **It is not a model one can replicate; it must be created as a collaborative process.**

What all teacher-powered schools have in common is that they are student-centered and their teams are committed to keeping students at the center of all design and decision-making. We use Education Evolving's Seven Principles of Student-Centered Learning (www. educationevolving.org/learning) to understand what student-centered means in practice. At teacher-powered schools each team implements some or all of these principles in the ways best suited for their communities.

There are also common teacher-powered practices that many teams use in helping them govern their schools. Collaborative leadership between administrators, teachers, and support staff; distributed leadership structures; rotating leadership positions, engaging in peer observation; including student voice and choice; embracing a culture of transparency; seeing themselves as lifelong learners; engaging families in design and decision-making; and reimagining the roles of teachers and administrators are common practices found at successful teacher-powered schools. This guide focuses on this last teacher-powered practice of reimagining the roles of teachers and administrators. What does this mean? What does it look like? Where do you start?

Reimagining the Roles of Administrators

Several teacher-powered administrators have described the role as "servant leadership," meaning that they see themselves in a servant position to their teacher teams. Alissa Cheek, principal of Tri-County Early College in Murphy, NC shares, "Although I never planned on being an administrator, when I became one, I knew I wanted to find a way to lead more as a servant and supporter." Instead of leading from the front, teacher-powered principals often lead from the back or the middle, building up their teams and supporting their teachers in what they have collectively decided is best for students.

Teacher-powered also embraces the philosophy that what is good for students is good for educators. Buffy Cushman-Patz, School Leader and Founder of SEEQS: the School for Examining Essential Questions of Sustainability in Honolulu, writes, **"Leaders in teacher-powered schools use the same practices in leadership that good teachers use in student-centered classrooms: they incorporate all voices, they share the air, they act as a guide-on-the-side rather than a sage-on-the-stage.** The only way I really started to feel comfortable as a new leader was realizing that the same things that made me a good teacher made me a good leader. I already had the skillset, I just needed to apply it differently. Now I think of it as parallelism: this idea that structures that work at one level of an organization work at all levels of an organization. So my leadership is guided by the question, 'how would I work with students to approach this?' It seems like that might come across as condescending, but it doesn't. It works really well."

Most Americans grew up in traditional school systems and, even for those who embrace an innovative mindset, challenging the hierarchical status quo can be daunting. Research and experience tells us that traditional teaching methods don't work well for all students. We need new and engaging ways to meet students' 21st century needs. The same is true for teachers. Ayla Gavins, principal at Mission Hill K-8 School in Boston, MA writes, "Working in a progressive, democratically run school opened my world to what was possible for children and the adult educators." Teacher-powered administrators actively create environments where teaching, learning, and leading at their schools works for everyone—students, teachers, and support staff.

The goal of the Teacher-Powered Schools Network is to support, encourage, and be a resource for teacher-powered administrators and their teams. Leading teacher-powered teams is a delicate dance, balancing the needs of everyone in the building, using well-developed skills, creating a culture of trust and accountability, and thinking long-term about sustainability. "Within all of these topics is the underlying issue of sustainability. A constant area of concern around leadership at our school is making sure everyone contributes to the school while not feeling overwhelmed." writes Jeff Austin. This guide will help you do all of this and create schools where students and adult educators thrive.
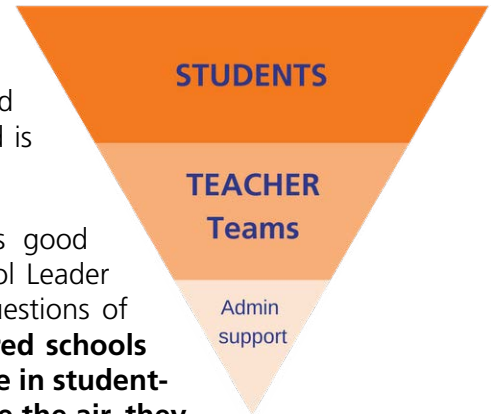
Having a shared purpose (mission, vision, values, and goals of the school) is commonly seen as important in traditional schools as well as teacher-powered schools. One key difference is that teacher-powered teams "use their autonomy to take the words off the wall and translate them into action in significant and substantive ways… It's not just the shared purpose statement that matters—it's the process of *developing* the shared purpose." (Shared Purpose Discussion Starter). A teacher-powered administrator is often tasked with the duty of helping the team stay focused and true to their co-created shared purpose.

For more information about developing your team's shared purpose, view the Teacher-Powered Discussion Starters at www.teacherpowered.org/starters.

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Reflection Questions for Individual Administrators

1. As the site administrator who do you serve?

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2. How do you see your role as a site administrator of a teacher-powered school in regard to your teacher team?

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3. In what ways do you keep your school's shared purpose and students at the center of decision-making?

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Team Conversation Starters

1. Many teacher-powered teams describe that one role of the administrator is to help the team stay focused on their shared purpose. How can the administrator do this at your school?

2. How has your team's shared purpose stayed true to the original design, and at the same time adapted to meet the changing needs of your students and community?

3. How often do you review/adjust your shared purpose and what is that process?

4. What decisions should always be made as a whole team?

Common Challenges

Teams that co-create their shared purpose and devote time regularly to keeping it alive know how important it is to the success of their school. The challenges that arise in this area often stem from team members who, for a variety of reasons, were not part of creating (and reaffirming) the shared purpose. This might include new teachers who started later in the process, part-time teachers, and support staff.

You will notice that one of the top tips for multiple topics in this guide is to "hire well". This is because **teams can stop a lot of challenges from occuring by hiring people who are a good fit culturally as well as skill-wise for their school.** By hiring teachers who are already aligned with your school's shared purpose, the cultural integration will be much easier.

Part-time teachers and support staff need to have time built into their schedules to participate in team discussions and decision-making. Michele Pellam, headmaster at Another Course to College in Boston explains, "It is so important we all feel as equals on our team and generate shared purpose and investments from all staff in all decisions." Being upfront about that expectation with all staff sets everyone up for success.

Tips and Tricks

Be a Facilitator

- The role of facilitator is one that collaborative leaders often take on. In this role, the **administrator helps the team find paths to accomplish their larger vision, mission, and goals.** Alissa writes, "My role can best be described as a facilitator who helps the team stay focused on the task at hand and ensures that the decisions support the mission and vision of our school."

- Successful teacher-powered teams have a **well-developed shared purpose.** This is the foundation upon which everything else is built. "Although we may change the methods of meeting our goals based upon the students and school community, our goals stay the same," shares Irene Salter, administrator at Chrysalis Charter School.

Focus on Vision When Prioritizing

- **Constantly evaluate and frame discussions back to your shared purpose.** Ayla explains it this way: "We also have what we call 'meta moments'. Those are times when we stop our conversation during a meeting, and we explain what's happening with the view that people may know what's going on or they may not. We just want to be sure that everyone has equal access to the conversation." This ensures that the whole team, especially newer staff who lack historical knowledge, is on the same page and approaching the discussion from the same space.

    Teams also intentionally weave in questions to keep themselves accountable to their agreed upon shared purpose. "We ask each other 'How is that innovative? How does that impact students with disabilities, including significant disabilities?' And we hold each other accountable through the conversations, decisions made, and support that we give each other to co-construct something that is unique for our education system," explains Anna O'Connor-Morin, Senior Director at UCP Bailes.

- **Weave shared purpose into a weekly event or meeting.** "[A] mission committee has a place on our weekly Staff Meeting Agenda, anchoring us to our shared purpose through sharing positive stories of student successes as well as celebrating one another for living our values and bringing that to light through staff members honoring one another both at close of staff meeting as well as in our Weekly Bulletin. This keeps us grounded in our shared purpose and in maintaining a positive school culture," writes Michele.

Schedule Specific Time Devoted to Shared Purpose

- **Intentionally scheduling time for this important task means it will actually get done on a regular basis despite the constant pace of schools.** Shared purpose conversations often fall into the category of important, but not urgent. "Creating the time and space for staff members to discuss and choose an instructional focus, be explicit about our values, and how this is reflected in the professional practice and student learning goals we set—individually and in teacher teams—which are linked to observations and evaluations, has helped to create congruence between whole school goals and individual teacher practices," writes Michele.

- Many teacher-powered teams have **retreats at least once a year** preferably over multiple days and off campus. "The first way we stay focused on our shared purpose is assuredly at our annual GSC Retreat. It's a time away from campus when we are blessed with the warmth and serenity of summer sunshine to reflect on who we are and why we do what we do." shares Letitia. "Spending time at the beginning of the year, every year, with our whole team revisiting our founding principles and big ideas sets the stage for the whole year and gets everyone on the same page," writes Buffy.

Almost anyone educated in the United States attends a traditional school in which there is a principal, teachers, and support staff who carry out directives dictated by the state, school board, district administrators, and site administrator. It is a predictable, easy-to-understand chain of command, and—although there are complaints—it is "the way things are". Teacher-powered governance flips this traditional hierarchy around and puts teacher teams at the top, teachers who know their students best and are knowledgeable professionals trained in teaching and learning. **In this system, teachers are trusted to make school decisions in areas impacting student success.**

Going against the status quo is always challenging. When things are hard, the instinct is to revert back to what people know and are comfortable with. One of the top challenges for teacher-powered administrators is navigating traditional educational structures and preserving their innovative governance model.

> "The 'good' schools in this country haven't managed to defeat the lies that undermine our system so much as they've been able to circumvent them."
>
> Arne Duncan

? *Reflection Questions for Individuals*

1. What part of the traditional education system works well for your school?

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2. If you could change 3 specific things with the education system you currently work within what would they be?

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3. What innovations have you seen or experienced that excite and energize you? What do these have in common?

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4. What holds you back from trying innovations? How might you get around these limits?

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Team Conversation Starters

1. What are some arguments that you've faced in promoting teacher-powered schools? What are some responses your team has to these questions?

2. What are the barriers you have seen in your district or with your authorizer when moving toward a more teacher-powered model?

3. Are there barriers that still stand in your way? What has made them difficult to overcome?

4. What criteria do you want in place when deciding to do things differently?

Common Challenges

One of the most common challenges in this area is continually **having to advocate for already agreed upon autonomies.** For example, Letitia shares, "Our curriculum autonomy is one we exercise yet the district doesn't support fiscally. On the contrary, schools have to raise funds to purchase materials while the district continues to buy materials that go unused. It would make much more fiscal sense for schools to be able to use the funds—that the district allocates for the procurement of materials to go directly to schools—to be able to get what we actually use for curriculum… We continue to advocate for ourselves and push back when the district fails to honor or recognize what we do and how we operate as a teacher-powered school." Taking on the task of advocating for your team is one of the most important roles of a teacher-powered administrator.

Another challenge is **working within a system that expects a principal to be able to make quick decisions.** When others don't give adequate turnaround time for team decision-making, that puts teacher-powered administrators in a hard position. It is important for teams to discuss this ahead of time and have a clear understanding of what decisions they want to make as a team and which ones they trust the administrator to make on their own.

Many teacher-powered teams have memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with their district or teachers' union that clearly articulate agreed upon working conditions, autonomies, and processes, but **few teams have MOUs with the local administrators union** or classified unions. This creates problems because everyone is not bound by the same agreements. In New York City, they have been able to solve some of these challenges by including the administrators' union on the PROSE team ([www.teacherpowered. org/inventory/prose-agreement](www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/prose-agreement)), which works with teams to create their own unique set of waivers based on what they need for their school community.

Engaging families and community members is important at every school, but it is especially important at teacher-powered schools so that these groups become valuable allies for your innovative governance structure. This takes time—which is always in short supply—but the benefit is that once parents and community members understand and support your model they will become fierce advocates for your team.

Myth: *Real collaborative decision making is the same as "teacher voice"*

We hear the term "teacher voice" often in education, wanting to make sure that teachers have an opportunity to share their experiences and expertise. It is a good start to include teachers on district committees and education projects; and while the sentiment is well-intentioned, in practice "teacher voice" isn't really a powerful practice. **Teacher-powered is *not* teacher voice.** Teacher-powered goes way beyond including a teacher on a team or asking a teacher's opinion on something. Teacher-powered teams aren't just asking teachers' opinions, they are empowering them to make actual decisions that impact student success. We know from our research* that when teacher teams have collective autonomy they are willing to take accountability for their decisions. Real collaborative decision making brings the whole team together around their shared purpose for the benefit of students.

*See the book Trusting Teachers with School Success (Farris-Berg and Dirkswager).

Tips and Tricks

Host site visits
- Hosting site visits and giving presentations to **increase awareness and understanding of your school's model** is one of the best ways to explain how and why you do things differently at your site. When other educators and stakeholders see for themselves and hear directly from teachers about why this model works for students, they are more likely to understand and work with you—not against you. Hosting a site visit also provides an excellent opportunity to reflect on your actual practices versus what is on paper. Jeff writes, "Another important outcome of site visits is that you have to think about the validity of what you are saying. You may say that you do X, but can you show that during a site visit?"

- Connect with local schools. At Chrysalis Charter School, their local small schools network prioritizes **visiting each other's schools.** "[We] organize something called 'Learning Walks' each year in which principals with teacher teams are invited to spend two hours at a rotating set of other schools in the area to observe classrooms and best practices," Irene shares.

Include stakeholders in meetings and events
- Relationship-building is at the root of all positive support. Invite district administrators, from the superintendent to directors and coaches, to be part of your school meetings. Alissa at Tri-Tech Early College says of her superintendent, "I make sure to invite her regularly to join our meetings, be involved in our projects, attend staff meetings, and keep her informed of our events and decisions." When other leaders **understand your work, they can be supportive of your unique needs.**

Apply for waivers
- State and district waivers allow your team **flexibility and reduces the amount of time** your team (usually you!) spends jumping through hoops. From Alissa, "We have asked for some waivers from the NC Superintendent of Public Schools that would not require us to use PowerSchool, the student information system that NC uses to manage grades, attendance, teacher schedules and assignments, etc. Because our schedule, assessment methods, and teacher responsibilities are so different from the traditional model, using PowerSchool for us is like fitting a square peg in a round hole."

- Use your innovations to your advantage and be sure to show **how they go beyond the minimum requirements.** Jeff advises, "I'd also add that showing how your innovative practices at least match, if not exceed, the rigor and purpose of the practices you want a waiver from has always been a good practice."

Model collaborative leadership
- Model being a teacher-powered leader, **especially in the area of transparency.** From Ayla, "I model being a teacher-powered administrator by naming the source of ideas that are not mine and mentioning our process before sharing the outcome/decision." Crediting others dilutes any competitiveness that can creep in and sabotage a collaborative culture.

Most teacher prep programs do not train teachers to be leaders or to work collaboratively with their colleagues, yet these are vital skills at a teacher-powered school. Successful teacher-powered teams invest in themselves and help everyone to view themselves as a leader. A teacher-powered administrator leads this type of leadership capacity-building at their school both in terms of mindset and in terms of specific skills needed for certain autonomies (for example, if your team has hiring autonomy, there are personnel laws your team might need to know). View the autonomies online at www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/autonomies.

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Reflection Questions for Individuals

1. In your role as principal or administrator, what are some specific ways you build leadership capacity in your team?

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2. What skills do you look for when encouraging people to take on leadership positions?

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3. What has been helpful in developing your own leadership skills?

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Team Conversation Starters

1. What does your team look for when hiring new team members in terms of their leadership skills?

2. How does your team evaluate a potential candidate's collaboration skills?

3. How has your team prepared for leadership transitions (either the principal role, or perhaps leadership team, committee chairs, or department leads)?

4. What are some leadership opportunities that your team can create for members of your team?

Common Challenges

The most common challenges in building leadership capacity on your team are really around **mindset and time.** Sound familiar? These two are consistent challenges in each topic.

Some teachers are natural leaders, and this shines through in all their work. For others, getting teachers to see themselves as leaders is a challenge. Many are used to traditional systems where the principal makes decisions and tells them what to do, and, even for those who want to use shared decision-making structures, when things get hard the easiest path is to revert back to what they know—traditional hierarchy. Knowing each member of your staff well will help you know just the approach to get them to embrace leadership positions. Some need to be asked, others will gladly take on responsibility when an opportunity arises, while others need to be encouraged (even pushed) into leadership. Having everyone take a leadership style survey is helpful for you as the site administrator and for teachers to know that there are many ways to lead at a teacher-powered school.

Time is always a challenge. Buffy sums it up perfectly: "There's not enough of it to do all the things we want to do, to do all the collaborating and partnering and feedback-giving that we know is best for students and adults. It's hard to give up anything; it all matters!"

Teachers are busy, all the time, and while some seasons are more crazy than others, regularly scheduled team time is vital for all successful teacher-powered teams. Creating space for important conversations, skill-building, and team work is difficult when there are so many urgent needs at a school each day. **Finding the balance between having teachers take on leadership and decision-making and over-extending teachers is an ever-changing task that requires a lot of navigating from the team and the site administration.** As Jeff says, "When you ask teachers to contribute to and run programs, we also need to make sure we are giving them the time and resources to do so; anything from having their copies made for them to having a sub day available for collaboration."

Tips and Tricks

Hire Well

- "Hiring is definitely the most important thing," says Buffy. When asked what is the most important autonomy for teams to have, most teacher-powered practitioners point to **hiring autonomy as being critical to their success.** If you are going to run the school with your colleagues, you need team members who are not only excellent teachers, but work well with others, can add to the larger school culture, and want to take on leadership roles in the future.

- You need more than someone with good teaching skills; new hires must **share values and vision** of the team. "You can help someone with pure teaching strategies, but you can't change their values," writes Jeff.

- **Collaborative mindset matters.** Letitia agrees: "Having a strong, aligned, collaborative teacher is paramount, in whom leadership can be cultivated, as opposed to having a strong leader who is perhaps not highly collaborative and/or a strong practitioner."

> **"Regularly switching up different leadership roles has helped us to create well-rounded leaders. For example, our staff meeting is facilitated by a different person each month and we all have agreements to present at conferences or host visitors."**
>
> **Ayla Gavins**

Pair veterans with newer team members

- **Partnering up with a team member** allows both people to grow, one as a mentor, and the other with new skills. "As far as building capacity, it's important to make sure that all projects are carried out collaboratively between people with experience in the task and people with less experience. For example, the teacher who has been running our college trips since the school opened works with two newer teachers so that they can see how the trip is executed. This also means that the new teachers have to be trusted with carrying out some of the tasks and be included in the discussion of the others," shares Jeff.

Rotate positions

- Rotating who leads each staff meeting, alternating who is the designee at district meetings, and **having a cycle for leadership positions** allows all team members to not only learn new skills, but to have a broader perspective on what goes into running the school. Ayla says, "Regularly switching up different leadership roles has helped us to create well-rounded leaders. For example, our staff meeting is facilitated by a different person each month and we all have agreements to present at conferences or host visitors."

- Letitia says, "A teacher voice leading a discussion, initiative, presentation, etc. holds a different weight than me doing so. Teachers need to see themselves as leaders; helping to push them further into leadership roles helps to distinguish that I am but one leader amongst several leaders, with all of our voices having value and influence." **When teachers see their peers leading** it reinforces that teachers are leaders and encourages others to step up.

Designate Time for Developing Leadership Skills

- Teams must have time together outside of their classrooms and outside the regular work day. **Annual or semi-annual retreats** allow everyone space to look at the bigger issues and provide time to process the conversations. "We've spent time reading, discussing and defining what shared leadership means and what it looks like for us; this is something we revisit annually at our governing school council retreat as we re-calibrate where we are and how we're wanting to grow year to year," shares Letitia.

- Several teacher-powered schools also encourage **all teachers to get their administrative credentials.** This helps ensure that there are several people in the building who are qualified to do things that require an administrative credential such as evaluations. Teachers not only learn valuable leadership skills, they increase the leadership capacity of their team without having to leave their classrooms.

Create a Culture that Values Collaborative Leadership and Individual Needs

- All team members need to **embrace the collaborative leadership culture** at the school. From before they are hired, through the onboarding process, to their own professional learning year after year, leadership should be a commonly discussed topic. Alissa writes, "By requiring all teachers to serve in a leadership capacity on a regular basis, it has become an expected part of our overall culture, so when there are changes and transitions, the procedures and protocols we have developed remain. Each teacher chooses a leadership skill to develop as part of their professional development plan each school year."

- Encourage everyone to **name their limitations.** Everyone has different limitations due to life circumstances, life stages, and personal choices. Saying what these are upfront allows people to adjust expectations and create structures and processes that work for all team members. Ayla shares, "As part of our expectations for working together, in our handbook it says that you should name your limitations. If limitations are made clear we can partner up and work as a team in ways that are helpful and will allow us to still reach our goal even though we all contribute differently. When we know what our team members are able to contribute that helps the rest of us pick up where needed."

Prepare for Leadership Changes

- Leadership changes are one of the most challenging events for teacher-powered schools. Adjusting to this innovative model, learning each person's leadership style, and building trust with the team is hard. **Having a succession plan** is an essential part of successfully navigating this change. Ayla says, "At the winter staff retreat I asked if anyone was interested in taking on a larger leadership role such as my position. Three years ago I told our staff that I was ready to make a transition and that we would spend the next five years preparing ourselves for that transition. Next year two teachers that are interested will be working closely with me to broaden their scope of leadership within the school. This will really be helpful as a bridge when I leave the position."

- Irene at Chrysalis successfully took over from the school's founders after **a year of overlap:** "When I came on as administrator, I overlapped for a year with the prior administrator and school founder. The teachers had made the choice (using budget autonomy) that paying for two admins in that first learning year was a worthwhile investment. I sure felt supported and learned a ton that year, especially since I came from outside the charter world and was not a teacher within the school first." While this isn't feasible for many schools, even a month of overlap is helpful for those that can make it work.

> **"Management is about
> persuading people to do things they
> do not want to do, while leadership is
> about inspiring people to do things
> they never thought they could."**
>
> Steve Jobs

Successful teacher-powered administrators take Steve Jobs' distinction between management and leadership to the next level by knowing when to lead from the back, the middle, and the front.

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Reflection Questions for Individuals

1. When and how do you decide to take a more active "lead" role in decisions?

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2. Is there an experience you had on this topic that pushed your thinking on what it means to be a "leader among leaders"?

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3. Who do you know that leads well from the middle or the back? Describe what that looks and feels like.

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Team Conversation Starters

1. What does leading from the middle or back look like with your team?

2. In what ways have teachers taken on some of the instructional leadership and operations duties that traditionally fall on a principal? How has the admin role shifted? Who keeps people accountable?

3. Which shared or distributed leadership structures does your team use (or plan on using) that spread out traditional responsibilities of the principal?

4. In what ways does your team keep students at the center of both instructional choices and operations management?

Common Challenges

Time is always a challenge. People have good intentions, but **finding time for follow through is often difficult.** As Irene says, "They're on when we are *in* a meeting but they're so busy teaching in *between* meetings." One solution to this is to be clear during the meeting what the next steps are and how much time they will take. When people commit to take on leadership, have them also reflect on other commitments they already have. Having open conversations about what is on everyone's plate allows teams to identify when responsibilities need to be shifted.

Another common challenge for teacher-powered administrators is **supporting each teacher in their unique needs.** "Navigating the push-pull of different teachers' needs… Some teachers think I'm not supportive enough with difficult parents, others want less intervention. Some teachers want me to be harder on discipline issues, others think it's just right. Some teachers think it's best to retain a student that's far below grade level, others think that's rarely a good idea, if ever. Some teachers like to assign homework, others don't which leads to weird transitions from grade to grade for students," shares Irene. It often feels like you can't make everyone happy all the time. When this struggle becomes too much, take it back to the whole team for a discussion on whether it makes sense to establish a common practice across teachers or whether teacher autonomy in this area is important. Trust that teachers know what's best for their kids and can have the hard conversations necessary to make the right decision. If necessary bring in a facilitator to help the team navigate the hard conversations so you, as the administrator, don't have to take on that role on a topic filled with tension.

Another challenge is **being clear about what the teachers expect from their administrator.** They hired you for a reason. What is it? Which decisions and areas of responsibility do teachers want to hold onto and which could they not care less about? Disagreements and misunderstandings about expectations can be particularly challenging. At Chrysalis, the team began using a "decision tree" several years ago to set a common understanding for which decisions would be delegated to the administrator and which decisions team members should participate in. The idea of a decision tree comes from the book *Fierce Conversations* by Susan Scott. At Chrysalis, leaf decisions (like renewing transportation contracts) are delegated to the administrator. Stem decisions (such as approving large purchases) are delegated to the administrator, but she reports back to the staff to make sure there are no objections before moving forward. Branch decisions (like setting playground expectations) are delegated to a committee. Trunk decisions (like setting the annual budget) are delegated to a committee that reports back before moving forward. Finally, root decisions (like hiring and evaluating teachers and the administrator) require full participation by the whole team.

Myth: *Every decision is made as a team*
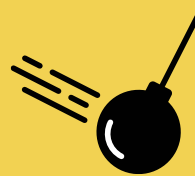
Collaborative leadership does not mean every decision is made as a team. In most schools, that would be impossible. The reality is that there are hundreds of decisions that get made daily at each site and, even for very small schools, group decision-making isn't feasible for every decision. Shared decision-making is about creating a set of guiding principles and values for your team and then distributing decision making responsibility among your colleagues. Teacher-powered teams have created processes and structures that allow them to know what decisions need to be made as a whole team, which ones are made by committee or small group, and which ones individuals are trusted to make. Being transparent and clear about these processes and practices **leads to effective and efficient collaborative leadership.**

Tips and Tricks

Hire Well

- "With people who are interested in learning, engaging, and improving the idea of 'leading from the back' becomes much more feasible," writes Jeff. During your hiring process, be thinking ahead and **evaluate candidates on their leadership and collaborative potential.**

Create Space and Set the Expectations

- Letting go and **creating opportunities for others to lead** is an important part of leading from the middle and the back. "My job now is to make sure there is space for *others* to lead from the middle," says Buffy. As Jeff puts it, there is a "need to push some people into the space—create a culture where teachers see that there is an expectation that they lead."

- Take the time to **set expectations about which decisions teachers want a part in and which can be delegated.** Every year, Chrysalis brings out the decision tree and the teachers modify their selections from the year before. Priorities shift over time and the decision tree changes as the school and the pressures facing it evolve.

Use Distributed Leadership Structures

- **Specific governance organization structures and intentional practices support collaborative leadership** and cultivate a shared value for group leadership. Letitia reflects, "I think over time I've gotten savvier at highlighting areas where shared leadership is needed as opposed to the traditional model where the principal is the leader and primary decision maker. Having teachers identify the value in a structure/practice/activity and then leading them into how we can collectively invest in it brings teachers around to seeing from another vantage how the leadership must be shared with participation from all."

Facilitate with Protocols

- Most teacher-powered teams take advantage of modern technology and use shared documents and agendas. They have **protocols for how decisions are made based on their shared value for collaborative leadership.** Alissa says, "In these protocols, everyone has a role and sometimes I lead, sometimes I keep time, but always I am part of the discussion and solution. There is never a mandate from 'the top.'"

- A good teacher-powered administrator **takes on the facilitator role from the back while others lead.** "My role is to facilitate so that everyone's time is as well spent as it possibly can be, and to share the lead as much as possible. I have a strong sense of each team member's strengths and what they bring to the table, and whenever possible, I listen and participate as a part of the team while a colleague presents, leads a discussion, or shares something with us," writes Buffy.

Know When to Take an Active Role

- Leading from the front is also important, the key is **knowing when to do it.** Ayla shares, "I take a more active lead role in decision-making when the decision making process used by a team is damaging to relationships, when we have a deadline to meet and we're not even close to consensus, when there is a high-stakes decision to be made and our team doesn't understand the urgency (usually because they weren't present for the context of the high-stakes item coming directly from an external source), and when it's my idea that people have approved I take the lead in shaping what the proposed idea will look like."

- Another time teacher-powered administrators need to **lead from the front is when the team is veering away from their co-created shared purpose.** Jeff writes, "As far as when I just step in and make decisions, I usually do that when it seems like the idea is not guided by our vision."

Keep the Focus on Students and Learning

- "The most important thing that happens in a school is what happens in the classrooms. Leading from the back means being willing to do whatever it takes to provide a powerful teaching and learning environment for both teachers and students," writes Alissa. Teacher-powered administrators prioritize students and learning and sometimes this means doing things from the middle or back. Covering a class so teachers can do peer observation, or **doing the unseen work so teachers and students can focus on learning** allows everyone to succeed.

Act as a Shield

- Many teacher-powered administrators share that an **important part of their job is to run interference** or act as a shield for their team, so their teachers can focus on the students. One leader writes of conflict with district leaders, "I do not share this struggle with the teachers. I want to protect the positive relationship they have with our superintendent and board members. That feels a little dishonest in a teacher-powered school but I feel if they knew, it would create a distraction from the teaching and learning process through negative or even rebellious feelings. I struggle often with my decisions in what to share and what not to share, but I decide, wrong or right, by asking myself the question, 'Is my decision best for my students?'" It is a hard balance and each leader and team needs to make their own decisions about how much interference to run.

All teams have conflict. The goal of course is to have conflict that ultimately leads to improvements and bonding over shared experiences. Leading your team away from the edge of unhealthy conflicts and creating healing relationships is a vital skill set of any leader. Teacher-powered teams thrive not because they don't have conflict, but because they have mutual trust with each other and are committed to working it out for the greater good of their students and community.

> **"Conflict can be *healthy* and *unhealthy.* Healthy conflict brings group members closer to each other and contributes to strengthening the work or product they're focused on. Unhealthy conflict does the opposite. It erodes trust among teammates and distracts the group from their goals and objectives."**
>
> Elena Aguilar
> *The Art of Coaching Teams*

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Reflection Questions for Individuals

1. Reflect on ways you typically handle conflict. Do you tend to embrace it head on; do you prefer to have a mediator; do you avoid confrontation?

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2. Think about a conflict that ended ended positively. What role did you play?

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3. Think about a conflict that ended poorly. What would you do differently in a similar situation?

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Team Conversation Starters

1. What strategies does your team use when dealing with a conflict between team members?

2. What are some ways your team facilitates healthy conflict? How do you build trust with and among your team?

3. Talk about the hard conversations… Why are they necessary, how do you have them, and how do you encourage your team to have them with each other? What are some ways your team takes personal accountability in personal conflicts without relying on an administrator to intervene? When should someone intervene?

Common Challenges

People are challenging, some more than others. Personalities, high maintenance team members, and differences in processing emotions lead to frustrating experiences. As one of our participants shared, "When there is upset involving those people their reactions get in the way of the collegial spirit we committed to." When this occurs, finding someone (not necessarily you) to deescalate the situation and bring people back to the collaborative cultural norms is helpful. Identify peacemakers on your team and ask them to mediate when tensions arise.

Teacher-powered is not for everyone. There are excellent teachers who might not want to be involved with leadership or decision-making. Helping people understand if the school isn't a good fit culturally solves a lot of conflict problems. Letitia says it well: "commit to why you're here, coalesce around your school's mission, and if you're not down with riding on this bus, you can ride on another one!"

Tips and Tricks

Embrace the Hard Conversations

- The best way to solve problems is getting to the core of the issue. **Don't make assumptions, ask questions.** Michele writes, "We are also honest where we may diverge in our thoughts or feelings and take an honest approach so we can build towards shared values as a team."

- **Keep the focus on students** and bring the conversation back to your team's shared purpose. "When a conflict or dilemma is interfering with the goal of educating our students, the hard conversation becomes necessary, and that is how I approach the conversation – by pulling the person in privately, saying we have this problem and it is hurting in this way and we have to get past it for the good or our students," says Alissa.

- Ayla shares, "When things are not going well we talk, talk, talk and write, write, write. Providing direct feedback is the best way we go about creating a balance. The feedback begins as any feedback does with best hopes for learning and growth. That same feedback can be used as documentation or the basis for a written directive if the feedback was not taken and the cause of concern was not addressed in some other way by the person not meeting expectations." **Continue moving the conversation forward toward a resolution,** even if it means small steps.

Humanize the Conflict

- When emotions are high it is easy to see others as the enemy. **Take time to focus on the individuals and relate to everyone as a colleague,** not a problem. "There are a lot of discussions around 'so-and-so doesn't do as much work as the rest of us' and the need for work-life balance. Some people have decided that they can achieve this balance by not taking responsibilities, which makes the others who won't let things drop more bitter about their work-life balance... I think that one way to ease the tension around this is to make sure that we are doing more work around humanizing and maintaining relationships. When we see where each person is at personally we are less likely to put burdens on them," encourages Jeff.

- "We all come with baggage, some heavier than others or more bags than the one allotted for the trip, and how we manage ourselves becomes the most impactful piece of conflict resolution. Navigating conflict is something we have worked through with intention and by nature of force," writes Anna. **Take time to get to know everyone and what is going on in their lives.** Sometimes understanding another's challenges and empathizing with them takes the tension out of the conflict.

Use Consistent Protocols

- Many teacher-powered schools **use the same mediation system with adults in the building as they use with students,** for example restorative justice practices.

- **Setting clear expectations for behavior ahead of time** keeps everyone accountable to themselves and each other. "We always agree not to leave the meeting and talk negatively or listen to someone else talk negatively. If you don't say it in the group, you are agreeing to the decisions made," says Alissa.

- "Having a person with facilitation training who is not directly part of the conflict manage how the conflict is confronted is super important. The facilitator should do as much as possible to remove fear from the situation by giving participants a sort of agenda for the resolution meeting," shares Jeff. When a conflict reaches the point where mediation is necessary, **having a planned facilitator keeps things professional and helps defuse the tension.**

Many teacher-powered teams use peer observation as part of their professional learning and prioritize spending regular time in each other's classrooms. While some teams do have teacher evaluation autonomy—meaning they are able to evaluate each other—most teacher-powered teams work within the constraints of systems that require an administrator to evaluate teachers. Teacher-powered administrators must navigate teacher evaluation and observation carefully, keeping everyone accountable, making the evaluation process meaningful, and creating a culture where it is safe to reflect and grow as a teacher.

For more information about evaluation please see the Teacher-Powered Discussion Starter on the topic of "evaluation," at www.teacherpowered.org/starters.

> "The teacher observation process has provided angst for teachers and principals for far too long. More than that, it's been a waste of time in many schools, which is highly unfortunate because it is one of the times during the school day that teachers and principals can really learn from one another. Additionally, it has deep implications for other learning that could take place in the school."
>
> **Peter DeWitt**

? *Reflection Questions for Individuals*

1. Thinking back on being observed and evaluated as a teacher, what parts of the process helped improve your teaching?

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2. As a site leader, what type of feedback do you want to receive? What will help you improve?

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3. Who are your own mentors? Is there anyone else you want to build a mentor relationship with this year? What first step will you take?

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Team Conversation Starters

1. When dealing with teacher evaluation, what is expected of teachers and who sets these expectations? If you have mandated protocols do you also want a set of expectations that staff agreed upon and are evaluated on?

2. What roles do teachers play in evaluation and observation?

3. What support do teachers need when doing peer evaluation and/or observation?

4. How do you create a culture where the evaluation/observation process feels safe to everyone involved? What happens when there is conflict with the outcomes?

Common Challenges

Personnel confidentiality regulations and laws create challenges in teacher-powered schools used to operating with a transparent culture. These laws are in place to protect employees, and schools risk being out of compliance—or worse, lawsuits—if they are not followed carefully. Some teams create a personnel committee to handle all of these regulations and confidentiality issues, while others leave this area in the hands of the administrator knowing that they trust the principal to make decisions in line with their shared purpose. Whatever system your team chooses to use, make sure that everyone is trained in the appropriate laws and that you follow those carefully.

Many teacher-powered **teams describe themselves as family.** Colleagues become friends and often people have worked together for decades. This makes it extra hard to observe and evaluate each other unless there is a lot of trust and commitment to improving. It is better to call these tensions out in a neutral setting before they become problematic, for example a retreat. Acknowledging that this is hard and focussing on everyone learning allows teachers to be less defensive and more open to suggestion.

Another challenge in this area is when a team wants to be able to evaluate each other, but **the union, district, or state mandates that teachers are evaluated by an administrator.** Seeking out MOUs and waivers is one solution. Another way teams handle this is by having peer evaluation be part of the process, but still have the site administrator write and sign the final report. This hybrid process allows your team to be true to their collaborative culture, while still following protocol. For teams that use peer evaluation, the administrator is part of the review team for some teachers. At Mission Hill, the site principal is part of the peer review team for teachers in their first three years at the school, helping to ensure that new teachers are properly evaluated before being offered tenure.

Tips and Tricks

Hire Well (again!)

- The best way to prevent challenging evaluations is to **hire quality candidates who fit your team's culture from the start.** "We ask a lot of questions about how they deal with adult conflict, specifically looking for examples of when this happened. When the answer is pretty cookie-cutter like 'people can always come talk to me' then there is a red flag," shares Jeff.

Create a Transparent Process

- **A clear peer observation/evaluation process and structure is imperative** to make it successful. This must include a plan for covering teachers' classrooms so they can visit/observe their colleagues. Some teams set aside funds for substitutes, while other teams have the administrator regularly cover classes to allow teachers to observe each other. Alissa says, "My role is to facilitate the pre-conferences, observations, and post-conferences, teach the proper language of how to deliver the facts, and be the stand-in if an observing teacher needs a 'sub' in his/her classroom."

Everyone is a Learner

- Peer observation should be part of a lifelong learner mentality. **Teacher-powered teams embrace a growth mindset for themselves and their students.** When everyone is there to learn it takes away some of the defensiveness that can accompany observations. "I think teachers feel safe because the observer always shares at least one thing they learned and how they can use that to improve their own classrooms, so everyone is there to learn," writes Alissa.

- **Every professional needs coaching,** including teachers and administrators. Creating that mentorship culture improves instruction and outcomes. "Under a true coaching and collaborative method I know teachers will improve each year and students will make learning gain increases that are valuable," says Anna.

Be Consistent and Transparent

- There will be teachers that need improvement, teachers that aren't a good fit for your team, or even rarely teachers that violate more serious standards. **Being clear with your team about when you will step into a more official administrator role creates trust and understanding even when it is hard.** "If I feel that the school or the safety of our students or staff are in jeopardy I abide by the district policies. Doing so has been one of the most difficult parts of my job because it runs counter to our school culture—how we treat one another," shares Ayla.

- It is also vital that everyone on the team trusts the site administrator. **Being accessible, present, and transparent gives a strong foundation for the team.** "Transparency, presence, and accessibility have supported me in creating a space where our community can come share their concerns with the administrator," writes Letitia.

We all know we need to take care of ourselves, but it is hard to do when there are so many other people and tasks to take care of. School leaders carry a large emotional, mental, and physical workload (does anyone actually sit at their desk during the school day for long periods?). To be a long-term successful leader you *must* prioritize yourself and intentionally encourage your team to do the same. This doesn't require tons of time or money, but it does require discipline.

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Reflection Questions for Individuals

1. What conditions do you need in place to work as your best self?

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2. What are some physical signs that you are stressed and overworked?

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3. How do you prioritize your time and energy between those constant, urgent needs at a school and the long term bigger picture needs?

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Team Conversation Starters

1. Spend time sharing with each other what you need to be at your best.

2. Having fun together is important. How often does your team want social events as a group? Brainstorm ideas and schedule them.

3. What expectations do you have of each other's time outside of the school day? Can everyone agree that these are reasonable?

4. A teacher may take on more or less responsibilities each year depending on personal circumstances or life stage. How does your team want to handle this? What is fair and does not breed resentment?

Common Challenges

The most common challenge in all of these topics is the shortage of time. We are all short on time, but we aren't getting any more of it. Rather, we have to reflect carefully and see how we can better use the time we have. Ayla explains this well: "A challenge for me is balancing the time it takes to help a student learn how to tie their shoe with writing for publications, speaking at conferences, doing my own learning… Instead of more time, I'd like to know my working style better. When do I work most efficiently? What's easy for me? What takes me a long time to do?" **Part of self-care is figuring out how you work at your best.** Prioritizing this will help you and your team.

Tips and Tricks

Set Boundaries

- **Know your limits and your needs.** Irene at Chrysalis has a daily alarm on her phone that alerts her to literally leave school and go home. The to-do list is always endless, so taking time to eat dinner with your family, enjoy coffee with a friend, or simply take a walk helps you get closer to that elusive work-life balance.

Prioritize Based on Your Shared Purpose

- Engaging in **common readings and experiences** allows your team to remain focused on your school purpose while still taking care of yourselves as individuals. "The text for the summer is always something around self-care, mindfulness, being our best selves in an effort to restore, refresh and re-center us around why we were all called to do this work in the first place, but the frame is around attending to who we are as individuals, bringing our gifts, talents and capacities to our work, so we can come together to collectively focus on our shared purpose as a school," writes Letitia.

> **"Self-care is never a selfish act—it is simply good stewardship of the only gift I have, the gift I was put on earth to offer others. Anytime we can listen to true self and give the care it requires, we do it not only for ourselves, but for the many others whose lives we touch."**
>
> **Parker Palmer**

- "Burnout is inevitable when a leader is overwhelmed with work that doesn't contribute to his or her inner purpose. If you find this becoming your reality, reexamine your 'why.' Determine if your work as a leader is corresponding with that purpose," writes Buruti Kafele in "Avoiding School Leadership Burnout". When you lose sight of the real reason you are in this profession, you experience burnout quickly. **Find a photo, a quote, or a symbol and post it somewhere you will see it often to remind you of your purpose.**

Spend Time With Students

- Almost all educators go into teaching because of the students, and yet sometimes we lose track of that, even when we are student-focused. Go spend time with your students, sit with them at lunch, join them in an after school club, hang out on the playground or in the halls. **It will help re-center you.** After a long day Jeff shared with another administrator seeking advice, "Spend some time with your students today. I did that and felt tons of appreciation. It helped."

Suggested Resources

Below is a short list of recommended resources. More resources are available on our online Steps Guide found at www.teacherpowered.org/guide.

1. *The Art of Coaching Teams* by Elena Aguilar
2. *Trusting Teachers with School Success: What Happens When Teachers Call the Shots* by Kim Farris-Berg and Edward Dirkswager with Amy Junge
3. *Leading In Sync: Teacher Leaders and Principals Working Together for Student Learning* by Jill Harrison Berg
4. *Fierce Conversations* by Susan Scott
5. National School Reform Faculty Resource Book

Ways To Connect

Whether this is the beginning of your teacher-powered journey, or you are a veteran, we are here to support you and your team. Teaching, leading, and embracing teacher-powered governance can be a lonely journey in a traditional system. You need other educators who understand your struggles and can celebrate your successes. **You need mentors, and you need to be a mentor!** This is where the Teacher-Powered Network comes in. There are local teacher-powered networks as well as a national network that offers opportunities to connect, learn, and advocate for your school. Learn more at www.teacherpowered.org/networks.

Conclusion

Your work is important. In the craziness of leading a school, it can feel exhausting and thankless and you may wonder if it is all worth it. *It is!* You are not only creating a better place for learning for your students and a better place for teaching for your teachers, your team is reimagining what education looks like and pushing the boundaries of collaborative leadership. Thank you for your innovative, passionate leadership, your commitment to student-centered learning, and paving the way forward for future teacher-powered teams.

Jeff Austin
Principal and Co-Founder at Social Justice Humanitas Academy (SJHA)
Los Angeles, CA

Jeff Austin currently serves as the principal and was on the design team at the Social Justice Humanitas Academy in Los Angeles. He is a National Board Certified Teacher and was a 2013 Los Angeles County and Los Angeles Unified School District Teacher of the Year. Jeff has been a teacher-powered ambassador since 2014.

About his school: "At the Social Justice Humanitas Academy, we treat each of our students as individuals, and we teach to their diverse learning needs. We prepare each and every one of our students to get to and through college, in an effort to increase their social capital. Our curriculum combines the lessons from the past, with the skills they need for their future. However, above all else we prepare our students to be the humane stewards of the future. Our vision is social justice, and we fight for it through our lessons every day."

Alissa Creek
Principal at Tri-County Early College
Murphy, NC

Alissa helped write the grant to open Tri-County Early College High School (TCEC) in rural North Carolina and taught math at the school before she became the principal. Before coming to TCEC, Alissa worked at one of the three traditional high schools in the local county for 14 years and although she loved her job, she knew there had to be a better way for students to learn and teachers to teach.

Alissa is a graduate of Western Carolina University with a B.A. in Secondary Mathematics Education, an M.S. Ed in Secondary Mathematics, and an M.A. in School Administration 2006

Tri-County Early College High School is a small innovative high school in the mountains of western North Carolina. TCEC focuses on project-based learning, STEM-focused learning activities, competency-based assessment, experiential hands-on activities, college courses, 21st century skills, Tony Wagner's survival skills, college visitation experiences each year, trust levels that require students to take responsibility for their own learning, and a service learning component requiring students to achieve 100 hours of volunteer work by the time they graduate from high school. Student voice and choice is a strong part of our approach so that students can take ownership and feel highly engaged with their work. The school targets students who traditionally might not attend college after high school, i.e. lower socioeconomic status, first in family to go to college, underserved minorities, and any student at risk of dropping out of high school.

Buffy Cushman-Patz
School Leader and founder at [SEEQS: the School for Examining Essential Questions of Sustainability](#)
Honolulu, HI

Buffy Cushman-Patz is the founder and School Leader of SEEQS. Buffy completed her EdM in School Leadership at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in 2012 with School Development as her concentration. She earned her principal's license while serving as a member of the leadership team of Neighborhood House Charter School in Dorchester, Massachusetts. In 2010-2011 Buffy was honored with an Albert Einstein Distinguished Educator Fellowship; she served her fellowship year at the National Science Foundation's Office of Legislative and Public Affairs. Prior to the fellowship, Buffy taught secondary math and science in public, charter, and independent schools in Hawai'i. She earned an M.S. in Geology and Geophysics from the University of Hawai'i at Mnoa and a B.S. in Geology from the University of Florida. She volunteered with Teachers Without Borders in 2008 and 2010, leading math and science workshops for teachers in South Africa.

SEEQS: the School for Examining Essential Questions of Sustainability offers an interdisciplinary project-based, community-based secondary school for families in Honolulu, Hawaii. Learners engage in a project-based, collaborative curriculum centered around multi-disciplinary examination of questions essential to our collective future.

SEEQS's foundational educational philosophy can be described with five core principles:
1. Real-world situations and real-world contexts enable real-world learning.
2. Learning occurs when learners take ownership of their learning.
3. Everyone is a teacher; everyone is a learner, all of the time.
4. A learning environment is composed of its community members, cultural values, and physical surroundings.
5. Improvement of the organization requires consciously collaborative participation by community members.

SEEQS's mission and vision: The diverse community of SEEQS fosters a joy of learning through collaborative and interdisciplinary investigation of questions essential to Hawaii's future. SEEQS graduates will be stewards of planet Earth and healthy, effective citizens of the world.

Letitia Davis, Ed.D.
Principal at Baldwin Hills Elementary Pilot & Gifted/High Ability
Magnet
Los Angeles, CA

Letitia Davis has been an educator for over twenty years and is a proud parent and principal at Baldwin Hills Elementary Pilot, where she has served as principal for five years. She was part of the contributing author collaborative for the school's pilot plan and has been the school lead from its authorization to its pilot school quality review year at present.

About her school: "Baldwin Hills Elementary Pilot & Gifted/High Ability Magnet is unique and has a reputation for being a gem among LAUSD schools because of our success educating African-American and Latino children. Though high achieving, we believe there should not be a ceiling on achievement and that we can do more when given the autonomy to make decisions that directly impact the children we know so well and teach.

"The mission of Baldwin Hills Elementary Pilot and Gifted/High Ability Magnet, a culturally and linguistically diverse community, is to work in partnership with the children, families, and community we serve in order to provide a strong academic, ethical, and culturally responsive education with measurable results.

"Our aim is to create an academically rigorous, culturally responsive instructional program that can propel students to meet their limitless potentials.
- Work in partnership with children, families, and community to provide a strong academic, ethical, and culturally responsive education.
- Create an environment where students' diversity, backgrounds, and languages are highly valued.
- Build "bridges" between home and school to enable lifelong learning, problem solving, increased self-esteem, and responsible citizenship for success in a diverse, ever-changing world."

Ayla Gavins
Principal at Mission Hill K-8 School
Boston, MA

At 18 Ayla Gavins left the small town life of a Pennsylvania suburb and moved to Boston to attend Boston University's School of Education. Upon graduation, she began six years of teaching in two affluent suburbs of Boston. Her teaching career continued in Boston Public Schools where she taught ages 7-14 for 6 years at Mission Hill School (MHS). Under the guidance of Deborah Meier, Ayla received her school administrative license from the Principal Residency Network and became principal of Mission Hill School in 2006. She has connected with a global audience of educators through presentations, school visitations, conference participation, online presence, and writing.

MHS was founded in 1997 by educator and author Ms. Meier and is modeled on democratic principles. The small learning community emphasizes a project-based, collaborative curriculum, inclusive of all learning abilities. Mission Hill's mission is to maintain and nurture the best habits of a democratic society in their students- to be smart, caring, strong, resilient, imaginative and thoughtful. "Such habits of mind and such competence are sustained by our enthusiasms, as well as our love for others and our respect for ourselves, and our willingness to persevere, deal with frustration and develop reliable habits of work. Our mission is to create a community in which our children and their families can best maintain and nurture such democratic habits.

Amy Junge
Director of Teacher-Powered Schools
Education Evolving

Amy is a former California public elementary and middle school teacher and assistant principal. She started working with teacher-powered schools in 2009 and was a contributing author for *Trusting Teachers with School Success: What Happens When Teachers Call the Shots*. Today, Amy works with Education Evolving advocating for teacher-powered schools and supporting teacher-powered teams.

Anna O'Connor-Morin
Senior Director of education at UCP Bailes Charter Schools
Orlando, FL

Anna has been an educator for almost 20 years and was drawn to serving students with autism early in her career. She taught in a traditional school district that had 12 Exceptional Student Education (ESE) teachers as a 'designated' feeder school for students with disabilities. This led her to a graduate focus in ESE and then a project director for a state discretionary project with the University of Central Florida and Florida Department Of Education. Afterward, Anna joined UCP of Central Florida at one of their 7 charter schools as the School Administrator.

About her school: "At UCP of Central Florida, we believe every child deserves academics to help them learn, grow and excel. That's why each of our classrooms is led by highly qualified and experienced teachers who welcome children and families into a community of learning. Our research-based academics lay the foundation for each student's future success. By opening our classrooms to children with and without special needs in a unique education model called inclusion, not only are we breaking down barriers but we are also teaching children at a very young age to embrace differences. Our unique education approach promotes a valuable skill set that creates stronger, more open leaders in the future. We provide support, education and therapy services to each of our students and families, therefore creating a learning environment that unlocks the potential for every student.

"In 2011 Dr. Rebecca Hines (University of Central Florida professor) and Anna began to peel back the layers and relaunched UCP Bailes with an aligned vision for inclusion, innovation, and collaboration—teacher led, teacher say, teacher developed at the bottom, top, and middle layers of everything we set out to do. It is now the flagship of our system where we grow ideas, research, and initiatives out to our other six schools. Our student sub groups outperform the state and district averages, in testing grades. Individual student growth is consistently more than one year of learning gains, and importantly we have created a school community where teachers are happy and 'happy teachers will change the world'. (Thich Nan Han)"

Michele Pellam
Headmaster at Another Course to College (ACC)
Boston, MA

About Michele's school: "ACC teachers use a variety of instructional approaches that enable students to be independent thinkers and cooperative learners. Strategies include a constructivist approach to learning and a focus on seminar-style discussions that enable analysis and analytical writing. In the constructivist approach, students create and shape their own understanding of the work at hand, while being challenged by their teachers and fellow students for sound argument, depth of analysis, and thoughtful evaluation.

"Through a variety of instructional methods and assessments, students make meaningful connections between their personal experience, background knowledge, nightly reading, and class work. Teachers design curriculum that aim for a balance of breadth and depth in subject matter. The teaching staff works to enrich students with an expanse of cultural literacy, and gives them the power to focus their research, analytical and evaluative skills for depth of understanding.

"To further engage students, teacher created curriculum is encouraged and valued. An engaged teacher leads to engaged students. Giving teachers the freedom to craft their own curriculum, guided by the high expectations of the school's college preparatory mission, helps to create energy in the classroom, job satisfaction among teachers, and achievement in our students."

Irene Salter
Administrator at Chrysalis Charter School
Palo Cedro, CA

Irene Salter received a PhD in neuroscience from the University of California, San Francisco. Over the course of the following decade, she taught middle school science and math, led professional development workshops at the Exploratorium Teacher's Institute, developed curriculum with the GEMS group at the Lawrence Hall of Science, and taught science to preservice teachers at California State University, Chico, where she served as the chair of the Department of Science Education. These experiences are now intertwined in her role as the principal of Chrysalis Charter School, a science- and nature-focused K–8 school near Redding, California.

About her school: "The mission at Chrysalis Charter School is "Encouraging the light within each student to shine brighter!" Our mission shapes every aspect of our school — from the small size of our school, to the way we teach, to the close relationships we form with families. While some students shine brightest in our full-time classroom program with experiential learning in all subjects, others shine brightest through homeschooling where a teacher works alongside families to design and implement a program tailored to fit the student, with the option of on-campus science, nature, and elective classes."

Collaborative Leadership for Thriving Teams