

EXPLORE THE MANY PATHS TO LEADERSHIP

By Tracy Crow

Do you consider yourself a leader? People answer this question in different ways at different times, and their job title may have little bearing on how they answer it. Rather, they may consider several factors. How do they influence or assist others, formally or informally? Who comes to them with questions and requests for support? How do they innovate and ideate? What visions do they share with others? How do they nurture others to be their best? Their job responsibilities and formal or informal roles in organizations are also indicators of their leadership.


Educators lead from many positions in schools, districts, and organizations. Expectations for leadership are high from all corners. Not only do school and system leaders have critical responsibilities to address daunting challenges in their communities, but they also share those responsibilities across school buildings, asking more from every employee.

So does that make everyone in a school a leader? At times, each of us exercises leadership when we feel compelled to do so. We may see a responsibility to stand

up for a particular vision for students or to speak up and advocate for ourselves and our colleagues. We've all seen examples of professionals standing up as leaders in ways that surprise us — and most likely surprising themselves.

Not everyone who leads recognizes himself or herself as a leader. The term “leader” carries different weights and expectations for each of us. Teachers may hesitate to call themselves leaders because they associate the term with those in particular roles. If they never envision themselves leaving the classroom for an administrative position, they may think they aren't cut out for leadership. Yet their colleagues and students may turn to them as leaders because of their character, vision, and influence over others. They may take on volunteer positions or committee roles that offer more formal leadership opportunities, or they may lead quietly without external recognition.

The road to leadership isn't necessarily one that educators plan carefully with a series of logical steps. Certainly some educators start as teachers and then systematically work through a traditional hierarchy on their way to the superintendency. Others, however, take a turn when an opportunity arises, or they take what might be considered a step back to explore a newfound passion, then find themselves years later an expert in their field.



In the absence of structures that help educators envision the steps they might take to keep themselves engaged and growing throughout their professional life, educators will have to create their own pathways.

Throughout this issue of *JSD*, we explore the many ways that schools and systems support and develop leaders at all levels, and we meet educators who describe how they found their way to leadership. We're highlighting diverse routes to leadership for a range of purposes.

First, if you're active in promoting and studying effective professional learning, you are most likely a leader at some level, and we hope to help you recognize that and nurture your inner leader. You may not have a title or authority that indicate a leadership position. However, those who care deeply about the kinds of learning that educators experience and who demand that such learning produce results for students hold high expectations for their profession. They also hold high expectations for themselves and their colleagues and work tirelessly to reach challenging goals. Those are key attributes of education leaders.

Second, schools, districts, and states do not consistently or systematically outline career ladders for educators. In the absence of structures that help educators envision the steps they might take to keep themselves engaged and growing throughout their professional life, educators will have to create their own pathways. We hope that this issue will spark some ideas

for educators at any age and stage in their profession.

Third, as we learn from the various programs and individuals featured in this issue, leaders in different positions require different types of learning and support depending not only on their career stage but also their individual goals, inclinations, and aspirations. As more schools and systems develop leadership programs, they will need to attend to the elements and conditions that make such learning meaningful.

Finally, we believe schools and systems have a responsibility not only to develop leadership but also to nurture it, recognize it, and celebrate it. Without leaders, the change that our students need just isn't going to happen. Whether they stand in front of kindergartners every day, lead schools with the title of principal, create compelling learning from the central office, or support educators from outside the district, education leaders demand more from themselves and others and figure out how to make results happen.

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