

Strengthening Teaching as a Profession

Examples of Career Trajectories for Teacher Leaders in the United States

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The profession of teaching requires strengthening to ensure that teachers have opportunities to grow, develop their knowledge and skills, and take on many roles without having to leave the field of education. Ultimately, the profession has to provide multiple career paths that lead to positions as school and district and university leaders. Having attractive and clear career trajectories in place enables veteran educational professionals to actively contribute to developing the research and practice base for teaching and to support the professional development of others.

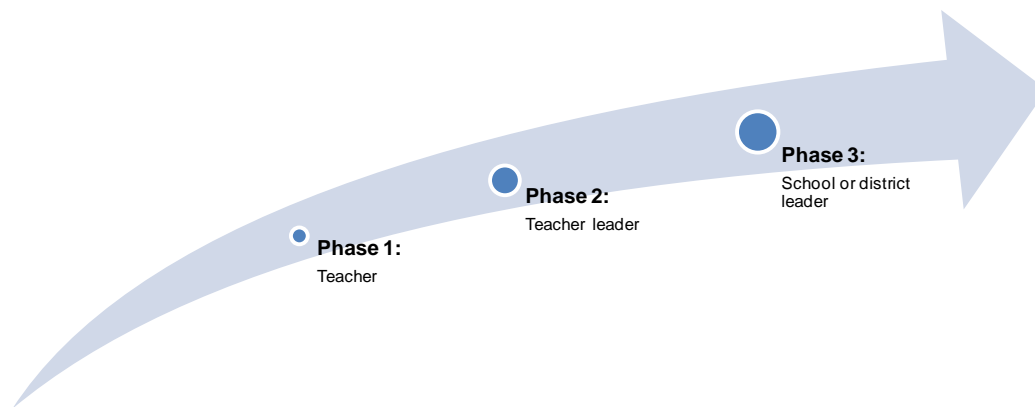
To truly strengthen teaching as a profession requires careful consideration of the following issues:

<i>Issue to consider</i>	<i>What this means</i>
Knowledge base	Defining what effective teachers know and do needs to be prioritized and needs to inform teacher preparation, teacher professional development, teacher compensation, and teacher evaluation.
Teacher evaluation	Implementing valid and reliable processes that help determine quality teaching and support professional development and personnel decisions.
Teacher professional development	Providing ongoing supports so that teachers are able to demonstrate the expected subject knowledge, teaching competencies, pedagogical skills and professional behaviors.
Compensation	Developing a compensation structure for professionals requires a shift in thinking from dependence on a salary schedule based on time to teacher performance pay and career ladders.
Career trajectories	Determining and making visible career paths that specifically increase teacher engagement and develop educational leaders.
Policy enactment	Identifying and implementing structures needed to support change at all levels of the educational enterprise from the classroom to the school board.

The remainder of this article presents three examples of possible teacher career trajectories that teachers might follow in the United States at the elementary, middle school and high school levels. Each example has implications for all of these issues in all three phases of each teacher's career.

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Example 1: Anna, an elementary teacher

Phase 1: Anna graduated with honors from the teacher preparation program at the local university. Her teaching degree was in elementary education. She taught third grade for five years during which she participated in several book studies focusing on how to improve reading instruction. Through a project at a local university, Anna participated in a peer coaching experience where she and a colleague observed and provided feedback on one another's teaching. She took a few courses towards her master's degree but stopped when she needed to provide care to a family member.

Phase 2: Anna was encouraged by her principal to apply for National Board Certification. She explored the requirements which include the development of an extensive portfolio including videotaped footage of classroom instruction. Two years later, Anna applies and becomes board certified in the area of Literacy: Reading-Language Arts/Early and Middle Childhood. As a result of being board certified, Anna receives a higher salary and is asked to be a mentor to new teachers. As a mentor, Anna gets further training on how to coach colleagues and she is asked to serve on several task forces related to literacy – choosing a new language arts textbook series, developing a school-wide writing rubric, and selecting a benchmark reading assessment for students in grades K-3. Anna becomes intrigued by how to best help struggling readers. After another three years of teaching, Anna completes her Master's degree in the area of specialized reading instruction.

Phase 3: Anna applies for and is selected for the position of reading language arts coordinator in the district. In her new position, Anna is able to mentor reading specialists across the elementary schools. She begins to study for her doctorate in the area of special education and to teach students at the local university. When she completes her dissertation several years later, Anna applies to teach at another teacher preparation program and becomes a university professor who is responsible for teaching pre-service courses and in-service workshops for teachers. Local school and district leaders like to hire her students because they are well-prepared to meet the needs of struggling readers.

Example 2: Elaine, a middle grades teacher

Phase 1: Although she completed a college degree in the area of History, Elaine began working as a journalist after college and it was several years before she decided to be a teacher. When, at the age of thirty, she decided to switch careers, she attended classes at a local university to get certified to teach history in the middle grades. Elaine was assigned a veteran teacher as a mentor and she also was expected to participate in several book study groups focused on improving instruction. She learned a number of active reading and learning strategies that she could incorporate into the classroom. Students liked the strategies Elaine used to engage them in the reading of primary sources and she felt that they grew as readers and writers when they were in her class.

Phase 2: After teaching for three years, Elaine was asked to serve on the school's leadership team. Team members interviewed parents, students and teachers about how to improve student achievement in their school. They looked at student performance on state tests. They looked at student work. Then they made a school improvement plan. At team meetings each month, they looked at the plan and thought about what has transpired and what still needs to happen. The year after, an assistant principal position opened at the school. Elaine

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applied and got the job but could only be provisionally certified until she completed the necessary coursework for certification as an administrator.

Phase 3: After serving as assistant principal in charge of instruction for several years, Elaine took a position in charge of instructional improvement at the district level. In this position, she supports school-based improvement efforts such as the one she participated in as a teacher leader. After several years as a district leader, Elaine began to miss the opportunity to be close to students and she applies to be a middle school principal in a neighboring district. She gets the job and is able to productively apply all she has learned up to that point as a teacher and school and district leader to improving student outcomes. Elaine establishes an instructional leadership team which looks at the data and decides that writing across the curriculum is the best approach to addressing student needs. Elaine finds resources to support a robust writing across the curriculum initiative that includes teacher professional development, accountability and support. Participation is high and student achievement begins to improve.

Example 3: Mark, a secondary teacher

Phase 1: Mark begins his career teaching math, chemistry and physics at the high school level. For the first two years, Mark is mentored by an older member of the department who is an excellent instructor and who observes his teaching and provides feedback and coaching. Mark also meets with the assistant principal and the other three teachers hired that year. In year 1, they get advice on classroom management and study preferred instructional methods. In year 2, each new teacher carries out and shares an action research project to improve student learning.

Mark is supported by the principal to take additional coursework to develop both his content knowledge and his pedagogy. During years 3-9 of his teaching, Mark continues to take courses and completes a master's degree in science education. Mark is recognized by his peers as a good teacher and he is proud of the good results that his students receive on the math and science exams.

Phase 2: In years 10-14, Mark is asked to serve on the school leadership team. He participates with other team members in assessing school strengths and developing a school improvement plan. Part of the plan includes focusing on strengthening literacy in the content areas (how to read primary sources; how to do technical writing; how to present research). Team members participate in teacher professional development, use the recommended approaches in the classroom, and share the results and the approaches with peers. During this time, Mark is also encouraged to take courses to gain his certification as an administrator.

Phase 3: When he completes the certification classes, Mark is offered the position of assistant principal in charge of instruction at another high school in the district. Three years later, Mark becomes a building principal. The focus of his efforts to improve instruction begins with putting in place a strong teacher mentoring program as well as an instructional leadership team. Mark insists on conducting a data driven assessment of current school status and, based on that, he and the instructional leadership team begin to develop and implement a school improvement plan based on the data and the recommendations of the visiting accreditation team. Mark works with the team to improve student engagement and critical thinking, two areas where the team feels much progress is needed. Mark is also very aware of the need to reach out to parents and the community to inform them of the school's improvement plan and how they can be supportive.

About the author

Julie Meltzer is a Senior Advisor for Strategy, Research, and Design at Public Consulting Group. Julie has spent the past decade leading research, development, and program evaluation projects related to students' K-12 literacy development and serving as a literacy and Response to Intervention (RtI) and 21st Century Teaching and Learning consultant to national, state, and district projects. Julie brings substantive experience as a teacher, teacher educator, and leadership coach to her work in the areas of systemic school improvement, capacity building, and design of professional development services and materials. She is author or coauthor of many educational articles, professional development materials and resources, and four books: *Taking the Lead on Adolescent Literacy: Action Steps for Schoolwide Success* (Corwin and IRA, 2010); *Meeting the Challenge of Adolescent Literacy: Practical Ideas for Literacy Leaders* (IRA, 2009); *Taking Action on Adolescent Literacy* (ASCD, 2007); and *Adolescent Literacy: Linking Research with Practice* (Education Alliance, 2002).

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Additional information

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