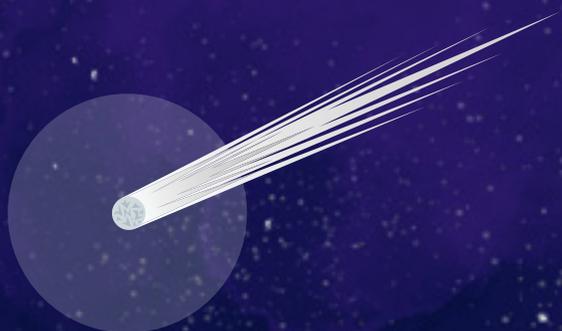


# SHARE THE SPOTLIGHT

Principals lead more effectively  
by empowering teacher leaders





BY SUSAN McLESTER

**"S**tart with the assumption that leadership is everywhere and in everyone," says Andrew Olson, principal of Progress Village Middle Magnet School of the Arts. "Then, think about how to structure a capacity-building program that takes advantage of it."

Olson is one of 244 principals in Tampa, Florida's Hillsborough County Public Schools, one of six large urban districts across the country that since 2011 have been involved in The Wallace Foundation's "principal pipeline" initiative—designed to grow more effective principals.

At the helm of the initiative at Hillsborough is Tricia McManus, assistant superintendent of educational leadership and professional development. She is in charge of all levels of professional development for the district, including building capacity in teachers, aspirational principals, current principals, and principal supervisors. A sampling of the program she's put in place to do

this features a Preparing New Principals Program, a Principal Induction Program, and Coaching for Success.

With a mandate to cultivate leadership in others as part of their job description and with district guidelines indicating the *what* that principals must do, Hillsborough County principals are nevertheless given the autonomy to build their own leadership growth programs, leaving the *how* up to them. "You need to give people the individual freedom to be innovative," McManus says.

Olson and two other Hillsborough principals share their approaches to developing leadership capacity in others, and how empowering staff members to rise as leaders creates a stronger learning environment for students.

### **Development by Design**

Progress Village serves 870 students in grades 6 through 8, and it offers a range of unique electives, such as keyboarding, dance theater, costume design, and culinary arts. School admission is

lottery-based, with a consistently high demand for limited slots.

Working from the belief that there are opportunities for everyone to lead, Olson, during his five years as principal, has created a range of formal and informal options to promote and encourage the development of leadership skills in his staff. Playing a central role are Olson's two teacher leadership teams: Talent Developers and Team Leaders.

The Talent Developers consist of two subject-area coaches: a math/science coach and an English language arts/social studies coach. They help develop

other teachers by meeting weekly with subject-area teachers to facilitate their professional learning community (PLC) planning and also overall schoolwide professional development. In addition, Talent Developers organize quarterly peer observation walk-throughs, which focus on specific subjects, such as data management and lesson design.

The Team Leaders take on a few of the duties traditionally assigned to administrators. They consist of six teachers, two for each grade level—one educates teachers on data, attendance, and behavior, while the other oversees interventions and coordinates student

success programs, such as the Student of the Month program.

Olson has also instituted a monthly Tea Party, a presentation that allows each teacher to share knowledge with colleagues. Rotating among teachers, the presentations can focus on any topic of interest to the presenter, whether it be an article, a TED Talk, a study, or something else.

"Knowing your people and creating the right opportunities is key," Olson says.

### Layers of Leadership

At the K-5, 400-student Lanier Elementary School, building leadership is



Photo courtesy of Lifetouch Photography

“

**Less is more. It's about having the right people. And because trust is key, their roles are not evaluative.”**

—Rachael O'Dea, principal, Lanier Elementary School, Tampa, FL

at the core of teacher development, but also of the school as a whole. Structured around the Leader in Me program, an education offshoot of Stephen Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, the school's instructional approach includes goal-setting and action steps for both teachers and students.

"The Covey-infused curriculum teaches students skills such as how to be proactive rather than reactive, how to participate in crafting your own pathway, and what it means to be a leader," says principal Rachael O'Dea, who began incorporating the Leader in Me program three years ago.

Lanier's leadership development is layered, with teachers supporting student leadership development, the leadership team supporting teacher development, and the principal supporting the leadership team.

O'Dea prefers a small leadership team, with hers consisting of a reading coach, a math coach, a guidance counselor, an ESC specialist for exceptional students, and the assistant principal. "Less is more. It's about having the right people," she says. "And because trust is key, their roles are not evaluative."

As developers of adult learning, team members lead and participate in a variety of activities designed to build capacity in others. These include learning walks, peer coaching, lesson and assessment strategies, feedback, and assistance in the development of action steps.

During weekly, hourlong planning time, coaches meet with PLCs to support teachers in ensuring lessons are aligned with standards. Team members also conduct mentoring sessions in which teachers demonstrate lesson strategies

for peers, followed by a discussion on ensuring the lesson teaches what it's supposed to teach and that the assessment matches the lesson.

Quarterly learning walks pair coaches with general education teachers to observe classroom lessons with detailed follow-up debriefings. Walks are based on a three-G structure—goal, grow, and glory—in which observers provide feedback to the teacher on how well the lesson matches the teacher's goals and how much growth the teacher is showing, and they offer praise for the teacher's accomplishments.

"We focus on research, and it's job-embedded," O'Dea says. "We don't do research after school. The school itself is the perfect research lab, and we take advantage of it."

### Getting Teacher Buy-in

In contrast to O'Dea's "less is more" leadership team is Principal Larissa McCoy-Mitti's 18-teacher capacity-building team.

Arriving at A.P. Leto High School in January 2017 as assistant principal of curriculum and instructional leadership, McCoy-Mitti had her work cut out for her. As a turnaround school, Leto has a student population of 2,287, with 84 percent economically disadvantaged students, 30 percent English-language learners, and a long history of ranking near last place in state test scores.

"When I first got there, only the 10 department heads had any kind of say or voice in how the school was run," McCoy-Mitti says. "It was like going back in time to [the movie] *Stand and Deliver*."

McCoy-Mitti knew getting teachers' quick buy-in was vital. She assembled

## A Tale of Two Teacher Leadership Teams

At Progress Village Middle Magnet School of the Arts, two types of teacher leadership teams provide extended leadership opportunities for the staff.

### TALENT DEVELOPERS

- Consist of two subject-area coaches: one in math/science, one in English language arts/social studies.
- Develop other teachers via weekly meetings focused on professional development.
- Organize quarterly peer observation walk-throughs, script notes, facilitate follow-up debriefings.
- Receive \$3,000 stipends.

### TEAM LEADERS

- Consist of six teachers, two for each grade level—one educates on data, attendance, and behavior; one oversees interventions and coordinates student success programs.
- Assume some duties typically assigned to administrators.
- Receive \$1,000 stipends.



**You have to approach the job with a positive attitude, model behavior, and see each person’s potential.”**

—Andrew Olson, principal, Progress Village Middle Magnet School of the Arts, Tampa, FL

the leadership team from teachers who had the capacity to lead and from instructional coaches. None were department heads, which ensured that as many people as possible would have a voice.

Identifying instructional leadership as a high-need area, McCoy-Mitti began a twice-monthly, one-hour lesson-tuning showcase in which teachers meet with the leadership teams to look critically at lessons to ensure that activities align with goals and include critical thinking and multiple assessments.

The leadership team also creates 100 percent of the school’s professional

development and helps promote the vision and mission of the school by “rallying the troops” and creating a sense of urgency, says McCoy-Mitti.

In fall 2017, McCoy-Mitti assumed the principalship of Leto and continued building on her leadership development program with quarterly highly structured learning walks. The program includes four walks a day, with each team visiting two to three classrooms, followed by a group debriefing. Six to eight teachers participate in each walk, including an instructional team member. Before the walks, the group sets norms to decide

what they are looking for, and debriefings include sharing takeaways and discussing how to implement best practices.

“Our priorities are what we teach, how we teach, and authentic literacy,” McCoy-Mitti says. “We make it work by all pulling together and working collaboratively to overcome barriers.”

### Overcoming Challenges

The three principals talk about the challenges they have faced in their efforts to grow leadership in others.

For McCoy-Mitti, it was a “baked-in” sense of apathy on the part of both

students and teachers, and a resistance to disruption from staff members who wanted to do their best for students, but had not been trained. “It’s natural to be fearful of change,” she says.

O’Dea shares that an early challenge was about risk—taking risks and hoping for the right outcome. “Being empowered to take risks is a little bit frightening, and you hope you’re doing the best thing for your staff,” she says.

As far as working with her leadership team, training them while they are training others can be an ongoing challenge. “Sometimes you need to use direct, explicit instruction and say, ‘Here’s what you need to spend your time doing, and even though you may be friends with another teacher, you still need to push them,’” O’Dea adds.

For Olson, learning how to meet people where they are—even if it’s frustrating—is a challenge he once faced and is now seeing his leadership teams face. “You have to approach the job with a positive attitude, model

behavior, and see each person’s potential,” he says.

However, all three principals agree that once people start seeing the impact of the work they’re doing, behaviors and attitudes of both students and teachers change.

### Measuring Impact

At Leto, the quality of lesson plans has increased exponentially, and the school is no longer at the very bottom when it comes to test scores. “Although it may not seem like a huge improvement, we’re now third from the bottom in Algebra I,” McCoy-Mitti says. “And in the district formative assessment that mirrors state tests, we scored 11th out of 23 schools that administered the Algebra I-A assessment.”

O’Dea also reports “steady growth” in test scores from 2015 to 2017, with students going from 42 to 49 percent on the state English/language arts test, and from 43 to 53 percent in math.

Olson says his school grade increased

40 points on the state tests over the last five years, and that teachers seem more willing to take chances, seek help, and volunteer their time. For example, on a recent Saturday, members of the Beautification Committee spent the whole day painting murals and planting an aromatherapy garden.

Across the board, the principals report increasingly positive responses from teachers on School Climate Surveys, and a greater willingness to trust each other and the administration.

Principals who are most effective at growing leadership in others share common traits, McManus says. “It’s not just about performing tasks, but about interacting with others and building credibility,” she explains. “They are people who want to create a culture in which others thrive. And most of all, they want to make sure everyone has a voice.” •

*Susan McLester is a freelance education writer in Berkeley, California.*

Photo courtesy of Larissa McCoy-Mitti, A.P. Leto High School



**Our priorities are what we teach, how we teach, and authentic literacy. We make it work by all pulling together and working collaboratively to overcome barriers.”**

—Larissa McCoy-Mitti, principal, A.P. Leto High School, Tampa, FL (pictured at right)

