

## **Abstract**

“No matter what reform strategy is being pursued, the overall quality of a school system rests on the quality of its teachers, and **the quality of its teachers depends on the system** in place to support them.”

Vivian Stewart (2012)

To create the change necessary for students in Cedar Rapids to reach their full potential, teachers must be more than effective instructors. Our vision is to provide all teachers with multiple opportunities to hone their exceptional instructional skills while learning and practicing strategies to bring out the best in their colleagues. Our plan does not simply fund Teacher Leader (TL) positions. We are creating the comprehensive TL system envisioned in Vivian Stewart’s quote.

We began our planning in September 2013. During the past 5 months we’ve gathered significant input from multiple stakeholders. A 26 member Advisory Committee composed of teachers, parents, community members, and students guided the process. Through presentations in all buildings, a video developed in partnership with the CR Education Association and viewed by all teaching staff, and through 2 online surveys, nearly 800 teachers provided valuable input. Parents, students and the broader community shared ideas through an online forum. A Leadership Team of 3 teachers (including our teacher’s association president), the Cedar Wood UniServ Director, 4 administrators, and a planning consultant knitted the stakeholder input into this comprehensive Teacher Leader Program plan.

Cedar Rapids has a history of employing teachers in multiple leadership roles. We also have a strong track record for sustaining effective TL positions. As an example, 8 years ago we hired 6 Instructional Coaches with Reading First grant funds. Because these Coaches had a positive effect on instruction and student achievement, not only did we keep the positions after the grant ended, we used general funds to expand from 6 to 23 full time coaches. Even though we have had to absorb substantial budget cuts in the past few years, the impact of TLs serving as Instructional Coaches has been powerful enough to expand these TL positions in tight financial times.

We have been able to grow our Instructional Coaching efforts because they are part of a highly organized, systemic initiative that includes strong leaders, extensive professional development, and the use of data for continuous program improvement. Data from our coaching efforts lets us understand and share information about the effect on teachers and students. With funding from the Iowa DE, **Cedar Rapids will create a comprehensive TL program** that provides the same high level of organization and support for **all** TL positions—not just Instructional Coaches. We believe a highly organized TL program will help us sustain the successful aspects of the entire TL effort just as a highly organized program allowed us to sustain and expand our coaching efforts. We will move **from** a loosely organized program in which many TL positions are unpaid and don’t benefit from ongoing PD and support **to** a comprehensive TL system that:

- Encourages all teachers to lead;
- Employs a rigorous selection process;
- Compensates all positions;
- Trains and supports every TL in the summer and during the school year;
- Facilitates collaboration among TLs;
- Ensures consistent support of teachers across all buildings and all grade levels;
- Uses data to continuously improve implementation; and
- Collects and shares data about the impact of **all** TL positions on teachers and students.

We currently have 268 teachers in **paid** leadership positions. State funds will provide compensation for an additional 614 to work as leaders. While the funding for these 614 positions will be new, many of these teachers in these roles have done similar work without any compensation or formal training from the district. Our capacity to increase student achievement will be significantly enhanced because state funds will support extensive introductory and ongoing Professional Development (PD) for **all** 882 TL positions.

In our comprehensive plan, levels of leadership range from extra duty TL roles to full-release positions that fall into 1 of 3 levels.

- **Level 1—Intensive Coaching** (58 TLs working in 9 different part time & full time roles).
- **Level 2—PD/Curriculum/Technology** (141 TLs working in 27 different part time, full time & extra duty roles).
- **Level 3—Building Based Support** (683 TLs working in 10 different extra duty roles).

TLs in part time and extra duty positions will continue in the classroom in addition to their TL duties.

Our TLs will provide all teachers with building-based & district-level PD and support to achieve our 3 district goals—(1) close the achievement gap; (2) implement the Professional Learning Community (PLC) framework; and (3) provide quality instruction. Our TLs will provide **all** teachers with 3 types of essential support:

1. A consistent **foundation** so all teachers implement the curriculum with fidelity and embed frequent assessment of student learning as a part of instruction consistently across all buildings;
2. Individual support and **coaching** in all K-12 buildings through focused 6-week improvement cycles; and
3. **Building structures** that support teachers as they work collaboratively to create a culture of student learning.

Our teachers are ready to begin! 54% of staff are currently in, or have been in, positions of leadership. Many teachers are experienced TLs who will be able to “hit the ground running.” 79% of our teachers are considering applying for a TL position in the next few years. Many teachers clearly have the desire to serve in a leadership role, especially in ones that include significant training and support. We are fortunate to have so many teachers with both the experience and interest in serving as a TL. We believe our systemic approach to Teacher Leadership will be the key to increasing student achievement.

For additional information on the Teacher Leadership Compensation and Supplement grant application, please contact:

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