

Providing Career Growth Ladders

National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality

Research finds that many teachers leave the profession because they feel stifled by a flat career trajectory that prevents them from making a difference beyond their classrooms. This is the case even more so for the incoming cohort of teachers (Berg, et al., 2005). A recent survey of Generation Y teachers (i.e., those born between 1977-1995) found that nearly all Generation Y teachers planned to remain in the education field for life, but only half of them wished to remain classroom teachers for life (Coggsall, Ott, Behrstock, & Lasagna, 2009). Teachers, particularly as they reach the second stage of their careers (i.e., the decade after tenure), wish to continually explore new challenges and growth opportunities while at the same time keeping one foot in the classroom.

Providing career growth ladders for teachers has multiple meanings in policy and practice ranging from a series of advancement opportunities for teachers both in and outside the classroom as well as tiered approaches to licensure. True career ladders recognize the progression from novice teacher status to proficient, professional, and eventually master or expert teacher status. Each phase of growth comes with changes in teachers' responsibilities, expectations, supports, and rewards. An example of such a career growth ladder is the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP). The TAP model differentiates between career, mentor, and master teachers, who, based on their individual interests and abilities, are held to differentiated standards, compensated differentially, and take on decision-making responsibilities as part of a school's Leadership Team (Teacher Advancement Program Foundation, n.d.). Teacher career growth ladders may include such teacher leadership positions as mentor, coach, or specialist. Incentives or leadership responsibilities based upon achievement of National Board Certification can also contribute to a meaningful career trajectory for teachers. Career growth ladders may also extend to non-teacher staff, such as paraprofessionals and teachers' aids. Through the use of "grow-your-own" programs, these staff members can be encouraged to become teachers, particularly in areas where there are shortages (Fritz, Cooner, & Stevenson, 2009; Mollenkopf, 2009). Because non-teacher school staff are already acquainted with the community and often know its culture and needs well, providing resources and support for their teacher training is often a worthwhile investment (Hayes, 2009).

Action Principles

For District

1. Define the expectations and responsibilities of different positions along a career ladder.
2. Create a system of incentives, including monetary and non-monetary rewards, to encourage teachers to advance along this career path.
3. With their input, customize career ladders for individual teachers, based on their interests and skills.
4. Advertise the career ladder at the time of recruitment to increase interest in the district.
5. Create a "grow-your-own" teacher preparation program to assist paraprofessionals and teachers' aids in becoming teachers, especially for high-need areas like math, science, and special education.
6. Establish a system to evaluate teacher retention and satisfaction with the various career advancement opportunities.

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