

Filling the Void:

Developing Teacher Leadership Through Micro-Credentialing

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Nancy White is owner of Innovations in Education LLC, and serves as secretary for the Colorado ASCD Affiliate. She has served as a teacher, librarian, and 21st Century Learning & Innovation Specialist in PreK-12 for over 20 years. She is passionate about helping teachers to become designers of learning, and helping them to help students develop essential 21st century skills and own their learning through curating, personalized learning, global collaboration, inquiry, and project-based learning. She strives to help teachers, schools, and districts transform teaching and learning to better prepare students for the world in which they will live, learn, and work, and to help teachers design learning that sticks and that kids love.

A perfect storm is approaching the state of Colorado, and Colorado ASCD is poised to do something about it. What storm? A critical teacher shortage, brought about by a large number of educators retiring, teachers leaving the classroom after only a few years of teaching, and the declining number of Coloradans enrolling in teacher education programs. The 2017-18 school year saw a decrease of 17% of students enrolled in educator preparation programs. Additionally, “Between the 2010-11 academic year and 2015-16, enrollment in teacher prep programs dropped by 24 percent, and completers dropped by 17 percent. This decline occurred during a period of robust population growth in Colorado.” (Traffica, 2018). According to the latest data for 2016-2017 from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education, Colorado has teacher shortages in the arts, early childhood, special education, world languages, mathematics and natural sciences. (Cross, 2016). While there is much speculation as well as research regarding the reason for the decreased interest in entering and staying in the teaching profession, one thing we know is this: teachers have little opportunity for significant advancement in terms of salary and leadership opportunities as a K-12 teacher unless they choose to earn an additional degree or certification as an administrator, at great personal expense. When our best and brightest educators leave the classroom in search of opportunity for significant increase in salary and/or to fulfill their leadership potential, this too creates a void of experienced and highly qualified teachers for our students. Whether teachers leave the teaching profession to enter into new career fields or move into administration, the effect on our students is the same: a constant stream of new and inexperienced teachers. “Quantitative analyses indicate that measures of teacher preparation and certification are by far the strongest correlates of student achievement in reading and mathematics, both before and after controlling for student poverty and language status” according to Linda Darling-Hammond.

(Darling-Hammond, 2000, p. 1). Furthermore, multiple studies using data from North Carolina and Florida show that, on average, teachers with 1–2 years of experience are more effective than teachers with no experience (Rice, 2010). This effect is primarily indicated in test scores, however another North Carolina study off 1.2 million middle school students also looked at indicators such as absences, disciplinary offenses, amount of time reading for pleasure, and amount of time completing homework. Findings from this study indicate that as teachers gain experience, their students are less likely to miss school. (Kini & Podolsky, n.d.).

As educational leaders in the state of Colorado, the CO ASCD Board, with a vision and mission focused on promoting excellence and success for each Colorado learner, we decided to explore ways we could begin to shift this trend in a way that would open doors for our educators and positively impact student success. During a strategic planning session in the fall of 2017, we came to the realization that our niche in the state of Colorado, unlike any other Colorado-based professional education organization, is to support teacher leadership. A powerful experience in 2015 attending the U.S. Department of Education Teach to Lead Summit in Denver had opened our eyes to the possibilities of supporting the development of teacher leaders in our state. A new research study, School Leadership Counts, by Ingersoll, Dougherty and Sirinides, for the New Teacher Center and the Consortium for Policy Research in Education, University of Pennsylvania shows that “Schools with the highest levels of instructional and teacher leadership rank at least 10 percentile points higher in both math and English/language arts on state tests, compared to schools with the lowest levels—even after controlling for factors like school poverty, size, and location.” Also, the study shows that schools rarely implement the instructional and teacher leadership variables most strongly related to increased student achievement. (School Leadership Counts: 2017). Additionally, some new case studies spotlighted in the 2016 report by the National Network of State Teachers of the

Year and Pearson, *Teacher Career Advancement initiatives: Lessons Learned from Eight Case Studies* indicates that there is evidence that supporting a culture of teacher autonomy, collaboration, and positive growth through teacher leadership opportunities can increase teacher satisfaction and retention. As a board we began to wonder if we could provide professional learning opportunities to develop teacher leaders, encouraging these master teachers to stay in the classroom by contributing to overall job satisfaction and potentially provide them with a pathway to increased salary and fulfillment of their leadership potential.

The CO ASCD Board decided to move forward with developing professional learning for teacher leadership through the development of Teacher Leader Micro-Credentials (TLMCs) based upon the teacher leader model standards developed by The Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium. (2011). These standards, developed by a diverse set of education groups including ten national organizations, eight institutions of higher education, ten practitioners and eight state agencies, feature seven domains describing various qualities of teacher leadership:

- Domain I: Fostering a collaborative culture to support educator development and student learning
- Domain II: Accessing and using research to improve practice and student learning
- Domain III: Promoting professional learning for continuous improvement
- Domain IV: Facilitating improvements in instruction and student learning
- Domain V: Promoting the use of assessments and data for school and district improvement
- Domain VI: Improving outreach and collaboration with families and community
- Domain VII: Advocating for student learning and the profession

(Teacher Leader Model Standards, 2011).

As our Teacher Leader Micro-Credential Team began to dig in to these domain descriptions and the functions that make up the bulk of the model standards document, we began to see 4 key areas of focus:

- Teacher as Learner and Leader
- Teacher as Collaborator
- Teacher as Advocate
- Teacher as Champion for Cultural Diversity and Equity

The model standards did not specifically address Teacher as Learner and Leader, however we felt that this was an essential entry point for teachers who join our TLMC program, currently being developed for online delivery with our partner, BloomBoard. (<https://bloomboard.com/>) We decided to add this to our TLMC process, recognizing the importance of teachers exploring and reflecting on why they want to become a teacher leader, and then working with them through the process of developing a personal vision and mission for teacher leadership within their school environment. All of the TLMCs had to follow the ADDIE design process: Analyze, Develop, Design, Implement, and Evaluate. All teachers were required to first earn the Teacher as Learner and Leader Micro Credential, followed by two collaboration-focused TLMCs before they move on to select one or both TLMC pathways that concentrate on advocacy, cultural diversity and equity.

The benefits of the CO ASCD Teacher Leadership Micro-Credential program will be numerous. The TLMC program will provide pathways for teachers seeking opportunities for leadership to share their voice, talent, knowledge and skills from the classroom. Teachers can stay focused on becoming a leader in their school or district, in areas such as data informed decision making, collaborative instructional design, peer coaching, or curriculum development. They may choose to expand their influence to the state, national, or global levels. Administrators

with limited budget and staffing can benefit by tapping in to the teachers' leadership skills, especially to serve as mentors and peer coaches for new and inexperienced teachers in their schools. However, the greatest benefit could be to the students, as research shows that teacher leadership has a significant impact on student achievement. Our board is also engaged in conversations with our state department of education about how we can collaborate to give greater incentive and benefit to teachers who earn CO ASCD Teacher Leader Micro-Credentials through special certificates that can give them the ability to increase the time before state recertification is required. All teachers should be able to earn credit toward recertification by earning the TLMCs. Potentially, we hope to use our influence to convince local school districts and school boards to consider offering salary incentives for those who complete all of the CO ASCD TLMCs.

Colorado ASCD is working with BloomBoard to launch the first three Teacher Leader Micro-Credentials in the fall of 2018. While our target audience is teachers in Colorado, we recognize that interactions between teachers in TLMC cohort groups with teachers from other states and countries will make their experience far richer, so our program will be open to all interested educators, regardless of location. We are excited to offer this robust, online Teacher Leader Micro-Credential program at an affordable cost to teachers, and to see the benefits that it brings to the students, teachers, schools, districts, and community.

CO ASCD Board and TLMC Leadership Team:

- Jill Lewis, CO ASCD President
- Dr. Robin Wisniewski, CO ASCD Executive Director
- Dr. Ceri Dean, CO ASCD Board Member
- Nancy White, CO ASCD Board Secretary
- Melissa Gibson, CO ASCD Committee Chair, Professional Development

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