

## Teacher leaders support colleagues in pilot program



English teacher Debbie Caltuna was part of a group of more than a dozen new teachers to arrive at fast-growing **Appoquinimink High School** this fall. Caltuna meets on a regular basis with teacher leader Dr. John Tanner. Their discussions include a wide range of topics, everything from lesson planning to classroom management, goal setting, engagement strategies and more.

During John Tanner's first year of teaching, an administrator visited his classroom twice – and one of those times was an announced observation.

"That's not enough feedback when there is so much nuance to doing this job well," said Tanner, now a 16-year classroom veteran who provides **Appoquinimink High School's** novice teachers with on-going coaching and support as one of the school's three teacher leaders. "Teachers need frequent and specific, sometimes in-the-moment feedback, something much more targeted and responsive than traditional feedback models are able to provide."

This fall the state [launched a teacher-leader pilot](#) that provides educators the opportunity to support other teachers without leaving the classroom. Their days are split between leading their own classrooms and providing instructional support to their colleagues. Midway through the first school year, the teacher leaders gathered in January to share their successes and challenges to date and learn from one another.

Having the opportunity for teacher leaders to hear from one another is a key element of the state's strategy during this pilot year. Districts and charters submitted plans for how they wanted to leverage the teacher leader roles within their school. Currently, each of

these roles is being implemented a bit differently across all eight schools that are in the pilot.

“Through these ‘share-outs,’ we can learn from one another about what has worked and what strategies have been implemented to address challenges that have come up thus far. In addition to sharing success stories, the teacher leaders were engaged in professional learning sessions focused on developing and delivering high-quality support for their colleagues,” said Jon Neubauer, the education associate leading the program for the state.

In addition to the quarterly meeting that was held in January, the teacher leaders and their administrators will gather two more times before the end of the school year.

Statewide 19 educators are serving in this pilot, filling one of five roles within their buildings:

- *Instructional practice leads* improve the instructional practice of fellow educators using a variety of high-impact support strategies focused on frequent, targeted feedback in educators’ development areas.
- *Digital content leads* help educators build their instructional technology knowledge so more students have access to technology that helps improve their academic outcomes.
- *Instructional strategy leads* introduce new instructional strategies into schools to help educators meet their learning needs and help schools meet their academic goals.
- *Community partnership leads* help students gain access to services designed to improve their physical and mental health, giving them a greater chance at academic success.
- *Instructional culture leads* help schools build a philosophy around culture, discipline and culturally responsive teaching.

The role the teacher leaders play as well as how their days and class schedules are structured is determined at the school level. Leaders at Appoquinimink High -- which has 24 new teachers this year -- chose to focus the work with novice teachers. Other leaders designed models to meet their buildings’ needs.

Shana Noll, a teacher leader at **MOT Charter School** in Middletown, has a co-teacher who shares her third-grade classroom. During the half of her day devoted to her instructional practice lead role, Noll, a 14-year teacher, facilitates professional growth for her colleagues through internal professional development and classroom observations and coaching. She also provides them with resources and other supports to strengthen their practice.

At her school, they are building a sense of collaboration with teachers seeing the observations as a way to grow professionally and learn. While educators get feedback, it isn’t tied to the performance reviews conducted by administrators.

“It’s not formal or evaluative,” Noll said of the visits.

Tanner said the educators know the teacher leaders’ role is to support them.

“We are critiquing, but we are trying to make it safe to receive feedback and grow,” he said, adding students also see the growth mindset being modeled by their teachers. “It’s important that students see that their teachers are receiving coaching just like they are.”

The educators participating in the pilot hope that the program will continue and grow. They and their colleagues are seeing the benefits, they said.

“The more leaders you put into a building, the stronger your instructional practices can be,” Noll said.

And as the state grapples with how to better retain teachers, especially those who leave the profession in the first five years, providing them with supports such as this will be critical, Tanner said.

“If people feel supported and effective in their jobs, they are more likely to stay,” he said.

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Read an earlier story about the teacher leader pilot [here](#).

Check out John Tanner’s blog for his mentees [here](#).