

Utah Spotlight: Inspiring Educators

June 2021

Learning to Drive Through the Smoke

Leveraging Teacher Leaders

In many school districts and charters around the state, leaders are faced with the immense challenge of providing adequate resources and supports to all their educators to ensure high quality instruction in every classroom. A prime example of such a challenge can be found in Weber School District (WSD) where the district's Curriculum and Assessment Department consists of a team of five. Through innovative thinking and intentional design, Weber leverages the largest number of employees in their system, their teachers, to provide the resources, culture, and structures needed for the entire system to thrive.

In WSD, they have drawn on the resourcefulness of experienced teachers by creating curriculum fellows. Their curriculum fellows are teacher leaders within their school district who have demonstrated excellence in education and are highly respected by their peers. These teacher leaders are achievement oriented, demonstrate a strong desire to acquire new skills and capabilities, all while being willing to take risks and assume greater responsibility. By leveraging their teacher leaders, who are still in classrooms providing day-to-day leadership and support for their peers, the district has been able to ensure impressive support for their educators.

Identified through an application and vetting process, these curriculum fellows provide key supports such as: developing curriculum, designing assessments, creating pacing guides, and other instructional resources for their fellow colleagues to rely on. Additionally, they provide sustained professional learning sessions to support the ongoing development of all teachers in Weber School District.



Weber School District

Curriculum and Assessment Department



District Demographics

Total Enrollment: 32,197

- 24% of students with limited income
- 4% of students learning English
- 13% of students with a disability

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Ongoing Professional Learning Offerings

The curriculum fellows, with the support of the Curriculum and Assessment team, design and deliver a variety of professional learning options.

Buzz Sessions. 30–60-minute online sessions held monthly that are focused on just in time content. The fellows and district staff listen to the conversation coming in from around the district and provide on-demand professional learning on those hot topics.

Meetups. An after-school conference style professional learning experience that is offered three times a year where educators can choose from approximately 20 different sessions based on their personal learning needs.

Collaborative Leadership Team Development.

In collaboration with district leadership, the fellows are trained on districtwide initiatives and provide ongoing support and training to their school leadership teams to support implementation and talent development.

Back to School Professional Learning. Two days at the beginning of the school year, based on district level data, the fellows design content to address identified areas of needs and deliver the content to their fellow peers.

As evidenced by these options, the curriculum fellows serve strategically as teacher leaders who advance the priorities of the district and support their fellow colleagues while providing a critical feedback loop back to the Curriculum and Assessment department.



The goal of the Utah Spotlight is to offer Utah educators inspiring stories of educational strategies that impact student learning in dramatic ways, and importantly, designed to encourage and support educators in enriching their own practice. It is an opportunity to shine a light on inspiring and engaging practices in education with ideas worth spreading.

Next Steps

What's next for the curriculum fellows in WSD? The district plans to continue to leverage their teacher leaders to provide ongoing professional learning support as described above but will also be adding additional supports to continue to refine the resources and supports available for their educators to ensure more opportunities for students to be successful. Specifically, this summer the curriculum fellows will be working on two projects this summer and beyond:

Project 1 Acceleration Toolkits. Curriculum Fellows will develop teaching and learning packages focusing on the essential learning standards with built in instructional strategies. These packages will include complete teaching cycles with defined success criteria and embedded formative assessments to support classroom teachers in providing targeted instruction to accelerate student learning for those demonstrating need. The curriculum fellows will also provide professional learning for educators to ensure they know how to use the materials.

Project 2 Canvas Course Upgrades. Based on educator feedback, curriculum fellows will be refining previously create canvas course packages to improve the quality and extend the content beyond their initial design in addressing the immediate needs of the 2020-2021 school year.

These on-demand resources are evidence of Weber School District's balancing support with teacher autonomy. They consider their educators experts and respect that they know best how to advance student learning and afford teachers the choice of when and how to leverage these resources to do so.

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

Why teacher leaders are effective?

Teacher leaders, as seen in Weber School District, can be a powerful lever for any educational system for several reasons including:

- Teacher leaders have built-in credibility with their peers because they are applying the new methods in the classroom themselves.
- Teacher leaders provide critical insight into what is working, what isn't, and what needs to change. They provide a critical feedback loop to instructional coaches, building leaders, and curriculum experts into classroom needs and realities that inform future decision making.
- Teacher leaders have a vested interest in ensuring new strategies and initiatives work because they will be using them with their own students, too.
- Teacher leaders actively contribute to achieving the identified goals of the school or school system.
- Teacher leaders positively influence the results in improved educator practice through collective responsibility and shared accountability for student success.