

Key Elements of Leadership Excellence for Multi-Classroom Leaders:

Launch and Lead

Establish leadership by ensuring the right people are on the team and clarifying the team’s vision, goals, roles, and process for collaborating to achieve excellence.

“One of the things that we set as a priority for us is making sure that our goals are ambitious, maybe even a little exaggerated for some peoples’ taste; however, we know that we had to put that high goal out in front of us in order for us as teachers to be motivated to get our kids to that level of excellence.”—*Multi-Classroom Leader Erin Williams*

Assess each team member’s strengths to assign the right roles to each teaching team member, then set the tone and expectations for team members to ensure that all feel supported and clear about the work to come.

Launching and leading a team includes planning, communicating, executing, and improving these actions:

- * Set team vision and goals
- * Clarify team roles
- * Organize team work process—how we work together
 - o Make team action plan and lead team to follow it
 - o Make schedules and agendas for collaboration
- * Select the right people for each role

*** Set team vision and goals**

For all teaching team leaders, **setting and communicating a positive, clear vision and high-but-reachable goals must be a first step.** Teaching team leaders understand the power of working toward common goals.

Team leaders note that **this element goes hand-in-hand with that of building team cohesion.** Team leaders should guide but not fully dictate their team’s formulation of a vision and goals. Collaborating on these helps build team cohesion. Goals should always meet the team leader’s standards, though, in their ambitiousness for students.

“We had to do a little something different because more of the same equals exactly the same. One of the things that we set as a priority for us is **making sure that our goals are ambitious, maybe even a little exaggerated for some peoples’ taste;** however, we know that we had to put that high goal out in front of us in order for us as teachers to be motivated to get our kids to that level of excellence. It started with us recognizing the potential in our kids first and then being able to basically transfer that feeling of empowerment

to our students so that they’re able to kind-of take on that ownership as well.”—*Multi-Classroom Leader Erin Williams*

“The vision and goals are really important because it gives us a direction to go in, but I don’t think it’s my vision, I think **it’s a vision that we all buy into.** What is it that we want from our students, and how can we get them there? Because if we do feel like we’re collaborating and we’re more of a team, then I think the effort’s a little bit more genuine. If it was my vision, I may get a little more pushback as to, ‘well, that’s what Stacie wants, but that’s not what I want.’”—*MCL Stacie Bunn*

*** Clarify team roles**

When a school gets away from a one-teacher, one-classroom design, team leaders have the freedom and responsibility to set role expectations that work for the team. **Leaders must be clear about what team members can expect from them, take full advantage of their team members’ strengths, and understand where team members will need guidance and support.** Expectations for roles should be clarified in person and in writing, preferably starting long before hiring.

“First of all, anybody that is being interviewed for a position at our school is interviewed by me and the principal, and so that way we can **very clearly articulate how we coach, what we coach on, what our expectations are, and who I am and why I’m in the interview.** And so, I do a lot of the interview and talk to them about how I support and how I also push and what my role is. We don’t hire anybody that’s not 100 percent OK with coming on board and having an MCL/coach.”—*MCL Kristin Cubbage*

After school starts, Cabbage continues to clarify roles through individual teacher meetings: “I start the meeting with exactly what my roles are and how I’ll support them, but also there’s a period before that meeting even happens that I’m starting to do some relationship building with them of calling or texting, if they’re in their classrooms in the summer I’m usually here all summer so checking in on them and seeing what they need. So I’ve already had good dialogue with them, but that first meeting is about ‘so I will be coaching you in this strategy or I’ll be coming into your classroom, I’m the second teacher in the classroom, sometimes I’ll ask you if I can take over, sometimes I want you to watch me, we’ll co-teach, I’ll model lessons for you, anything you need.’ “

Changing jobs within the same school can also require clear communication about new roles.

“So since I was a literacy coach in this building prior, there was a shift of responsibility off of me and onto the MCL team. [The other English MCLs and I] just made sure that we clarified what was expected, who was in charge of what. We met as a team and we made sure that we understood who’s in charge of what type of curriculum decisions, who’s in charge of what kind of data decisions. **We make sure that we communicate regularly**; we share an office together so we communicate regularly.”—*MCL Sarah Skopolitis*

*** Organize team work process—how we work together**

- **Make team action plan and lead team to follow it**
- **Make schedules and agendas for collaboration**

Setting mutually agreed-upon norms can set the team off on the right foot.

“**Our first meeting together, we establish team norms and we follow a protocol around how to establish norms:** Everyone has a few minutes to brainstorm what norm is important to them, we create a list, everybody has to share, no one can be vetoed, and then, from that we narrow it down to build what are the key norms that would make our [team] successful.”—*MCL Adrienne Ciccarello*

Consistency helps teams run smoothly, with rubrics and protocols for meetings, collaboration, and coaching.

“Having the protocol and the expectations is really important because our meetings can’t be wasted time. I really don’t want us to be sitting and just chit-chatting for an hour whenever it could be more student-driven

or data-driven, because we’re not pushing students, and I don’t feel that if I did that I would have a sense of urgency. And so, for me, getting in and doing what we need to do and letting it out to do whatever you need to do after that really kind of says to my teachers, ‘your time is valuable and I’m only going to use what I need, so we’ll make the most of it while we’re in there,’ “ MCL Stacie Bunn says. “I think when we do that, I get more of a 100 percent ‘OK, I’m in, right here with you right now.’ So I think those **protocols are important because they know what they’re going to get from me when they walk in the room.**”

Trust and team norms allowed Russ Stanton’s team to air and resolve disagreements, too.

“When people know what to expect because someone has created a routine, is enforcing norms, and is maximizing their time, **you create a safe space for them**, and that’s important,” Stanton said. “When it’s a safe space, teachers will feel comfortable asking for help instead of wasting time on a technique that is likely to fail, or airing a complaint instead of harboring bad feelings that lead to dysfunctional groups.

“For example, we have elementary-school compartmentalization here—students switch classes in different subject areas. Recently, one student’s behavior was viewed as inappropriate by one teacher, but the same behavior was being rewarded in another teacher’s room. In the past, the teacher who felt she was experiencing problem behavior would have felt isolated. Now that teacher can express this concern during our weekly team meetings, and we can discuss that behavior together and come to an agreement that involves everyone’s cooperation.”

*** Select the right people for each role**

Whenever possible, **MCLs should be able to participate in hiring**, in part to understand from the start what weaknesses and strengths exist among team members. Knowing that can help in determining who fills what roles on the team.

“Being able to be in the hiring process now, you can let people know up front that these are the basic expectations as to what we’re looking for, whereas before, they might have been hired by a principal years ago who had a whole different set of ideals that you were kind of trying to fight through. **It’s a lot easier now that I get to hire my team.**”—*MCL Erin Burns*

At MCL Ashley Jackson’s school, a **rigorous, multistep hiring process** allowed interviewers to see firsthand how teacher candidates respond to feedback, and allowed an MCL participating in the process to spot each candidate’s strengths and potential. Top candidates came in to teach a sample lesson, receive feedback, and then go back to teach again. Jackson watched for how comfortably candidates accepted feedback, and whether they could work cooperatively with others—which, she said, can make or break a team.

“I give the candidate some sample data and see how they interact with the rest of my team in a discussion about what next steps to try,” she said. “This exercise can uncover a lot about this person’s potential fit! I also want to see if the candidate allows and encourages others on the team to contribute their analyses, and if the candidate offers a new perspective that the team is currently lacking.”

After hiring is done, MCL Adrienne Ciccarello spent time **learning as much as possible about how her team members work best.**

“At the beginning of the year, I met with each one of my teachers one-on-one to figure out what kind of coaching style works best for them,” Ciccarello said. “As a first-year teacher or even a second or third who haven’t had a coach before, they may not know and so, I did have a list of questions that I went through with them: How do you like to receive feedback; I gave them some scenarios—if I were in your classroom and there were these things happening, what would you want me to do? And so, we just walked through a bunch of different questions about my role and how we could work together.

“Some teachers like to receive immediate feedback by a sticky note on their keyboard; some teachers like me to come up to them and talk to them before I leave to get that confirmation that things are going well. Some teachers would rather an email so that they can get it later on. So just figuring out how they like to be communicated with, how they like to work with other people were some of the key things I did.”

Note: Some quotes have been edited for clarity and length.

Learn More: Watch the [Launch and Lead](#) videos.

Discussion Questions

1. Which actions in this element of leadership excellence are **strengths** for you or your team?
2. Which actions in this element of leadership excellence are **weaknesses** for you or your team? Think about actions you never take, fail to take as often as needed, or do not take as well as needed to achieve a strong teaching team and strong learning growth consistently.
3. What one to three specific changes will you or your team make to **use your strengths more** often or more consistently and **improve weaknesses** in the coming months?
4. Make a brief **action plan** with specific goals, roles, and time by which you will make specific changes!
5. Did your changes produce **better learning results**? If so, keep them. If not, think again about what other changes to make!

For more elements of instructional leadership and excellence, visit the [Instructional Leadership and Excellence webpages](#), which each have **video clips** of teacher-leaders who have achieved high-growth student learning; **discussion questions** or developing your team and yourself; **training links** for ongoing professional development; and other **developmental resources** including books, videos, articles, and tools

For more on an Opportunity Culture, visit OpportunityCulture.org.

We’re happy to hear your feedback on this element; **contact us!**

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