

Key Elements of Leadership Excellence for Multi-Classroom Leaders:

Support and Develop Individuals

Provide support and development to each educator, through co-planning, co-teaching or co-leading, modeling, observing and providing feedback, and coaching.

“I’m in it with them; their success is my success and their failure is my failure, so every day we are talking constantly in and out of classrooms. The teachers know that I am in it with them, so when they have a lesson that bombs, they don’t feel like they need to hide it from me. It’s more like, ‘that was terrible and how can I change it for the next block?’ That is, I think, that ongoing support.”—Multi-Classroom Leader Ellen Rayburn

No other word so defines an Opportunity Culture as “support.” Teachers cite the value of the routine, on-the-job support and development they receive from multi-classroom leaders (MCLs), making their jobs better and having a direct impact on students’ learning growth and development. Effective MCLs maintain a constant loop with their team of co-planning, co-teaching, modeling instruction and classroom management, observing and giving feedback, and other coaching, on a carefully crafted schedule that allows these actions to happen weekly, and often daily.

Supporting and developing individuals includes planning, communicating, executing, and improving these actions:

- * Co-plan
- * Co-teach, co-lead, or model for others:
 - o Great teaching
 - o Great leadership
- * Observe and give feedback
- * Coach

* Co-plan

For many multi-classroom leaders (MCLs), **co-planning is key to setting up the teaching team for success.** This holds especially true for teams without veteran teachers, but using the lesson-planning skills and knowledge of the MCL moves all teachers on the team—new and veteran—toward stronger student learning growth.

“The most valuable is co-planning. I think the goal of MCLs is to not do all the work, the goal of the MCL is to *guide* the work, and so I’ve made it a mission to have the teachers do the work. You do the thinking, you come with the resources, you come with the ideas, you come with the thoughts,” MCL Julie Hill said. “Therefore, then our discussion is richer, it’s not just me saying, “We’re going to do this, this, this, and this.” My job is in that discussion to push them forward—like, is this rigorous enough? Does this address the standard? Why are we doing this? I think there’s too many times that we read the standard and they just plan something

but have you at any time told the children why they’re learning what they’re learning? So I just sort of point out those types of things to the teachers just to deepen it a little bit more, but they own those plans, they’ve developed them, and then, they have buy-in.”

As a new MCL, Jacqueline Smith discovered a pitfall of doing the work for her team. Given the task by her principal of creating a pacing calendar, Smith spent many nights planning the calendar.

“I sat down [with the team] and I said, ‘Here you go, I did it for you, you should be so happy,’” but I quickly learned that that was probably not the best thing,” Smith said, laughing. “I thought I was helping the team by doing the work, but then I realized that we spent a good amount of our time talking about what objective they would have put and what objective they wouldn’t put on the pacing, so what I did this year was significantly different. We calendared out the weeks as a team and then, in our planning time, that’s when we actually talk about what are the actual strategies and the ways in which we would teach in order for students to master them.”

For MCL Lauren Woodworth, working with a team of all first- or second-year teachers, most of whom took a lateral-entry path into teaching, planning with her team removed some of the biggest stress the teachers faced. “I was a non-traditional teacher myself, so I knew where they were, and I could see the stress in their eyes and know I’ve been there, so this is what we can do to fix it.”

Especially with a team of new teachers, **MCLs may take over all of the lesson planning** for the year. Doing so ensures consistent teaching throughout the team's classrooms, consistent assessments, and allows teachers to focus their planning and collaboration time on practicing how to deliver lessons well.

When MCLs take over the planning, **paid summer planning time** becomes especially important, so that much if not all of the first months' lessons are prepared; this gives team teachers and MCLs time to review and practice lessons, tweaking as needed.

*** Co-teach, co-lead, or model for others:**

- Great teaching
- Great leadership

MCLs use a variety of methods to co-teach and model great instruction, emphasizing the value of the time to do so.

For MCL Karen von Klahr, **modeling a lesson allowed her new team teacher to watch excellent instruction** with one group of students, then deliver it to the next group using von Klahr's methods, with von Klahr available in the second block to co-teach as needed.

"I modeled classroom management as I moved students around the classroom, and showed quick ways to assess students' understanding. During the second block, the roles would reverse. At first it was easier for her to use some of my examples—sometimes nearly word for word—but in no time she was clearly comfortable sharing more of herself. Behavior management and procedures were smooth, and a community was forming in both blocks."—*MCL Karen von Klahr*

MCL Nicole Pries found similar reactions to her use of modeling. "The teachers that struggled really liked it when I would come and model, especially if **I could come model in first period and then they would have the rest of the day to implement the things that they saw** from me. That ended up being really good for us," Pries said.

She also made it possible for teachers to watch other teachers model a skill in which they excelled. "One teacher was working on pacing, and we were struggling on pacing for a long, long time and so, with these pacing issues came misbehavior issues, so that teacher and I went into another teacher's classroom because I knew that the other teacher was really, really good at that. And because we were already an established team, that wasn't threatening for anybody, and that ended up being a really good opportunity for the one teacher who was struggling to see someone else implementing that; I

think it was also really good that it wasn't just me doing it. And when we debriefed it became concrete for this teacher who had been struggling with that. The next time I go in, things are moving along quicker, the kids are paying more attention, and so, that clicked for him at that point."

*** Observe and give feedback; Coach**

Along with hiring teachers who are open to coaching and feedback, many MCLs say efforts **at the beginning of the year to create trusting team relationships sets a foundation for successful coaching cycles.**

"Relationships are so important—that's how you're going to coach people, because they have to trust you."—*MCL Jessica Smith*

Frequent, lower-stakes observation and feedback cycles have a direct effect on student learning, catching and fixing instructional mistakes before they take root.

"We have a very strong culture around observation and feedback. You don't want to wait for an entire week for a new coaching session or even a couple of weeks to give teachers feedback because, otherwise, if they weren't doing something quite right or you see an easy fix, that could be done within the next day," MCL Molly Whelan said. Along with regularly scheduled observations and feedback meetings, Whelan tries to add informal check-ins as well—"at the end of the day or planning, like, 'Hey, how's it going?' or 'Hey, I was in your classroom for 10 minutes, this is what was really good, what you might want to try for the next block is this." And that can be really powerful, too."

Smaller amounts of feedback at one time make a big difference in the effectiveness of coaching.

"We have a model based off of two pieces of information we give back. We give one on rigor and one on classroom management, and just one each time, so it's not overwhelming and something they can work on. We meet afterwards and debrief and talk about what they thought and what we thought and where they were and how they can improve."—*MCL Lance Kanter*

Many MCLs use **standard cycles for coaching**, often involving a meeting before an observation; the observation/co-teaching session; a feedback meeting; and a later observation to see how teachers followed through on the feedback. Schools with strong instructional leadership teams also use consistent methods and rubrics to document the observations.

Many schools use **videotaping to make their observations and feedback more reliable and useful.**

“We have used video coaching, which has been really powerful in making sure our classrooms are equitable and also, tweaking recurring issues that we may be seeing in the classroom. It really has been powerful to help teachers understand like, ‘You’re right, I *am* doing that. How can I fix it?’ ”—MCL Lauren Woodworth

“I as a coach have to record my coaching conversations with my teachers. When I go in for observations, I record what I see, so that I can watch that footage in order to really pinpoint the action step that needs to be addressed, and also, it’s a way for other teachers to see what’s happening and to name the gap that we’re going to discuss and create an action step around,” MCL Okema Owens Simpson said. “Sometimes the teachers choose to record themselves because they too see the benefit of watching and analyzing their own work and their own practice in order to get better. So video is what we do all in the spirit of getting better faster, and what better way to get better faster is you can see yourself doing the work and you can see immediately what changes need to be made in order to get better. So I might use a video of another teacher, a small segment of it during a coaching conversation so that that will serve as the model sometimes so that the teacher can see the gap.”

Finally, what comes out of the co-teaching, modeling, observations, and coaching cycles back to co-planning time, to adjust and improve instruction accordingly.

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

Learn More: Watch the [Support and Develop Individuals](#) 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 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** for 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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