

# DID YOU KNOW?

*Opportunity Culture*, a career ladder model for teachers, is expanding in North Carolina

## What is Opportunity Culture?

With a finite number of administrative positions limiting the upward career trajectories of teachers, many school districts and states are beginning to design paths that can provide highly-skilled, master teachers with opportunities to increase their responsibilities—and compensation—without leaving the classroom entirely.

The [Opportunity Culture](#) Model, developed by nonprofit organization [Public Impact](#), allows schools and districts to extend the reach of excellent teachers by asking them to lead teaching teams that work with larger numbers of students. Through this model, and others like it, states and districts can reward the very best teachers, provide professional development and coaching to teachers who need it, and drive improvement in student outcomes.



Principal Sarah Reeves of Shamrock Gardens Elementary School leads a discussion with visiting North Carolina legislators.

## Opportunity Culture is Guided by the Following Key Principles:

- **Teachers lead the way.** Each Opportunity Culture school creates a team of teachers who decide which aspects of the model fit their school best.
- **Many more students are reached with excellent teaching.** Excellent teachers—those who typically make about 1½ years of progress each year with their students—reach more students directly or by leading teaching teams.
- In most cases, **large, permanent pay supplements** are funded through reallocations of current school budgets, making the higher pay sustainable.
- **Teachers gain more protected, school-day planning and collaboration time**, achieved through careful scheduling, and clarity about how to use that time.
- **Accountability matches the responsibilities of each person.** Teachers can focus on their best subjects and roles, with accountability matching what they take on.

## Additionally, Opportunity Culture lays out Four Advanced Teaching Role Models Schools can Adopt: *(some schools may implement more than one model at a time)*

- **Multi-Classroom Leadership:** A master teacher leads a teaching team and is accountable for all students taught by the team.
- **Subject and Role Specialization:** A master teacher specializes in high-priority subjects and/or roles, with support from paraprofessionals.
- **Time-Technology Swaps:** Digital instruction allows excellent teachers to reach more students at one time. Students spend an hour a day (or more) using technology for learning—during this time they are supervised by a paraprofessional.
- **Class-Size Changes:** An excellent teacher chooses to teach larger classes (within limits).

In each of these models teachers agree to take on additional responsibility for additional pay and are empowered to choose which roles they would like to pursue. Teachers also receive training for their new roles during the summer before implementation, with multi-classroom leaders receiving additional professional development throughout the school year. Importantly, the Opportunity Culture model is flexible. In each school and district, teams of educators shape the advanced roles to meet the needs of their school community.

## Research and Results

Public Impact [reports](#) that **students in Opportunity Culture classrooms demonstrate more academic growth** than those in comparative non-Opportunity Culture classrooms. They also report a **high-level of teacher satisfaction** in schools that have adopted the model.

Public Impact also identified several **areas of improvement** for schools and districts implementing career ladders including:

- Teachers need additional planning time to learn and adapt to their roles.
- Principals and district leaders need support to successfully implement and maintain career ladders in their schools.
- State-wide teacher evaluation policies must be well-matched to teachers' new positions.
- Compensation for performing additional responsibilities should be a high priority for districts and states.

## Opportunity Culture Expands in North Carolina

The Opportunity Culture model began in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) in 2011, Originally funded by the public-private partnership [Project L.I.F.T.](#), the model was so successful that it has been expanded into a number of traditional public schools in the district. This year, almost half of CMS schools will be implementing Opportunity Culture.

The success of Opportunity Culture in Charlotte led to its implementation in Cabarrus County Schools beginning in 2014-15.

**During the 2017-18 academic year, the Opportunity Culture model will be expanding into six additional schools, three in Vance County and three in Edgecombe County.** Both counties are recipients of grant funds through the state's Teacher Compensation Models and Advanced Teaching Roles pilot grant program, created by [House Bill 1030/2016 Appropriations Act](#). The three-year pilot grant program allows selected schools to develop and implement advanced teaching roles and organizational models linking teacher performance and growth to salary increases.

Nationally, the Opportunity Culture model has been implemented in **Syracuse, Indianapolis, Atlanta, Phoenix, Nashville, and multiple school districts in Texas.**



Mr. Faulk, previously a 5th grade teacher, leads a kindergarten lesson on goal setting while receiving live coaching from a multi-classroom leader.



Principal Sarah Reeves speaks with North Carolina legislators on a tour of the school.

## Considerations for Policymakers

As policymakers consider how to implement advanced roles for teachers and/or performance-based compensation reform, they would be wise to consider the following key questions:

**Do state funding streams allow schools and districts to flexibly distribute financial resources to pay teachers more if they take on additional responsibility?**

### Policy Levers:

- Increase flexibility in the personnel allotment system to allow districts to hire paraprofessionals to support teachers who teach larger numbers of students.
- Increase flexibility within the statewide salary schedule to fund teacher salary supplements.

**Does our state have an accurate and reliable measure of student growth that can be linked to teacher performance?**

### Policy Lever:

- Ensure that student growth measures capture the impact of teachers on student performance. Then link advanced roles to the demonstration of consistently high student growth.

**Do state policies around class size and course scheduling inhibit the adoption of advanced teaching roles?**

### Policy Levers:

- Allow schools and districts to flexibly schedule course offerings to maximize the reach of our best teachers.
- Allow flexibility in class size requirements when the school or district demonstrates that such changes contribute to an overarching plan to reach more students with highly effective teachers.