

## **Issue 4 – Teachers: Leadership from the Classroom**

### **Issue Overview**

In school systems, the leadership role is paramount. Research has found that leadership disparities explain almost a quarter of the difference in student performance accounted for by schools. While traditional definitions of education leadership focus on school and district administrative positions, the role of the ‘teacher leader’ is gaining considerably more attention, focus, and significance.

### **Significance for Georgia**

Research has shown that engaging teachers as leaders can promote a culture of collective responsibility and shared accountability for school improvement in our most struggling schools. Teacher leadership can also provide a career ladder for teachers who want to stay in the classroom. Historically, career pathways for teachers involved leaving the classroom and taking on administrative roles within education. However, a national survey of teachers found that most teachers (69%) are not interested in becoming a principal - the traditional education career ladder. The same survey found one in four teachers were ‘extremely’ or ‘very interested’ in serving in a hybrid role where he or she can both teach students and lead educational reforms.

### **Action Steps for Georgia**

There are a few different opportunities for Georgia to enhance support for teacher leaders that were identified in the EdQuest Georgia baseline report. An urgent opportunity found in the best practice research was to recognize teachers as professionals. Professionalization includes how the profession is viewed, compensated, and mentored and supported for ongoing professional learning. Focusing on teacher leadership gives Georgia the opportunity to further professionalize the field, leading to the retention of higher quality teachers, which ultimately impacts outcomes for all students. Other urgent opportunities include examining teacher compensation and addressing teacher equity – both actions that will also further support teacher leaders and keeping great individuals in the teaching profession in Georgia.

Why now for teacher leadership? Increased rigor and accountability, new state and federal reforms, and more students living in poverty have significantly added to the responsibilities of school principals. At the same time, teachers are seeking opportunities to expand their roles while staying in the classroom and asking for more professionalization within their field. Supporting and expanding teacher leadership can help distribute the pressure on principals, provide teachers with meaningful opportunities, and positively impact overall student achievement.