
Learn by Doing, Lead by Example

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If the goal of educators is to support students to reach their potential, it starts with school-level leaders modeling this for staff. What happens when formal leaders help teachers reach their leadership potential?

One of the most challenging issues that educational leaders face is how to sustain leadership efficacy as people transition in and out of the school community. At Meadow Glen Middle School (MGMS), our foundation is rooted in collective leadership. Using structures embedded throughout the school, teachers and staff are empowered to lead from where they are, whether in the classroom, on the field, or alongside their peers. Each person feels not only that they are a part of the school community but also that they have a place in designing the culture of learning for our students. This provides ***all*** staff — from student teachers and first year teachers to veteran teachers who are new to the building — a voice in the design and decisions that drive the school year.

Teacher Perspective: From Parent to Teacher Leader

Eleven years ago, I was a parent of a rising sixth grader, halfway through the education program at the University of South Carolina, and volunteering with the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). Two years later I traded in my volunteer badge for a teacher's ID card at MGMS.

The first thing that stood out to me was all the other staff members who reached out to offer support to a new teacher, not to mention the meetings and discussions that helped me better understand school structures, expectations, and the common language of our school. The second thing I noticed was all the committees, groups, and projects that I was encouraged to be a part of from the moment I was hired. There was never a time when I was expected to just sit back and listen or that my opinion was ignored in favor of someone who had more experience.

When the school culture provides the opportunity for teachers to have a voice and opportunities to lead, it allows teachers to teach and take risks that help all students achieve.

I learned how to be a leader by doing just that — leading.

Because of the opportunities provided, I never questioned whether I should be a part of the conversation. Nine years later, I am completing my master's degree in educational leadership; serving on the Instructional Leadership Team and the Teacher Leadership Council at Central

Services; and supporting the implementation of our English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum, schoolwide initiatives, and professional learning.

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Administrator Perspective: From Classroom Teacher to Assistant Principal

When I interviewed for the assistant principal position, the principal, Dr. Bill Coon asked me, “What does collective leadership mean to you?”

I shared my thoughts with him based on limited experience but was truly able to experience collective leadership firsthand once I stepped into the role. I quickly recognized there were many structures in place to empower teachers: the structure of the building; the structure of grade level teams; and the structure and culture of [Crew](#), a class that empowers students and teachers to build strong relationships, provides students with an opportunity to have their voices heard, and celebrates students who exemplify our [Habits of Success](#).

While I am still developing my leadership style as an administrator, I aim to be visible and approachable to teachers. Visibility invites conversation with teachers to build rapport and understanding. Through these conversations, I have learned the power of providing opportunities for **all** stakeholders to have a voice in decision-making. Whether it is related to schedule changes or revisiting schoolwide expectations, our leadership team invites teachers to conversations to ensure their voices are heard. As I continue to grow in leadership, I prioritize teacher voices when making decisions. As decisions are made, our leadership team carries out the next steps while working alongside teacher leaders to aid in the process.

We believe that all problems have solutions and the answers to these problems are in the building.

While our roles in the building are different, we all serve a greater purpose: to ensure that teachers and students feel empowered.

From the administrator perspective, it is vital to create a foundation and structures for teachers to have a voice as well as opportunities to lead.

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From the teacher perspective, it is imperative that each teacher feels that their voice is respected and valued in every conversation. By seeking out the thoughts, feedback, and ideas of everyone in the building, from students to staff, all stakeholders feel empowered to use their voices to impact our school community and student learning.

When school level leaders create structures across the building that support teachers as they step into leadership roles, teachers then create similar structures for students to step into leadership roles both in and outside of the classroom. Ultimately, collective leadership creates a thriving learning community for all.

Author Bios:

Brian Lim is serving in his second year as Academic Dean of Meadow Glen Middle School. Prior to his role in administration, Brian was a high school math teacher and tennis coach at River Bluff High school. He earned his B.S. in Mathematics, master's in Teaching: Secondary Education, and M.Ed in Education Administration, all from the University of South Carolina.



Trudie Montgomery is in her ninth year of teaching English/Language Arts at Meadow Glen Middle School in Lexington School District One. She was honored to represent her school as their Teacher of the Year this year and was a Top Ten Finalist for the 2023 District Teacher of the Year. She earned her B.A. in Middle Level Education and will graduate with her M.A. in Education Administration in May 2023 from the University of South Carolina.

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