

OUR MISSION

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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AFT Teacher Leaders Program



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What is the AFT Teacher Leaders Program?

The AFT noticed the lack of teacher voice in education policy discussions in our country and decided to do something about it. Why weren't experts in the classroom being asked for their input on how to ensure that our children have the best opportunities to learn? To help address this question, the AFT designed the Teacher Leaders Program in 2011, based on Ellen Meyers' Teachers Network, to help prepare educators to facilitate discussion of the issues that affect our profession—both locally and nationally. Seventeen locals have participated in the program since its inception.

The Teacher Leaders Program identifies and brings together a select group of teachers and empowers them to assume active leadership roles in their schools, unions and communities. These teachers then serve as catalysts to build the profession and strengthen the union and its connection to the community in order to generate support and understanding of public schools. Teacher leaders will continue to use the skills they develop in the yearlong program throughout their careers.

What Do Teacher Leaders Do?

At 9 a.m. one Saturday each month during the school year, teachers across the country meet with their union colleagues to discuss current federal, state and local policy issues; talk about their personal action research projects; develop plans to build community support for their schools; network with local leaders; and share in camaraderie with like-minded teachers.

"Truly a great experience networking with other teachers and developing strategies to discuss topics that are relevant in education today."

—AFT Teacher Leader from Pittsburgh



Examples of AFT Teacher Leaders Projects Include:

Community Actions

- Working with students, school officials and the community to persuade a local school board to reconsider new building design plans;
- Uniting students, teachers and parents to fight the testing mania;
- Collaborating with a community agency to draw attention to the undertaxed properties on the city's tax rolls; and
- Serving as chapter leaders, delegates and building stewards; joining committees; and becoming more involved in the legislative work of teaching.

Connecting Research, Policy and Practice

- Putting into practice the Socratic seminar and creating a professional development module;
- Piloting a model classroom focused on inclusion for students with disabilities and English language learners; and
- Providing citywide professional development on working with ELLs.

Conducting Action Research

- Impact of physical activity on students' academic performance;
- Effect of summer break on at-risk pre-schoolers;
- Importance of professional development for teaching assistants; and
- Relationship between school culture and student behavior in an inclusive setting.

Mona Al-Hayani,
vice-president of the Toledo Federation of Teachers,
used the action research skills she developed through her year in the program to address the problem of human trafficking. She recognized a need and developed and delivered a districtwide practitioner training focused on awareness and mitigation of human trafficking.



Why Should Local Affiliates Participate?

Through the AFT Teacher Leaders Program, local affiliates have:

- Established relationships among teachers and policymakers, community organizations and community leaders;
- Developed an informed teacher voice to participate in both the local and national dialogue on education;
- Established a vehicle for positive messaging about public schools and their unions; and
- Created a pipeline for future school and union leaders.

“One of the most rewarding professional development experiences I’ve had as a teacher.”

—AFT Teacher Leader from
Washington (D.C.) Teachers’ Union

Participating teachers develop expertise in:

- Building a collaborative culture;
- Accessing, using and presenting relevant research that connects policy with practice;
- Becoming advocates for teachers, students and their families, and for public education; and
- Understanding policy issues and making recommendations to and through their unions.

The AFT Teacher Leaders Program is supported by the national union in a variety of ways: Participating locals receive orientation for the local’s president and facilitator; technical assistance and materials; stipends for participating teachers and facilitators; ongoing support; and access to a nationwide online community of teacher leaders from all locals engaged in this work.

How Does My Local Apply To Be a Teacher Leaders Program Site?

The program is open to all local AFT affiliates. Applications are accepted every spring, with orientation to follow in the summer.

For more information, contact
Marjorie Brown at mbrown@aft.org.

Be the next local to join this exciting program, which enlightens, informs, and develops teachers and other educators, and makes long-lasting and purposeful changes in school districts.

“I thank you for the opportunity to be part of an educational, enlightening and meaningful program. As a result, I feel empowered to do more and speak up for my profession.”

—AFT Teacher Leader from Toledo, Ohio