

5 Ways for Teachers to Make a District-Wide Impact

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Classroom teachers can either (1) wait for change, or (2) go out and contribute to it. I encourage teachers to choose the latter. In *most* districts (yes, there are exceptions), I don't think teachers realize how powerful their voices/actions can be. The majority of administrators with whom I have worked would love nothing more than for significant change to start with those who are in the trenches.

Based on my experiences as a former fourth grade teacher, here are five ways for teachers to make a district-wide impact:

1. **Exude contagious excitement:** Get genuinely excited about what you have to offer, which should come naturally if your ideas are valuable. This concept may sound simple, but if you are enthusiastic about the possibilities then others will be as well. If it is boring for the teacher it is boring for the students, *and* if it is boring for one teacher it is boring for other teachers. When I was in the classroom, I was able to impact students from across my district by actively talking about philosophies and resources with teachers and administrators while in the hallways, during staff outings, while at the gym, and even when attending weddings.
2. **"Use" your key players:** Just like administrators need to get the right people on board when promoting change, so do teachers. Short story: About a handful of

years ago, I came across [The Daily Five](#), a book/structure for balanced literacy. This was a resource from which I knew many of the students and teachers from my district could benefit. So, I made sure it found its way into the hands of one of the “strong voices” in my school, the Instructional Support Teacher (IST). Now, roughly five years later and two years after I have left the district, some form of *The Daily Five* is being implemented in almost every classroom across the district’s seven elementary schools.

3. **Contact administrators:** As a fourth grade teacher, I cannot even begin to tell you how many times I wrote an email to a central office administrator, but then decided not to hit send for fear of overstepping my boundaries and being “annoying.” I did not want to create this impression that I thought what I was doing was so *important* it warranted contacting my Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, etc... My advice, send those emails. There is a lot more to gain than to lose. Also, now that I am an administrator, if a teacher regularly contacts me I view it as ambition, not annoyance. After all, what you are doing *is important*.
4. **Seek external validation:** Presenting at conferences (and possibly winning an award or two) can assist in opening up doors for students. From a personal standpoint, some of my efforts directly contributed to my classroom’s transformation. In a district of ten schools, my students were the first to (1) be provided iPads, and (2) implement [BYOD](#) (Bring Your Own Device). In both areas, I was then granted opportunities to use our experiences as the basis for professional development for other teachers, both in and out of district. While some may view conference presentations and/or awards as self-serving, there are definitely ways to leverage these accomplishments to benefit countless students and teachers.
5. **Educate yourself:** For my first four years teaching fourth grade, I thought math was my “weakest subject.” So, one summer, I dedicated a great deal of my time to studying inquiry-based mathematics and the work of [John van De Walle](#). As a result, thereafter, my math classes/instruction looked *drastically different*, and I believe my students learned to truly *understand* and appreciate math. In addition, while serving on the district’s Math Curriculum Committee I found myself in a position to lead the planning and creation process for the Common Core Mathematics professional development across the elementary level. As I have said before, “Be the expert you’d want to have at your school...Go out and keep on educating yourself no matter what it takes!”

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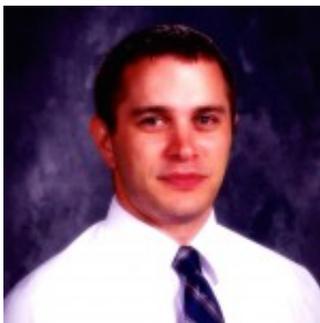
1. EXUDE CONTAGIOUS EXCITEMENT
2. “USE” YOUR KEY PLAYERS
3. CONTACT ADMINISTRATORS
4. SEEK EXTERNAL VALIDATION
5. EDUCATE YOURSELF

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Please keep in mind, these five approaches are what “worked” for me, and mileage may vary based on context. Nonetheless, I would be willing to bet these ideas could, at the very least, serve as a starting point for teachers in any district.

If you are a teacher, no matter where you are, I encourage you to do everything in your power to expand your reach. While the students in front of you are top priority, there is no reason why your entire district (and more) cannot benefit from what you have to offer.

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