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## How Are Teachers Leading Now? From Access to Activism: An Introduction to the Special Issue

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**How Are Teachers Leading Now? From Access to Activism:****An Introduction to the Special Issue****Abstract**

In this introduction to a special issue on teacher leadership (TL), the editors argue that recent attacks against antiracist teaching have influenced TL. Thus, we offer an overview of several issues these collected authors explore related to TL, including access to TL for teachers of color; advancing equity through leadership teams; self-care for teacher advocates; and TL as advocacy, activism, and antiracist work.

*Keywords:* urban education, teacher leadership, racism, critical race theory

**Introduction**

Over the last few years, the teaching profession has been under renewed attacks. Following other states in the country establishing legislation designed to prevent the teaching of race, racism, and Black history, in Virginia the newly elected governor banned critical race theory (CRT) in schools and then established a tip line for parents/guardians to report their child's teachers. In Florida, where anti-CRT legislation was also recently passed and an Advanced Placement course in African American studies was rejected, the governor signed the "Don't Say Gay" bill into law, which prevents educators from teaching about sexual orientation or gender identity in kindergarten through third grade.

These laws are particularly affecting urban schools, where most of the students are of color, and these laws are preventing students from learning about race, racism, and Black people's experiences in and contributions to this nation. All of this legislation comes amid a difficult time for teachers in which there are rising instances of verbal and physical attacks on teachers' lives. In light of this, leadership, particularly teacher leadership (TL), is needed more

than ever before. In order to unpack these assaults on the teaching profession, and in an effort to highlight teachers' leadership, professionalism, and activism while championing student learning in urban schools, we present this special issue on TL in difficult times.

TL has gained notable significance in educational research in urban schools (e.g., Scribner & Bradley-Levine, 2010), and it helps improve student learning (e.g., Ingersoll et al., 2017). Scholars working in the field of TL have identified five different waves of TL that have moved from formal roles (such as department chair) to a fifth wave of *teacherpreneurs* (Davis & Leon, 2009; Levin & Schrum, 2017), who teach in the classroom part-time while pursuing leadership roles outside of the classroom. Scholars have also suggested TL is still evolving and see leadership as an obligation to ensuring equity, social justice, and democracy (Bradley-Levine, 2018; Milner et al., 2015; Robinson & Ross-Baber, 2013; Smulyan, 2016). The authors in this special issue of *Urban Education* explore the different ways teachers, a significant number of whom work in urban schools, are leading during these difficult times and how they can be supported in these roles.

This special issue includes six articles and one book review. In the first, Beck, Hinton, Butler, and Wiens use a CRT lens to illuminate the role race and racism could play in determining who gets access to TL positions and how administrators and teachers characterize that access using liberal discourse and ideology. Wiens, Calkins, and Skousen use data from the American Teacher Panel to quantitatively explore Black, Indigenous, and People of Color's experiences with TL—specifically, principal leadership quality, teacher influence, and shared decision making. Berg and Parad advance a framework for instructional equity based upon CRT and their own experiences with Instructional Leadership Teams (ILTs).

Next, while sharing narratives from urban school-based practitioner projects, Rogers-Ard and Knaus introduce their applied CRT model and steps educational institutions can take to cultivate systemic antiracist approaches. Gabbadon and Brooks share three Black women's stories of teaching and leading in the midst of heightened sociopolitical tension. Bradley-Levine and Bender illustrate the pressures that critical teacher leaders faced during the COVID-19 pandemic and how they exercised self-care. The final contribution to the issue is Juergensen's review of *Promoting Teacher Advocacy as Critical Teacher Leadership* (Bradley-Levine, 2022).

Through this issue, we hope to present how current sociopolitical unrest shifts understandings and purposes of TL and its possibilities for improving student learning in urban schools. With challenge comes opportunity, and the authors in this special issue stress the importance of teachers' and administrators' understandings of TL to highlight the complex and ever-evolving purpose (and work) of TL and to illuminate the need for more teacher leaders of color.

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