

2024 Teacher Leadership Report

AMPLIFYING

Excellence




ARIZONA
K12 CENTER

FEATURING TEACHER LEADER SPOTLIGHTS:

ERIKA CHAPMAN, NBCT

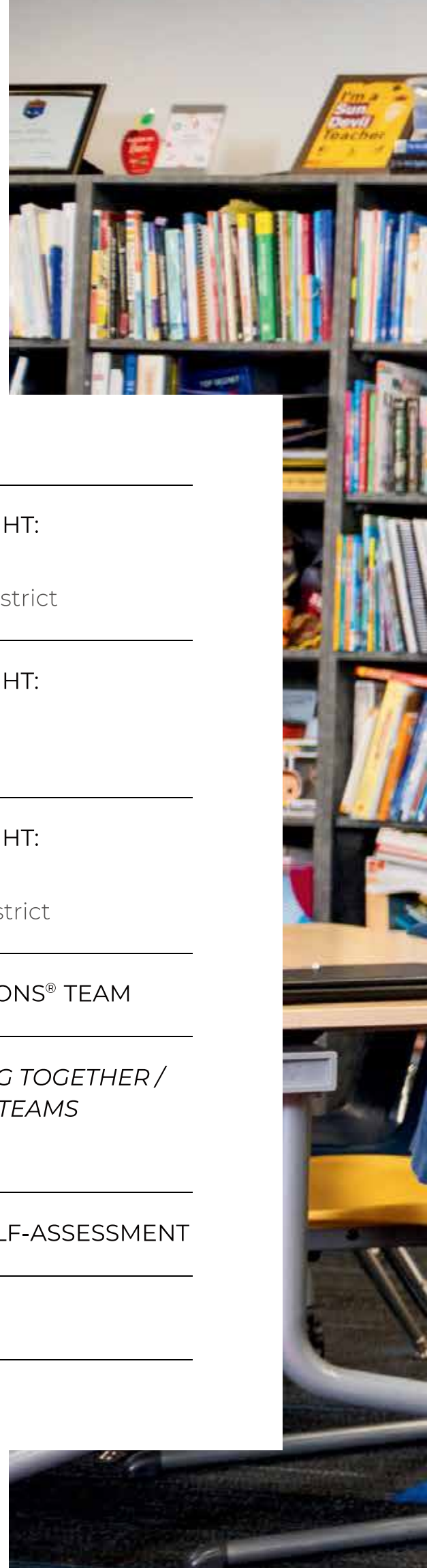
JESSIE MCKINLEY

REBECCA ORAVEC, NBCT



*“Successful teams are greater
than the sum of their parts.”
-Dr. Jill Harrison Berg*

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Rebecca Oravec, a National Board Certified Teacher in Sahuarita Unified School District, works with students to express their creative sides.

WELCOME

A warm welcome to the **19th Annual Teacher Leadership Institute: Amplifying Excellence!**

This year's theme was inspired by the exemplary practice and dedication you bring to your students and communities each day. We know you will find the learning at this year's Institute engaging, informative, and empowering, whether you are a teacher leading from the classroom working to advocate for your students or share best practices with your team; an instructional coach or mentor working to amplify the practice of your colleagues; or an administrator who works to create a system of excellence.

Our inspiring keynotes and facilitators will strengthen your practice by delving into subjects such as cognitive psychology, overcoming self-imposed barriers rooted in fear, and increasing collaboration between teacher leaders and administrators to create a shared vision of academic success. We believe that by fostering bravery, overcoming perfectionism, upgrading effective strategies, and fostering relationships, you will be able to extend your leadership potential and, ultimately, contribute to the success of every student.

Our hope is that you leave here with a renewed sense of purpose, understanding that your work and effort matter. Your voice matters. Your impact is woven into the past, present, and future of Arizona. Amplifying excellence isn't only done in one's individual practice, but in building a community and network of educators from across the state. It is not always easy to meet new people or learn new strategies, but approaching these new situations wondering, "What's the best that can happen?" can lead you down a path of leadership that the education world desperately needs.

We are excited to see what possibilities will unfold when you amplify your excellence.

TEACHER LEADER SPOTLIGHT

NADABURG UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Erika Chapman, NBCT



"This is my gift, and for the longest time, I never thought what I did was special. But it is special. How I make kids feel is special. I help them believe in themselves and see their value and worth."

When Erika Chapman student-taught in a special education resource setting at Nadaburg Elementary School, she knew she had found her career. From 2008 to 2022, she worked in Nadaburg as a self-contained classroom teacher of students with mild to moderate disabilities, shaping and supporting students from kindergarten through their high school graduations with her calm and caring approach.

“I have watched students start in kindergarten, grow and learn, and prepare to graduate this year as seniors at our first high school,” she shares. “I have stood by students who just can’t seem to find their way as they take responsibility and ownership for their actions. I mentor, guide, and empower my high school students to advocate for themselves, make good choices, and just know they are loved.”

“All of these students will be mine for life, and I will always be that teacher who loved them with no conditions—saw them when no one else did, heard them when no one else would listen.”



Chapman’s warm and caring demeanor characterizes both how she teaches students and how she relates with students’ families.

“At the heart of education is the basic human need of belonging, and that is where my passion lies,” she explains. “Relationships allow students to grow and thrive. When a classroom and/or school has a deep belief that all students can and will achieve, they will.”

While Chapman loves working with students, she’s also realized how much she loves supporting families... sitting across from a parent and reassuring them that things will be okay in difficult situations, that Nadaburg can support their child and they will progress together.

As a teacher, she also achieved National Board Certification in the area of exceptional needs specialist and earned a master’s degree in educational administration. After deciding she was not best suited for administration, she earned an education specialist degree in school psychology. The 2023–2024 school year was her first serving as Nadaburg’s school psychologist, though she also continued to teach in a special education self-contained classroom due to teacher shortages.

“When I work with teachers who have classroom management problems or students with difficult behaviors, we talk about relationships. We talk about helping them to feel seen and heard. We talk about strategies to use when there isn’t a natural, easy connection between the teacher and student. Relationships are intentional and take work that is consistent over time.”

This past school year, as a teacher, school psychologist, and the district special education coordinator, Chapman has been especially focused on student accommodations in the classroom and how to make the most of time with students. Through her time in education, she has learned how to approach hard questions and has seen how changes meant to help a few learners often actually benefit most.

“With my colleagues, I’ve learned that courageous conversations are at the heart of where change occurs,” Chapman says. “I’ve worked on and continue to perfect my ability to have tough conversations about changing flawed systems in classrooms when teachers typically want to talk about fixing kids.”

“I support teachers through gentle but courageous conversations that ask them to reflect on their practices and how they might make intentional shifts to support student achievement. I’ve also learned that these conversations must also be with administrators and leaders of the district, as change typically starts from the top.”

TEACHER LEADER SPOTLIGHT

MADISON SCHOOL DISTRICT

Dessie McKinley



"I hope [my students] have a love for technology like I have a love for technology, but also for the art of it too. There's some beauty in the creativity in programming and putting electronic components together and building something."



When Jessie McKinley was in sixth-grade band class at his Wisconsin school, he wrote on a form that he would like to play the drums or the flute—mostly because those were two instruments he knew how to spell, he notes. His teacher said the band had enough drummers and flutists but suggested he try the baritone euphonium, an instrument that looks similar to a tuba but with a sound more like a trombone.

“I loved it so much, and got very good at it,” McKinley explains. That teacher’s continued encouragement and attention launched McKinley’s interest in music and eventually led to him earning a degree in K-12 music education from Minnesota’s St. Cloud State University in 1999.

After teaching music for 17 years—the last 12 at Madison Camelview Elementary School—McKinley’s administration announced they would be introducing a STEAM focus and offering coding and computer science classes. Harboring an interest in science and computers since his school days and recently graduating with a second master’s degree (this one in curriculum and instruction with an emphasis on technology), he decided to step up to become the school’s STEAM specialist.

He spent his 18th year teaching music while also studying STEAM, attending trainings, and envisioning the school’s future STEAM programming.

Now, he confidently leads kindergarteners through directional coding activities, such as building robots that can drive a particular path, and older students through the engineering design process. He’s training teachers across the district, reviewing science curriculum, and serving as a K-8 representative for the Arizona chapter of the Computer Science Teachers Association. And he has earned multiple grants to advance STEAM offerings at Camelview, including building a makerspace/STEAM lab. With hands-on and learner-directed lessons, McKinley helps students and educators alike see themselves as engineers and scientists.

McKinley hopes his students develop an interest in technology and use those skills moving forward wherever they go. Maybe one will be the CEO of a technology mega-corporation. But he also emphasizes the importance of communication in STEAM.

I hope they are “successful in communicating with each other and that, even if they don’t agree with the way things are done, they have practiced those communication skills, agreeing to disagree or coming to a compromise, to collaborate, to listen to others’ stories, and seeing where they either have common ground or where they can find common ground and go from there.”

At times, McKinley questioned his decision to move from music education to STEAM.

“How am I going to do this as a music teacher?” he asked himself. “That’s kind of a lonely world. I had some imposter syndrome going on.” Colleagues coached and affirmed his leadership in this field with words of encouragement... ““Yes, you can do this. You belong here. You have the knowledge; you have the desire to learn.’ I’ll always be a lifelong learner.”

He also found parallels in the two fields, like how designing code for a computer can be like writing a piece of music.

“You start off with the idea, you brainstorm, you try something out. It doesn’t work? Go back to the drawing board. The engineering design process, the inventor cycle, and the creative process for creating compositions and performance all kind of have the same language.”

“That gave me more confidence and more of a boost to say, ‘Hey, I can do this. I just need to backfill what I don’t know, ask questions, listen to those experts, and apply what I’ve learned. That’s what’s brought me to where I am today.”

TEACHER LEADER SPOTLIGHT

SAHUARITA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Rebecca Oravec, NBCT



“My philosophy is that not every student will become an ‘artist’ in the practical or career sense, but every student has the ability to be a creative thinker and to learn to embrace their authentic identity and express themselves through art.”

Rebecca Oravec has always been crafty and a doodler, but after attending a year at the Pratt Institute in Utica, N.Y., she realized the studio fine arts weren't a fit for her. She then worked school-related jobs in Germany and Washington state, where her vision for her career became clear.

"I was happy making art on my own and found joy in it, but I knew that making art with children would be the dream," she says.

Oravec pursued a one-year alternative certification/master's program through Seattle Pacific University, then began teaching elementary fine arts. After her second year teaching in Washington, she applied and was hired at Wrightson Ridge K-8, a brand-new school in Sahuarita. Beginning in the fall of 2019, she built the art program from an empty classroom with little budget, through seasons of remote and hybrid learning, to today's culture that embraces art in her classes and includes a twice-weekly art club comprised of a quarter of the students on campus.

When she began teaching, Oravec wanted to encourage agency in her students, but now realizes she was more rigid and structured than she intended. "I thought that giving students voice was allowing them to choose their paint colors in the matching project they all completed on a curated timeline," she remembers.

After joining the CommunityShare Teacher Fellowship, a Tucson-area effort to get teachers involved in community-engaged, real-world learning, Oravec transformed as a teacher.

"I learned about authentic student voice, collaboration, nontraditional assessment, and the power of student agency," she says. "I wrapped my head around letting go of control and, slowly but surely, my classroom became a magical place of learning and empowerment for students."

Oravec has also begun a Sahuarita-based CommunityShare Teacher Fellowship and a National Board Certification cohort for Arizona art teachers.

That work faced some early challenges. In January 2022, Oravec was recovering from a recent bout with COVID and was still feeling weak to the point of needing to take a break to catch her breath and use an inhaler on stairs. She felt guilty about possibly missing out on the start of a new quarter, though, and pushed herself to be back at school.

"When I came back, I had lost my mojo." She describes how exhausted and tearful she was. "I loved my students, but I had no joy."

One day at lunch, a student showed Oravec a piece of artwork. Oravec thought she had communicated how much she liked the piece, but the student pounded her fist on the desk and exclaimed, "What's wrong with you?! You don't talk like you! You don't get excited about our work anymore! You're not even you!"

Oravec walked into her principal's office and broke down sobbing. Her principal was very supportive and encouraged her to take time at home to recover fully and to seek professional medical guidance. She took that advice and within a month, she felt herself again.

With all the time teachers and students spend together, "we become so intimately and acutely aware of what makes each other tick, what little changes in the face mean, the difference between a sigh of exhaustion and one of annoyance. If we are not our best selves for our students, we cannot truly be there for them, and so many of them desperately need us to be there."

Review Oravec's notes from any conference or workshop she attends and you'll find an interactive accordion book featuring watercolors, mosaics from magazine clips, ink illustrations, and pockets with removable notes.

She combines her interest in both art and brain science in the workshops she leads about accordion books. She explains how doodling can reveal subconscious thinking and how dual coding (taking information in both verbally and visually) helps the brain retain that information.

"I make these folded visual notebooks everywhere I go! They capture all of the learning, funny anecdotes, and special moments at the professional developments I attend. They also provide an outlet of art-making for me, a regulating activity that helps my brain stay focused on long days!"





Jessie McKinley created a hands-on curriculum that encourages his students at Madison Camelview Elementary School to see themselves as engineers and scientists.

ARIZONA TEACHERSOLUTIONS® TEAM

The Arizona TeacherSolutions Team consists of teacher leaders from across the state working together to identify problems of practice that impact systems in their classroom or community. They're a critical part of developing Teacher Leadership Institute each year! Interested in unlocking your leadership potential? We're looking for passionate Arizona educators like you to join our team of teacher leaders, building leadership capacity through collaboration and continuous improvement. As a TST member, you will:

- Grow through an inquiry cycle project
- Engage in whole-group studies of leadership books and content
- Impact colleagues from across the state at the annual Teacher Leadership Institute

2023-2024 ARIZONA TEACHERSOLUTIONS TEAM



Cathy Bailey-Bagby, NBCT
Lake Havasu Unified School District



Rebecca Brinkman, NBCT
Cartwright School District



Jaime Camero, NBCT
Flowing Wells
Unified School District



Hannah Carnahan, NBCT
Paradise Valley
Unified School District



Ashley Crose, NBCT
Scottsdale Unified School District



Tania Gray, NBCT
Lake Havasu Unified School District



Staci Hayes, NBCT
Maricopa Unified School District



Jessica Jaeger, NBCT
ASU Preparatory Academy



Katherine Larned Ortega
Flowing Wells
Unified School District



Kimberly May
Florence Unified School District



Megan Milmine
Phoenix Union High School District



Hannah Milne
Madison School District



Patricia Moore
Catalina Foothills
Unified School District



Patricia Perez, NBCT
Tucson Unified School District



Jessica Pio, NBCT
Mesa Public Schools



Jillian Powers, NBCT
Flowing Wells
Unified School District



Tracey Regan
Glendale Elementary School District



Erin Strong, NBCT
Phoenix Union High School District



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LEADING TOGETHER / THE INNER WORKINGS OF TEAMS

The sum of a successful team is greater than its parts.

By Dr. Jill Harrison Berg

It's easy for educators to feel overwhelmed today. We want each and every student to feel healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged. Yet the COVID-19 pandemic has not only made this goal feel more distant, it has also exposed upsetting race-based patterns in which students are not being reached. Many of the instructional practices we once relied on are outdated, and our school and district policies are in need of an overhaul.

These needed adjustments—most of which are underway—are for the better, but it's a lot of change at once, and change is hard, especially when the goalpost feels increasingly out of reach. It's enough to make educators exclaim, "I can't do this!" The truth is: You're right. You can't do this. But together we can.

Research on teachers' collective efficacy has long shown that where teachers believe in the difference they can make together, they succeed in making a difference together. They take the risks needed to meet the team's high expectations and support one another to meet them.

In fact, a Massachusetts study of teaming practices during the pandemic found that schools with strong teams pivoted quickly and successfully to online learning, while schools in which teachers worked in isolation simply were not structured to provide what teachers or students needed to thrive.

True teamwork, however, is much more than the absence of working in isolation, and a team is more than merely a group of people. A group becomes a team when its members share a vision for what they aim to accomplish together; trust one another enough to coordinate their efforts to achieve that vision; and develop a collective identity in which the sum is greater than its parts.

To be sure, doing these things effectively is easier said than done and requires strong structures and cultural norms for communication. But, when groups manage to become true teams, they can take on and achieve far more complex goals than individuals ever could alone.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICES FOR TEAMS

If you lead a grade-level, department, or schoolwide team, why not put it to the test? Engaging your colleagues in reflection about the team's vision, strengths, and identity can build solidarity and even a sense of pride in team membership.

To determine if your team has a shared vision, simply ask: If our work is successful, what will be true about our students' products and performances? About our professional practice? About our school? Take team meeting time to have everyone articulate a response to these questions in writing, and then compare the responses to evaluate the extent to which you are headed in the same direction. Operating under a shared vision is one thing; naming it explicitly is another. If there is misalignment, leave room for members to hear one another out. If there's near-alignment among members, discuss how the team's work fits within the school's larger vision.

An effective and efficient team maximizes the strengths of each member. Does your team know what everyone's strengths are? Ask each person to name an area of professional expertise or experience they have in relation to the team's work. If your team has been collaborating for some time, ask each member to also identify something they view as a strength of each teammate. We all have things we appreciate about one another's expertise; there's power in articulating these qualities. Be sure to capture these reflections as a resource you can return to later. Before you plan to repeat an activity in your team's repertoire (such as looking at student work, unit planning, or preparing to host a family event), reflect on your team's experience in light of this new information by considering how you have (or could have) utilized the team's strengths as assets.

Successful teams are greater than the sum of their parts. Over time, team members develop confidence in what they can accomplish together, and other educators in the building increasingly value what the team produces. How do faculty members refer to your team? Simply listen to them. If they're still thinking about Math Night as "Jill's event" or they refer to your meetings as "Jack's meeting," it's time to talk up the power of "we." Take the lead in offering the team (as a whole) specific praise about what you do well and offer

RELATED ARTICLE

gratitude for what you appreciate about participating in the team's work. Then encourage others to do the same. Use "we," use your team's name, give your team a nickname, create a symbol or even a special handshake. Over time, the team will take on its own identity and members will use the team's name with pride in all you have accomplished together.

NURTURING THE WORK

You've no doubt put time and attention into getting your teams off to a strong start. Now that the school year is underway, take stock of your team's inner workings and nurture its ability to accomplish more

than any one member could alone. By doing so, you will be creating conditions for your students—and your colleagues—to feel healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged.

END NOTES

1. Donohoo, J., Hattie, J., & Eells, R. (2018). The power of collective efficacy. *Educational Leadership*, 75(6), 40–44.
2. Johnson, S.M. (2021). Why teacher teams are more critical than ever. *Educational Leadership*, 79(1), 59–63.

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<https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/leading-together-the-inner-workings-of-teams>

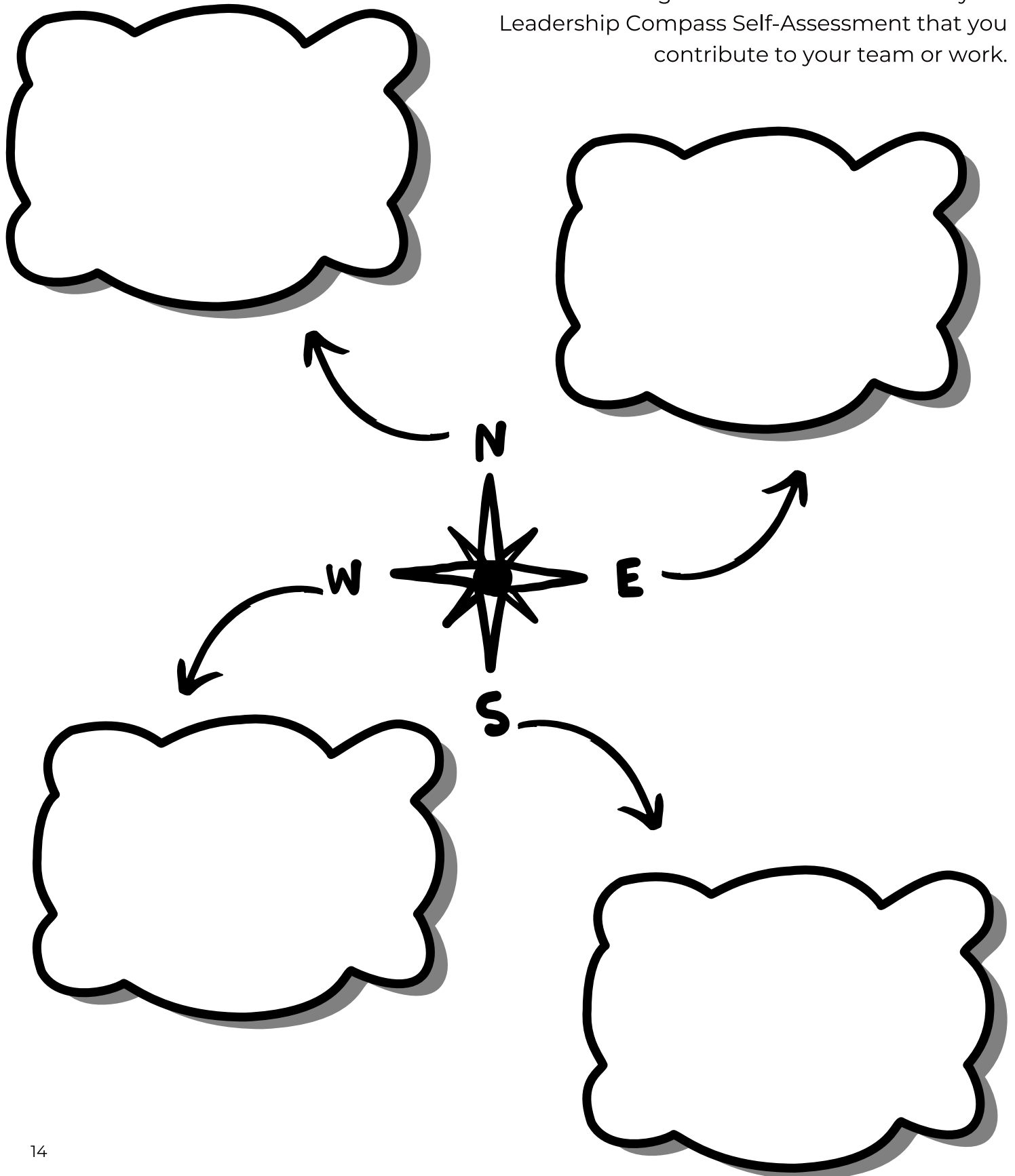


Erika Chapman, NBCT, works closely with her colleagues to amplify excellence across Nadaburg Unified School District as well as the state.

LEADERSHIP COMPASS SELF-ASSESSMENT

My Strengths

Select strengths from each direction of your Leadership Compass Self-Assessment that you contribute to your team or work.



NOTES

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



Thank you to this year's teacher leaders who allowed us to share their stories and expertise, and to their colleagues, schools, and districts for welcoming us into their spaces. Thank you to the Arizona TeacherSolutions Team for their work the past year envisioning and preparing for this stellar event.

We hope these teachers' accounts of passion, courage, selflessness, and resilience inspire you to take positive action to enhance your education communities.



We dedicate this publication to all of Arizona's educators. As teacher leaders, we salute your willingness to take risks for your students, colleagues, and the betterment of your community. You are cultivating a spirit of hope for the future of Arizona and our nation. The energy you exert and the time you dedicate to better our state's education systems are priceless.



Thank you!



*"The world needs your value."
-Michelle Peler*

Learn more about teacher leadership
at **AZK12.ORG**

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