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OU helps empower educators through national Teach to Lead initiative

Leaders in Oakland University's School of Education and Human Services (SEHS) are engaged in a national movement to help teachers revolutionize student learning by taking an active role in building- and district-level reform. The **Teach to Lead** initiative, created in 2014 by the United States Department of Education and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, is a grassroots effort to cultivate new ways for teachers to promote student success through leadership activity. The **Galileo Institute for Teacher Leadership** at Oakland is one of nearly 70 sponsor organizations that are helping teachers develop and lead innovative programs for students in their districts.

Cynthia Carver, associate professor of education, has helped coordinate Oakland's involvement with Teach to Lead. She explained that sponsorship does not involve financial support, but rather, allows Oakland faculty members to "serve as ambassadors and spread the word" about how teachers can become part of the Teach to Lead movement. OU leaders also provide support and technical assistance to local schools and districts interested in supporting and growing local capacity for teacher leadership. With the movement still in its infancy, Dr. Carver says that vital connections continue to be made.

Through the SEHS Galileo Institute for Teacher Leadership, Oakland is partnering with nearby Auburn Elementary School, in the Avondale School District. Over the past several months, Auburn teachers have attended two Teach to Lead summits, joining educators from around the country, to brainstorm ideas for enhancing student learning through teacher-led projects. Through these experiences, Auburn teachers developed a plan for expanding their Teacher Lab, a program that enables teachers to observe each other's teaching methods across a range of disciplines, including music and art. They are also in the midst of expanding their Earth Force program, which blends elementary education with civic engagement.

"In the Earth Force curriculum, students learn math, science, social studies and other disciplines by learning about their own communities," said Dr. Timothy Larrabee, the OU professor who oversees the program. "This is then tied to a community project chosen and led by the students. The teacher serves as a facilitator, providing access to resources the students need to learn about their communities and carry out their community improvement plans."

At Auburn Elementary, the Earth Force program has led to the installation of a bat house to control flying insect populations on the playground; newly painted restrooms and use policies to reduce noise and waste; a school-wide campaign to bring awareness to the school garden and the benefits of healthy eating, as well as a litter reduction program.

"Through these projects, students learn and utilize democratic decision-making strategies to reach consensus and move forward as a team," Dr. Larrabee said. "The elementary students are eager to meet with their OU Earth Force teachers each week, and the Auburn teachers are happy to see their students so actively engaged in their learning."

The Teach to Lead summits – three to date – have spawned hundreds of ideas for giving teachers a central role in providing student-focused learning opportunities. Organizers recently chose 10 ideas to represent the broad spectrum, including one from Marshall Middle School, in Marshall, Mich. With the help of representatives from the Avondale School District and Oakland's Galileo Institute, school officials refined their plan, which consists of creating data profiles of each student in order to identify and better meet the needs of the school's lowest performers.



Auburn Elementary teacher and OU alum Marcia Hudson coordinated Auburn's involvement with the Teach to Lead initiative.



Auburn Elementary teacher and OU alum Sarah Bruha is also active in Teach to Lead efforts.



From left: Cynthia Carver, Sarah Bruha, Timothy Larrabee and Auburn Elementary teacher Lori Sakalian at a Teach to Lead Summit in Denver.

“The Teach to Lead initiative empowers teachers to make schools more vibrant places for students and their teachers, which is at the heart of our work at the Galileo Institute for Teacher Leadership,” Dr. Carver said. “When teachers are encouraged and allowed to exercise leadership and influence, everyone wins.”

Learn more about programs in OU’s School of Education and Human Services at oakland.edu/sehs.