# Fostering Collective Teacher Efficacy: Three Enabling Conditions

# By Jenni Donohoo

## What Is the #1 Factor Influencing Student Achievement?–Collective Teacher Efficacy!

Amazing things happen when a school staff shares the belief that they are able to achieve collective goals and overcome challenges to impact student achievement. Recently, Professor John Hattie ranked collective teacher efficacy as the number *one* factor influencing student achievement (Hattie, 2016) based on a meta-analysis by Eells (2011). Collective teacher efficacy refers to the “collective self-perception that teachers in a given school make an educational difference to their students over and above the educational impact of their homes and communities” (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004, p. 190). Rachel Jean Eells’ (2011) meta-analysis demonstrated that collective efficacy and student achievement were strongly related with an effect size of 1.57. According to the Visible Learning Research (Hattie, 2012), this is more than double the effect size of feedback (0.75). Collective teacher efficacy is beyond three times more powerful and predictive than socio-economic status (0.52). It is also greater than three times more likely to influence student achievement than student motivation and concentration, persistence, and engagement (0.48).

Collective teacher efficacy, as an influence on student achievement, is a contribution that comes from the school—not the home and not the students themselves. According to the Visible Learning Research (Hattie, 2012), it is more than double the effect of prior achievement (0.65) and more than triple the effect of home environment (0.52) and parental involvement (0.49). This supports Bob Marzano’s (2003) conclusion, based on his analysis of research conducted over thirty-five years, that “schools that are highly effective produce results that almost entirely overcome the effects of student backgrounds” (p. 7). Research shows that at the school level, collective teacher efficacy beliefs contribute significantly to the school’s level of academic success.

## THREE CONDITIONS THAT ENABLE COLLECTIVE TEACHER EFFICACY TO FLOURISH

Perceptions of collective efficacy however, vary greatly among schools. Some staffs believe that through their collaborative efforts they can help students achieve in measurable ways, while others feel that they can do very little to impact student results. The adaptive challenge is in shifting the latter group’s beliefs. Although there is still much to be learned in regard to factors that contribute to collective efficacy, existing research provides guidance on three enabling conditions for collective teacher efficacy to flourish. While enabling conditions do not *cause* things to happen, they increase the likelihood that things will turn out as expected. Attending to these three enabling conditions will help in realizing the possibility of collective teacher efficacy in schools.

### #1. Advanced Teacher Influence

There is a *clear* and *strong* relationship between collective efficacy and the extent of teacher leadership in a school (Derrington & Angelle, 2013; Goddard, 2002; Knobloch, 2007). Advanced teacher influence involves teachers assuming specific leadership roles and, along with that, the power to make decisions on school-wide issues. Sherri Lewis (2009) suggested that “with more opportunity to participate in school decision-making, teams build more mastery experiences in this type of decision-making and experience social persuasion through colleagues’ feedback” (p. 72). In order to advance teacher influence, administrators can identify areas that might be considered for school improvement (e.g. school environment, delivery of curriculum, professional learning, collective efficacy, parental involvement, etc.) and begin to increase opportunities for teachers to become involved in meaningful ways. Providing teachers greater autonomy and influence over important decisions will help to build collective efficacy.

### #2. Goal Consensus

Having a clear set of goals is important to the success of any endeavor—including school improvement. Setting measurable and appropriately challenging school goals helps educators achieve purposeful results—especially when the staff reaches consensus on which goals to set. Terri Barber Kurz and Stephanie L. Knight (2003) found that consensus on school goals was a significant predictor of collective efficacy in their study which examined the relationship between the two. It takes a special skill set to lead a group in collaboratively developing, communicating, and gaining consensus on powerful goals that transform learning, teaching, and leading. Understanding why goal setting is important and having knowledge of how goal setting works is critical to the effective execution of this leadership practice. Viviane Robinson et al. (2009) identified three conditions that must be met in setting goals.

The conditions of effective goal setting required that:

1. the team had the capacity to meet the goals;
2. the goals were clear and specific; and
3. the staff was committed to the goals.

Leaders can help build collective efficacy by communicating a strong belief in the capacity of the staff to improve the quality of teaching and learning and attain appropriately challenging goals throughout the goal setting process. Acknowledge joint accomplishments and identify and celebrate small and large wins that have resulted from team work.

### #3. Responsiveness of Leadership

In schools where leaders act consistently with the principle that it is their responsibility to help others carry out their duties effectively, leaders are responsive and show concern and respect for their staff. Responsive leaders demonstrate an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and protect teachers from issues and influences that detract from their teaching time or focus. This includes providing teachers with materials and learning opportunities necessary for the successful execution of their job. When principals demonstrate the ability to respond to the needs of the staff, teachers feel supported and they have a greater belief in their collective ability to affect student outcomes. Staffs respond positively by working more diligently. Responsiveness requires awareness of situations – the details and undercurrents in the school. Is anything preventing the team from carrying out their duties effectively? If so, how can leaders respond to the situation in a way in which the team will feel supported?

## In Conclusion

If educators’ realities are filtered through the belief that they can do very little to influence student achievement, then it is very likely these beliefs will be manifested in their practice. Rather than leaving it to chance, it is timely and important to consider how collective efficacy beliefs may be fostered in schools and organizations. Three enabling conditions, identified from research on school characteristics associated with collective teacher efficacy, were outlined above. While there is no failsafe set of steps leaders can take, by attending to the enabling conditions, change leaders increase the likelihood that collective efficacy will be fostered. By strengthening collective teacher efficacy, teachers will develop the resolve to persist against challenges and realize increased student results. Given its effect on student learning and achievement, the importance of strengthening collective efficacy must not be understated or overlooked.

Dr. Jenni Donohoo is a best-selling Corwin author. In her latest book, entitled [*Collective Efficacy: How Educators’ Beliefs Impact Student Learning*](https://us.corwin.com/en-us/nam/collective-efficacy/book253572)she outlines additional enabling conditions along with leadership practices, professional learning designs and protocols for fostering collective efficacy in schools. This book will be available this fall.

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