Volume 9

Jan 2025

TeachBetter

Iransition to Leadership	
Message from the Editor	2
TeachBetter: In Review	3
It's Data Time!	4
Session 1: Rethinking leadership for international school teachers in China	6
Session 2: Mind the gap: developing and transitioning future leaders	9
Breaking the glass ceiling, one classroom at a time	12
Session 3: From classroom to staffroom: delivering impactful staff training	13
Navigating the middle: your journey to educational leadership	15
Session 4: Moving knowledge around: myths, opportunities, and barriers to education collaboration	18
Looking Forward	23



Message from the Editor

Joy Tao, Junior Consultant at Venture Education

Our recent "Transition to Leadership" workshop series has been a remarkable journey of collective learning and growth. As I reflect on our recent "Transition to Leadership" workshop series, I'm struck by how deeply the experience resonated with my own journey into leadership. Hosting my first online workshop series was, in itself, a lesson in leadership – from coordinating with our brilliant speakers to fostering meaningful discussions across digital spaces. This practical experience beautifully aligned with our workshop's theme, reminding us that leadership often begins long before we hold formal titles.

The path from classroom teaching to educational leadership represents one of the most significant transitions in an educator's career journey. Through four enriching sessions, we explored this transformation together, examining not just the evolving responsibilities, but the fundamental mindset shifts that shape effective educational leaders. I'm particularly grateful to our exceptional speakers – Dr. Adam Poole, Kevin Baker, Shane Leaning, and Dr. Paul Armstrong – whose diverse perspectives and deep expertise illuminated different facets of leadership, from everyday practices to strategic approaches.

What touched me most deeply was witnessing the vibrant energy our participating educators brought to each session. The thoughtful questions, passionate discussions, and genuine desire to grow reminded me that the warmth and dynamism we bring to our classrooms truly runs in our professional DNA. Your engagement transformed these online gatherings into a living laboratory of leadership in action.

In the pages that follow, you'll find detailed recaps from each of our inspiring speakers, fascinating data about leadership transitions in education, and some thoughtfully crafted articles on leadership. Whether you're contemplating your first leadership role or seeking to enhance your current practice, I hope these pieces will spark further reflection and conversation as you continue your leadership journey.

The path to educational leadership may be complex, but as our workshop series demonstrated, it's enriched by shared expertise and collaborative learning. Thank you for making this series not just educational, but transformative.







TeachBetter: In Review

November-December 2024, Venture hosted the eighth TeachBetter series, free online workshops for teachers in China.

This series we explored the mindset, strategies, and confidence for teacher's pivotal career leap to be a school leader.

Since the first series in October 2021, TeachBetter has featured topics such as Embedding Employability, Early Years, Confident Communication, Mental Health and Wellbeing, and now Transition to Leadership. With a total community of over 2,000 educators in China, we know that good quality professional development is in high demand. This series, we received great feedback for all four webinars, as the following:



Dr. Adam Poole, Assistant Professor, The Education University of Hong Kong

Rethinking leadership for international school teachers in China

Stepping into leadership roles can feel daunting for teachers. Drawing on his experience as a former international school educator in China and leadership expert, Adam tackles common hesitations, shares reasons to embrace the leap, and offers practical strategies for a successful transition. This session reimagines the concept of 'leadership' to resonate with the lived experiences of international school teachers and inspires a new understanding of career growth.



Shane Leaning, Organisational Coach

From classroom to staffroom: how to lead impactful staff training

Leadership roles go beyond teaching students they are also about inspiring and guiding adults. And transitioning into this role can be challenging. Shane Leaning's workshop aims to demystify the process. Learn how to adapt effective classroom techniques for adult learners, avoid common missteps, and deliver memorable staff training. Shane's session is created for educators ready to expand their impact beyond the classroom and lead transformative professional development that their colleagues will both enjoy and remember.



Kevin Baker, Director, American International School of Guangzhou

Mind the gap: developing and transitioning future leaders

Are you ready to cross the chasm? Are you equipped to bridge that gap? Kevin Baker unpacks the essential strategies to identify, nurture, and transition future leaders within schools. This session promises valuable insights and tools to transform your school's leadership landscape and equip you for the next generation of dynamic leadership.



The University of Manchester

Dr. Paul Armstrong, Reader in Education, University of Manchester

Moving knowledge around: myths, opportunities, and barriers to educational collaboration

Collaborative activities bring many possibilities and opportunities, but there are misconceptions surrounding this way of working. With his extensive research experience and knowledge, Dr. Paul Armstrong's session helps attendees to develop a broader and more nuanced understanding of the different ways in which collaboration in schools is understood, and enable participants to apply this knowledge practically.

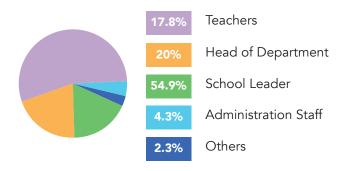
It's Data Time!

Data based on workshop attendance and participant surveys from January 2025.

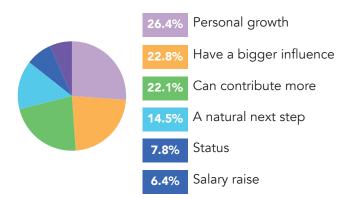
A glimpse into our educational leadership journey

Our workshop series brought together more than 400 dedicated educators, representing a beautiful tapestry of roles and experiences. Teachers formed the heart of our community, alongside department heads and school leaders – each bringing their unique lens to our shared learning journey.

Distribution of Attendee Roles



Overall Motivation Distribution



Building leadership together

From early-career enthusiasts to seasoned veterans, every experience level enriched our conversations. The strong presence of mid-career educators (6-15 years) particularly stood out, showing how classroom wisdom naturally evolves into leadership aspirations.

What moves us forward?

Here's what really touched our hearts: across all roles, personal growth emerged as the leading light (26%), closely followed by the desire to influence positive change in schools (23%). This tells us something beautiful about our education community – we're driven not just by career advancement, but by a genuine passion for making a difference.

What the numbers tell us

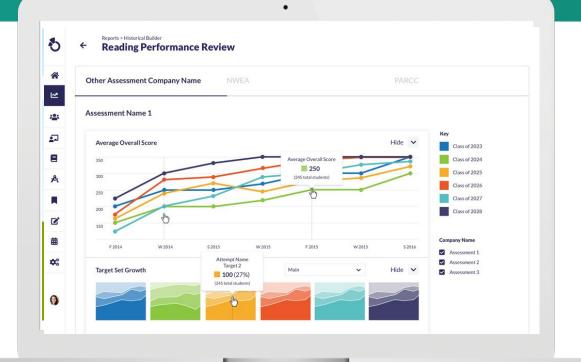
When we dig deeper into the data, some fascinating patterns emerge:

- **Teachers** in their growth phase (6-10 years) showed the strongest drive for **personal development**, making up nearly **30%** of all participants. Their enthusiasm often paired beautifully with a desire to influence school-wide decisions.
- **Department Heads** predominantly came from the 11-15 year experience band, bringing a perfect blend of classroom expertise and emerging leadership vision. They consistently emphasized wanting to **contribute more** to school leadership.
- **Current school leaders** with 15+ years of experience overwhelmingly cited "making a bigger impact" as their motivation, showing how leadership aspirations evolve from personal growth to **system-wide influence**.
- This beautiful progression reveals how our educators' aspirations mature alongside their experience – from seeking growth to creating lasting impact. It's a reminder that leadership in education is truly a journey of continuous learning and expanding circles of influence.

This data paints a picture of a profession that's alive with possibility, where educators at every level are united in their commitment to growth and positive change.

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Daniel Rosenberg Otus China Head







Session 1: Rethinking leadership for international school teachers in China

Speaker: Dr Adam Poole, Assistant Professor, The Education University of Hong Kong

Editor's note: Leadership in education often seems like a dramatic leap from teaching. Yet, as Dr. Adam Poole demonstrates, the transition is more evolutionary than revolutionary. Drawing from his research at The Education University of Hong Kong, Dr. Poole introduces the concept of 'everyday leadership' – a framework that helps bridge the perceived gap between teaching and formal leadership roles.

The social construction of leadership

The term 'leadership' often conjures images of prominent figures like Winston Churchill or Xi Jinping, making it seem distant and unattainable for the average individual. This perception is rooted in what can be called Big 'L' Leadership, which refers to the conventional view of leadership as a position of significant authority and influence.

However, there is also little 'l' leadership, or 'everyday leadership', which is more accessible and relevant to daily life. Everyday leadership involves:

- Engaging in leadership activities regularly.
- Facilitating the movement of a group toward a common goal or outcome.
- Practicing leadership skills in everyday situations.

Instead of viewing leadership as a large leap from teaching, it is more constructive to see it as a gradual transition. This perspective highlights that many of the skills required for Big 'L' Leadership are already being practiced on a smaller scale in everyday interactions.

Understanding leadership barriers

Despite the benefits of transitioning into leadership roles, many teachers are hesitant to do so due to various institutional and psychological factors.

Institutional factors

- Contractual Precarity: Teachers often face short-term contracts of 2 to 3 years, leading to high mobility and uncertainty.
- Institutional Structure: The leadership opportunities available depend on the school's structure, whether hierarchical or distributed.
- Educational Philosophies: Different approaches, such as student-centered or exam-oriented philosophies, can influence leadership roles.
- Policy Constraints: Some international schools have restrictions on leadership roles, with increasing national focus due to reforms in international schools in Mainland China.

Psychological factors

- Self-Perception Challenges: Teachers may struggle with their identity and how they perceive themselves in a leadership role.
- Psychological Barriers: Factors like imposter syndrome can prevent teachers from seeing themselves as capable leaders.

How can I transition into leadership roles?

Transitioning into leadership roles can seem daunting, but by employing effective strategies, individuals can overcome barriers and thrive in these positions. Here are some detailed approaches to facilitate this transition:

Create a leadership role that fits you

To ensure a successful transition into leadership, it is crucial to tailor roles to align with your personal strengths and interests:

Begin by evaluating your skills, passions, and values. Understanding what you excel at and what motivates you will help identify the types of leadership roles that suit you best. Look for opportunities within your organisation where you can apply your unique skills. This might involve proposing new initiatives or taking on projects that leverage your expertise. Be open to roles that might not be a perfect fit initially but offer potential for growth and alignment over time.

Scaffold yourself into leadership

Gradually increasing your responsibilities can help build the confidence and experience needed for leadership:

- Start by accepting small leadership tasks or projects (i.e., little leadership tasks), such as leading a committee or coordinating a specific event. These smaller roles provide a foundation for developing leadership skills.
- Regularly seek feedback from colleagues and supervisors to understand your strengths and areas for improvement.
- Seek out mentors who can provide advice and share their own leadership journeys. Learning from others' experiences can offer valuable insights and guidance.

Undertake professional development

Continuous learning and development are key to preparing for leadership roles:

- Consider enrolling in leadership courses or pursuing further education, such as a Master's in Educational Leadership, to deepen your understanding of leadership principles.
- Attend workshops and seminars focused on leadership skills, such as communication, decisionmaking, and conflict resolution.
- Take advantage of online resources, including webinars, podcasts, and articles, to stay updated on the latest leadership strategies and trends.

By implementing these strategies, you effectively transition into leadership roles, leveraging your strengths and building the necessary skills to lead successfully. This proactive approach will not only enhance personal growth but also contribute to the success of your organisation as a whole.



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Session 2: Mind the gap: developing and transitioning future leaders

Speaker: Kevin Baker, Director, American International School of Guangzhou

Editor's note: The landscape of educational leadership continues to evolve, demanding new competencies and approaches. Drawing from three decades of leadership experience in Asia, AISG Director Kevin Baker identifies critical elements for successful leadership transition.

In today's rapidly evolving educational landscape, leadership development has never been more crucial. With 15% of international school leaders forecasted to leave leadership in 2024, the need to cultivate future leaders is pressing. In Kevin's session, we explored this critical challenge and uncovered strategies for educators to develop their leadership potential.

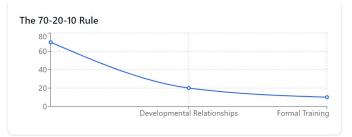
The leadership imperative in education

Research consistently shows that effective leadership is the second most significant schoolbased variable influencing student outcomes, following only classroom teaching. This underscores a vital truth: investing in leadership development isn't just about succession planning—it's about enhancing educational outcomes for all students.

However, our current leadership capacity faces significant challenges. Many schools report insufficient programmes for developing future leaders, with most staff rating their school's leadership development programs as only "somewhat effective." This gap presents both a challenge and an opportunity for educators aspiring to leadership roles.

Understanding the 70-20-10 rule: a framework for leadership growth

Kevin revealed a powerful framework that challenges traditional leadership notion that leadership development primarily occurs through



formal training and emphasised the importance of practical experience and mentorship.

- **70%** comes from challenging experiences and assignments
- 20% derives from developmental relationships
- stems from formal coursework and training



The transition journey

Leadership transition is both an external change and an internal journey. Studies show that 27-46% of new leaders struggle in their roles within the first two years, often due to inadequate transition support. Success in leadership transition requires careful attention to three phases:

1. Ending and letting go

- Acknowledging the completion of your current role
- Preparing for new responsibilities

2. The neutral zone

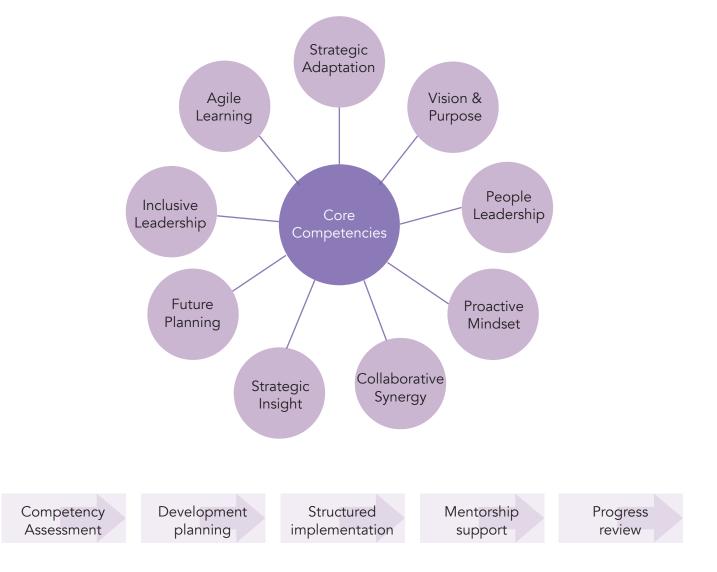
- Navigating the uncertainty between roles
- Building new skills and relationships

3. New beginning

- Establishing yourself in the leadership position
- Implementing your vision while respecting existing systems

For the transition, Kevin suggested 9 essential competencies and 5 development paths, shown as below:

Educational leadership: pathways to excellence



Practical Q&A from the workshop

On Starting Your Journey: Begin with informal conversations with mentors. Most development opportunities start through mentoring relationships.

On Taking Initiative: Show proactive engagement through networking and involvement in school initiatives.

On Leadership Presence: Develop emotional regulation skills to facilitate solution-focused discussions while managing personal responses.

Final thoughts

Leadership development is not a destination but a continuous journey. As we face increasing challenges in international education, the need for prepared, skilled leaders becomes ever more critical.

Remember: leaders are made, not born. Your leadership journey starts with intentional development and a commitment to growth.

Take the first step today by identifying one area where you can gain more leadership experience in your current role. The future of educational leadership begins with educators who are willing to step forward and develop themselves intentionally.



MORE About Kevin...

Coaching & Consulting on a limited basis in this area

Conducting Practitioner Research about Leadership Transitions – survey launch for Whitepaper forthcoming!

Please participate!

Reach out at: <u>kbaker@aisgz.org</u>



Breaking the glass ceiling, one classroom at a time

In the evolving landscape of education, we're witnessing a remarkable shift in how schools thrive under diverse leadership. Beyond traditional metrics and familiar statistics, research reveals compelling insights about the unique strengths women bring to educational leadership.

Do you know?

Cultivating connected communities

When we examine successful school environments, a pattern emerges: institutions led by women often excel at building robust community relationships. These leaders frequently pioneer innovative approaches to parent engagement, creating schools that function as true community hubs.

Innovation through inclusive leadership

- More diverse perspectives in curriculum development
- Creative solutions to institutional challenges
- Stronger teacher development programmes

Redefining professional growth

Schools under female leadership often report stronger teacher retention rates.

- Personalised professional development pathways
- Mentorship opportunities at all career stages

Through our research reviews and institutional observations, one thing becomes clear: when we embrace diverse leadership styles, our entire educational community benefits. The question isn't whether women make effective leaders—they demonstrably do—but how we can better support and amplify these transformative leadership approaches across all educational settings.

Breaking patterns: microactions for change

Every day presents opportunities to support women's leadership in education. Here are micro-actions that create macro-impact:

- Mentor a female colleague
- Share leadership resources
- Create informal networking spaces
- Amplify women's voices in meetings
- Celebrate small leadership wins

Leadership Laboratory

Try this: Shadow Mapping

You should always be proud of your own progress. Take a week to observe your own leadership moments, both big and small. Note when you:

- Made a decision that impacted others
- Supported a colleague's growth
- Challenged the status quo
- Advocated for change



Session 3: From classroom to staffroom: delivering impactful staff training

Speaker: Shane Leaning, Organisational Coach

Editor's note: The transition from teaching to leading professional development represents a crucial step in educational leadership. Drawing from extensive experience in international schools, Shane Leaning offers practical insights into creating transformative professional development experiences.

After years of leading professional development across international schools, I've learned that creating workshops that truly transform practice isn't about having the most innovative content—it's about how we deliver it.

Here are my top tips for making your staff training stick:

Master the Art of Cognitive Load I always start by breaking down complex topics into digestible chunks. Overwhelmi teachers with information is the quickest w to lose them. Instead, I structure my session carefully—introducing one concept at a tir and using strong visual anchors. Think of it teaching a new language: you start with ba	teachers. I always model the practice first, then move to small group work. tike
phrases before tackling complex grammar	
Turn ideas into action with WOOP	Follow through is everything

Have a go with one of the ideas above in your next workshop. Start small, be consistent, and always keep the focus on practical application.

As an organisational coach specialising in international education, Shane works with school leaders worldwide to create meaningful change. Connect with him at <u>shaneleaning.com</u>.

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Navigating the middle: your journey to educational leadership

The transition to leadership often begins in the middle - a critical yet frequently overlooked space in school hierarchies. While professional development often focuses on classroom teachers or senior leadership, the unique challenges and opportunities of middle leadership deserve special attention.

Classroom excellence as leadership foundation

"If people are part of a rich environment, then they can become better teachers. For me, it's about doing the job and learning from other teachers as opposed to theory and courses" – Head of Secondary History

As you transition to leadership, your classroom expertise becomes a powerful tool for mentoring others. Successful middle leaders understand that practical experience often resonates more deeply than theoretical frameworks alone.

Leadership Insight: Create opportunities for experiential learning within your department. Consider implementing peer observation programmes or collaborative planning sessions that showcase practical teaching strategies.

Cultivating collaborative leadership

"Top-down initiatives... means that we just keep telling teachers how to teach instead of skilling them to make judgements...and develop who they are as teachers" – Secondary Head of English

Emerging leaders often discover that genuine influence stems from collaboration rather than authority. Your role involves creating spaces for meaningful dialogue and shared decision-making.

Leadership Insight: Start building your collaborative leadership style early. Initiate professional learning communities or subject-specific working groups where colleagues can contribute their expertise.

Undertake professional development

"I don't feel like I have any real control over what I'm doing to train and develop other people" – Primary English Lead

The transition to leadership requires developing new skills, particularly in mentoring and developing others. This journey involves both acquiring mentorship capabilities and creating opportunities to practice them.

Leadership Insight: Seek out opportunities to mentor colleagues, even before formal leadership roles. Consider leading professional development sessions or supporting new teachers to build your mentorship toolkit.

Moving forward

As you progress in your leadership journey, remember that effective middle leaders serve as crucial bridges within their schools. They connect classroom realities with strategic vision, making them invaluable agents of positive change in educational communities.



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Session 4: Moving knowledge around: myths, opportunities, and barriers to education collaboration

Speaker: Dr Paul Armstrong, Reader in Education, The University of Manchester

Editor's note: Understanding collaboration is essential for emerging educational leaders. As Dr. Armstrong explains, while collaboration has become a pervasive term in education, its effective implementation requires deeper understanding and intentional practice.

Collaboration has become a catch all term that is used unproblematically in education discourse. According to Keast and Mandel (2012): "collaboration has become so pervasive that it is now an elastic term referring generally to any form of 'working together'" (p.9). If we are to fully harness the potential of collaborative working in schools and educational organisations it is important to understand what the term actually means in definition and in practice and this also includes understand its limitations as well as its potential.

Defining collaboration

There are a range of different ways of understanding the notion of collaboration. It is a slippery concept that means slightly different things to different people:

- 'The situation of two or more people working together to create or achieve the same thing' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024)
- Shared responsibility and decision-making on common practices; collective problemsolving/joint method; aligned goals and concept of collaboration; group cohesion (Meirink et al, 2010)
- Working together; towards a common goal; pooling knowledge; problem solving; coconstruction (Lofthouse & Thomas, 2017)
- Shared dialogue, expertise, leadership, learning and design process (Magolda, 2001)
- Everyday, continuous cycle of collective professional teacher dialogue, decisionmaking, action taking, and evaluation; datainformed problem-solving (Woodland et al, 213)

Chapman (2019) talks about an escalator of collaborative endeavour. As groups of people travel up this escalator they progressively become more embedded in their collaborative activity:

1. Association

Traditional hierarchical working interspersed with incidental meetings and with little sharing of knowledge.

2. Cooperation

Short-term activity around specific issues with some superficial knowledge exchange. Task focused.

3. Collaboration

Sustainable joint activity becomes with the emergence of common goals, shared values and the potential to develop new ways of working.

4. Collegiality

emergence of longer-term commitments to the partnership underpinned by strategic goals and objectives, common values and a focus on shared knowledge, resource and practice development.

Collaboration: some myths

- Teams should always get along, conflict is bad
- You can never have enough collaboration
- Teamwork can compensate for gaps in capability
- Collaboration does not involve leaders/leading/ leadership
- Collaboration is straightforward

Collaboration: some barriers

There are a number of barriers to collaboration including contrived collegiality (or forced collaboration), perceived power imbalances between individuals or groups, the additional workload associated with the collaborative activity and difficulties in establishing shared objectives and common goals.

However, if organisations can establish the optimum conditions for collaboration this can bring about opportunities including:

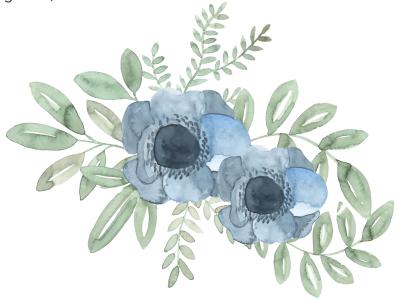
- Inclusive Learning: Collaborative teaching brings together educators with diverse experiences and knowledge.
- Professional Growth and Development: Educators learn from each other, share best practices, and gain new perspectives, expertise and experiences
- Problem-Solving: The development of innovative solutions through teamwork and collective discussion
- Strengthened School Culture: Collaboration between educators can create a more positive and supporting school culture
- Critical friendship: Conflict/debate can be a source of learning, growth, and innovation.

Moving knowledge around

Schools and educational organisations often 'know more than they use'. That is to say there are vast pools of expertise and knowledge that exist within classrooms, schools and education systems and so finding ways to capitalise on this untapped potential for self-improvement is important.

Collaborative working can help here for example through the development of networks (e.g. between educators themselves and/or other actors such as researchers or policymakers) to support schools to make better use of their existing expertise.

The role of leaders should not be understated in all of this. Educational leaders also have a key role in creating the organisational climate that encourages knowledge mobilisation within, between and beyond schools





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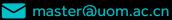
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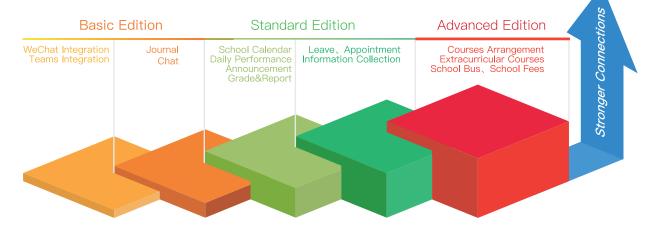


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Looking Forward: Expanding Our Teaching Excellence

The conversations and connections forged during our leadership series remind us that meaningful educational change happens through continuous learning and shared expertise. As we build on this momentum, we're excited to announce our next focus: Effective Teaching.

Watch for our upcoming messages with registration details and speaker announcements. Your engagement continues to make TeachBetter a vibrant space for professional growth and educational excellence.

Any questions please reach out to joytao@ventureeducation.org





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