



Guidance on Establishing and Strengthening Teacher Leadership in New York State

Authors: New York State Professional Standards and Practices Board for Teaching. The New York State Professional Standards and Practices Board for Teaching (<http://www.highered.nysed.gov/kiap/standardboard/standardboardmain.html>) is a 31 member board that serves in an advisory capacity to the Board of Regents and the Commissioner of Education on matters related to teaching in New York State. The Board is composed of K-12 teachers and administrators, higher education representatives, public representatives, and one teacher education student.

I. Preamble

The purpose of this guidance document is to provide schools, school districts, and teacher and educational leader preparation programs a resource to navigate a complex pathway to develop, refine, and/or implement a robust and successful P-12 teacher leader program. Four key areas are addressed in this guidance document:

- New York State Teacher Leader Frameworks
- Developing and Strengthening a Teacher Leader Program
- Teacher Leader Vignettes for school level conversations on teacher leadership
- Research and Resources

Teacher leadership matters. Teacher leaders transform schools through shared responsibility for curriculum, instruction, assessment, and policy decision making. They motivate, inspire and support colleagues and administrators; create a positive learning environment for all students; and craft thoughtful messages for their schools, communities, and profession. By leading educational efforts, teacher leaders are essential for preparing students who are able and willing to contribute to a democratic society.

Teacher leadership is not a new phenomenon, and has been advanced as a key component of successful school reform and the professionalization of teaching. A growing number of effective teachers—the single most significant factor affecting student achievement—are assuming formal and informal leadership roles both inside and outside of the classroom. Based on local context and specific needs, stakeholders collaborate to create teacher leader roles and responsibilities that improve instructional practice. These roles may include (but are not limited to) instructional/data coaches, mentors, grant coordinators, action researchers, peer-assistance reviewers, and/or literacy coordinators with a range of responsibilities (e.g., grant writing, professional development provider).

Research and evidence-based practice increasingly point to teacher leadership as a viable strategy for addressing the complex nature of schools. It requires an on-going collaborative process to engage teachers more fully in applying their expertise to strengthen the profession and increase student success (Aspen Institute, 2014; Bond &

Expanding Expertise

Statement: The teacher leader has expertise with specific content and pedagogy that continues to be informed by new research and practice. The teacher leader both participates in and facilitates professional learning that promotes reflective practice and growth.

Teacher leaders:

- demonstrate and use expertise in specific content area(s) and pedagogical practices to develop strategies and innovative practices;
- access, discuss, and use relevant research findings for continuous improvement of practice;
- participate in professional networks and associations (local, regional, state, national);
- initiate, develop, and facilitate continuous professional learning for self and others;
- embed adult learning theory and practices in professional learning opportunities;
- analyze and reflect to initiate and promote self-directed learning and seek growth in self and others;
- seek feedback from other experts and respond to suggestions; and
- use expertise to assemble and discuss resources, data, and research to inform decision making processes.

Systems Thinking

Statement: The teacher leader understands the complexity and interconnectedness of the P-20 systems in which they work across local, regional, state, and national contexts. The teacher leader uses this knowledge and their own expertise to promote improvement of the system to improve student learning.

Teacher leaders:

- understand, promote, and contribute to the strategic plan and vision of the systems in which they lead to develop shared commitments, goals, and action plans;
- engage diverse and multiple P-20 stakeholders, through a consensus building process, to identify, clarify, and leverage connections to the larger community;
- reconsider IHE representation in steps of the strategic planning process, from vision setting and gap analyses to goals and objectives;
- lead continuous improvement of systems through understanding change theories, data usage, reflection, and respect for the social-emotional needs of stakeholders;
- advocate for and within systems to address policy, planning, and resource distribution; and
- identify and act on high impact leverage points such as fostering agency in others, personal accountability, and responsibility.

Leadership

Statement: The teacher leader understands the underlying principles, theories, and skills of leadership. The teacher leader brings that knowledge to their role to inform continuous improvement.

Teacher leaders:

- understand the role of leadership within their systems, and work in concert with colleagues toward a common vision;
- share responsibility to build teacher confidence and ownership by supporting, developing, and nurturing the agency of others;
- establish and foster professional cultures of trust, responsible risk taking, collaboration, ethical decision making, personal accountability, and respect for diversity; and
- incorporate reflection, modeling, effective communication, mentoring, coaching, conflict management, and facilitation skills in their teacher-leadership roles.

A Note about Process: *To create the Teacher Leadership Framework, the PSPB Professional Practices Sub-Committee (which includes IHE, P-12, and community membership) began with a survey of comparative works. This included the Teacher Leadership Skills Framework from the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession, Teacher Leader Model Standards from the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, the Kentucky Teacher Leadership Framework, the Teacher Leadership Competencies, the International Literacy Association Standards for Specialized Literacy Professionals, and NYSED Part 52.21 Requirements for Programs that Prepare Educational Leaders. See the “Teacher Leadership Framework Domain Resources” list below for links to these websites. The subcommittee identified and grouped big ideas from all works based on similarity. Some ideas were identified as major sections for the framework, others were used as threads cutting across many sections, and remaining ideas were organized as sub sections. The final organization resulted in five categories: Expanding Expertise, Systems Thinking, Collaboration, Advocacy, and Leadership. Team members developed categories and descriptions to be illustrative and inclusive of a variety of approaches to teacher leadership.*

III. Developing and Strengthening a Teacher Leader Program

Research and experience from teacher leader initiatives across the nation identify important components in collaboratively designing a teacher leadership program:

[See Appendix A: Establishing a District Teacher Leader Program for guiding questions.]

1. Identify and engage stakeholders to create a collaborative P-20 partnership to design, sustain and develop the teacher leadership program.
2. Develop a common understanding, purpose, and philosophy of teacher leadership anchored in research.
3. Use multiple assessment methods and data sources to analyze teacher, student, principal, system, and community needs and, where appropriate, develop a strategic plan.
4. Identify and describe clear roles and responsibilities aligned to the needs assessment, strategic plan, and local context.
5. Provide differentiated professional development to prepare and support confident teacher leaders' general knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for specialized roles and responsibilities.
6. Collaborate with leadership teams, including union representatives, to determine conditions, compensation, and/or incentives to support various teacher leader roles while considering a manageable workload, responsibilities and expectations.
7. Develop and negotiate selection criteria and process to match the function and role of the teacher leader.
8. Establish program evaluation and performance management to ensure effective use of resources to meet priorities. Provide ongoing support and redesign the program as needed.

IV. Vignettes:

The following vignettes are provided to support and facilitate school level conversations on teacher leadership.

<p style="text-align: center;">SCENARIO 1</p> <p>A large city school district was having difficulties providing high quality teacher professional development and retaining new hires. This issue became particularly difficult under the change in APPR and the evaluation process. To reduce these problems, the school district and union leadership established a district wide Peer Assistance and Review program which identified teacher leaders in roles as peer reviewers and panel members to provide support and mentoring for new and non-tenured faculty, and to make recommendations to the Superintendent on employment.</p> <p>Peer reviewers need strong interpersonal skills, a keen understanding of adult learning, an anchor in recognizing good or accomplished teaching practice, and confidence to provide constructive criticism. Panel members need to think critically, feel comfortable speaking their opinion openly around other teachers and administrators, and must be able to contribute to decisions around another teacher's employment.</p> <p>Peer reviewers are often faced with negative opinions from some of the new teachers, who feel they are being too critical.</p>	<p>Another issue is some veteran teachers dismiss peer reviewers as just evaluators, and give the new teacher the counterproductive advice of putting on a show for their observations rather than seeing an opportunity to improve instructional practice.</p> <p>The Peer Assistance and Review program, which has been running for six years, has been so successful the district has added more Peer reviewer roles. This has come with the realization, on the part of the peer reviewers, that adult learning theory and highly effective teaching strategies are essential areas of the work and require specific training for this teacher leadership role.</p> <p>The district collected evidence via surveys of new hires that clearly demonstrates how peer reviewers have improved teacher professional development. Collected evidence also displays that fledgling teachers have moved to effective in a short period of time. This program provides further essential evidence of teacher's practice for tenure decisions with the knowledge that the district provided support and opportunity for improvement.</p> <p><i>(Expanding Expertise; Collaboration; Leadership)</i></p>
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Questions to Consider for Scenario 1

1. What are the assumptions about these roles to which the stakeholders agree?
2. Who are the most appropriate representatives to engage in developing or strengthening the teacher leadership efforts within this district?
3. How do we communicate the purpose, goals, and roles of the teacher leaders to the school community to avoid a negative lens?
4. How does the current school system, structure, and culture contribute to and interfere with the success of teacher leadership roles? What needs to change to increase the viability of teacher leadership roles?

SCENARIO 2

A small, rural, agricultural district faced a lack of teacher leader roles that could potentially have an impact on instructional practice. Faculty often worked in isolation, and teachers did not feel comfortable visiting other classrooms or sharing best practices. Professional development was mostly done off site, with teachers attending workshops or conferences. During Race to the Top funding, the district applied for a Strengthening Teacher and Leader Development grant to create eight teacher leader positions to develop and lead in-district professional development opportunities.

A collaborative group of administrators, teachers, and union leadership created the teacher leader positions, identified as Professional Support Providers (PSPs), and defined the PSP roles and responsibilities. The panel determined PSPs need to be respected by their peers, and established a selection process to foster such trust. The group also identified areas of training for the new teacher leader roles in partnership with an Institute of Higher Education, establishing a P-20 partnership.

The open nomination selection process and panel review of nominees produced PSPs that began with buy-in and credibility from colleagues and peers. PSPs

responded to the data and results collected in a district wide Needs Assessment survey to design after school workshop sessions on relevant topics. PSPs teamed up in sets of two, making sure each workshop had one PSP from both high school and elementary levels. They found this format opened conversation across content areas and grade levels, allowing for sharing of ideas and deeper discussions on various topics.

The PSPs and district collected evidence and assessed the success of workshop offerings through attendance and participant surveys. To reach more teachers, the PSPs created a new offering called “Milk and Cookies” a less formally structured sharing of best practices, around a specific topic, by participants and facilitated, rather than led, by PSPs. Surveys and subsequent needs assessments were used to identify future topics of interest and teacher identified areas of need for workshop offerings or Milk and Cookies topics.

During the second round of STLE grants the district extended this process into new roles for teacher leaders, including Peer Reviewers and cooperating teachers for Master’s level teacher candidates.

(Expanding Expertise; Collaboration; Leadership)

Questions to Consider for Scenario 2

1. How does the current school system, school structures, and school culture contribute to and interfere with the success of these teacher leadership roles?
2. What are the best ways to engage teachers in generating strategies and tactics for addressing challenges within the school or school system?
3. How important is autonomy for the success of a teacher leader program? How can the system support this autonomy?
4. What is the role of teacher leader analysis, reflection, and self-generated feedback in assessment and evaluation of the impact of their work?

SCENARIO 3

A K-6 school in a large urban community has faced difficulties establishing effective lines of communication between cooperating teachers, teacher preparation candidates, and the Institute of Higher Education. Too often, the IHE placed teacher candidates in classrooms with little or no communication with teachers, and no systems in place for support. To address this need, the IHE and school district appointed a teacher leader point person role (Curriculum and Field Study Coordinator). This role covered two major areas: curriculum coordination and integration, and field study coordination and course instruction. This unique role required the teacher leader to navigate the varied responsibilities within and between the P-12 setting and the IHE.

The first priority of the Curriculum and Field Study Coordinator was to collaborate with teachers to review curriculum maps and day-to-day instruction. The teacher leader coached teachers in the areas of reading, writing, and social studies instructional practice; and provided ongoing job-embedded professional development in the areas of literacy and social studies. In addition, the teacher leader supported cooperating teachers in data collection, analysis, and instructional decisions to improve instructional practice.

The teacher leader initiated communications with IHE to bridge the connection with higher education and the partnering teacher preparation program.

The field study coordination and course instruction responsibilities included placing teacher preparation candidates with cooperating teachers, meeting with teachers to set expectations, and providing ongoing communications with teachers, teacher preparation candidates, and the college field placement office. In addition, this teacher leader built connections by being both a faculty member and teacher leader in the P-12 school community. She served as an adjunct professor at the higher ed institution, teaching undergraduate and graduate literacy courses and supervising student teaching and practicum placements.

The creation of these roles has clearly defined the commitment to both the P-20 learning continuum and reciprocal relationship between P-12 and higher education. This role requires deep understanding of theory, research, and practice. This process has optimized the support for school based teacher educators, and enhanced the theory of practice connections teacher candidates experience in site school classrooms.

(Expanding Expertise; Collaboration; Leadership; Systems Thinking)

Questions to Consider for Scenario 3

1. What are the benefits and challenges to P-20 roles and responsibilities for a teacher leader?
2. What could be identified as indicators of success for teacher leadership roles?
3. How will teacher leaders be evaluated? Who is responsible for evaluating teacher leaders?
4. How might data be used to inform the evaluation of teacher leadership and teacher leaders?
5. How do teacher leaders use data about the impact of their work to refine their practice and its impact?

References

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Appendix A: Establishing a District Teacher Leadership Program

Creating a teacher leadership program is not a linear process. This resource is intended to guide and focus thinking but is not a prescribed set of ordered steps. Districts may be at different places in the process and entry points may vary.

Establishing a Teacher Leadership Program <i>These numbered items align with section III. Developing and Strengthening a Teacher Leader Program.</i>	Guiding Questions
<p>1. Identify and engage stakeholders to create a collaborative P-20 partnership to design, sustain and develop the teacher leadership program.</p>	<p><i>-Who needs to be involved?</i> <i>-How do we build will and a sense of urgency?</i> <i>-What is the sense of urgency?</i> <i>-How will we ensure an equitable representation of stakeholder groups?</i></p>
<p>2. Develop a common understanding, purpose, and philosophy of teacher leadership anchored in research.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather multiple definitions of TL. • Define purposes. • Examine current research and practices. • Develop a vision and strategic plan for the school or district. 	<p><i>-How do we define a teacher leader?</i> <i>-How could it look in our school/district?</i> <i>-What might it look like in five years?</i> <i>-How will we get there?</i> <i>-How will shared leadership strengthen the school?</i></p>
<p>3. Use multiple assessment methods and data sources to analyze teacher, student, principal, system, and community needs and, where appropriate, develop a strategic plan.</p>	<p><i>-What challenge or opportunity creates a need we wish to address through teacher leadership?</i> <i>-What data supports this need?</i> <i>-How will improvement be measured?</i></p>
<p>4. Identify and describe clear roles and responsibilities aligned to the needs assessment, strategic plan, and local context.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure these roles address local needs. 	<p><i>-What purpose will the teacher leaders serve?</i> <i>-What are the qualifications for the role?</i></p>

<p>5. Provide differentiated professional development to prepare and support confident teacher leaders' general knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for specialized roles and responsibilities.</p>	<p><i>-How will teacher leaders be supported?</i> <i>-What communication paths need to be part of the system?</i> <i>-What are the professional learning needs of the teacher leader(s)?</i> <i>-What resources do teacher leaders have access to?</i></p>
<p>6. Collaborate with leadership teams, including union representatives, to determine conditions, compensation, and/or incentives to support various teacher leader roles while considering a manageable workload, responsibilities and expectations.</p>	<p><i>-What is the "cost" of the role/program?</i> <i>-What compensations will be provided (money, time, or other)?</i> <i>-How can the district provide for that "cost"?</i></p>
<p>7. Develop and negotiate selection criteria and process to match the function and role of the teacher leader.</p>	<p><i>-How will teacher leaders be fairly selected?</i> <i>-Who will make the final decisions?</i> <i>-Will teachers be able to self-nominate?</i></p>
<p>8. Establish program evaluation and performance management to ensure effective use of resources to meet priorities. Provide ongoing support and redesign the program as needed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop evaluation tools to analyze the impact of the roles and ensure effective use of resources to meet priorities. • Provide ongoing support and redesign the program as needed. • Align assessment tools with your goals, roles, and supports. 	<p><i>-What do we want to know?</i> <i>-How will we learn what we want to know?</i> <i>-Has teacher leadership improved school climate, professional culture, instruction, or student learning/engagement?</i></p>

TEACHER LEADERSHIP IN NEW YORK STATE: WHY?

Teacher leadership matters BECAUSE it:

- Enhances support to districts, schools and building leaders in navigating the increasingly challenging landscape of education in New York State.
- Builds an environment of shared responsibility for curriculum, instruction, assessment, and policy decision making.
- Provides pathways for keeping talented teachers in the classroom while engaging them more fully in applying their expertise and individual talents.



Teacher leadership builds the capacity to transform schools, improve institutional practice, strengthen the profession, and increase student learning.