

Resource 6. Approaches to Professional Learning for Teacher Leaders

It is important for teacher leaders to have professional learning⁴ that is specific to their needs and role, because teacher leaders have different professional learning needs than traditional teachers. One of the most commonly cited differences is the need for teacher leaders to develop knowledge and skills related to effective adult learning approaches. Some roles require teacher leaders to demonstrate advanced instructional, pedagogical, and technical skills (e.g., student data analysis), while others require advanced content knowledge in a subject area (e.g., history). Teacher leaders want to become experts. Table 2 shows examples of professional learning topics for teacher leaders.

Table 2. Examples of Professional Learning Topics for Teachers and Teacher Leaders

Professional Learning for Teachers	Professional Learning for Teacher Leaders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General instructional practices <i>e.g., questioning, scaffolding</i> • Data analysis <i>e.g., use of rubrics, assessment literacy</i> • Child development <i>e.g., cognitive milestones</i> • Lesson planning <i>e.g., objectives, demonstration of learning</i> • Equitable and culturally competent practices <i>e.g., high expectations</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advanced content knowledge <i>e.g., advanced degree in subject area</i> • Advanced data analysis <i>e.g., formative assessment design, data triangulation</i> • Advanced support for students <i>e.g., evidence-based interventions</i> • Adult learning <i>e.g., engagement</i> • Critical conversations <i>e.g., constructive feedback</i> • Team building and facilitation <i>e.g., shared ownership, building trust</i> • Project management <i>e.g., backwards planning, communications</i>

Many teacher leaders engage in professional learning not only to be effective but also to become experts in their field. Teacher leaders can benefit from having frameworks and curriculum for the new skills required for their roles, such as adult learning.

⁴ Professional learning as described in this resource is focused, active, collaborative, and differentiated to meet the needs of individual educators.

Types of Professional Learning for Teacher Leaders

There are three different types of professional learning:

- ***Job-embedded professional learning*** is integrated into regular weekly or monthly activities, such as grade-level team meetings or feedback on walk-throughs. This type of professional learning may require initial training in facilitation or change management to be effective.
- ***Targeted professional learning*** is determined based on specific needs of teacher leaders and may be provided through small- or large-scale trainings.
- ***General, large-scale professional learning*** is based on common, overarching topics. This type of professional learning may include opportunities for teacher leaders to learn from one another about effective practices.

Table 3 provides example elements of the three types of professional learning.

Table 3. Examples of Professional Learning for Teachers and Teacher Leaders

Job-Embedded	Targeted	General, Large-Scale
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Real-time support• Professional learning collaboratives• Peer observation• Adaptive positive deviance approach• Inquiry teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Book study• Webinars• Individualized coaching• Graduate study• Role-specific training	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• District- or statewide workshops• Regional or statewide convenings

Professional learning can be most effective when it includes a combination of different types of professional learning, affording multiple and varied opportunities for learning and school development over time. When possible, it can be helpful to have current or former teacher leaders deliver or spearhead professional learning for their peers, because they may be well positioned to anticipate potential challenges and share lessons learned through experience.

Other Considerations

Engage School Leaders in Professional Learning for Teacher Leaders. School leaders play an important role in teacher leader professional learning, providing opportunities and learning more about teacher leaders' development needs. School leaders can collaborate with teacher leaders in identifying artifacts for their evaluation from professional learning opportunities and engage in discussions about their professional growth goals. School leaders may also need support in learning ways to effectively support a differentiated leadership system.

Use Data to Inform Professional Learning for Teacher Leaders. Data should be used to help teacher leaders assess the outcomes of their work and personalize professional learning to help them improve those outcomes. For example, for a mentor teacher, the school principal could

collect feedback from teachers who were mentored, analyze evaluation data for mentored teachers, monitor metrics of student learning and behavior, and analyze teacher retention data. For student support specialists, the principal or direct supervisor would collect data on student behaviors, individualized education plans, and 504 plans. In both of these examples, the goal is to collect meaningful data to inform the focus of the teacher leader’s professional learning.

Align Professional Learning with Key Policies for Teacher Leaders. States can help to promote consistency and quality of professional learning for teacher leaders by adopting teacher leader standards or skills frameworks, using these as the foundation for specialized evaluations and professional learning plans. Districts may consider designing teacher leader roles with flexible schedules to allow time for professional learning. Likewise, districts may offer teacher leaders access to experts, resources, or technology to facilitate self-led professional learning.

For more information, see:

- *The Marion Independent School District Teacher Leader Handbook*, including the Teacher Leader Evaluation Rubric, available at <http://www.marion-isd.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Teacher-Leadership-Handbook.pdf>
- The Kentucky Teacher Leadership Framework, available at <https://education.ky.gov/teachers/Documents/Kentucky%20Teacher%20Leadership%20Framework.pdf>