

# Using ESSER Funds for **Professional Learning & Collaboration for Teachers**

Enabling professional learning and collaboration for educators creates the **foundation to successfully and sustainably implement most other improvement strategies**. This school year and beyond will be shaped by the capacity of educators. See how you can build capacity in your district.

Successful improvement strategies—everything from small group literacy instruction to addressing students’ social-emotional needs and implementing tutoring programs—depend on educator capacity.

To transform experiences and outcomes for this school year and beyond, leaders must put systems and structures in place that build educator capacity and expand opportunities for educators to collaboratively plan and coordinate student supports.

We offer guidance for districts to successfully and sustainably improve professional learning and collaboration, including concrete examples of staffing and scheduling models that you can implement today and improve over time.

---

## **ESSER GUIDANCE** STAFFING • SPENDING • SCHEDULING

---

How can district and school leaders use stimulus funding to make “Do Now” investments that respond to urgent student needs, center equity, accelerate student learning, and also sustainably “Build Toward” long-term improvement?

[See the other ESSER guides](#)





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Research-Based Professional Learning & Collaboration](#)

[“Do Now” Professional Learning & Collab. Investments](#)

[Funding Professional Learning & Collab. Sustainably](#)

[Strategic Scheduling & Staffing](#)

[District Examples](#)

[Common Challenges](#)

## DO NOW, BUILD TOWARD

covid recovery | federal stimulus funding | long-term vision

District and school leaders can best navigate ESSER investment decisions by choosing **doable starting points** for the upcoming school year, while designing changes with a **long-term sustainable vision** in mind.

LEARN  
MORE



# **Research-Based Professional Learning & Collaboration**



# Research<sup>1</sup> and case studies of high-performing schools<sup>2</sup> indicate that high-quality, collaborative professional learning is grounded in:



## Rigorous, comprehensive curriculum and assessments

- Teachers should receive, adapt, and codevelop a highly detailed, engaging, culturally relevant, and rigorous standard curriculum and assessments that include lesson plans, sample texts, and student project ideas with common student misunderstandings and examples of mastery.



## Content-focused, expert-led collaboration in shared-content teams\*

\*Note: In non-departmentalized elementary schools, “shared-content teams” are grade-level teams, as teachers typically teach the same grade-level content.

- In many high-performing schools, shared-content teaching teams meet for at least 90 min/week, led by an instructional expert, to: understand curriculum, improve both content and pedagogical knowledge<sup>3</sup>, adapt and plan lessons, and review students’ work.
- When collaborative planning time is content-focused and facilitated by an instructional expert, it serves as both collaboration *and* professional learning.



## Frequent, growth-oriented feedback

- In many high-performing schools, teachers are observed by an instructional leader and participate in a debrief at least once every two weeks.
- Subject-specific, individualized, intensive, and sustained coaching has shown strong effects on classroom practice and student learning.<sup>4</sup>



## Focus on individualized student support

- Teachers need additional time in *shared-student* teams to coordinate differentiated student supports, especially for students with greater needs.
- In addition to collaboration and professional learning structures, teachers need protected individual planning time to reflect on student data, tailor instruction, and check in 1-1 with students and families.

Sources:<sup>1</sup>IES, *American Educational Research Journal*; <sup>2</sup>ERS *Igniting the Learning Engine*, <sup>3</sup>AERA, <sup>4</sup>Kraft

# High-quality professional learning includes a **mix of meeting and coaching structures** while protecting individual teachers' planning time.



## Shared-Content Team Meeting ~90 minutes/week

- Embedded into the school day.
- Led by instructional experts.
- Focused on improving instruction.
- Ideally includes ELL and special education teachers.



## Growth-Oriented Observation & Feedback Biweekly, with a 20-40 minute debrief

- Observations by a teacher-leader, instructional coach, or administrator.
- Debriefs during planning periods or outside of the school day.



## Expert Roles

- Role with instructional expertise to lead professional learning, facilitate collaboration time, and provide coaching and feedback to teachers.



## Shared-Student Team Meeting ~60 minutes/week

- Time to coordinate student supports.
- Most schools have 60-minute weekly staff meetings before or after school that could be repurposed — but additional time may be needed to be sufficient for the school year.



## Specialized Team Meetings

- For example, may include: Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) team, Early Warning Systems team, attendance team, or instructional leadership team.
- Arranged during common planning periods or before/after school, as needed.



## Individual Planning Time

- Embedded into the school day.
- Used for independent planning, reflection, and 1:1 check-ins.

# Research indicates the importance of using **granular student data** deliberately and strategically within collaboration and planning structures.

---

- Research shows that typical approaches to analyzing student assessment data are not always an effective practice, potentially because they are not frequent enough and because teachers focus on student factors instead of adjusting instruction.<sup>1</sup>
- There are better results when analysis of student assessments is combined with content planning / development and instructional-focused feedback.<sup>1</sup>
- Experts recommend a variety of approaches that go beyond periodic review of interim assessment data, including:
  - Analysis of student work samples to identify trends and determine how to address students' needs.<sup>2</sup>
  - Frequent review of granular student-level assessment data to identify what types of small group instruction are needed to address unfinished learning.<sup>3</sup>
  - Rebalancing of “satellite data” (test results that capture a high-level snapshot of student learning but don't explain what caused the results or what to do about it) with:
    - **“Map data”**: More real-time, formative, and diagnostic assessments.
    - **“Street data”**: Rich, ground-level information about students' experiences, prioritizing perspectives from the margins.<sup>4</sup>

Sources: <sup>1</sup>EdWeek, <sup>2</sup>Instruction Partners, <sup>3</sup>Instruction Partners, <sup>4</sup>Street Data



**“Do Now” Professional Learning  
& Collaboration Investments**

# Investments in professional learning and collaboration will vary across districts and schools based on **student and staff needs and context.**



Content-Expert Roles



Dedicated Time for Professional Learning and Collaboration



High-Quality, Aligned Materials



Program Development and Management




For more support in estimating the *true cost* of implementing professional learning and collaboration sustainably in *your specific context*, see our [ESSER Strategy Planner & Funding Calculator](#).

- This interactive tool allows you to see a breakdown of potential **ESSER spending (SY 2021-22 – SY 2023-24)** and the implied spending commitments post-ESSER (from SY 2024-25 and onward).
- For **professional learning and collaboration**, select the tab at the bottom labeled “#3 Teaching Job” and scroll left or right within the sheet to view the different strategies.



# Districts and schools will need to invest in developing **expert roles** to support professional learning and collaboration.

## Content-Expert Roles


 Dedicated Time for Professional Learning and Collaboration

 High-Quality, Aligned Materials

 Program Development and Management

### What new and/or existing roles are best for supporting professional learning and collaboration?

- **Invest in one or more of the following roles** that have instructional expertise for specific grade bands and content areas to lead professional learning, facilitate and provide expertise during collaboration time, and provide coaching and feedback to teachers.
  - **Teacher-leaders:** provide stipends or increasing compensation for additional responsibilities, or hire additional staff to create release time for teacher-leaders so they can extend their reach while remaining in the classroom.
  - **Instructional coaches:** hire at the school- or district-level.
  - **Administrators:** repurpose these roles to take on additional responsibilities and hire additional staff focused on operations to free leaders' time.
- **Provide training and support for new expert roles** to further develop their content expertise and build their coaching and adult learning skills.
  - Provided by district office teams.
  - Partner with external organization.

 See the **“Scheduling & Staffing”** section to explore options for investing in staff.

See how one Denver school **redistributed roles** to invest in more instructional and teacher-leadership roles

# Districts and schools will need to find **sufficient, dedicated time** for professional learning and collaboration.



Content-Expert Roles



Dedicated Time for Professional Learning and Collaboration



High-Quality, Aligned Materials



Program Development and Management

How will we find sufficient time for professional learning and collaboration while protecting individual planning time? How will we minimize tradeoffs?

- **Invest in additional professional learning time** to ensure that teachers have enough time in one or more of the following ways:
  - Add teacher days before the start of the school year.
  - Create new student release days.
  - Leverage substitutes to flood a targeted grade level and/or content area to release teachers.
- **Embed this time within the school day** by adjusting the student schedule through one or more of the options found in the [“Scheduling & Staffing” section](#).

Examples from the Field:

Dallas ISD’s [intersession calendar](#) includes specific days for teacher planning without students on campus

Lander Elementary’s implementation of [Professional Learning Communities](#)

Aldine ISD’s remote learning days provide [additional teacher planning time](#)



# Districts must ensure **high-quality, aligned materials** for *students* and **equitable access to materials** for *teachers*.



Content-Expert Roles



Dedicated Time for Professional Learning and Collaboration



**High-Quality, Aligned Materials**



Program Development and Management

High-quality instructional materials and assessments are the basis of any strong, curriculum-connected professional learning. Depending on the current state of your district's materials, what investment is needed?

- **Assess current curriculum and assessments** by using resources such as [EdReports](#), [Achieve the Core Toolkit](#), or [NGSS](#) for science.
- **Prioritize investing in rigorous, comprehensive curriculum and assessments** as a foundational element for ensuring students are accessing grade-level content and enabling teachers to adjust instruction and tailor interventions. (**Note:** Adopting a new curriculum with aligned professional learning is an investment of time. Consider rolling out the new curriculum over a few years to watch out for the bandwidth of staff).
- **Adapt curriculum and assessments to address students' needs and district priorities**, such as integrating just-in-time supports ([Instruction Partners](#)), social-emotional learning ([CASEL](#)), early literacy ([Achieve the Core](#)), cultural responsiveness ([Achieve the Core](#)), and/or focus on foundational reading in upper elementary.



# Assessments and monitoring systems are needed to both evaluate the program and to evolve the approach.



Content-Expert Roles



Dedicated Time for Professional Learning and Collaboration



High-Quality, Aligned Materials



Program Development and Management

## What investments must be made in developing, managing, and monitoring the program?

- **Determine whether you have capacity and expertise** to develop strong and coherent learning and collaboration structures and materials (including agenda, data reports, and relevant resources), or whether you will need to partner with an external organization with expertise in this area.
- Invest in **job-embedded professional learning scope and sequences** that are closely tied with teachers' daily needs. Support all tiers and aspects of instruction (tiered instruction, SEL instruction, building relationships, trauma-informed practice, etc.) with expert-led sessions by:
  - Purchasing materials externally,
  - Partnering with an external organization to deliver these trainings, or
  - Providing district staff with time to develop materials.
- Build **continuous improvement structures** at the school- and district-level to evolve practices.
  - Ensure systems for professional learning and collaboration are **implemented with fidelity**.
  - Evaluate the **impact on student learning** and achievement outcomes.
  - Evaluate the impact of professional learning and collaboration on **teacher satisfaction**.
    - Collect data on teacher retention and related statistics; administer surveys to determine whether teachers feel that the teaching job is rewarding, sustainable and collaborative.
    - Ensure professional learning and collaboration are job-embedded and relevant to teachers' daily lives and experiences.



**Funding Professional Learning & Collaboration Sustainably**

# Federal stimulus funds provide an opportunity to **address students' current needs *and* build toward lasting improvement.**

To plan investments of one-time revenue infusions (such as ESSER) with [long-term sustainability](#) in mind...

- ✓ **Size the full cost of implementing strategies over time.**
- ✓ **Plan out how spending and organization will shift to sustain critical investments over time.**
- ✓ **Pilot and evaluate new approaches that redirect resources or lower future costs.**
- ✓ **Define success, measure, and adjust.**





## Size the full cost of implementing strategies over time.

Consider *all* the cost components associated with implementing your strategy well.

---



### Content-Expert Roles

What new and/or existing roles are best for supporting professional learning and collaboration?



### Dedicated Time for Professional Learning and Collaboration

How will we find sufficient time for professional learning and collaboration while protecting individual planning time?  
How will we minimize tradeoffs?



### High-Quality, Aligned Materials

High-quality instructional materials and assessments are the basis of any strong, curriculum-connected professional learning.  
Depending on the current state of your district's materials, what investment is needed?



### Program Development and Management

What investments must be made in developing, managing, and monitoring the program?

✓ **Plan out how spending and organization will shift to sustain critical investments over time.**

Investments should balance **immediate student needs** with **building lasting capacity**, while also being mindful of start-up vs. ongoing costs.

Some of the components of an investment in professional learning and collaboration **start-up costs** that can be funded with one-time revenue. Other components are **ongoing costs** that need to be funded for the duration of the investment.

One-time funding (e.g., ESSER) enables significantly increased professional learning and collaboration in the near-term to support teachers' response to pandemic-related needs. Systems should monitor results closely to determine strategic levels of ongoing investment.

*"Even though we have multiple years of ESSER funds to support programs, we have a pending fiscal cliff. We have to use new money or reallocate existing spending for the programs we want to sustain over time."*

Matthew Stanski  
 Director of Financial Operations  
 Anne Arundel County Public Schools



**Content-Expert Roles**

→ Ongoing cost



**Dedicated Time for Professional Learning and Collaboration**

→ Ongoing cost



**High-Quality, Aligned Materials**

→ Start-up cost



**Program Development and Management**

→ Ongoing cost

Address intensified needs

Build system capacity



ESSER investments in this area are highly strategic as they both build system capacity for the long-term to deliver improved teaching and learning and increase teachers' capacity to respond immediately to intensified student needs.

See here for more examples of schools' sustainable shifts in time and money that allow for more flexible professional learning

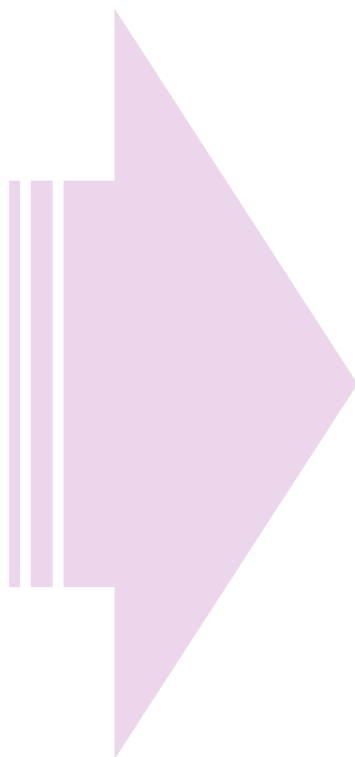


## Pilot and evaluate new approaches that redirect resources or lower future costs.

Districts and schools can pilot ways to sustain better professional learning and opportunities for collaboration than were provided pre-COVID.

### For now, schools might...

- Provide stipends to staff to meet after school and during additional professional learning days.
- Provide stipends to teacher-leaders or hire instructional coaches to facilitate professional learning and collaboration.
- Add staff to increase teacher release time.



...while piloting and evaluating ways to provide more and better professional learning and collaboration, even without stimulus dollars.

- Pilot **other ways** to embed more **staff collaboration time** into the school day.
- Build **partnerships with community organizations** who can provide programming while teachers engage in professional learning and collaboration.
- **Restructure compensation systems** to pay for teacher-leader responsibilities instead of education-based lanes.
- Shift more resources to **roles focused on professional learning**. For example, reduce administrative staff to instead allocate teacher-leaders or instructional coaches based on students' needs.
- Explore **shifts to funding systems** that will increase resources at higher-need schools. For example, schools with more novice teachers are allocated an instructional coach.





Define success, measure, and adjust.

## Use **continuous improvement cycles** to plan and improve on future investments

Districts and schools should invest in rapid cycles of **continuous improvement** to answer questions such as:

- Where is professional learning and collaboration being implemented with fidelity? Where it isn't, what are the barriers? How can we address them?
- Which schools are bright spots where professional learning and collaboration are improving teacher practice? What effective practices can we try?
- What challenges are arising? How can we address them?
- As more students are reaching grade-level achievement, how should we adjust our structures for professional learning and collaboration?

### A whole-system approach to continuous improvement...



Emphasizes a clear set of priorities



Empowers practitioners with evidence-based strategies and logic models



Assesses the fidelity and equity of implementation across the whole district




Tracks costs and compares them to the ROI of other potential approaches



Relies on cross-functional system leadership to dismantle barriers, address inequities, and support schools

[ERS, Uncharted Waters](#)



**Strategic Scheduling & Staffing for  
Professional Learning & Collaboration**

# Scheduling and staffing for professional learning and collaboration centers around **three key decision points**.

---



Decision Point #1:

**Determine who should meet**, for how long, and how frequently, as well as how much individual time teachers should have.



Decision Point #2:

**Find dedicated time** to embed planning, professional learning and collaboration within the school day.



Decision Point #3:

**Provide expert-led time** through teacher-leader roles, instructional coaches, and/or school administration.

# Determine who should meet, for how long, and how frequently.



Teaming structures can include...	Description
All staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All staff, including teachers, meet to discuss <b>school- or district-wide initiatives and updates</b>.</li> <li><b>Trainings</b> for all staff (on topics like family and community engagement, and procedures/policies).</li> <li><b>Frequency:</b> Should take place every week but can be flexibly used for shared-student teams and other collaboration.</li> </ul>
Shared-content teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers who teach the same content meet for shared <b>adult learning, lesson planning/adapting curricula, and analyzing student data</b>.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At the <b>elementary level</b>, content teams are likely the same as grade-level and shared-student teams, unless grades are departmentalized.</li> <li>In <b>larger schools</b>, content teams can be single grade/content (e.g., 6<sup>th</sup>-grade math), while in <b>smaller schools</b>, they can span grades (e.g., 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup>-grade science team).</li> </ul> </li> <li>Teachers also need <b>unit planning/internalization time</b> to deepen understanding of curriculum and content in upcoming units, including identifying “load bearing” concepts/skills that require different strategies and approaches to intervention, and planning lessons (every 6-9 weeks, depending on length of each unit).</li> <li><b>Frequency:</b> Should take place at least for at least 90 min/week and for a longer meeting every 6-9 weeks.</li> </ul>
Shared-student teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers who <b>share the same students</b> require time to review student data to inform data-driven practice, and regroup students as needed.</li> <li><b>Frequency:</b> Should take place as frequently as needed.</li> </ul>
Coach-coachee pairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher-leaders/instructional experts meet with teachers to provide <b>individualized, intensive, and sustained coaching</b> to improve teaching practices.</li> <li><b>Frequency:</b> Should take place at least once every 2 weeks.</li> </ul>
Special purpose teams (MTSS, EWS, attendance, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers who share the same students (or schoolwide teams) require time to <b>identify students who need additional academic, behavioral, and social-emotional supports</b> and connect them to the appropriate resources and interventions.</li> <li><b>Frequency:</b> MTSS meetings should take place every 5-6 weeks; EWS meetings should take place 1-2x/month.</li> </ul>
Teacher-leaders & instructional experts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher-leaders/instructional experts need <b>time, support, and training</b> to develop their own content knowledge and improve their coaching practices.</li> <li><b>Frequency:</b> Should take place weekly to quarterly, depending on need.</li> </ul>
Individual Planning Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Embedded into the school day.</li> <li>Used for independent planning, reflection, and 1:1 check-ins.</li> </ul>



## Decision Point #2 For Elementary

# Find dedicated time to embed programming within the school day.



To find time...	Description
Early release or external partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adopt half-day calendar so that teachers have time for professional learning and collaboration <b>after students go home</b> one day per week.</li> <li>Can also collaborate with <b>external partners</b> to provide student programming during early release or during the school day so that teachers are free to meet for professional learning and collaboration.</li> <li>Also increases <b>individual planning time</b> for teachers.</li> </ul>
Stack planning time with non-instructional blocks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schedule daily planning time next to <b>non-instructional blocks</b> that can be covered by support staff once per week, such as lunch/recess, community circle, and/or arrival/dismissal to create time for an extended block once per week.</li> <li>Non-instructional blocks can be staffed by temporary or <b>part-time staff</b>.</li> </ul>
Redistribute minutes throughout week using existing staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Redistribute minutes throughout the week with existing specials staff</b> to create extended block once per week for each team for professional learning and collaboration (e.g., move from 60-minute classes every day to 4 days a week of 50-minute specials and 1 day a week of 100-minute specials).</li> <li>Each grade has extended block on a different day of the week, so that students have the same schedule 4 days per week and extended specials time once per week.</li> </ul>
Add an additional specials block weekly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One day per week, additional staff are used to <b>increase specials capacity</b> to allow for all grade level teachers to have extended blocks for professional learning and collaboration</li> <li>Could be existing staff (librarian or aide helps students check out books, counselor teaches SEL block), or newly hired staff.</li> </ul>
Hire a floating core content-area teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hire a <b>multi-grade floating science or social studies teacher who provides coverage</b> for professional learning and collaboration time; stack with specials block to create an extended-release block for teachers.</li> <li>Also increases <b>individual planning time</b> for teachers.</li> </ul>



## ➔ Decision Point #2 For Secondary

# Find dedicated time to embed programming within the school day.

To find time...	Description
<b>Early release or external partnerships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create one <b>early release day</b> per week so that teachers have time after students go home.</li> <li>• Partner with community organizations, other secondary schools, or local community colleges to provide opportunities for <b>internships, enrichment, community service, or asynchronous classes</b>.</li> <li>• Also increases <b>individual planning time</b> for teachers.</li> </ul>
<b>Stack planning time with non-instructional blocks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schedule <b>planning time next to beginning or end of day</b> to create time for an extended block once per week.</li> </ul>
<b>Modified block (floating long block on 6-day cycle)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create floating block schedule where each day has six periods on a rotation so that <b>all periods have extended long block every six days</b>.</li> </ul>
<b>Block schedule options</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shift to a schedule that has <b>fewer, longer blocks of time on a rotation</b> (typically 8 periods that rotate every other day or semester).</li> </ul>
<b>Reduce the fraction of each day teachers spend directly teaching</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce amount of time each day that teachers are directly teaching to allow for <b>two planning periods back-to-back</b>, creating 90 min of release time every day.</li> <li>• Depending on <b>school size</b>, this could be a targeted strategy for one grade and/or one subject based on focus areas (ex: all 9<sup>th</sup>-grade teachers, 9<sup>th</sup>-grade ELA and math teachers, or just 9<sup>th</sup>-grade ELA teachers).</li> <li>• Also increases <b>individual planning time</b> for these teachers.</li> </ul>

## Decision Point #3

# Provide expert-led time through teacher-leader roles, instructional coaches, and/or school administration.



To have an expert...	Description
<p><b>Create teacher-leader roles</b></p> <p>(See <a href="#">Leap Leader at DC Public Schools</a>, and next page for more details)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides opportunities to <b>advance into teacher-leader roles</b> with additional responsibilities for stipend or increased compensation.</li> <li>Enables the <b>strongest teachers</b> to share their talents while still staying in the classroom.</li> <li>Additional staff must be hired to create <b>release time</b> for teacher-leaders.</li> <li>Teacher-leaders will need <b>professional learning</b> to deepen content expertise.</li> <li>Teacher-leaders will need <b>time to plan and prepare</b> for meetings, and to meet as an instructional leadership team 1x/month.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Hire school- or district-level instructional coaches</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Likely <b>most expensive</b> option, especially if hiring multiple instructional coaches to support all grades.</li> <li>If supporting multiple grades, need to hire someone with <b>expertise across grades and contents</b> (or build this expertise).</li> <li>Instructional coaches will need <b>time to plan and prepare</b> for meetings, and to meet as an instructional leadership team 1x/month.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Repurpose administrator time to take on additional responsibilities of an expert</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Must redistribute some <b>administrator duties</b> so that administrators have time to plan and prepare for meetings, and to be available during meetings across grades; may need to hire additional staff to take these duties on.</li> <li>Administrators will need <b>professional learning</b> to deepen content expertise across multiple grades and content areas.</li> <li>Administrators will need <b>time to plan and prepare</b> for meetings, and to meet as an instructional leadership team 1x/month.</li> </ul>

# Creating **teacher-leader roles** with release time gives strong teachers the opportunity to share their talents while still remaining in the classrooms.

## Teacher-leader roles should include...

### Weekly Time in Leadership Team

For example...

- 90-minute biweekly instructional leadership team meetings
- 55-minute weekly leadership team meetings
- 55-minute one-on-one meetings with the principal
- 55-minute school climate meetings

In **elementary school**, release time for teacher-leaders can be achieved by...

- Having **pairs of teachers** with 50 percent release time share a homeroom.
- In a **teacher residency model**, the teacher-leader has release time when the teacher resident independently leads instruction.
- Having a **floating teacher** release the homeroom teacher from one content area (for limited release time).

In **high school**, release time can be achieved by **reducing the fraction of each day that teacher-leaders spend directly teaching** (for example, teaching 5/7 or 6/8 periods).

### Time Built Into Schedules

For example...

- Leading weekly planning meetings for core subject teachers\*  
*\*in shared-course teams or in one-on-one meetings where only one teacher teaches a course.*
- Preparing for collaborative planning meetings\*  
*\*At least as much time for preparing as is spent attending meetings*
- Observing and providing feedback to all teachers in their caseload at least once every two weeks

[Click here](#) to see how Baltimore City Public Schools schedules a lead teacher's time





# **Decision Points in Action: Concrete Examples**

## ➔ Elementary Example #1

# Early release or external partnerships.

### WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE

- Create one early release day per week so that teachers have time after students go home.
- Core instructional time is maintained and individual planning time for teachers is increased.
- Allows for flexible teaming structures since all staff are available at the same time.

### KEYS TO SUCCESS

- Maintaining core instructional time across the week and school year.
- Deliberate planning about how to use the collaboration time effectively.
- Sufficient expert support since meetings will be at the same time (for example, one coach cannot support all grades at once).

### TRADEOFFS

- School day might need to be extended on other days, which is expensive and requires buy-in.
- Transportation might need to be adjusted and families might have to organize childcare.

### ALSO CONSIDER

- Collaborating with external partners to provide meaningful enrichment opportunities during this time.
- Leveraging technology to create release time for teachers by having support staff supervise students.
- Combining this move on a quarterly basis with another option for additional time.

2 <sup>nd</sup> -Grade Student 1 day per week	2 <sup>nd</sup> -Grade Student 4 days per week
ELA	Community Circle
Science / Social Studies	Math
Math	Science / Social Studies
Lunch & Recess	Lunch & Recess
Early Release or Community Partner Enrichment	ELA
	Small Group Instruction
	Closing & Dismissal

## ➔ Elementary Example #2

# Stack planning time with non-instructional blocks.

### WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE

- Stack planning time next to non-instructional time and have support staff provide coverage.
- Non-instructional time can include lunch/recess, community circle, and/or arrival/dismissal (as depicted here).
- Core instructional time for students and individual planning time for teachers is maintained.

### KEYS TO SUCCESS

- If planning time is stacked with lunch/recess, maintain enough time for teachers to have full duty-free lunch and sufficient planning time
- If planning time is stacked with arrival/dismissal, support staff are available and have strong classroom management skills.

### TRADEOFFS

- Requires enough support staff time to cover each homeroom.

### ALSO CONSIDER

- If planning time is stacked with community circle or closing/dismissal, planning is required to ensure procedures are followed safely and calmly.

2 <sup>nd</sup> -Grade Teacher 1 day per week	2 <sup>nd</sup> -Grade Teacher 4 days per week
Community Circle	Community Circle
ELA	ELA
Lunch & Recess	Lunch & Recess
Duty-Free Lunch	Duty-Free Lunch
Science / Social Studies	Science / Social Studies
Math	Math
Collaboration Time	Planning
	Closing & Dismissal

*One day per week, teachers stay after students have been dismissed for the day.*

## ➔ Elementary Example #3

# Redistribute minutes throughout week using existing staff.

### WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE

- Extend specials time once per week for each grade while keeping specials the same length on other days to protect daily individual planning time for teachers.
- Each grade has extended block on a different day of the week, so that students have the same schedule 4x per week and extended specials time once per week.

### KEYS TO SUCCESS

- Maintaining sufficient core instructional time with an extended specials block.
- Specials teachers have capacity to teach additional extended blocks.
- Specials classes can be pooled to get coverage if needed.

### TRADEOFFS

- Reduces core instructional time on the day with extended specials. Creates variation in schedules throughout the week.

### ALSO CONSIDER

- Shortening specials on the other days to maintain instructional time and eliminate the need for additional specials coverage. Would require teacher buy-in, as this would reduce daily teacher individual planning time.

2 <sup>nd</sup> -Grade Student Mon.	2 <sup>nd</sup> -Grade Student Tues.-Fri.	4 <sup>th</sup> -Grade Student Tues.	4 <sup>th</sup> -Grade Student Mon., Wed.-Fri.
Specials	Community Circle Science / Social Studies	Specials	Community Circle ELA
Small Group Instruction	Small Group Instruction	ELA	Specials
ELA	ELA	Math	Math
Science / Social Studies	Specials	Lunch & Recess	Lunch & Recess
Lunch & Recess	Lunch & Recess	Small Group Instruction	Small Group Instruction
Math	Math	Science / Social Studies	Science / Social Studies
Closing & Dismissal	Closing & Dismissal	Closing & Dismissal	Closing & Dismissal

*In this example, 2<sup>nd</sup> grade has long specials on Mon., and 4<sup>th</sup> grade has long specials on Tues.*



## ➔ Elementary Example #4

# Add an additional specials block weekly.

### WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE

- Use non-specials staff (e.g., librarian and counselor) to extend specials time once per week for all grades while keeping specials the same length on other days to protect daily individual planning time for teachers.
- Students have the same schedule 4x per week and extended specials time once per week.

### KEYS TO SUCCESS

- Staff (librarian and counselor) have capacity to teach extended specials blocks.
- Specials classes can be pooled to get coverage if needed.

### TRADEOFFS

- Reduces core instructional time on the day with extended specials. Creates variation in class length across days. This requires deliberate and thoughtful action on planning and scope and sequence to cover necessary core content in less time.
- Will need buy-in from staff who are being asked to teach extended specials blocks.

### ALSO CONSIDER

- Shortening specials on the other days to maintain instructional time. Would require teacher buy-in, as this would reduce daily teacher individual planning time.

Specials <i>Teacher</i> (P.E., Art, Music) <b>Mon., Wed.-Fri.</b>	Specials <i>Teacher</i> (P.E., Art, Music, Library, SEL with Counselor) <b>Tues.</b>
Kindergarten Specials	Kindergarten and 1 <sup>st</sup> Grade Specials
1 <sup>st</sup> Grade Specials	
3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade Specials	2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade Specials
2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade Specials	
Duty-Free Lunch	Duty-Free Lunch
Prep Time	Prep Time
5 <sup>th</sup> Grade Specials	4 <sup>th</sup> and 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade Specials
4 <sup>th</sup> Grade Specials	

*In this example, the school uses a librarian and counselor to provide additional capacity for extended specials time.*

## ➔ Elementary Example #5

# Hire a floating core content-area teacher.

### WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE

- Hire a multi-grade science or social studies teacher who provides coverage to multiple grades to enable extended blocks, achieved by stacking science or social studies with specials.
- Core instructional time is maintained and individual planning time for teachers is increased.
- Reduces one content area for homeroom teachers to plan.

### KEYS TO SUCCESS

- Floating teacher has strong content knowledge across grades.
- Floating teacher has support from administrator and/or instructional coach.
- Floating teacher has strong classroom management and relationship-building skills.

### TRADEOFFS

- An additional classroom teacher is expensive, and depending on school size, more than one teacher may be needed to provide coverage for all grades.
- The floating teacher's class typically only meets twice per week, which may be below the desired instructional minutes goal for a core class.
- Multi-grade teacher has high student load and limited in-school collaborators.
- Rotating student and teacher schedule can be initially confusing.

2 <sup>nd</sup> -Grade Student 2 days per week	2 <sup>nd</sup> -Grade Student 3 days per week
Community Circle	Community Circle
ELA	ELA
Small Group Instruction	Small Group Instruction
Science (floating teacher)	Social Studies
Specials	Specials
Lunch & Recess	Lunch & Recess
Math	Math
Closing/Dismissal	Closing/Dismissal

## → Secondary Example #1

# External partnerships.

### WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE

- Partner with community organizations, other secondary schools, or local community colleges to provide opportunities for internships, enrichment, community service, or asynchronous classes.
- Core instructional time is maintained and individual planning time for teachers is increased.
- Allows for flexible teaming structures since all staff are available at the same time.

### KEYS TO SUCCESS

- Sufficient expert support since meetings will be at the same time (for example, one coach cannot support all grades at once).
- Strong community partners with staffing capacity to supervise and provide opportunities and strong relationships with other organizations for community service and internship opportunities.
- Accessible transportation for students to/from school to ensure on-time arrival.

### TRADEOFFS

- Reduction in course seat time.
- Additional financial costs (for example, partnership contracts, transportation, and supplies).

### ALSO CONSIDER

- Keeping classes the same length by alternating which periods are off (for example, periods 1-4 off on the first Wednesday, periods 5-8 off on the second Wednesday).

	11 <sup>th</sup> -Grade Student 1 day per week	11 <sup>th</sup> -Grade Student 4 days per week
Per. 1	External Partnerships	World History
Per. 2		Biology
Per. 3		Elective 1
Per. 4	World History	English I
	Biology	
Per. 5	Elective 1	Advisory
Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
Per. 6	English I	Algebra I
	Algebra I	
Per. 7	Elective 2	Elective 2
Per. 8	Elective 3	Elective 3

## → Secondary Example #2

# Stack planning time with non-instructional blocks.

### WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE

- Stack planning time next to beginning or end of day, depending on teacher preference (teacher contract includes additional time).
- Schedule rotates so that every teacher has an extended block every 7 days.
- Core instructional time for students and individual planning time for teachers is maintained.
- Administrators and support staff supervise students during arrival to release teachers for planning.

### KEYS TO SUCCESS

- Teacher contract enables teachers to have sufficient time before school for an extended block.
- Teacher input is considered, and teachers are bought into the benefits of a rotating schedule.
- Clear, thoughtful communication to students/families about varying schedule and the rationale.

### TRADEOFFS

- Planning time isn't fully embedded into the day, which can make it more challenging to consistently take place.
- Students and teachers will need to adapt to a varying schedule each week.

#### 11<sup>th</sup>-Grade Student

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
Per. 1	English I	World History	Biology
Per. 2	Elective 1	English I	World History
Per. 3	Algebra I	Elective 1	English I

*Note: Not all periods shown.*

#### 11<sup>th</sup>-Grade Teacher

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
Arrival	Collaborative planning time	Off/Independent time	
Per. 1	Collaborative planning time	Geometry A	Algebra I B
Per. 2	Algebra II A	Plan	Geometry A
Per. 3	Algebra I A	Algebra II A	Plan

*Note: Not all periods shown.*



## → Secondary Example #3

# Modified block (floating long block on 6-day cycle).

### WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE

- Students have one extended or double-block period of instruction every day.
- To ensure that all teachers in the school have 90 minutes of collaborative planning, the extended block is a different period every day. In this example, since it's a 6-period day, the bell schedule has a 6-day rotation.
- Content teachers have their planning period at the same time (for example, all math teachers are off during period 2) so they can collaboratively plan together.
- Core instructional time for students and individual planning time for teachers is maintained.

### KEYS TO SUCCESS

- Clear, thoughtful communication to students and families about varying schedule and rationale.
- Professional learning to effectively plan for extended blocks: Since students have a double block at different points in the unit, teachers may need to plan “floating lessons” that can be flexibly scheduled into the unit.
- Teacher buy-in.

### TRADEOFFS

- Reduces the number of electives students can take, consider impact on graduation requirements.
- Students and teachers will need to adapt to a varying schedule each week.
- Requires thoughtful lesson planning to adapt to changing schedule and class length.

### ALSO CONSIDER

- Having a fixed long block where the extended block is at the same time every day, and the order of the classes rotate through the extended block time.

### 11<sup>th</sup>-Grade Student

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
Per. 1	English I	English I	English I
Per. 2	English I	Elective	Elective
Per. 3	Elective		Algebra I
Per. 4	Algebra I	Algebra I	Algebra I
Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
Per. 5	Biology	Biology	Biology
Per. 6	World History	World History	World History

## → Secondary Example #4

# Block schedule.

### WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE

- Shift to a block schedule where students have 8 periods over two days or over two semesters.
- Each period is ~90 minutes, and teachers teach 3 out of 4 periods, which gives teachers one 90-minute planning period each day, increasing individual planning time for teachers.
- If shifting from a 7-period day, students likely will have the opportunity to take an additional elective.
- Students have more instructional time since there are fewer class transitions.

### KEYS TO SUCCESS

- Teachers need support and professional learning opportunities to effectively plan for extended block.
- If students have an additional elective, need to carefully consider how the mix of staff may need to change.

### TRADEOFFS

- Teachers are only teaching about 75 percent of the day, which makes this schedule the most expensive.
- Likely need to hire additional teachers or increase class sizes.
- Student absences have greater significance, as each class meets fewer times and students may have a harder time focusing during longer classes.
- Semester rotation: A semester schedule creates potential problems for classes that may require yearlong instruction, such as Advanced Placement or IB.

### ALSO CONSIDER

- Semester rotation: Allows you to remediate/accelerate students in semester 2, based on semester 1 performance.

	11 <sup>th</sup> -Grade Student A Day	11 <sup>th</sup> -Grade Student B Day
Per. 1	English I	Biology
Per. 2	Algebra I	Elective 2
Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
Per. 3	World History	Elective 3
Per. 4	Elective 1	Foundations of Algebra

## → Secondary Example #5

# Reduce the fraction of each day teachers spend directly teaching.

### WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE

- Reduce the amount of time teachers spend teaching in targeted grade levels and subjects to allow for two planning periods back-to-back to create 90 min of release time every day (in this case, for 11<sup>th</sup>-grade ELA teachers).
- Core instructional time for students is maintained and individual planning time for teachers who spend less time directly teaching is increased.
- Teacher load is also somewhat reduced by teaching one fewer period per day.

### KEYS TO SUCCESS

- Will require buy-in from all teachers, since only some teachers have additional planning.

### TRADEOFFS

- Tradeoffs to consider include increased class size in some areas or costs of hiring additional staff to maintain class size while increasing planning time.

### ALSO CONSIDER

- In larger schools, organizing students in cohorts with dedicated teaching staff to enabled shared-student teams and lower student-student load.

	11 <sup>th</sup> -Grade Student	11 <sup>th</sup> -Grade Teacher
Per. 1	World History	Collaboration Time
Per. 2	Elective 1	
Per. 3	Biology	English I
Per. 4	English I	English I
Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
Per. 5	Algebra I	English I
Per. 6	Elective 2	English I
Per. 7	Elective 3	English I

# Teacher-leaders' roles can be leveraged to coach other teachers and facilitate collaborative professional learning.

Science & CTE Content Expert (Lead Teacher)<sup>1</sup>

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Per. 1	Teaching	Teaching	Teaching	Teaching	Teaching
Per. 2	Teaching	Teaching	Teaching	Teaching	Teaching
Per. 3	Env. Sci Planning	Biology Planning	Chemistry Planning	Physics Planning	Meeting Prep
Per. 4	Observations	CTE Planning	Meeting Prep	CTE Planning	Observations
Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
Per. 5	Course Prep	Course Prep	Observations	Observations	Observations
Per. 6	Meeting Prep	Principal Meeting	Course Prep	Course Prep	Observations
Per. 7	Leadership Team Mtg.	Meeting Prep	Meeting Prep	Observations	Course Prep
Afterschool			ILT Meeting		

In this example, the teacher-leader spends the morning in the classroom and the afternoon working on teacher-leader responsibilities, such as facilitating collaborative meeting time or observing teachers.

**Scheduling will need to be adapted according to the skills and expertise of staff within each building.**

For even more examples, refer to ERS's [Finding Time for Collaborative Planning](#)

Sources: <sup>1</sup>Baltimore City Public Schools





A woman with glasses and a man in business attire are sitting at a desk, smiling and looking at a laptop screen. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent purple filter. The text 'Common Challenges with Professional Learning & Collaboration' is written in white, bold font at the bottom of the image.

**Common Challenges with  
Professional Learning & Collaboration**

# Common challenges with professional learning and how to address them

Common Challenges	Pitfalls to Avoid	Examples of What to Do Instead
<p>“We’re not sure <b>how to get the most value</b> from professional learning sessions.”</p>	<p>Creating time for professional learning <b>without having a strong training curriculum for teachers.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use one-time funds to get access to new capacity and expertise through qualified third-party vendors (e.g. <a href="#">Instruction Partners</a>, <a href="#">Leading Educators</a>, <a href="#">Teaching Lab</a>). These experts can develop a strong curriculum for professional learning and coaching sessions and bring knowledge into the school system.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Putting unqualified staff</b> into Instructional leadership roles.</p>	
<p>“<b>No one has free time to prepare</b> for these long collaborative planning blocks.”</p>	<p>Giving instructional experts new responsibility to facilitate professional learning <b>without the time and resources</b> to do it well.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure that instructional experts leading collaborative time have at least the length of the meeting to prepare for it. For teacher leaders, this prep could be through weekly release time or stipends that account for the additional time they need to spend outside of their contract day.</li> </ul>
<p>“It’s <b>hard to find time</b> in the day for collaborative planning.”</p>	<p>Squeezing in <b>tiny blocks of time</b> here and there.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prioritize time blocks that allow for deep engagement and progress.</li> <li>Schedule time strategically. Learn more <a href="#">here</a>.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Not including</b> all the right people.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Account for all members of the team when building the collaboration schedule, including Special Education, ELL, and other specialized instructors. Strategies such as stacking planning time at beginning or end of day, leveraging external partners, or implementing early release days can free more adults to collaborate at the same time.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Imposing scheduling shifts</b> on teachers without discussion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with teachers to codesign solutions. Think creatively about assets that could release teachers from non-instructional responsibilities and create time for professional learning.</li> </ul>

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This guide was authored by Crystal Chu (Associate), Gayatri Mehra (Principal Associate), Eddie Branchaud (Manager), and Kristen Ferris (Partner). It is the result of collaborative efforts among numerous people, both within and outside of ERS. We would like to acknowledge the following ERS team members who contributed to this work: Mark Heath, Gloria Samen, Torrie Mekos, Daven McQueen, April Liu, Kaitlyn Chantry, Sarah Waldman, Ben Beane, Becca Luberoff, and Karen Hawley Miles.

We owe our deep thanks to our partners at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York for supporting the creation of this set of guidebooks.

We are continually inspired by people in districts and schools across the country who engage in this difficult (yet rewarding) work each day.

We are grateful to all those listed above who inspired, informed, contributed, and reviewed this work.

To share your work or get help, **contact us.**



VISIT

**[www.erstrategies.org](http://www.erstrategies.org)**



SUBSCRIBE

**[www.erstrategies.org/signup](http://www.erstrategies.org/signup)**



LIKE + FOLLOW

**[@ERStrategies](https://www.facebook.com/ERStrategies)**

