Using ESSER Funds for Professional Learning & Collaboration for Teachers
1. Introduction
2. What does the research say?
3. How can districts and schools invest sustainably?
4. What does strategic scheduling and staffing look like?
5. Conclusion
Our Shared Challenge

• Students — especially students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, English language learners, and students with disabilities — have experienced months of disrupted learning.

• The unprecedented infusion of federal stimulus funds (ESSER) provides an important opportunity for districts to equitably meet students’ needs and lay the foundation for meaningful, long-term change. With careful planning and investments, leaders can ensure changes are sustainable beyond the three-year ESSER funding period.

It’s time to redefine what ‘going back to normal’ means and use learnings from the pandemic to innovate and rethink the student learning experience.

-Elementary school dean of students in Minnesota

Source: Educators for Excellence, Voices from the Classroom, 2021
“Do Now, Build Toward”

District and school leaders can best navigate ESSER investment decisions by taking a “Do Now, Build Toward” approach — choosing doable starting points for the 2021-22 school year, while designing changes with a long-term sustainable vision in mind.

These overviews lay out a long-term, “Build Toward” vision for key strategies district and school leaders are prioritizing in schools this fall.

These guides offer a blueprint for organizing resources this school year and beyond.

See the full “Do Now, Build Toward” toolkit
The Schools Start Here Series

IN THIS SERIES:
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?

IN THIS GUIDE:
What could it look like for my district or school to organize resources in ways that build adults’ capacity for meeting students’ needs?
What does the research say?
Professional learning and collaboration for educators is foundational to successfully and sustainably implementing most other improvement strategies.

This school year and beyond, the success of other strategies — including everything from small group literacy instruction, to addressing students’ social-emotional needs, to implementing tutoring programs — will be shaped by the capacity of educators. This requires putting systems and structures in place to build educator capacity and expanding opportunities for educators to collaboratively plan and coordinate student supports.
Research\(^1\) and case studies of high-performing schools\(^2\) indicate that high-quality, content-focused, collaborative professional learning is based on **three key elements**.

### 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\(^3\), 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.\(^4\)

**Sources:**\(^1\)IES, American Educational Research Journal; \(^2\)ERS Igniting the Learning Engine, \(^3\)AERA, \(^4\)Kraft
In addition to content-focused teams, various collaboration structures are needed to support students, especially those with greater needs.

- Due to intensified student needs, it’s even more important that teachers have content-focused collaboration time with the support of content-experts embedded into the school day.

- Teachers will also need additional time in shared-student teams to coordinate differentiated student supports.

- 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.

Therefore, investments to increase release time so teachers have individual planning time and can collaborate in both shared-content and shared-student teams will be key in this moment.
Strategic schools integrate professional learning and collaboration through a **mix of meeting and coaching structures** while protecting individual teachers’ planning time.

**Schools Start Here:**

**Professional Learning & Collaboration**

**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.

**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 2021-22 school year.

**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.

**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.

**Expert Roles**

- Role with instructional expertise to lead professional learning, facilitate collaboration time, and provide coaching and feedback to teachers.
Research indicates the importance of deliberate & strategic approaches to using **granular student data** 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.¹

- Programs in which analysis of student assessments is paired with content planning / development and instructional-focused feedback and content development produce better results.¹

- 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.²
  - Frequent review of granular student-level assessment data to identify what types of small group instruction are needed to address unfinished learning.³
  - 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.⁴

Sources: ¹EdWeek, ²Instruction Partners, ³Instruction Partners, ⁴Street Data
How can districts and schools invest sustainably?
Federal stimulus funds provide an opportunity to address students’ current needs and build toward lasting improvement.

To plan ESSER investments with long-term sustainability in mind…

- **Size the full cost of implementing strategies over time.**
  Consider *all* the cost components associated with implementing the strategy well, including those that address intensified needs and those that build long-term capacity. Understand which costs will need to be sustained over time.

- **Plan out how spending and organization will shift to sustain critical investments over time.**
  To avoid fiscal cliffs, have an exit strategy where possible. Carefully monitor and plan for what needs to be sustained.

- **Invest in building bridges to new ways of organizing.**
  Pilot and evaluate new approaches that lower future costs or redirect resources to sustain this strategy.

- **Define success, measure, and adjust.**
  Investing in a continuous improvement system is critical for ensuring that strategies evolve and improve over time. For more on this, see *Uncharted Waters*.
Size the full cost of implementing strategies over time.

To invest sustainably, districts and schools will need to size the full cost of key components of their approach to professional learning and collaboration.

**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?
ESSER investments should balance investing in immediate student needs with building lasting capacity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content-Expert Roles</th>
<th>Address intensified needs</th>
<th>Build system capacity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated Time for Professional Learning and Collaboration</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-Quality, Aligned Materials</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Development and Management</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.
Illustrative investment needed

ESSER funds offer significantly more expertise and time to support professional learning and collaboration in the short term to support teachers’ response to pandemic-related needs. In the long term, systems may seek to maintain higher investment than pre-COVID. Systems should monitor results closely to determine strategic levels of ongoing investment.

Key Question: How can districts and schools sustain increased professional learning and collaboration — without increasing long-term costs?

Possibly reduce investments in these areas back to baseline once curriculum and monitoring systems are in place.

ESSER funds start-up costs as systems build out their programs, long-term costs will continue at lower levels.
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, for example, lanes.
- Shift more resources to roles focused on professional learning. For example, reduce administrative staff to instead allocate teacher-leading 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.
Districts and schools will need to monitor progress and learn from experience 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
How can districts and schools target ESSER dollars now?
Investments in all components of professional learning and collaboration are strategic and allowable uses for ESSER dollars.

The CARES Act (ESSER I) includes allowable uses of funds related to preventing, preparing for, and responding to COVID-19.

Note that the ‘additional’ LEA allowable uses of funds under the CRRSA Act (ESSER II), such as addressing learning loss, preparing schools for reopening, and testing, repairing, and upgrading projects to improve air quality in school buildings, already are permitted under the CARES Act.

-US Department of Education
Districts and schools will need to invest in developing **expert roles** to support professional learning and collaboration.

**Content-Expert Roles**

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

- **Invest in one or more of the following roles** with 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.
  - Create teacher-leader roles by providing stipends or increasing compensation for additional responsibilities, or by hiring additional staff to create release time for teacher-leaders so they can extend their reach while remaining in the classroom.
  - Hire instructional coaches at the school- or district-level.
  - Repurpose administrator 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.
Districts and schools will need to find **sufficient, 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?

- **Invest in additional professional learning days** 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 on a quarterly basis.
  - 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 "Scheduling & Staffing" section.

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**Content-Expert Roles**

**Dedicated Time for Professional Learning and Collaboration**

**High-Quality, Aligned Materials**

**Program Development and Management**
Effective professional learning and collaboration must be grounded in **high-quality, aligned materials for students**.

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 thoughtfully adjust instruction and tailor interventions. *(Note: Adopting a new curriculum with aligned professional learning is an investment of time. Consider staging the roll-out of the new curriculum over a few years to watch out for the bandwidth of staff, especially at the start of 21-22 school year).*

- **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.
Effective professional learning and collaboration must also have strong and coherent structures in place, including ways of ensuring teachers have access to high-quality, aligned materials.

What investments must be made in developing, managing, and monitoring the program — including ensuring teachers’ access to high-quality materials?

- Determine whether district teams have the capacity and expertise to develop strong and coherent professional learning and collaboration structures, 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 and experiences and support all tiers and aspects of instructions (tiered instruction, SEL instruction, building relationships, trauma-informed practice, other school initiatives, etc.) to facilitate the growth and development of teachers in expert-led sessions in one of the following ways:
  
  - Purchase externally.
  
  - Partner with an external organization to deliver these trainings.
  
  - District staff invest time to develop materials.
  
  - Invest in experts who have sufficient time and expertise to develop materials for collaboration time, including agenda, data reports, and relevant resources.
Assessments and monitoring systems are needed to both evaluate the program and to evolve the approach.

What investments must be made in developing, managing, and monitoring the program?
- Build **continuous improvement structures** at the school- and district-level to evolve practices and identify proof points.
  - Ensure systems and structures for professional learning and collaboration are being **implemented with fidelity**. For example, meetings are happening as planned, and barriers to professional learning and collaboration are minimized.
  - Evaluate the **impact on student learning** and achievement outcomes.
  - Evaluate the impact of professional learning and collaboration on **teacher satisfaction**.
    - Administer surveys to determine whether teachers feel that the teaching job is rewarding, sustainable and collaborative.
    - Collect data on teacher retention and related statistics.
    - Ensure professional learning and collaboration are job-embedded and relevant to teachers' daily lives and experiences.
    - Identify and track data and/or changes in teacher practice depending on district priorities.
Investments in professional learning and collaboration will vary across districts and schools based on student and staff needs and context.

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.
What does strategic scheduling and staffing look like?
Scheduling and staffing for professional learning and collaboration centers around **three key decision points.**

**Decision Point #1:**
**Determine the teams that should meet**, and what durations and frequencies.

**Decision Point #2:**
**Find dedicated time** to embed 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.
Decision Point #1

Determine the teams that should meet, and what durations and frequencies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaming structures can include…</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| All staff                      | - All staff, including teachers, meet to discuss **school- or districtwide initiatives and updates.**  
- **Trainings** for all staff (on topics like family and community engagement, and procedures/policies).  
- **Frequency**: Should take place every week but can be flexibly used for shared-student teams and other collaboration. |
| Shared-content teams           | - Teachers who teach the same content meet for shared **adult learning, lesson planning/adapting curricula, and analyzing student data.**  
- At the **elementary level**, content teams are likely the same as grade-level and shared-student teams, unless grades are departmentalized.  
- In **larger schools**, content teams could be a single grade and content (ex: 6th-grade math), while in **smaller schools**, multiple grades could meet in vertical content teams (ex: 6th-, 7th-, and 8th-grade science team).  
- **Frequency**: Should take place at least for at least 90 min/week and for a longer meeting every 6-9 weeks.  
- Teachers also need **unit planning/unit internalization time** to deepen understanding of curriculum and content in upcoming units, including identifying “load bearing” concepts/skills that require different strategies, identifying approaches to intervention, and planning lessons (should take place every 6-9 weeks, depending on length of each unit). |
Continued: Decision Point #1

Determine the teams that should meet, and what durations and frequencies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaming structures can include...</th>
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</table>
| **Shared-student teams**         | • Teachers who **share the same students** require time to review student data to inform data-driven practice, and regroup students as needed.  
• **Frequency:** Should take place as frequently as needed (likely more at the beginning of the 21-22 school year due to intensified student needs). |
| **Special purpose teams (MTSS, EWS, attendance, etc.)** | • Teachers who share the same students (or schoolwide teams) require time to **identify students who need additional academic, behavioral, and social-emotional supports** and connect them to the appropriate resources and interventions.  
• **Frequency:** MTSS meetings should take place every 5-6 weeks; EWS meetings should take place 1-2x/month. |
| **Coach-coachee pairs**          | • Teacher-leading/instructional experts meet with teachers to provide **individualized, intensive, and sustained coaching** to improve teaching practices.  
• **Frequency:** Should take place at least once every 2 weeks. |
| **Teacher-leading & instructional experts** | • Teacher-leading/instructional experts need **time, support, and training** to develop their own content knowledge and improve their coaching practices.  
• **Frequency:** Should take place weekly to quarterly, depending on need. |
### Decision Point #2 For Elementary

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To find time...</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Early release or community partner enrichment</strong></td>
<td>• Adopt a half-day calendar so that teachers have extended time for professional learning and collaboration after students go home one day per week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Can also collaborate with external partners to provide student programming during early release or during the school day so that teachers are free to meet for professional learning and collaboration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Also increases individual planning time for teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stack planning time with small group instruction or non-instructional blocks; cover regularly</strong></td>
<td>• Schedule daily planning time next to non-instructional blocks that can be covered by support staff once per week, such as small group instruction, lunch/recess, community circle, and/or arrival/dismissal to create time for an extended block once per week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Can be temporary or part-time staff (see Appendix for note on part-time staff in this moment).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extend enrichment time on one day</strong></td>
<td>• Increase enrichment time for coverage or redistribute existing individual planning time to create an extended block once per week for professional learning and collaboration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hire a floating teacher</strong></td>
<td>• Hire a multi-grade floating science or social studies teacher who provides coverage for professional learning and collaboration time; stack with enrichment block to create an extended-release block for teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Also increases individual planning time for teachers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Decision Point #2 For Secondary

### Find dedicated time to embed professional learning and collaboration within the school day.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To find time…</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Modified block</strong> (floating long block on 6-day cycle)</td>
<td>• Create a floating block schedule where each day has six periods with a rotation so that all periods have an extended long block every six days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Block schedule options</strong></td>
<td>• Shift to a schedule that has fewer, longer blocks of time on a rotation (typically 8 periods that rotate every other day or semester).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Reduce the fraction of each day teachers spend directly teaching** | • Reduce the amount of time each day that teachers are directly teaching to allow for two planning periods back-to-back, creating 90 min of release time every day.  
  • Depending on school size, this could be a targeted strategy for one grade and/or one subject based on focus areas (ex: all 9th-grade teachers, 9th-grade ELA and math teachers, or just 9th-grade ELA teachers).  
  • Also increases individual planning time for these teachers. |
Continued: Decision Point #2 For Secondary

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To find time…</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early release</td>
<td>• Create one <strong>early release day</strong> per week so that teachers have time after students go home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Also increases <strong>individual planning time</strong> for teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External partnerships</td>
<td>• Partner with community organizations, other secondary schools, or local community colleges to provide opportunities for <strong>internships</strong>, <strong>enrichment</strong>, <strong>community service</strong>, or <strong>asynchronous classes</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Also increases <strong>individual planning time</strong> for teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leverage technology to release teachers</td>
<td>• Integrate a <strong>technology-based block</strong> that can be supervised by support staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Can be temporary or <strong>part-time staff</strong> (see Appendix for note on part-time staff in this moment).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students can be <strong>dual-enrolled</strong> with a local community college for an asynchronous class or participate in an education technology program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stack planning time with beginning or end of day</td>
<td>• Schedule <strong>planning time next to beginning or end of day</strong> to create time for an extended block once per week.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Decision Point #3**

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To have an expert…</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Create teacher-leader roles** | • Provides opportunities for teachers to **advance into teacher-leader roles** with additional responsibilities for a stipend or increased compensation.  
• Enables the **strongest teachers** to share their talents while still staying in the classroom.  
• Additional staff must be hired to create **release time** for teacher-leaders.  
• Teacher-leaders will need **professional learning** to deepen content expertise.  
• Teacher-leaders will need **time to plan and prepare** for meetings, and to meet as an instructional leadership team 1x/month. |

(See [Leap Leader at DC Public Schools](#))

| **Hire school- or district-level instructional coaches** | • Likely **most expensive** option, especially if hiring multiple instructional coaches to support all grades.  
• If supporting multiple grades, need to hire someone with **expertise across grades and contents** (or build this expertise).  
• Instructional coaches will need **time to plan and prepare** for meetings, and to meet as an instructional leadership team 1x/month. |

| **Repurpose administrator time to take on additional responsibilities of an expert** | • Must redistribute some **administrator duties** 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.  
• Administrators will need **professional learning** to deepen content expertise across multiple grades and content areas.  
• Administrators will need **time to plan and prepare** for meetings, and to meet as an instructional leadership team 1x/month. |
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 must be designed to include…¹

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**Weekly Time in Leadership Team**

Including…

- 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

**Time Built Into Schedules**

Including…

- 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.
- Planning for collaborative planning meetings*  
  *At least as much time for planning as is spent attending meetings
- Observing and providing feedback to all teachers in their caseload at least once every two weeks

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).

Source: ¹Baltimore City Public Schools
The following pages show **concrete examples** of these decision points in action.
Elementary Example #1

Early release or community partner enrichment.

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.
Elementary Example #2

Stack planning time next to small group instruction.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE
- Stack planning time next to small group instruction and have support staff provide coverage.
- Core instructional time for students and individual planning time for teachers is maintained.

KEYS TO SUCCESS
- Support staff are available and have strong classroom management skills.
- Access to technology-based intervention for the one day per week with support staff.

TRADEOFFS
- Requires enough support staff time to cover each homeroom.
- If small group instruction is covered, time for classroom teachers to lead small group or individual instruction is reduced and requires whole-class management by support staff.

ALSO CONSIDER
- Stacking the planning time next to non-instructional blocks (for example, enrichment, lunch/recess, community circle, arrival, or dismissal).
  - If enrichment is stacked with lunch/recess, teachers still need duty-free lunch.
  - If enrichment is stacked with community circle or closing/dismissal, planning is required to ensure procedures are followed safely and calmly.
Elementary Example #3

Extend enrichment time on one day.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE

• Extend enrichment time once per week while keeping enrichment the same length on other days to protect daily individual planning time for teachers.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

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

TRADEOFFS

• May reduce core instructional time (Note: Due to impact on core instructional time, districts and schools need to be deliberate and thoughtful about how to do this well and reduce time in areas that are not core instruction such as enrichment on other days).
• May require support staff to enable sufficient coverage for the increased amount of enrichment.

ALSO CONSIDER

• Shortening enrichment on the other days to maintain instructional time and eliminate the need for additional enrichment coverage. Would require teacher buy-in, as this would reduce daily teacher individual planning time.
Elementary Example #4

Hire a floating science or social studies teacher.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE
- Hiring 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 enrichment.
- 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.
- Multi-grade teacher has high student load and limited in-school collaborators.
- Rotating student and teacher schedule can be initially confusing.
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 Wednesdays).
Secondary Example #2
Stack planning time.

**WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE**

- Stack planning time next to the beginning of the day (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 and 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.

**ALSO CONSIDER**

- Stacking planning time at the end of the day according to teacher preference.
Secondary Example #3

Grade-level and content teams.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE

- Schedule students in the same grade to electives during the same period.
- Core instructional time is maintained and individual planning time is maintained.
- Also enables time for shared-student teams or content teams by grade level.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

- Teachers should only teach one grade level and can therefore have shared release time.
- Students need to have enough elective options to be spread out across elective teachers.
- School must be large enough to have content teams by grade level.

TRADEOFFS

- Elective teachers are unable to participate in shared-student team meetings and may not get collaborative planning.
- Depending on the number of available electives, elective class sizes could be larger.

ALSO CONSIDER

- Leveraging in-building substitutes to free teachers who have shared students but not shared planning time on an as-needed basis.
- Using an “all-hands-on-deck” approach to create small, differentiated groups during the schoolwide intervention block.
Secondary Example #4

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 ELA 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 the rationale.
• Professional learning for teachers to effectively plan for an extended block of instruction. Since students have a double block of instruction 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.

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.

### 11th-Grade Student

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Per. 1</td>
<td>English I</td>
<td>English I</td>
<td>English I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per. 2</td>
<td>Elective 1</td>
<td>Elective 1</td>
<td>Algebra I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per. 3</td>
<td>Elective 1</td>
<td>Elective 1</td>
<td>Algebra I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per. 4</td>
<td>Algebra I</td>
<td>Algebra I</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per. 5</td>
<td>Elective 2</td>
<td>Elective 2</td>
<td>Elective 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per. 6</td>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>Biology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per. 7</td>
<td>World History</td>
<td>World History</td>
<td>World History</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Secondary Example #5

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 in 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: Gives opportunities to remediate or accelerate students second semester, based on their first semester performance.
## Secondary Example #6

**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 9th-grade ELA).
  - Change staff assignments to increase the number of ELA teachers and reduce the number of elective teachers. This will enable the number of ELA sections (and therefore ELA class size) to remain the same, while elective class sizes will increase.
  - Hire additional ELA teachers to keep the number of ELA sections similar.
- Core instructional time for students is maintained and individual planning time for teachers who spend less time directly teaching is increased.

### KEYS TO SUCCESS
- Will require buy-in from all teachers, since only some teachers have additional planning.
- Schools have additional resources to put toward hiring more full-time staff and lowering load.

### TRADEOFFS
- All other teachers teach 6 out of 7 periods every day and don’t have collaborative planning time.
- Hard to use similar strategy if the school wants to scale the practice.
- Teacher load is less meaningfully reduced (~30 fewer students).

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

### Table: 11th-Grade Student and 11th-Grade Teacher Scheduling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>11th-Grade Student</th>
<th>11th-Grade Teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Per. 1</td>
<td>World History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per. 2</td>
<td>Elective 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per. 3</td>
<td>Biology</td>
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<td>English I</td>
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<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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<td>Algebra I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per. 6</td>
<td>Elective 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per. 7</td>
<td>Elective 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Schools Start Here: Professional Learning & Collaboration
Teacher-leaders’ roles can be leveraged to coach other teachers and facilitate collaborative professional learning.

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Per. 1</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
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<td>Teaching</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Biology Planning</td>
<td>Chemistry Planning</td>
<td>Physics Planning</td>
<td>Meeting Prep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per. 4</td>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>CTE Planning</td>
<td>Meeting Prep</td>
<td>CTE Planning</td>
<td>Observations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per. 5</td>
<td>Course Prep</td>
<td>Course Prep</td>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per. 6</td>
<td>Meeting Prep</td>
<td>Principal Meeting</td>
<td>Course Prep</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Course Prep</td>
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<td>Afterschool</td>
<td></td>
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<td>ILT Meeting</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: 1 Baltimore City Public Schools
Additionally, there are **district-level enabling conditions** that can either expand or limit how effectively schools can create time and roles for professional learning and collaboration.

**Role Flexibility**

- **Teacher-of-record policies** that encourage teaming and/or collaboration among experienced, rookie, and pre-service teachers.

- **Compensation policies** that enable pay to be based on differentiated roles and increased responsibilities.

- Ability to contract with **third-parties** — such as local organizations and community colleges — to provide tutoring or enrichment to create release time for teachers.

**Schedule Flexibility**

- The ability to develop **schedules** that take into account students’ needs, interests, and progress.

- The flexibility to schedule long **collaborative planning blocks** during the school day for shared-content and shared-student collaboration among teachers and staff.
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, 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.
For more tools and information...

See the full “Do Now, Build Toward” toolkit

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As your team weighs the possible tradeoffs associated with different approaches, makes decisions about how to organize resources, and plans for how to evolve and scale your approaches over time, we encourage you to adapt these guides to meet your unique needs and context.

To share your work or get help navigating your “Do Now, Build Toward” approach, contact us.
Appendix
Note: In this moment, hiring **part-time staff** may offer flexibility and options that strategies requiring additional, specialized, full-time staff may not.

- Enables **schedule flexibility** (for example, two part-time staff members can cover all elementary school blocks in the morning).
- Likely **more affordable** option, since part-time staff are working fewer hours and not specialized.
- Enables **concentrated expertise and lower caseloads** if the part-time staff is only responsible for a small number of students.
- Provides more **individualized attention and support** for each student to feel known by at least one adult given potentially lower caseloads.
- Allows for **hiring from a greater and non-traditional talent pool**, which is key in this moment given school staffing needs.
- Can be **added to existing structures or used in combination** with any of the other strategies.
- **Clear exit plan** as the need for additional professional learning and collaboration time decreases.