



Reimagining the Teaching Role: Model Teacher Contract Language

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Introduction

Across the country, districts are focused on attracting and retaining an effective and diverse teacher workforce to meet student needs. Districts recognize that, in many cases, the traditional one-teacher, one-classroom model is not meeting student or teacher needs. It's time to reimagine the teaching role and redesign staffing structures to be more attractive and sustainable for teachers and support better student outcomes. Strategic staffing models build out formal teacher leadership roles, create structures for working in teams led by teacher leaders with shared responsibility for student learning, and position all the adults in a school to maximize their service to students and their work with each other.

What does it mean to reimagine the teaching role?

Often used interchangeably with terms like “strategic staffing” and “strategic school staffing,” reimagining the teaching role involves disrupting traditional approaches to teaching in favor of innovative solutions like creating teacher teams to manage the instruction of larger classrooms, implementing flexible scheduling, and developing new roles for teachers that allow them to advance in their careers while staying in the classroom, making the profession more sustainable—and ultimately leading to improved student outcomes.

There are many approaches to strategic staffing. [Education First](#) categorizes them into three primary model types: 1) changing how teams are structured to better support students, 2) leveraging broader pools of talent to teach courses, and 3) changing how existing teachers do their work by optimizing technology. For this work, NCTQ primarily focused on the first type of model, which includes distributed leadership models. [Click here](#) to learn more about different models and approaches.

Reimagining teaching roles often requires revising teacher contracts and district policies. This tool is designed to help. We organized it by five key elements commonly found in teacher contracts that may be relevant to districts implementing strategic staffing models. It is especially useful when it comes to shifting teaching structures so there is more shared responsibility for student outcomes, tapping the talent and expertise of varied roles. Not all the elements we identified will be relevant for all districts: Districts must consider their context and take care to align their desired strategic staffing model to their unique goals for students and teachers.

Five Elements

1. Teacher Leader Roles and Responsibilities, Selection, and Compensation
2. Class Size
3. Evaluation and Team Outcomes
4. Collaborative Time
5. Support Staff

Each section of the tool presents one of five key contractual elements to consider when pursuing a strategic staffing model. Sections include 1) a rationale for why this element matters to a strategic staffing model, 2) key questions to consider when developing contract language related to the element, and 3) model contract language.

Teacher employment contracts are bargained by the parties in good faith and within the parameters of state policy and local context. Some recommendations in this guide may be more relevant than others to a particular school district.

The model contract language is based on the analysis of the 148 teacher contracts and district policies in NCTQ's [Teacher Contract Database](#) (TCD), research from current strategic staffing models, and other best practices identified through qualitative interviews. In our analysis of contracts in the TCD, we found the most common approach to fostering teacher leadership is to develop mentor-teacher roles with a minimal stipend attached. This is the status quo. It is not the strategic staffing we are imagining. Districts will need to design strategic contracts to create structures for teams of educators, working under the direction of teacher leaders, to support instruction that bolsters student outcomes and attracts and retains the most effective teachers. Strategic contract provisions will codify roles and responsibilities, incentives and rewards, and ways of measuring the models' success. Districts should use this resource to identify opportunities to use the collective bargaining process to advance policies related to strategic staffing.

Element 1: Teacher Leader Roles and Responsibilities, Selection, and Compensation

Why This Matters: Teacher leaders are a core element of strategic staffing [models](#). The definition of a teacher leader varies widely from district to district, depending on the specific contextual needs teacher leaders are being called on to meet. In the most innovative models, teacher leaders lead teams of teachers, provide feedback, and help build the skills of others. Teams of teachers may work together with other staff, sharing responsibility based on their distributed expertise for various subjects and students' needs.

Strategic staffing models redesign how all the individuals in a building support teachers and students. Teacher leadership enables strategic staffing models to work, expanding the reach of highly effective teachers and improving instructional

quality for students. Most strategic staffing models call for teacher leaders to continue to work directly with students in some capacity while also assuming team leadership and/or coaching responsibilities.

Creating teacher leader roles can also contribute to [higher rates of retention](#) of the most effective teachers by offering them differentiated responsibilities (sometimes called a career ladder), additional compensation for their expertise and skill, and a way to take on new professional experiences while still keeping one foot in the classroom.

This document refers to teachers who serve in teacher leader roles as their core position. This does not include teacher leaders who teach in the classroom all day and conduct leadership functions on top of their regular duties, often referred to as extra pay for extra responsibility. Additionally, there may be other new roles associated with strategic staffing models, such as teachers who earn more for taking on more students, but those roles are not addressed here.

Districts should ensure that their teacher contracts address three aspects of teacher leader roles to establish a foundation of trust and collaboration and promote strong outcomes:

1. Make clear the roles and responsibilities of teacher leaders.
2. Define the selection criteria and process for identifying teacher leaders, one that stresses transparency and the importance of using data to select the most effective educators for each position.
3. Provide a clear and transparent compensation structure for each teacher leader role.

Key Questions When Developing Contract Language:

- Did we clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of each type of teacher leader role? If we had a teacher leader role previously, have we explained how this role is different in the context of the strategic staffing model we are adopting?
- For teacher leaders, did we specify a range for the desired ratio of teaching time with students to leadership time with teachers?
- Did we clearly articulate the selection criteria for each type of teacher leader role, including that the teacher has demonstrated a high impact on student growth (as determined by multiple measures used by the district)?
- Did we outline the process by which teacher leaders are selected, evaluated, and compensated?

- Did we ensure that the process is based on clear performance criteria, including student performance, and does not rely on subjective measures such as peer voting?
- Have we clarified whether teacher leaders conduct any evaluative responsibilities?
- Have we defined the principal's role in teacher leader selection?
- Is the language flexible enough to meet the needs of the district's individual schools from year to year? Is there a clause that permits annual modifications as necessary?
- Did we make it clear that supplemental pay, if structured that way, is reported to the state retirement system?

MODEL CONTRACT LANGUAGE

I. Roles and Responsibilities

The role of _____ is a teacher leader position within the district and consists of the following responsibilities:

- Leads a team of X to X individuals *[may include positions or titles]* consisting of teachers, paraprofessionals, and/or teacher residents in the same grade or subject *[or in X grades or Y subjects if the position is across grades or subjects]*. *[Note: team size may vary by level of the teacher leader role.]*
- Co-plans, co-instructs, models, coaches, observes, and gives feedback to designated team members.
- Collaborates with designated team members to plan and instruct students assigned to the team.
- Instructs students part time, at least XX%–XX% of the time (or XX hours or days per week). These expectations may differ from school to school and team to team, and expectations will be communicated to all teacher leaders in writing at the beginning of the year. Some teacher leaders may have their own class of record (elementary) or sections (secondary), and if so, this should be specified. *[The percentage of time may look different from team to team based on teacher and student needs. It could be noted as a range of percentage of time or hours per week/month].*
- Accepts responsibility for the learning and development of all students assigned to their team.
- May assist in hiring or evaluating team members.

II. Selection Criteria

To be eligible to apply for the _____ *[teacher leader role title]* position, candidates must demonstrate the following:

- A. Possession of a standard/professional *(insert state)* teaching credential.
- B. High impact on student growth based on multiple measures in at least X out of the past X years of teaching experience. Candidates cannot have attained a low impact on student growth in any year during the past X years.
- C. A highly effective or equivalent rating on recent teacher evaluations, earning proficient or above on all standards and the summative rating.
- D. Leadership that brings about strong results. Candidates must demonstrate characteristics such as working cooperatively and effectively with children and adults, using data to set goals and evaluate results, responding to feedback, attending to details, and giving constructive feedback.

The district uses a two-step process for selecting teacher leaders. First, candidates apply to the district to join the teacher leader selection pool based on the selection criteria above. Second, administrators at individual school sites facilitate the selection process through interviews, demonstrations, and other means.

The principal has discretion in the final selection of the _____ role, from candidates in the teacher leader selection pool.

***Note: Given districts' varying sizes, districts may choose to delegate more hiring responsibilities to the school level. As such, it is still recommended that districts establish a multi-step process whereby aspiring teacher leaders demonstrate their effectiveness before proceeding to the next step in the process.*

EXAMPLE: Charlotte-Mecklenburg uses its [Student Achievement Form](#) to gather information on a teacher's impact on student outcomes as part of the selection process for teacher leaders.

III. Compensation

Bargaining unit members assigned to the following positions shall receive a stipend added to their base salary, increased by the following amounts for each school year they are assigned.

Should a teacher (i) fail to maintain the minimum criteria established for the position, (ii) not successfully perform the duties associated with the role, or (iii) voluntarily relinquish the role, the teacher will no longer be paid the associated supplement and will only be paid the applicable salary.

For schools implementing strategic staffing models, on an annual basis, the district and school administrators shall review teacher leader candidates to affirm (or deny) each individual continuing in the role of *(insert position here)*. Teachers serving in any of the leadership roles identified in this contract shall be compensated according to the provisions below. The number of positions may be reviewed, modified, eliminated, or expanded by the *(insert position here)* based on the needs of the schools and their students each year.

Additional compensation may be given for competitive market value, unique skills and experiences, and district- or school-specific needs.

[Districts should list each position and the associated compensation that corresponds to the roles and responsibilities listed in the contract.]

- *Title of teacher leader role: \$ XX,XXX*
- *Title of teacher leader role: \$ XX,XXX*
- *Title of teacher leader role: \$ XX,XXX*

[Examples]

Baltimore City:

Multi-Classroom Leader III: \$16,500

Multi-Classroom Leader II: \$13,500

Multi-Classroom Leader I: \$10,000

Indianapolis:

Multi-Classroom Leader III: \$18,300

Multi-Classroom Leader II: \$11,400

Multi-Classroom Leader I: \$6,800
Expanded impact teacher: \$6,800

Teachers who teach on a team led by a multi-classroom leader could earn up to \$1,300 additional pay, *if* schools can afford to do this on each team in the school building.

Note: In Baltimore and Indianapolis, Multi-Classroom Leader levels (I, II, and III) represent increasingly large team sizes. [Multi-classroom leaders](#) typically lead teams in lesson planning, data analysis, etc. They observe, give feedback, co-teach, and model while instructing students a portion of the time.

Element 2: Class Size

Why This Matters: They may be well-intended, but class size limits and student-teacher ratios can be barriers to implementing strategic staffing models. In some scenarios, these policies prevent more than one adult from supporting students in the same classroom or prohibit a highly effective teacher from taking on additional students in return for additional support and pay. In rethinking how staffing structures are designed, districts need to consider how all adults in a building can support meeting student needs, and they may need to adjust class sizes accordingly.

Key Questions When Developing Contract Language:

- Is there a provision, waiver, or exception for school-based class size policies in schools to provide flexibility for implementing strategic school staffing models?
- Is there an allowance for teachers to receive additional pay and support in exchange for taking on more students?
- Did we consider how changing class sizes may impact teacher collaborative time?

Model Contract Language *(For contracts that currently include class size restrictions)*

The school council *[or relevant term for the school leadership team]* may waive the class size provision of the teacher contract provided they are implementing an approved strategic school staffing model. The school council will develop its strategic school staffing model and gain the superintendent's (or their designee's) approval to implement it. The superintendent or their designee will re-evaluate the strategic school staffing model annually.

If the model includes highly effective teachers taking on more students, it should indicate how these teachers will be selected and how they will be supported by other teachers or other support positions (e.g., paraprofessionals, residents, tutors) to meet student needs. The plan must also include the compensation rate for teachers who take on at least **XX%** more students than the average class size *[if applicable]*.

Element 3: Evaluation and Team Outcomes

Why This Matters: A key foundation in most strategic staffing models is shared accountability among a team of teachers. Teacher leaders may take on the role of team leader, which may mean they are responsible for developing other teachers' skills while also teaching students part-time. Given the various roles that teacher leaders play at different school sites, it is vital to outline in detail how teachers will share accountability for students. It is also important for everyone involved to be clear on teacher leaders' role in teacher observations or teacher evaluations, as well as how teacher leaders are evaluated.

Key Questions When Developing Contract Language:

- Did we clearly outline the process and criteria by which teacher leaders are evaluated?
- Did we clarify the role teacher leaders may play in observing other teachers and providing feedback?
- Did we make clear the role teacher leaders may or may not play in evaluating teachers on their team?
- Did we clarify the process that determines how students are assigned to the rosters of individual teachers or teams of teachers?

- Did we clarify how student learning data will affect each teacher's evaluation in cases when rostering assigns students to more than one teacher (e.g., a teacher-leader and a team member share responsibility or a grade-level team shares responsibility)?

Model Contract Language

We recommend coming to an agreement on the following for schools implementing a strategic staffing model:

- *The role teacher leaders may or may not play in teacher observations and evaluations.*
- *The role of team outcomes in a teacher's evaluation.*
- *The process for approving student rosters.*
- *The system to evaluate teacher leaders.*

I. Observations and Evaluations

- A. Teacher leaders **(if specific title(s) enter here)** may conduct observations to provide feedback to teachers on their respective teams. This role and process should be outlined in the school's strategic staffing model and made clear to all teachers involved at the beginning of the academic year.
- B. The district should determine whether the teacher leader's observations are part of the official evaluation record or for coaching purposes only at schools implementing a strategic staffing model.
[Note: It is recommended that if schools have different tiers of teacher leaders, then teachers in the highest tier (e.g., the most effective with the most responsibility) be part of the official evaluation process.]

II. Student Rosters

- A. Administrators in schools implementing a strategic staffing model *[insert other names as district sees fit]* shall identify by October 1 of each year the students for which each teacher, teacher leader, or team of teachers is responsible. This may include students appearing on multiple rosters or multiple teachers sharing one roster. Rosters may differentiate responsibility by subject. The rosters will be agreed upon by the applicable teachers on the team and approved by the building leader.

III. Team Outcomes

- A. All teachers who share students (i.e., on the same roster) take shared responsibility for students' success.

- B. Teachers on a team are expected to work together to meet their team’s goals.
- C. In teacher evaluation systems that include student learning data, this component of each teacher’s evaluation shall be based on all of the students assigned to them.

IV. Evaluation of Teacher Leaders

- A. Teacher leaders shall be evaluated annually, and the use of student growth data of all students served by the team they lead is to be included in their evaluation.
- B. Teacher leader evaluations should align with existing teacher evaluation processes. *[See Indianapolis’s example [here](#).]*
- C. It is possible for teacher leaders *(if specific title(s), enter here)* to be relieved of their teacher leader duties for various reasons, including but not limited to:
 - (i) Fails to maintain the minimum criteria established for the position.
 - (ii) Inadequate performance of the additional duties associated with the teacher leader role.

Element 4: Collaborative Time

Why This Matters: Collaborative teaming structures are a core principle of many strategic staffing models. When local policy limits the time teachers have to collaborate, it could impede the implementation of team-based approaches to instruction. Districts and schools must consider new ways to carve out time for teachers to work, plan, and problem-solve together. Since schools may have varied schedules, flexibility at the school level is likely necessary.

Key Questions When Developing Contract Language:

- Did we define the purpose of collaborative time?
- Did we allow for flexibility for different collaborative time models across schools in the district?
- Is the contract clear on expectations for collaborative time?
- Did we account for differences between elementary and secondary teachers’ schedules and responsibilities?

Model Language

Minimum requirement: Teachers shall receive a XX minute collaborative period each week. *[Districts may need to vary by elementary and secondary.]*

- I. Purpose of collaborative time
 - A. Collaborative time is a time to work, study, and plan together in a collegial manner to better understand content; better implement high-quality curricula to ensure consistent delivery of instruction; analyze student outcomes, products, and performance to determine implications for instruction; and share best practices to improve teaching and learning to meet the needs of our students.
- II. Use of collaborative planning time
 - A. Teachers shall use collaborative planning time for its intended purpose—to plan with other team members to provide better instructional services to students.
 - B. For schools implementing strategic staffing models, planning time for teachers working in teams shall be scheduled to accommodate team planning whenever possible. Teachers will be provided a minimum of XX minutes of planning time each week. The teams, at the direction of their teacher leader, shall determine the goals and tasks for each planning session.

Element 5: Support Staff

Why This Matters: Including support staff (paraprofessionals, residents, apprentices, tutors) is a key component in many strategic staffing models. Sometimes, state or local policy restricts the roles or functions of paraprofessionals, residents, or similar positions. In terms of contracts, schools trying to implement strategic staffing models should have flexibility in how individuals in these roles receive training, serve student needs, and support team outcomes.

While some districts may have separate contracts for paraprofessionals, teachers' aides, or similar positions, we felt it necessary to mention those positions in this guidance document, given their critical role in strategic staffing models.

Key Questions When Developing Contract Language:

- Have we made clear who determines the assignments of paraprofessionals/teachers' aides or other similar positions?
- Does the contract allow a wide range of assignments for these positions to fully support teacher leaders, teachers, and students (e.g., providing small-group instruction)?
- Is it clear that the primary responsibility for positions like paraprofessionals, teachers' aides, and other similar positions is to support instruction?
- Have we made clear who directly supervises paraprofessionals, teachers' aides, or other similar positions to support instruction?
- If the staffing model includes advanced paraprofessional roles with additional responsibilities and higher pay, does the contract specify the responsibilities, selection process, and compensation of such advanced paraprofessional roles?

Model Language

Language referencing paraprofessionals, teachers' aides, etc., may be included in the teacher contract, separate paraprofessional contract, or other district policy. It is also important to note that districts have specific paraprofessional roles related to special education service delivery. Those roles are likely to be assigned to a particular special education program and are likely to be assigned/managed by a building or district special education administrator.

In schools implementing strategic staffing models, paraprofessionals/teachers' aides *(insert other appropriate terms in your district)* shall be under the direction of the principal or their designee (such as a teacher leader). The assignment of duties and functions of classroom paraprofessionals/teachers' aides shall be the responsibility of the principal or assistant principal of the building or their designee (such as a teacher leader). Paraprofessionals/teachers' aides shall be informed of their regular assignments at the beginning of the academic year or semester. The principal shall maintain the flexibility to make adjustments in assignments for the benefit of the school program.

Paraprofessionals/teachers' aides are primarily responsible for assisting in the instruction of students under the supervision of one or more teachers.

Paraprofessionals/teachers' aides assigned to teachers or teacher teams are to be supervised by the teacher or teacher leader of the team to which they are assigned. Aides are not to be routinely asked to perform services for the school's administrative office.

At the district's (or school's) request, paraprofessionals are required to attend all staff meetings to stay informed about instructional plans for students. They will be paid at their current hourly rate.

Schools may implement staffing models that involve roles for paraprofessionals, aspiring teachers, and other staff who are not certified teachers. This section provides an example of language to specify the job responsibilities, selection processes, and compensation for each role:

Support Role 1: Team Support Paraprofessional or Teacher Resident

I. Job Responsibilities:

- A. Tutor small groups of students.
- B. Supervise classes to provide release time for teachers.
- C. Assist the teaching team with data analysis or other tasks that support the team.
- D. Participate in team meetings *[specify as desired]*.
- E. Meet with the teacher leader weekly to receive feedback and coaching.

II. Selection Criteria:

- A. For paraprofessionals:
 1. At least one year of effective performance as a conventional teacher assistant or comparable job.
 2. Demonstrated ability to work effectively with students and adult team members.
- B. For teacher residents:
 1. Enrollment in good standing in a program leading to teacher certification.
 2. Demonstrated ability to work effectively with students and adult team members.

III. Compensation:

- A. This section could specify a salary level or scale for these roles or a supplement to standard paraprofessional pay in the district.

Additional Resources

- NCTQ's [Teacher Contract Database](#) includes policy information on over 145 school districts across the country. It provides analysis of collective bargaining agreements, evaluation handbooks, salary schedules, and other documents to distill district policy across key topics such as salary, evaluation, and teacher work day.
- Education First's [Strategic School Staffing Landscape Scan](#). This report outlines three model types of strategic staffing and provides a conceptual framework for strategic staffing models. It also provides research on progress to date and comprehensive examples of different approaches across all three model types.
- Educators for Excellence's website, [Where We Agree](#), features additional contract examples for modern classrooms that include elements of strategic staffing models as well as other issues addressed in contracts, such as general compensation.
- Educators for Excellence and Columbia University's Center for Public Research & Leadership's report [Designing Contracts for the Modern Classroom](#) focuses on best-practice processes to formulate teacher contracts.