Teacher Leader Programs: Structure and Staffing in Four TIF Districts

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Introduction

Some Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grantees are experimenting with the design and operation of teacher leader (TL) programs as part of their performance-based compensation systems (PBCS). Much of the impetus for this is the U.S Department of Education TIF 4 requirement that grantees' PBCS should provide for "additional responsibilities and leadership roles," along with other TIF 4 system requirements for PBCS. In addition, districts now view TL programs as a way to provide professional development and advancement opportunities to educators, as well as to leverage the knowledge and experience of their most successful educators.

Establishment of a TL program requires creation of a TL program structure, accompanied by a staffing plan. The staffing plan must include (a) a description of the TL tasks, duties, and compensation, (b) a process for recruiting and selecting the desired number of TLs, (c) a procedure for making job offers, and (d) onboarding methods that will provide training and mentoring support to newly hired TLs.

To assist TIF grantees in learning about and developing staffing processes for TL programs, we looked at four grantees who have developed and implemented TL programs within their districts. We chose grantees by searching through the TIF 3 and TIF 4 grantee proposals and identifying those that included a TL program as part of their PBCS. We identified four districts: Seattle Public Schools (TIF 3) ; Denver Public Schools (TIF 4), Hillsborough County Public Schools (TIF 4), and the School District of Lee County (TIF 4).

We gathered information about these grantees' TL programs via phone conversations. We asked each district's technical assistance lead to connect us with the TIF coordinator and/or person in charge of the TL program. We prepared a set of questions to be asked of each district. The questions focused on the characteristics of the TL program, a description of the TL role, and the TL staffing and accompanying support processes. Table 1 provides more details about the range of topics we discussed with the grantees. We took notes during the phone conversations and asked for documents that provided more details about these topics.

Table 1. Topics of Discussion with TIF Coordinator and Teacher Leader Managers

Program Characteristics	Teacher Leader Role	Staffing and Support
Impetus for developing the program	Number and types of teacher leader positions	Eligibility criteria for the teacher leader role
Goals for the program	Time spent on teaching and leadership duties	Recruiting applicants
Managing the program	Specific duties of the teacher leader position	Selecting teacher leader applicants in the district and schools
District and school administrator roles within the program	Compensation teachers receive as a teacher leader	Training teacher leaders
School application process for the program	Contract terms	Mentoring teacher leaders
Program evaluation		Teacher leader evaluation
Sustainability plans post-TIF		

We reviewed the notes and program documents and created summaries of information gathered. Those summaries were placed into three tables. Table 2 deals with characteristics of the TL program in each district; Table 3 summarizes how each district defines the TL role; and Table 4 shows how each district goes about the whole TL staffing/support process. Each of the tables is shown below along with a written overview.

The Teacher Leader Programs

Table 2 illustrates the various characteristics of TL programs, which started primarily as a way to help teachers acquire professional growth and advancement opportunities without having to leave the classroom completely. One or more district-level individuals guided the creation and development of the TL programs; those district staff then became TL program managers.

In each district, the TL program manager oversees the total program and performs many different tasks. These include helping principals understand the program and define the TL role in their own schools, identifying the number of TL positions and school assignments, conducting the district-level recruitment and initial screening of TL candidates, developing TL program policies and procedures, establishing and managing TL training, and serving as a mentor to TLs.

At the school level, the principal is heavily involved in the TL program. Involvement takes many forms and may include defining the TL role and expectations, recruiting TL candidates, leading the applicant screening and the hiring committee, assigning teachers to TLs, assisting in identifying needed professional development, and evaluating TL performance. School staff also participate in the TL program, especially by serving on hiring committees. Union involvement in the TL programs ranges from advisory roles to negotiation of the specific contract language to define and govern the programs.

The number and types of schools that participate in the TL program vary. In Hillsborough County and Lee County, all TIF schools participate; these are high-need schools. In Seattle, all district schools participate in the TL program. Denver is different in that it has developed a school application process through which it recruits and selects schools that are most ready for, and will benefit from, the TL program.

The TL programs are too new for formal evaluation of their impacts. The districts collect some data now around teacher perceptions of the program, results of interviews about the program with various individuals, and student outcomes. The district TL coordinators said that more formal evaluation is needed.

Finally, the districts are beginning to discuss issues of sustaining the TL program post-TIF since they have a common desire to continue their TL programs. The districts are making headway in incorporating the TL program positions and costs into district management and budget decision making.

Table 2. Teacher Leader Program Characteristics

Topic	Denver	Hillsborough County	Lee County	Seattle
Logistics				
Creation and Goals	In 2011, identified gap in leadership opportunities for teachers in the district's strategy and wanted to leverage teacher leadership	• Started in 2007 to provide professional growth opportunities to teachers who don't want to leave classroom • More financially sustainable than other options because teacher stays in classroom part of time	• Noticed 50% turnovers within first 5 years of teaching to make more money as administrators • Goal in TIF application to increase teacher retention	Union and district could both agree on career ladder with extra compensation for 2010 TIF grant
Management of Program	• Manager works in human resources • Created design guide for schools, implementation guide, and other policies and procedures for the TL program • Has a peer in teacher development and leadership who develops TLs and provides support for differentiated roles	Manager has 90% time to support TLs, provide professional development at schools, recruit new TLs, and work with another staff member who oversees TIF schools	• District manager for program manages recruiting and provides mentoring for TLs • Meets with principals monthly to discuss TL in their schools • For new principals, meets to discuss how they view TL role in their schools	• Two managers for TL program divided into elementary and secondary career ladder programs • Post TL position openings and mentor and coach TLs
Number of Schools	• About 80: opt-in, early adopters in 2012–13, 40 schools in 2013–14, adding about 30 more schools in 2014–15 • Now blend of schools funded by TIF (hard-to-staff schools) and general district funds • 2 TLs (content specialists) and 1 senior TL per school, on average	• 30: 15 schools in 2013–14, 15 more added in 2014–15 • 1 TL per school	• 32 high-need schools • 2-4 TLs per school, on average (depends on enrollment)	• 95: 27 in first 2 years, now in all schools • 1-5 TLs per school

School Eligibility	Schools must apply to be part of the TL program and spend time designing the TL role in their schools	All TIF schools: high-need and "Renaissance" schools (90% of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch)	All TIF schools: high-need schools (80% students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch in elementary and middle schools, 50% in high schools, and with negative achievement trend or C, D, or F state school grade)	• All schools in the district participate • Began with hard-to-staff schools
Engagement				
Role of Principal	• Participates in school design process for TL roles • Recruits for TL positions within school • Creates hiring committee to review applications for TLs • Works with TLs to determine tasks/ roles • Evaluates TLs	• Recruits within district (prefers within school) • Leads applicant screening in school, which includes picking TL finalists to interview from a list provided by the district • Works with TLs to determine tasks/ roles (does not assign specific teachers to mentor) • Provides feedback and part of formal evaluation of TLs	• Recruits within district (prefers within school) • Participates in district screening panel • Leads applicant screening in school • Sets the schedule for the TL, leads monthly leadership meetings with leadership team, advises TLs to support specific teachers or teams, assigns which professional learning communities TLs lead • Completes part of the TL evaluation	• Recruits for TL positions within school • Leads applicant screening in school • Completes performance evaluation of TLs
Teacher Union Involvement	Not part of contract, but union allows approved TLs to serve as principal's proxy for teacher evaluations	Program under union contract and supports flexibility needed for TLs beyond contract terms	Approved and defined TL role through collective bargaining (along with school board approval)	Program part of contract provisions
Other Stakeholder Involvement	School staff participate in required school hiring committees	District hiring committee includes a TL, principal, and representatives for TIF, the teachers' union, human resources, professional development, and curriculum and instruction	Principals and assistant principals participate in district screening panel. TLs generally participate in school screening for new TLs	Some schools use a community of peers to select TLs

Programmatic Review				
Program Evaluation	• District just hired external evaluator • Uses perception surveys of teachers about their school principal, TLs, and faculty; two feedback sessions per year in which each school sends one administrator and 1-2 TLs; and student outcome data using 2014 as the baseline year	No formal evaluation, but keeps data on what TLs do through their logs and may field a survey this year for TLs to gather feedback from teachers in their schools	• Reviews student achievement data, retention, and proportion of effective and highly effective teachers in TIF vs. non-TIF schools, and time log • Will survey teachers about the TL in their school and survey TLs about district support for their role	• No formal evaluation • The TL program managers meet with each TL in the district • Developing tools to evaluate professional development
Sustainability	• Some school-specific resources and 30 non-TIF schools covered with district funding • District discussing how to fund teacher leader program after TIF since it is part of district strategy	May hire current coaches and mentors (who have full release) as teacher leaders to spend less on training in the future	• District has paid for career ladder evaluation bonuses to TIF and non-TIF schools ($5 million) and will increase district contribution next year • May reduce release time and/or bonuses in future	• The district currently pays for stipends for teacher leaders • Plans to continue program with district funds

The Teacher Leader Roles

As shown in Table 3, the districts have multiple TL roles, due to differences in titles and duties. Titles include TL, senior TL, demonstration teacher, mentor teacher, and master teacher. Such variation reflects both differences in duties and in hierarchy. Duties for a typical TL involve working with other teachers via an evaluation-coaching-feedback cycle, helping teachers understand data analysis and use for instructional improvement, designing and delivering professional development, and modeling instruction. In one instance, TLs also perform formal teacher evaluation.

The districts differ in where they place the TL job within a teacher career ladder. In Seattle, the TL job is part of a menu of career ladder options available to teachers. Lee County views the TL job as a progression into school administration. Denver sees the TL job as serving a dual purpose: allowing teachers to either move into administration or remain in the classroom. Hillsborough County views the TL job as addressing the demand for leadership opportunity from teachers who want to remain in the classroom.

Classroom release time for the TL job varies from 50–60 percent, except in Seattle, where it is 10–15 days per year. Compensation for the TL roles varies substantially, ranging between $1,000 and $10,000 in annual stipends.

Table 3. Teacher Leader Position Descriptions

Topic	Denver	Hillsborough County	Lee County	Seattle
Positions	Team lead, senior team lead	TL	TL	Demonstration teacher, mentor teacher, and master teacher
Duties—Overview	• The program creates time for teachers to transfer their expertise to other teachers by engaging in observation-feedback-coaching cycles • Senior team leads also perform formal summative evaluations of TLs	Support other instructors through modeling and classroom coaching and help principal identify data trends and areas for intervention	Support other teachers through modeling, co-teaching, observing, and providing feedback; pull and analyze data; support professional learning communities and common planning	Support teachers and teacher teams, mentorship, and professional development
Duties—Details	• Senior team leads lead teachers through data inquiry processes; perform needs assessments through data review and observation; develop and deliver professional development; perform observations and formal evaluations; and provide feedback and coaching • Team leads focus on specific content areas	Instructional coaching, developing and delivering professional development, analyzing student data and recommending interventions, analyzing observational data, and providing feedback	Developing and delivering professional development; providing coaching, modeling and formative feedback; developing and planning instructional improvement strategies; providing feedback to principal; and identifying future potential TLs	• Master teachers mentor teachers by observing, modeling, and providing feedback; support teacher teams by coordinating meetings with school leadership and developing and delivering professional development • Mentor and demonstration teachers focus on mentorship and modeling, respectively.
Release Time	50%	50%	60%	15 days for master teachers and 10 days for mentor and demonstration teachers
Compensation	$5,000 for senior team leads $3,000 for team leads	$1,000	$10,000	• $5,200 for master teacher $3,500 for mentor teacher $2,500 for demonstration teacher • Tasks and payouts can be pooled and re-distributed among multiple teachers
Contract	No	No	No	Yes (2 years)
Time Limit	No	No	No	2-year commitment but can reapply
Career Progression	Varies within program, with some TLs moving into administration and others staying in the classroom	Not a career ladder position, but leadership opportunity that teachers have while staying in the classroom	Designed as part of career ladder into administration: from TL to TL specialist to assistant principal	TL positions make up the district teacher career ladder

Teacher Leader Staffing and Support

Districts viewed the TL job as a critical human capital management experiment. To contribute to its success, districts invested heavily in a multi-stage staffing process and multiple support mechanisms for new TLs. Table 4 shows that the districts have developed formal staffing and support systems for their TL cadres. All begin with basic eligibility requirements for the TL job, most importantly teacher evaluation results of "effective" or "highly effective." Almost all recruitment for TL candidates is internal within the district or, in some cases, within the school. The intent of internal recruitment is to maintain a good cultural fit for the new TL, and use of internal recruitment is driven partly by the need for formal evaluation metrics, which are less readily available for teachers outside the district. TL recruitment occurs once or twice a year, interwoven with the regular teacher recruitment cycles.

All four districts set and assess specific qualifications beyond the eligibility requirements. Commonly used qualifications focus on leadership experiences, communication and collaboration (e.g., feedback and coaching), data usage in instruction, and adult learning expertise. Techniques used to assess these qualifications include detailed online applications, structured essays, references, and both one-on-one and panel interviews. In two of the districts, screening (hiring) committees apply formal scoring rubrics to the qualification information they gather.

The selection process is two-tiered in three of the districts. District staff conduct the initial recruitment, application review, and initial screening. School staff (the principal and/or hiring committee) then complete the remainder of the screening. In Seattle, the selection process is school-based. Common to all four districts is the use of principal and/or hiring committee interviews.

Applicants who make it through the selection process may then receive a job offer from the principal to become a TL; an offer is not automatic. The offer is more in the form of a verbal agreement or understanding between the principal and teacher, rather than a formal job offer letter. Most candidates accept the job offers.

All districts provide additional support to the TLs in the form of various types of training and mentoring. Such "onboarding" involves a requirement that new TLs participate in training (covering a variety of topics and skills) during the summer and/or early school year. Topics include teacher observation, rubric evidence and scoring, feedback and coaching/conferencing, data usage in instruction, and scheduling TL time with teachers. Districts also made mentoring available to new TLs. Usually, the TL program manager serves as the mentor, with additional staff also lending some support when needed.

Table 4. Teacher Leader Staffing and Support

Topic	Denver	Hillsborough County	Lee County	Seattle
TL Recruitment				
Applicant Eligibility	"Effective" or higher performance rating	"Highly effective" performance rating, 3 years of experience	Four years (one in district) of teaching ratings as effective/highly effective, 18-hour training, 2 years of leadership experience	"Distinguished" performance rating and "Average" or "High" student growth rating, or "Proficient" rating and "High" student growth rating
Internal vs. External	Mostly internal to school to attain culture fit; some schools recruit externally	Internal to district only due to evidence needed to show eligibility	Internal to district by design; 95% also within site	Internal to school; open to all eligible
Communication	Announcement made to entire school staff	Emails about vacancies to "highly effective" teachers, information meetings and video, and internal publications	Email to all teachers about application; email to TLs (applicants who pass first screening) about school vacancies	District website posts vacancies through a centralized application process; principals inform staff of vacancies
Application Dates and Process	By end of January; application to school principal	In fall and spring before teacher transfer period; online application	Fall and spring; online résumé and cover letter, two letters of recommendation	Apply online by November 1
Management of Process	Primarily at school level, human resource school partners assist principals	Managed by professional development supervisor	Managed by TIF coordinator	Managed by two career ladder professional development specialists
TL Selection				
Qualifications Required	Emphasize experience leading, communication skills, adult education	Certification, past experience, collaboration, work outside team, use of data to learn, helping other teachers	Four years of teaching (one within district), effective or highly effective ratings, 2 years of leadership experience	Adult learning experience, work collaboratively with colleagues, effective or distinguished ratings
Assessment Techniques	Sample interview questions for applicant; panel interview by school personnel committee (required by contract)	• Online application: certification and experience, four essays about working with others and using data for improvement, references • Screening panel interview: collaboration, communication, adult learning • Principal/hiring committee interview: content varies by school	Résumé, cover letter, three interviews (on instruction, data, professional responsibilities), video of instruction, principal/hiring committee interview	Site-based interview questions; focus on relationships with other teachers
Scoring	No scoring rubric	Online application data and screening panel interview scored with 1-4 rating rubrics	Scoring rubric for résumé, cover letter, three interviews and video	Principal and/or hiring committee combines information subjectively, makes final hiring decision

Hiring Process Participants	School personnel committee/ hiring committee (must be representative) and principal	• District staff administer online data review and panel interview; those who pass are referred to schools • School: Principal/ hiring committee interviews and makes hiring decision	• District staff administers résumé, cover letter, three interviews, and video; those who pass are referred to schools • Site: principal/hiring committee conducts final interview and makes hiring decision	• District: manages online applications that are sent to principals • Site: principal/hiring committee conducts final interview and makes hiring decision
Management of Process	Mostly at school level by principal, some district oversight	Managed by professional development supervisor	Managed by TIF coordinator	By principal with consultation available from district program manager
Final Math				
Job Offer	No formal offer letter or separate written contract	No formal job offer letter, just verbal agreement with principal	No formal offer letter, just verbal agreement with principal	No formal job offer
Job Offer Acceptance	No data on acceptance rate, but some teachers have backed out	High level of acceptance	High level of acceptance; more people in applicant pool than positions available	High acceptance rate (57/60)
TL Support				
Training	• One mandatory week in summer (teacher evaluation and certification, adult learning, cognitive coaching, scheduling of work with teachers- coaching cycles) • Cohort meetings during school year	• Summer: adult learning, teacher evaluation rubrics, use of evidence, coaching, diverse cultures • During year: tools/ techniques for mentoring	• Five days (3 before school year, 2 after) about achievement data, questioning, and standards- based instruction • Bi-monthly or quarterly meetings at district on various topics	• Six hours initial training (methods, observation and conference, coaching and feedback) • 12-hour follow-up learning-focused supervision with program manager
Mentoring	Four TL coordinators assigned to specific schools; work with TLs on feedback, scheduling, problems	Feedback and coaching from supervisor of professional development: bi-monthly meetings; semi-annual observation	Feedback and coaching from four TL specialists and TIF coordinator, informal assistance from principal	Done by two career ladder professional development specialists
Teacher Leader Evaluation	• 100% of evaluation on teaching component of their work using the LEAP evaluation system • District may add a competency to evaluation in the future to cover TL role	• TLs evaluated on the Danielson Framework for Teaching • The TL manager completes an additional observation of the TL portion of the position and two peer evaluators assigned to observe TLs complete an observation	• Evaluated 50% on value- added for 40% teaching time, and 45% manager's rating on non- instructional rubric (similar to Danielson Framework for Teaching but the term "student" replaced with "stakeholder") • 5% on achieving goals developed with district specialists	Principals evaluate TLs using same rubric (based on the Danielson Framework) as with other teachers but without a formal rubric for the TL role specifically

Summary

These four TIF grantees have responded to the TIF call for identifying and rewarding teachers who take on "additional responsibilities and leadership roles." Their common response is the development of a TL program that facilitates the movement of teachers into such responsibilities and roles without leaving the classroom completely. The district TL managers have guided the creation of TL structures at both the district and school levels. The districts have developed the roles of the TL to some degree, with more work remaining. They have also designed and implemented staffing plans for the TL role, including the number and locations of TL assignments, recruitment and selection policies and practices, and "onboarding" supports for TLs via various training and mentoring initiatives.

In short, the districts have crafted special human capital management systems to help them identify and acquire, select and place, and develop and retain TL talent. Such extensive processes illustrate a deep commitment to making the TL job and its new entrants successful. The districts vary in TL program practices, and at this incubation stage, it is impossible to specify "best practices." As the TL programs develop in scope and more districts adopt them, however, TL program evidence will help point the way to better TL program design, implementation, and management.

Appendix A:
Additional Information About Teacher Leader Programs

Additional information is available about teacher leader programs and standards generally, as well as specific state programs. A sample of the information is below:

General
- Milanowski, Anthony (2014). *Aligning the human capital management system to support STEM master teachers.* Rockville, MD: Westat, pp 1-20.
- Stern, Walter; Fu, Chong-Hao; Bourgeois, Maria; and Bates, Steph (2014). *Leading from the front of the classroom: A roadmap to teacher leadership that works.* Washington, DC: Aspen Institute, pp 1-19.
- Stern, Walter; Fu, Chong-Hao; Bourgeois, Maria; and Bates, Steph (2014). *Teacher leaders and common core implementation in Tennessee.* Washington, DC: Aspen Institute, pp 1-8.
- National Education Association. *Teacher Leader Model Standards.* Available at **http://www.nea.org/home/43946.htm**.
- Teach to Lead, an initiative of the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards and the U.S. Department of Education. Available at **http://teachtolead.org**.

State Program Examples
- Arizona K12 Center; Master Teacher Program. Available at **www.azk12.org/arizona-master-teacher-program**.
- Iowa Department of Education; Teacher Leadership and Compensation System. Available at **www.educateiowa.gov**.
- Louisiana Department of Education; Recruiting, Selecting and Hiring TAP Leaders. Available at **http://www.louisianabelieves.com/teaching/tap**.
- Ohio Department of Education; Educator Standards Board and Master Teacher Program. Available at **http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Teaching/Educator-Standards-Board**.