



# TLC Support for Return to Learn

## The role of teacher leaders in supporting schools during COVID-19 closures, Return to Learn planning and beyond

Schools across Iowa are currently planning for the start of the 2020-21 school year. Educators are hard at work preparing learning materials for students, delivering virtual lessons, and meeting with their colleagues.

Teacher leaders (such as coaches, mentors, and model teachers) have played a pivotal role in supporting their school communities during closures last spring and planning around how to best support students when they return to school in the fall. The Iowa Department of Education, with support from the Region 9 Comprehensive Center, reached out to a sample of schools and districts across Iowa\* to learn more about how teacher leaders in TLC-funded roles are supporting their colleagues and informing Return to Learn planning in their schools. This memo highlights how teacher leaders have helped their school communities come together to continue to support students and families during these unprecedented times, focusing on five key topics: transitions to online learning, ongoing coaching with teachers, collaboration with teachers and school leaders, curriculum and learning materials development, and emotional support for teachers.

### Transitions to Online Learning

Shifting to virtual instruction can be a challenge for teachers. Teacher leaders are supporting teachers in shifting to virtual learning and instructional supports, including: Helping teachers become more comfortable using online learning platforms, such as Google Classroom, video lessons, and more.

- Ensuring that all students have access to the necessary devices and internet bandwidth by reaching out to parents.

### Ongoing Coaching with Teachers

Prior to school closures, teacher leaders provided job-embedded professional learning to teachers, meeting with teachers for coaching cycles and mentoring meetings weekly. Now, teacher leaders are continuing to provide these supports to teachers virtually. Teacher leaders are also providing extra coaching supports, including:

- Reviewing formative student data with teachers to inform Return to Learn plans and determine student learning needs for the fall.
- Providing extra professional learning on scaffolding in anticipation of students' learning needs in the fall.
- Holding more frequent check-ins with teachers.
- Spending more time working on professional growth goals with teachers.

### Collaboration with Teachers and School Leaders

School closures provide extended opportunities for collaboration for school staff given that many educators have fewer time constraints working virtually. Teacher leaders are leading extended collaboration meetings between teachers through professional learning communities (PLCs), building leadership teams (BLTs), individualized education plan (IEP) teams, family engagement teams, positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) teams, and grade-level teams. Teacher leaders are collaborating with other teachers and school leaders around:

- Analyzing student data and planning extended, individualized learning opportunities for students beyond those that school staff have had time or capacity to develop previously.
- Engaging in data reviews such as root cause analysis to build teacher buy-in for school improvement and create more targeted intervention plans.
- Sharing messages, news, and resources on COVID-19 shifts and Return to Learn plans from the district.

## Curriculum and Learning Materials Development

School closures provide teachers and teacher leaders with time to develop curriculum and learning materials, especially since many schools are developing learning materials for students to use while they are at home. Many teacher leaders have increased their time spent working with teachers on developing curriculum and learning materials through June 2020. Specifically, teacher leaders have been:

- Designing weekly learning materials for students that align across grade levels and standards.
- Unpacking the standards included in learning and enrichment materials to ensure that students are prepared for the next school year, including key standards that students have not had time or opportunities to master this spring due to school closures.
- Creating lessons and materials for core subjects such as reading, math, social studies, and science that can be used by multiple teachers across their district.

In some districts, teacher leaders' curriculum supports have helped increase their trust and connections with more teachers, which has increased their engagement with teacher leaders.

## Emotional Support for Teachers

Many teachers have shared that they feel stressed or disconnected being at home and working virtually with less contact with their students and a lack of in-person interactions. Teacher leaders have increased their time checking in with teachers to provide emotional support since school closures, including

- Using regular meetings to check in on teachers' wellbeing and offer emotional support, in addition to new virtual connection opportunities through virtual coffee meet-ups, book clubs, etc.
- Providing social-emotional resources and materials teachers can use to support students' wellbeing now and in the future.
- Sharing specific and positive feedback on the things teachers are doing well (such as praising effective elements of virtual lessons) to encourage teachers and help them build confidence in their virtual education skills.
- Writing thank-you letters and connecting personally with teachers to help them feel supported and appreciated.
- Asking teachers what supports they need now, what supports they expect to need in the fall, and how they can ensure that resources are easy for teachers to access.