



**Illinois
State Board of
Education**

Teacher Leader Problems of Practice Best Practice Guide

October 2021

Introduction

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) released a Notice of Funding Opportunity for a Teacher Leader Problems of Practice Grant Program in fiscal year 2020. Local Education Agencies (LEA) within the State of Illinois were eligible to apply. Awards in the amount of \$75,000 were made to two LEAs categorized by Evidence-Based Funding (EBF) as Tier 1 or 2. Two awards were made in the amount of \$50,000 to LEAs categorized by EBF as Tier 3 or 4.

The grant period began July 1, 2019, and was scheduled to end June 30, 2020; however, it was extended one more year to June 30, 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

ISBE was seeking innovative approaches to recruiting, preparing, and utilizing teacher leaders as agents of change in PreK-12 public school districts. Districts, schools, or faculty members of state-approved teacher leadership programs who were interested in empowering schools or districts to build a network of exceptional instructional leaders were invited to propose research projects centered on a problem of practice focusing on teacher leadership.

ISBE was interested in proposals for new, innovative approaches or expansion upon research-based teacher leader practices that show promise for success in recruiting, preparing, or developing teacher leaders. Applicants had to utilize the National Network of State Teacher of the Year Teacher Leader Model Standards to guide their proposals.

Proposals were to include a description of an identified local problem of practice, including data and research to support the work; detail investigative measures that will be undertaken to better understand the problem at hand; and propose actionable solutions or approaches, including ways in which they will be enacted, for remedying the problem. Example problems of practice to explore may include, but were not limited to:

- Creating teacher leader pipeline models that will be sustainable and increase student achievement and growth;
- Redefining school culture to migrate educators from manager-as-leader models to instructional leader models;
- Growing the diversity within teacher leadership or developing teacher leadership in high-need communities (urban or rural with a high concentration of students who are classified as English Learners (ELs), special education, or live in poverty);
- Designing an assessment tool that can be used by districts to award teacher leader endorsements via demonstration of specific competencies, per Illinois School Code Section 21B-25(E);
- Developing collaborative adult communities of practice within a school to promote peer-to-peer learning and increase teacher support and retention;
- Improving outreach and collaboration with families and the community in order to support student learning;
- Developing best-practices guides about how to utilize and integrate both human capital and financial resources (e.g., Title II, School Improvement Grants, etc.) to better compensate teacher leaders within districts.

National Research

Teacher leadership has been defined in a variety of ways during the past two decades, making distinct comparisons across the literature difficult. The authors suggest the following definition:

Teacher leadership is the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of the school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement. Such team leadership work involves three intentional development foci: individual development, collaboration or team development, and organizational development.

Teacher leaders are facilitators within the school and can be an important element in spreading and strengthening school reform and improvement. Educational improvement at the instructional level, for example, involves leadership by teachers in the classroom. Tasks performed by teacher leaders include monitoring improvement efforts, selecting curriculum, and participating in administrative meetings. In addition, they often are called upon to participate in peer coaching, engage parent and community participation, and review research in their time away from the classroom. Typically, these leaders are teachers who have significant teaching experience, are known to be excellent educators, and are respected by their peers. They are learning and achievement oriented and willing to take risks and assume responsibility. These teachers use a variety of informal and formal channels to exert leadership, including acting as union representatives, department heads, and mentors.

Teacher leaders assume a wide range of roles to support school and student success. Whether these roles are assigned formally or shared informally, they build the entire school's capacity to improve. Because teachers can lead in a variety of ways, many teachers can serve as leaders among their peers:

Resource Provider

Teachers help their colleagues by sharing instructional resources. These might include websites, instructional materials, readings, or other resources to use with students. They might also share such professional resources as articles, books, lesson or unit plans, and assessment tools.

Instructional Specialist

An instructional specialist helps colleagues implement effective teaching strategies. This help might include ideas for differentiating instruction or planning lessons in partnership with fellow teachers. Instructional specialists might study research-based classroom strategies (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001); explore which instructional methodologies are appropriate for the school; and share findings with colleagues.

Curriculum Specialist

Understanding content standards, how various components of the curriculum link together, and how to use the curriculum in planning instruction and assessment is essential to ensuring consistent curriculum implementation throughout a school. Curriculum specialists lead teachers to agree on standards, follow the adopted curriculum, use common pacing charts, and develop shared assessments.

Learning Facilitator

Facilitating professional learning opportunities among staff members is another role for teacher leaders. When teachers learn with and from one another, they can focus on what most directly improves student learning. Their professional learning becomes more relevant, focused on teachers' classroom work, and aligned to fill gaps in student learning. Such communities of learning can break the norms of isolation present in many schools.

Data Coach

Although teachers have access to a great deal of data, they do not often use that data to drive classroom instruction. Teacher leaders can lead conversations that engage their peers in analyzing and using this information to strengthen instruction.

Catalyst for Change

Teacher leaders can also be catalysts for change, visionaries who are “never content with the status quo but rather always looking for a better way” (Larner, 2004, p. 32). Teachers who take on the catalyst role feel secure in their own work and have a strong commitment to continual improvement. They pose questions to generate analysis of student learning.

References:

The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (2005). "Research Brief: What does the research tell us about Teacher Leadership?" Washington, DC. http://www.centerforcsri.org/files/Center_RB_sept05.pdf

Blase, J., & Blase, J. (2006). Teachers bringing out the best in teachers: A guide to peer consultation for administrators and teachers. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Killion, J. (2001). What works in elementary schools: Results-based staff development. Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.

Larner, M. (2004). Pathways: Charting a course for professional learning. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Marzano, R., Pickering, D., & Pollock, J. (2001). Classroom instruction that works. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

<https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/ten-roles-for-teacher-leaders>

Program Background/History

ISBE redesigned requirements for teacher leader preparation programs in September 2012. As defined in Illinois Administrative Code Part 25, Section 25.32, a teacher leader is an individual with the capacity and skills to:

- 1) Harness the collective knowledge of teachers to have a positive impact on teaching and learning and school and student success;
- 2) Promote shared governance and leadership in schools by working effectively with the principal and other adults in the school, with a consistent focus on student learning and achievement;
- 3) Model excellence in teaching with a strong foundation in improving the climate of the school and classroom, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and intervention;
- 4) Provide guidance, coaching, mentoring, influence, direction, and support to teachers to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning; and
- 5) Promote and influence change to improve school and student outcomes.

One of the deliverables included a best practice guide. The guide was required to include:

- a. Solutions to the identified problem of practice shall be provided to ISBE no later than 90 days upon expiration of grant funding;
- b. The specific focus of this guide shall coincide with the grantee's problem of practice;
- c. The guide shall illustrate the chosen solution to the identified problem of practice;
- d. The guide must identify components of the partnership that will be essential for others to replicate.

These best practice guides accorded recipients the opportunity to share their work statewide and have their project results highlighted across state and national networks. The grant provided the opportunity for recipients to increase clarity of the roles and work of teacher leaders in Illinois and provide the state with evidence-based support for problems of practice that can be modeled and scaled statewide.

In the best practice guide deliverable, grantees were asked to describe the problem of practice their organization identified for this grant and how grant funding enabled them to develop and implement solutions to the local problem. Grantees had to address at least 10 of the following prompts in narrative form. In their responses, they were asked to include what their organization determined to be **best practices**.

1. Describe how your organization created a teacher leader pipeline model that is sustainable and increased student achievement and growth.
2. Explain how your organization identified the gap in existing resources limiting the use of teacher leaders within the school or/and district.
3. Explain how your organization migrated educators from the manager-as-leader model to instructional leader model.
4. Describe the collaborative process that was used to plan and decide the proposed solution to the identified problem of practice.
5. If your organization designed an assessment tool to award teacher leader endorsements via demonstration of specific competencies (per Illinois School Code Section 21B-25 (E), please explain the processes utilized.
6. Explain how collaborative adult communities of practice that promoted peer-to-peer learning were created.
7. Explain the approaches that were utilized to increase teacher leaders in underrepresented populations.
8. Describe the outreach and collaboration approaches utilized with families and the community in order to support student learning.
9. Describe the process used to incorporate support from the organization's management (e.g., a dean or superintendent).
10. Explain how grant funding met the needs centered around the recruitment, preparation, or utilization of teacher leaders.
11. Explain how your organization determined sufficient human capacity for performing and participating in this grant.
12. Explain how grant funds promoted shared governance.
13. Explain how grant funds provided a foundation in improving the climate of the school and classroom, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and intervention.
14. Explain the evaluation process (including all indicators) to sustain teacher leaders and how the results will be used to drive improvement.
15. Explain the organization's plan to sustain efforts created through this grant after the grant expires.
16. Illustrate how the partnership's processes for solving the identified problem of practice can be replicated by other LEAs in Illinois.
17. Identify components of the implemented solution that will be essential for others to replicate.

(There are many overlaps between the documents of Calumet and Altamont because they were partners and worked collaboratively throughout the duration of this grant.)

Section I. Grantees' Executive Summaries

Altamont and Calumet Executive Summary

Making the case to bolster student achievement begins with the essential belief that leadership starts from the top and teacher leaders are a key linchpin in connecting the Board of Education, administration, and teachers to improve student learning outcomes.

Altamont CUSD 10, using a grant provided by the Illinois State Board of Education, worked collaboratively with the Student First Consulting Group (SFCG) to become a Professional Learning Organization (PLO). The district also worked with a partner grant district, Calumet SD 132.

In 2018, the districts took steps to expand professional learning communities, the familiar collaborative model utilized by groups of educators to improve teaching skills and students' academic skills.

The PLO model encourages merging school boards, district staff, and community stakeholders within a systematic and complementary structure. In traditional school settings, the decision makers (school board and administration) are many levels removed from the educators – those doing the work with students. Generally, professional learning communities exist within the schoolhouse but have limited connection with other internal/external stakeholders.

Altamont CUSD 10's expansion of the model focused on the role of teacher leaders. Teacher leaders perform a vital, foundational role in a PLO and are expected to work with peers and other stakeholders to solve problems, make decisions, manage conflict and promote meaningful school/district changes.

The following action research questions guided the districts' expansion study:

- How can we improve the pipeline to teacher leaders?
- How can we strengthen the program?
- How can we share our findings (e.g., with other districts, ISBE)?

- What additional trainings teacher leaders need to be effective so that teacher leaders can excel and grow in the district?
- How would teacher leaders like to be more involved in the school/district outside of their classrooms?
- How can we measure the impact teacher leaders have on student achievement and school culture?

Bunker Hill Executive Summary

Most rural schools are small; as a result, administrative capacity and opportunities for teacher networking are minimal. Principals in small schools must take on many roles, so they often do not have the capacity to take on additional projects for school improvement. In addition, small schools may have just one teacher at a grade level or subject area, which makes it difficult for teachers to collaborate or find leadership opportunities. We used this grant to address both concerns by training and supporting teacher leaders who would bring peers together to collaborate and offer principals a leadership resource to expand their impact.

In order to maximize the impact of teacher leaders, this program selected National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs), theorizing that those teachers who had already demonstrated classroom expertise and leadership potential would be the most effective in promoting instructional improvements. Bunker Hill School District 8 partnered with the nonprofit IL-EMPOWER provider Teach Plus to provide training and coaching for teacher leaders. Teachers were prepared to lead change with an initial two-day training in which they worked with peers and principals to develop change goals and metrics. Monthly cohort sessions provided just-in-time learning of the skills needed to lead change, and two hours of one-on-one coaching per month helped participants respond to the unique challenges of their individual change efforts.

Project results were measured through two key metrics -- self-reported leadership growth and objective measures of project success in terms of both changes to teacher practice and outcomes for students. All program participants reported growth in their leadership skills, and all participants achieved their goals for changes to teacher practice. None of the projects could verify student outcome results, as end-of-year progress was not measurable due to school closures. However, mid-year progress data and anecdotal evidence suggested that six of the seven projects were on track to meet outcome goals as well. The remaining project did not collect sufficient mid-year evidence to suggest any conclusions about outcomes.

The results of this program aligned with our theory of action; NBCTs in this program demonstrated greater leadership growth and a higher project success rate than the average in comparable Teach Plus programs that did not require participants to be NBCTs. On the other hand, limiting participation to NBCTs also limited the pool of candidates and the diversity of

teacher leaders in the program. Therefore, we recommend that National Board Certification be used as one of several qualifying criteria to select teacher leaders as opposed to a requirement.

This grant as a whole does represent a sizable investment in teacher leadership that might not be feasible for rural and small school districts, but that investment was spread across seven districts. Not only did this partnership reduce the per-school cost, it also enabled teacher leaders to form a collaborative cohort across district lines and learn from one another. Cohort members reported that this was an important aspect of the program's success, and that it would allow them to continue to benefit from a local professional network of teacher leaders. For these reasons, we conclude that for smaller districts, a regional network or partnership is an effective strategy that builds collaboration and allows for investment in teacher leadership at a sustainable scale. Rural and small LEAs interested in implementing a similar model should consider forming multi-district partnerships and engaging an IL-EMPOWER provider that can provide the training and coaching services necessary to maximize teacher leaders' impacts, especially if local administrators do not have the capacity to offer this kind of intensive support.

Township High School District 214 Executive Summary

District 214 in Cook County is fully committed to and engaged in anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusionary practices and initiatives. This means creating a culture and school climate that supports every student and staff member. The district identified actions steps for the 2020-21 school year in response to recent national events and staff and student feedback.

The district is committed to creating an Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategic Plan that would encompass, but not be limited to, the following components:

Create a districtwide Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategic Council composed of three Education Association members, two Educational Support Personnel Association members, two Custodial Maintenance Association members, and two administrators or supervisors. This council will meet at least quarterly to develop intentional action plans to address anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion challenges and opportunities in the district.

In collaboration with the council, the administration will present the school board with a district goal pertaining to anti-racism, Diversity, Equity, and inclusion by the end of the first quarter of the school year.

In collaboration with the council and division heads for student success, safety, and wellness, the administration will present the school board with a revised dress code by the end of the first semester of the school year.

In collaboration with the council, the administration will review staff and student feedback and concerns and make appropriate recommendations to the District Executive Council or the school board, respectively.

Launch a Superintendent's Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Advisory Council for students this fall to hear about the experiences of students and to ensure the district is supporting them moving forward.

Launch a Superintendent's Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Council for staff this fall to hear about the experiences of our staff and to ensure the district is supporting them moving forward.

Launch a Superintendent's Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Council for parents this fall to hear their voices and stories and to ensure the district is supporting their children moving forward.

Continue to support and expand anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development training for staff and administrators.

Establish a process for undergoing a comprehensive curriculum and instructional materials audit districtwide.

Present an annual anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion report to the school board during a workshop or a regularly scheduled meeting.

The district will not hold summer school, summer camps, or other activities on June 19, also known as Juneteenth.

Section II. Grantees' Key Findings

Altamont and Calumet Key Findings

The findings in this district report include the following core attributes for districts to transform themselves into PLOs:

Leadership Starts from the Top

Board and administrative buy-in is fundamental. The board and administrative team should engage in professional development focusing on key transitional steps to become a PLO.

The board should consider codifying in board policy the need for the district to promote PLOs and collaborative leadership.

Develop Teacher Pipelines

Rigorous selection criteria for teachers in leadership roles while ensuring a diverse pool of teacher leader candidates. Criteria should include a strong track record of improving student learning and community engagement. Candidates should be respected by peers.

Opportunities for Teacher Leaders to Excel and Grow

Ensure teacher leaders have a voice in the district's mission, vision, and goals. They also should have other roles, such as assisting with development of the School Improvement Plan, developing and/or reviewing building safety protocols (fire, COVID-19), identifying staff professional development needs, and participating in community engagement.

- Teacher leaders should participate in teacher mentoring and induction programs to increase teacher support and retention.
- Assist teacher leaders to become more adept at becoming instructional and equity leaders.
- Survey and/or engage teacher leaders in a focus group to ascertain how they would like to be more involved in their school/district

Provide ongoing professional development in areas such as:

- Teacher Leader Model Standards, leadership principles, cultural competency/inclusion, how to work with adult learners, assessment and data, curriculum mapping, response to intervention, and technology.

Provide teacher leaders with key resources, including team-building, data assessment, instructional strategies, etc.

Strengthen the PLO Program

- The district administrative team and teacher leaders must annually review PLO assessment surveys that are completed by parents, students, and staff.
- Review key relevant data (attendance, discipline, student achievement data, climate survey data).

How to Share our Findings

- Participate in various educational conferences around the state.
- Altamont CUSD 10 participated in ISBE's ESSA Conference in February 2020.

Bunker Hill Key Findings

This grant project demonstrated that teacher leadership is an effective strategy for improving instruction and school climate in rural and small schools. This strategy is most impactful when teacher leaders have already demonstrated instructional expertise and leadership potential and are supported with effective professional learning and personalized coaching. In addition to the learnings from individual projects, the regional network model used in this program was shown to be an effective strategy to share costs and build collaboration.

This grant project was also uniquely impacted by remote learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although none of the teacher leaders' project plans directly prepared their schools for remote learning, all of them were able to help make their schools' response to school closings more flexible and responsive as they took on leadership roles to help teachers and families adapt. This unexpected result demonstrates the importance of teacher leadership in creating a distributed leadership model with the ability to continuously adapt in response to student needs.

Township High School District 214 Key Findings

District 214 is focusing on districtwide faculty and administrator professional development to better equip all staff to have a mindset that focused on equity and diversity. Several issues that have been identified for our district through Human Resources and Student Services include:

- Economic disparity leads to unequal educational experiences and outcomes.
- All parents want the best for their children, but some have greater means to leverage their influence.
- “Opportunity hoarding” complicates achievement of a common good.
- Biases can lead to self-fulfilling and self-limiting prophecies.
- Sufficient understanding of how race and class influences school success cannot be
be
- assumed among all staff members.
- Educators need a diverse array of strategies to teach children from widely
varying
- backgrounds effectively.

Our district puts a priority on low-cost/no-cost college, so dual credit provides a great value to the student for on-time completion and transfer of credits. We currently have more than 11,000 dual credit enrollments. Our primary problem of practice is that District 214 staff demographics are not representative of our student population demographics. How do we ensure staff do not project bias and stereotypes on students, which would lead to fair treatment and high expectations for all students?

Activities and event descriptions are detailed in this report that have taken place since 2019 at the start of the grant period. The grant progress and timeline were disrupted by the pandemic, but we were provided with an unexpected opportunity to move away from our traditional plan-implement-review model. Meetings were moved to virtual spaces and more freedom was given to all staff to openly discussing challenges and perceived areas of opportunity in larger group settings. This allowed us to realize that our equity work needed to move beyond

the surface level to be effective and sustainable over the long term, creating meaningful change.

Section III. Grantees' Solution to the Local Problem of Practice

Altamont and Calumet Solution to the Local Problem of Practice

In choosing teacher leaders, we rely on the input of teachers and administrators. When vacancies exist, the administration considers the recommendations of the school's leadership team regarding those who have expressed interest in the position and those who have a strong track record of improving student learning, community engagement, and are respected by fellow peers.

Those chosen to become teacher leaders are provided training centered on the Teacher Leader Model Standards and a thorough overview of roles and duties.

Student discipline, climate and culture, attendance, and student assessment data are reviewed and analyzed on an ongoing basis in teacher/school/district leadership team meetings.

The board commissioned various focus groups and/or surveys as it engaged in strategic planning. Information derived from these data sources highlighted a need to better capitalize on the strengths and skill sets of our teacher leaders.

It should be noted that Altamont CUSD 10 already had active professional learning communities among teachers. The PLO sought to expand the model to ensure districtwide collaboration.

A PLO is a new innovative model developed by SFCG in 2017 based on the precepts of "collaborative governance" and "systems theory." PLO districts pay attention to how systems and/or human capital are structured in ways that enable the organization to be efficient by having a shared purpose through systemic collaboration and communication, especially among peers.

PLOs consistently monitor and evaluate how internal and external stakeholders collaborate and communicate to accomplish district objectives. This requires intentional linkage, especially between the school district and its schools. The link (how internal stakeholders collaborate) is established by dividing human capital into collaborative teams or professional learning communities throughout the district.

Professional learning communities are simply the various interconnected components or organizational departments that make up the PLO. PLOs are based on the concept that there should be various peer learning communities throughout the district working collaboratively and interdependently.

Teacher leaders were pivotal because they were provided the opportunity to help bridge the gap between the board, district administration, teachers, and community stakeholders.

The local problems of practice areas were collaboratively identified and discussed by several stakeholders. Various teachers met with school administrators to identify problem areas. Afterward, the superintendents updated the school board regarding these concerns and the school board commissioned its superintendent to further study the issue.

While studying these problems, district administration consulted with SFCG, which corroborated staff findings (e.g., meetings with various staff members). Later, SFCG made a recommendation to the school board and superintendent that the district pursue becoming a Professional Learning Organization to remedy this problem and to work with a partnering district.

Bunker Hill Solution to the Local Problem of Practice

We gathered representatives from multiple stakeholders to develop plans.

- **Bunker Hill School District 8**, which would be the grant applicant and program host and represent the needs and perspectives of rural schools in planning.
- **The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards**, which offered research on the effectiveness of NBCTs as teacher leaders and knowledge about how NBCTs had been empowered as teacher leaders across the country.
- **The National Board Resource Center at Illinois State University**, which is charged with recruiting and engaging NBCTs across Illinois and was able to provide direct contact with practicing NBCTs.
- **Teach Plus Illinois**, which brought experience in training and coaching teacher leaders to lead change in schools, particularly through its Chicago Change Agent program, and provided the framework for the training program.

The original idea for this work was born out of a series of teacher leadership conferences in 2018 and 2019 -- the Elevating and Celebrating Effective Teachers and Teaching and Teach to Lead conferences. We spoke at these events with many rural educators who were hungry for leadership opportunities and for a network of peers with whom they could share ideas and collaborate. Once the ISBE grant was announced, planning discussions were held throughout the spring and summer of 2019. They included practicing educators whose experiences intersected with the target population — NBCTs who taught in rural schools and had previously participated in Teach Plus leadership programs. This group met weekly to plan for the recruitment and selection of NBCTs and to identify the unique needs of teacher leaders in rural schools and how the program might be adapted for them. Later, the same group met biweekly

during the first two months of the program to be responsive to participant needs and suggest changes as appropriate, and then continued to monitor the work through quarterly updates.

This teacher leadership program focused on teacher-led interventions to address problems of practice identified within individual schools; thus, building principals were the most appropriate management level to involve in the process. This was done from the start by incorporating principals into the selection process. Teacher leaders were required to consult their principals prior to applying and agree on a problem of practice to address that aligned with the school's priorities. This was further reinforced with principal contacts during the selection process to confirm the principal's support of the teacher leader's application and proposed problem of practice, as well as ensuring that teachers would have adequate protected time to meet with their leadership teams.

A significant portion of the kickoff training in September was devoted to honing the proposed problems of practice into firm solutions and establishing both year-end and progress point goals for accountability. Principals were asked to attend for one of the two days (or send a designee who would be directly connected to the work) so that they could work with their teacher leader to ensure the goals remained aligned with school priorities and were reasonable given other priorities, school and teacher readiness, and teacher capacity.

Throughout the year, principals were connected to the work with monthly updates that included the content of the cohort's professional learning, along with resources they might wish to share more widely with staff. Principals also met quarterly with their teacher leader and the Teach Plus program leader to review progress, adjust goals as needed, and determine next steps.

The largest expenditure of grant funding was the hiring of a Teach Plus teacher leadership coach, a 0.5 full-time equivalent position responsible for leading the cohort, including the selection, training, and ongoing coaching of teacher leaders. The teacher leadership coach prepared materials for and led the kickoff training and monthly cohort meetings, engaged in ongoing communication with cohort members and stakeholders, and provided two hours of individual coaching per month for each participant. This training and coaching provided teacher leaders with the skills and resources to lead change and was essential to the successful implementation of projects and the resulting student outcomes.

The other most significant grant expenses were those related to in-person cohort meetings, including physical training materials, food for participants, and travel expenses. While half of the cohort meetings and all of the individual coaching sessions were held virtually, gathering in-person every two months was an important factor in the development of collegial bonds among cohort members. This was an explicit goal of the grant and will help teacher leaders find ongoing support as they continue to lead in their schools.

Teacher leadership is an important component of shared governance in schools because it puts practice-related decisions in the hands of those closest to the work, who know best how those decisions will impact their classrooms and will be responsible for carrying them out. Rural and small schools often face challenges in implementing teacher leadership because their limited size and budget often prevent the hiring of teacher leaders whose roles take them out of the classroom. Lean administrative staffing also leaves limited time for the intensive, personalized coaching and training that can help grow teachers' leadership skills, which is important because few teachers are trained or experienced in leading adults.

The funds from this grant enabled us to provide the supports necessary to equip teacher leaders with the skills and knowledge necessary to take leadership over key practice issues in their schools. In addition, because the program was designed to support teachers' efforts to lead teams in the course of their normal duties, it was able to promote shared governance without requiring teachers to leave their teaching duties for part or all of the day. The program ensured that teachers and administrators engaged in continuous collaboration toward larger strategic goals through ongoing communication and quarterly progress reviews.

This grant project was uniquely impacted by the sudden emergency school closures required due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is worth noting that although none of the participants' projects specifically prepared their schools for this kind of traumatic shift in instruction, the leadership skills they developed in the program allowed them to pivot quickly to support teachers, students, and families. One teacher leader who had been working to support teachers' use of new one-to-one devices in school helped lead the district's development of instructional strategies for remote learning. Another who had been working to improve student attendance leveraged the parent outreach she had been leading all year to help parents adjust to remote learning. Two teachers who were working to provide interventions to students one or more grade levels behind their peers used their connections with parents and students to ensure the schools' highest-risk students had the supports they needed to learn at home. This kind of distributed leadership was especially important at a time when administrators were struggling to meet the intense and constantly changing demands of the moment because these teacher leaders were able to be more responsive to student needs and serve as an additional instructional leadership resource.

Township High School District 214 Solution to the Local Problem of Practice

A gap in existing resources centered on a lack of training for staff in regard to equity topics. The initial plan was to send two teacher leaders to Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity (SEED) training and then develop a train-the-trainer approach to building capacity across our high school campus sites. However, all travel was suspended indefinitely early in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We were able to hold a districtwide Beyond Diversity Training in February 2020. Four hundred teachers who were all chosen by their buildings as current and emerging

teacher leaders attended, in part because they were interested in learning more about equity. SEED training is a powerful, personally transforming two-day seminar designed to help leaders, educators, students, parents, administrators, and community participants understand the impact of race on student learning and investigate the role that racism plays in institutionalizing academic achievement disparities. Educators are taught a framework for engaging, sustaining, and deepening conversations aimed at dismantling the predictable

patterns of student success along racial identities and rebuilding systems, policies, and practices that will ultimately provide equitable access and opportunities for all. This framework consists of three parts -- the Compass, the Four Agreements, and the Six Conditions. Participants gain background in all parts via lectures, reading, collaborative activities, and reflective journaling. Homework is assigned between Days 1 and 2.

An existing team of teacher leaders in the district, in conjunction with the Department of Professional Learning, utilized this focus on equity to create ClassroomReady!, a two-year professional learning program that provides ongoing, personalized, job-embedded professional learning pertaining to equity, literacy, and innovative classroom practices. Teachers engaging in this work are provided ongoing support from the teacher leader in their building.

The model consists of:

- Two-year program
- Five teachers per building, three from specialized schools - 33 total in Year 1, 66 total divided into two groups in Year 2
- Four full-day sessions each year centered around topics listed above, facilitated by TLF team
- 1:1 coaching meetings in between full-day sessions with TLF
- Twenty-eight professional development hours provided per year
- Observation alternative peer-facilitated cohorts
- Three-hour vertical advancement

Section IV. Grantees' Essential Identified Components of the Implemented Solution for Others to Replicate

Altamont and Calumet Identified Components for Replication

- Ensure teacher leaders have a voice in the district's mission, vision, and goals. They also should have other roles, such as assisting with development of the School Improvement Plan, developing and/or reviewing building safety protocols (fire, COVID-19), identifying staff professional development needs, and participating in community engagement.
- Teacher leaders should participate in teacher mentoring and induction programs to increase teacher support and retention.
- Assist teacher leaders to become more adept at becoming instructional and equity leaders.
- Survey and/or engage teacher leaders in a focus group to ascertain how they would like to be more involved in their school/district
- Provide ongoing professional development in areas such as:
 - Teacher Leader Model Standards, leadership principles, cultural competency/inclusion, how to work with adult learners, assessment and data, curriculum mapping, response to intervention, and technology.
- Provide teacher leaders with key resources, including team-building, data assessment, instructional strategies, etc.

Strengthen the PLO Program

- The district administrative team and teacher leaders must annually review PLO assessment surveys that are completed by parents, students, and staff.
- Review key relevant data (attendance, discipline, student achievement data, climate survey data).

Bunker Hill Identified Components for Replication

Several of the key local issues addressed by this program — a lack of opportunities for leadership and career growth, a lack of opportunities to connect professionally with colleagues, and limited administrative capacity to provide ongoing coaching and leadership development to teachers — are shared by rural and small school across Illinois, as well as many larger LEAs.

One key component of our solution was to lean on the demonstrated expertise and leadership potential of NBCTs. While the capacity to teach and lead effectively is certainly not limited to teachers who hold National Board Certification, it is likely that NBCTs are more effective instructional leaders than the average teacher. Although the sample size was small, 100% of the teachers in this program met their goals even in a year shortened by pandemic, as compared to the annual target of 80% for comparable Teach Plus programs. Drawing on this proven pool of educators to share leadership is a high-leverage strategy that could easily be replicated in the 364 districts that employ NBCTs across Illinois.

Perhaps the most important strategy in this regional partnership for rural and small schools is pooling resources to create a cross-district network. The costs of supporting a single teacher leader are likely within reach of most schools, but hiring an effective full-time leadership coach is much less practical. By sharing a coach across multiple districts, however, many schools were able to benefit from the coaching services necessary to develop their teacher leaders. This pilot program was supported by a grant that required no additional investment of participating schools, but it could be replicated in the future by sharing those costs across districts, either independently through a Regional Office of Education or with IL-EMPOWER network partners. An additional benefit of the cross-district partnership was the formation of a leadership collaborative that enabled participants to share learning across districts.

Several aspects of the program stood out as essential to success. These also represent the best practices identified for developing effective teacher leaders who will spearhead change efforts in their schools:

- Early and ongoing communication with building principals -- Regardless of a teacher leader's commitment or skill, projects that are not aligned to school priorities or that conflict with other initiatives are unlikely to succeed. It was essential to establish this alignment early in partnership with building leaders and to maintain communication throughout the year to ensure it remained a top priority.
- Just-in-time professional learning -- A framework for leadership training was developed to guide the work based on the likely progression of teacher leaders' work, and it was continuously adapted to be responsive to teachers' needs. This approach is aligned with adult learning principals because it made learning both relevant to the goals of the teachers involved and almost entirely practical rather than theoretical.

- Ongoing, personalized coaching supports -- While every effort was made to ensure group learning met teachers' needs, individual coaching played an important role in connecting that training to project goals. Each school has its own unique culture and personalities, so coaching also allowed for problem-solving at a much more immediate and practical level. The coaching relationship is foundational to making this a successful support; it is important that the coach be knowledgeable, capable, and credible.
- Networking to build community and peer support -- Participants identified collaboration as a critical component that added significant value for them and helped them appreciate outside perspectives and solutions. In rural and small schools, it is important that this network include multiple schools or districts to build new connections and expose participants to new approaches, though in larger districts connecting across schools would likely accomplish the same goals.

Township High School District 214 Identified Components for Replication

Student-Focused Supports

First Generation Groups: All schools have specific times dedicated to offering additional personalized support for the college application process. This is a dedicated time that is advertised and promoted to seniors applying to college.

Tuesday Morning Application Support: These are morning meetings with student services staff dedicated to supporting and assisting students so they can complete college applications or ask for specific information. Topics covered could include applying, financial aid, requesting documentation, letters of recommendations, etc.

Virtual College Visits: We have transitioned over to virtual college rep visits that expand accessibility and the breadth of institutions. This has allowed all schools the ability to virtually offer college representative expert knowledge to all students across the district. This has increased our ability to host from 160 institutions throughout the year and to more than 300 different institutions already scheduled this year.

Black Affinity Group: Many schools have a Black Student Union that allows Black students a place to find support, create, and advocate. This is school-specific and sometimes is run by a student services staff member and sometimes by a member from the broader staff.

First Gen Mentoring: This is the new program sponsored in partnership with the D214 Foundation and focused on creating a mentor relationship from junior year in high school

through senior year/postsecondary years to support and assist first-generation students as they complete postsecondary programs.

Early Advising: This is a program dedicated to delivering postsecondary success information (pertaining to college freshmen) during a student's senior year to target summer melt and other potential barriers. This has been targeted to underrepresented, first-generation student groups.

Latinx Social Wellness Groups: Many schools have been running more targeted social-emotional support groups specific to our Latinx students. These topics can cover a wide array to social topics, social-emotional learning (SEL) strategies, and general support.

Forms/Letters Multiple Languages: The student services department from the building and district lens had made a targeted effort at converting or creating all forms to include a Spanish translation. Many legacy documents that have traditionally not have had a translated document have been translated.

Counselors 'Push Ins' to EL Classes Using Mawi Asgedom's 'Powerful Educator'

Curriculum: Elk Grove High School and the specialized schools have been using the SEL curriculum from Mawi Learning in EL classrooms.

Removal of PREP Level: The removal of our PREP Classes has allowed a more equitable delivery of our curriculum.

Earned Honors Credit for Written/Oral Communication: EGHS has a specific initiative targeting the removal of the PREP level and honors level to allow students the ability to demonstrate competency and submit additional work to earn honors credit.

Restorative Practice: The division heads for student success, safety, and wellness have continually reviewed and changed their practices to align with restorative practices in which students have a chance to have voice, reflect on situations, and develop a future plan of action. This aligns with a personalized approach to discipline action.

Staff-Focused Supports

Creating a Trauma-Informed School Culture: In August of 2020, all administrators participated in training that included strategies to develop a trauma-informed approach at the organizational level. Participants learned the prevalence of trauma in schools and ways in which trauma impacts a student's ability to learn.

Counseling Racial Equity Credential or Training in Development: The Illinois School Counselor Association (ISCA) is contracting a racial equity consultant and securing a racial equity steering committee to design a racial equity counseling credential. With that, there will be a personalized three-day training specific to school counselors. We may have the potential to work with ISCA to deliver this training at D214.

Interrupting Racism Counselor Book Study: “Interrupting Racism” provides school counselors with a brief overview of racial equity in schools and practical ideas that a school-level practitioner can put into action. This book study is occurring at one of the high schools. We are discussing and looking at scaling the book study to a broader school counselor audience.

AVID/AVID Counselors: Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) targets first-generation, college-going students from traditionally underrepresented groups. We have had a counselor dedicated to serving the AVID students and providing the personalized postsecondary counseling and support needed. A main focus of AVID is allowing students to have a postsecondary course experience through either Advanced Placement or dual credit, so a main focus is course planning to allow these experiences.

Cross-Referencing Data on our Tier 2/3 Students of Poverty: The Multi-Tiered System of Support/Response to Intervention Dashboard has allowed a desegregation of data to personalize and offer targeted support for students through a racial equity lens. In addition, this dashboard has allowed staff to target supports for most vulnerable students of poverty.

Section V. Sustainability

Altamont and Calumet Sustainability

Here are several foundational objectives for districts to implement that are fundamental if they are to successfully become a PLO and sustain the program:

1. Obtain school board support and provide regular updates from administrators and teacher leaders. Encourage the board to codify PLO language.

2. Ensure alignment of the district's strategic plan to the day-to-day work of the district and ensure staff are clear about the overall priorities of the district.
3. Develop a simple and transparent process for teachers to become teacher leaders. Criteria should include input from teachers and building administrators, years of experience, teacher evaluations, respect from peers, school, and district and community engagement. Suggestions from teacher leaders included the following criteria:
 - a. Are approachable
 - b. Trustworthy
 - c. Have a desire to be a teacher leader
 - d. Have experience as a classroom teacher
 - e. Good leadership and communication skills
 - f. Are positive
 - g. Good pedagogy
 - h. Consider an application process
 - i. Organized
4. Consider evaluating administrators in part based upon how they are working collaboratively with teacher leaders.
5. Provide districtwide training to staff so that there is an awareness of the model.
6. Administration must engage in program planning and create goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and anchored and time-bound (SMART) to successfully implement the model.
7. Ensure teacher leaders are given professional development around the Teacher Leader Model Standards, leadership training, PLO implementation resources, and clarity concerning their role and duties. And, time for teacher leaders to plan and meet with their teams.

Bunker Hill Sustainability

This program successfully demonstrated the capacity of NBCTs to take leadership over key practice issues; however, among the issues with the program design were the limited number of NBCTs available in the geographic target area and their concentration in more affluent, nonrural districts. This may be due to the significant cost associated with achieving National Board Certification and the fact that larger, more affluent districts are more likely to offer financial incentives for achieving certification. In addition, NBCTs tend to be disproportionately white, a trend that the National Board is working to address nationally. In order to serve a more diverse population of teacher leaders and reach more teachers in rural districts, future programs should make National Board Certification one factor in the selection of teacher leaders -- or one of several possible qualifying criteria -- rather than a requirement for participation.

This program was designed to demonstrate the impact of teacher leadership in rural and small schools, and that goal led us to connect with the Association of Illinois Rural and Small Schools (AIRSS). These conversations led to a deeper understanding of the issues facing small schools and an awareness of other efforts to promote teacher leadership in rural districts. Future efforts to build rural networks of teacher leaders should involve AIRSS early on in planning to leverage that expertise and bring in additional resources specific to rural leadership.

Township High School District 214 Sustainability

The district implemented the following professional development program to promote sustainability.

Session	Date 7:35-8:35 am	Topic	Learning Objectives
1	Monday, 11/16	Race, Anti-Racism Four Domains of Transformation Agents of Socialization	-Develop common definition of race and anti-racism -Critical acceptance to the personal and professional domains of transformation -Discuss personal experiences with race conversations and the impact of conditioning as a result of <i>Agents of Socialization</i>
2	Monday, 12/14	Five Fallacies of Racism Institutional and Structural Racism	-Consider personal <i>Spheres of Influence</i> and its comparison to the <i>Wheel of Oppression</i> -Develop common understanding of institutional vs. structural racism -Review examples of institutional racism in various institutions, including education
3	Monday, 1/25	Social Constructs of Race and Others Implicit Bias	-Explore racism and other -isms perpetuated in education -Acknowledge social constructs of self and its positionality in society and within institutions -Develop distinctions between explicit and implicit bias -Engage in conversations about experiences of biases for self
4	Monday, 2/22	Implicit Bias (continued) Nonverbal Communication	-Consider scenarios to disrupt biases -Engage in conversations about experiences with biases, implicitly and explicitly, of and by students
5	Monday, 3/22	Microaggressions Revisit agents of socialization	-Examine the three major categories of microaggressions -Discuss examples of microaggressions in schools
6	Monday, 4/19	Stereotype Threat Coded Racial Language Language that perpetuates Othering	-Explore the oppression manifestation of stereotype threats -Analyze scenarios of coded racial language and its shaping of racist ideologies -Identify oppressive terminology and equity-focus vocabulary
7	Monday, 5/24	Bystander v. Upstander	-Consider opportunities for reactive and proactive upstander in an anti-racist journey -Answer - <i>How will you commit to the anti-racism journey? What evidence will you have of it? What have you uncovered for self personally and professionally as a result of this PD series (e.g. conversations, activities, reflection)?</i>