

# Needs Assessment of Iowa's Teacher Leadership and Compensation Program

A Summary of Findings From  
Spring 2020

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## Executive Summary

In spring 2020, the Iowa Department of Education (the DE) and the Region 9 Comprehensive Center (Region 9)<sup>1</sup> conducted a needs assessment with teacher leaders and principals to learn more about how the Teacher Leader and Compensation (TLC) program influences student learning. The needs assessment included 48 interviews and focus groups in 14 school districts across Iowa that had some of the highest year-over-year growth scores on the FAST [Formative Assessment System for Teachers], which is an early literacy screener assessment. Through these interviews and focus groups, Region 9 identified several themes, best practices, and recommendations that other schools and districts across Iowa may find informative for their own TLC implementation.

The following are selected findings from the spring 2020 needs assessment.

**Teacher leaders use specific strategies for building positive relationships with teachers.**

Teacher leaders often emphasized the importance of building positive relationships for their work. Teacher leaders emphasized that having a non-evaluative role was critical in building positive, trusting relationships with teachers. Teacher leaders recommended modeling vulnerability and honesty (e.g., sharing their own mistakes or learning experiences), using a “learning together” approach, and including teachers in shared decision making.

**Teacher leader appreciate having clearly defined roles with flexibility to meet teacher needs.**

Many teacher leaders shared that it was important to have a clear purpose and focus in their role; however, they also shared the importance of flexibility in their roles to meet teachers’ most pressing needs. Teacher leaders recommended balancing clearly defined roles in terms of content and responsibilities and the ability to tailor teacher leader supports to individual teacher needs.

**Sharing the benefits of coaching and collaboration with teachers promotes engagement.**

Some teacher leaders shared that TLC led to improved school culture, yet a few teacher leaders also shared that some teachers were reluctant to engage in coaching cycles. Teacher leaders found that teachers were more likely to engage in coaching cycles when they learned about the benefits of collaborating with teacher leaders.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the Region 9 Comprehensive Center, please see <https://region9cc.org/about-us>.

**Teacher leaders use best practices for making collaboration more effective and helpful.**

Teacher leaders shared a variety of best practices for maximizing the effectiveness of collaboration, including building in opportunities for asynchronous collaboration between meetings, using consistent agendas and other meeting facilitation tools, balancing horizontal and vertical teaming structures, meeting frequently, and engaging in co-teaching when possible, allowing both teachers and teacher leaders to make real-time adjustments to strategies as necessary.

**Teacher leaders engage in inclusive, collaborative, ongoing data analysis to set priorities and support improvements in instruction.** Teacher leaders and principals shared that they used summative data to set schoolwide literacy priorities on a semi-annual basis, whereas teacher leaders and teachers used professional learning communities (PLCs) to iteratively review progress-monitoring and other formative data. Although teacher leaders shared that they used progress-monitoring data to assess how to adjust instruction over time, few teacher leaders were able to articulate any trends in progress monitoring or other formative data. Schools and districts may need to ensure that teacher leaders have access to progress-monitoring and other formative data so that their work (whether coaching, PLC facilitation, or other) targets student needs and successful student learning outcomes.

**Area education agencies (AEAs) and districts serve an important role in providing professional development for teacher leaders.** Teacher leaders shared that it was important for them to have deep content expertise for their role; however, few teacher leaders described identifying or using evidence-based practices or shared data on student needs and the impact of their work. Schools and districts can strengthen teacher leaders' effectiveness by ensuring they have access to targeted professional development in their content area of focus (e.g., early literacy, science, technology integration); know how to identify and use evidence-based practices appropriately to strengthen instruction; and understand how to use data to articulate student needs, goals, and progress.

**Teacher leaders promote effective instruction through support for curriculum implementation fidelity.** Many teacher leaders shared that the focus of their work was to help implement an early literacy curriculum with fidelity by modeling lessons, becoming experts in the content, or observing implementation. Teacher leaders recommended using curriculum implementation as a way to ensure that teachers provide consistent, high-quality instruction that is aligned across classrooms and grade levels.

**Teacher leaders need additional support to effectively communicate the impact of their work.** Although several teacher leaders were able to share examples of student learning they believe were influenced by TLC, most teacher leaders did not share supporting data or articulate

student learning trends over time. Many teacher leaders often use data in their work, but few have received training or support on how to analyze multiple data sources, summarize their findings on student learning succinctly, or share examples of student learning with administrators, district TLC leads, and other teacher leaders. By supporting teacher leaders in learning how to articulate and communicate how their work impacts student learning trends, schools and districts can better utilize teacher leaders' insights and perspectives to capture evidence of impact in their annual TLC reporting. Likewise, other teacher leaders across Iowa may benefit from hearing about successful practices and approaches to teacher leadership in other districts.

In the 2020–21 school year, Region 9 and the DE will continue to partner to explore how TLC promotes best practices and influences student learning. Region 9 plans to conduct additional outreach to gather educator perspectives on TLC, identify best practices, and understand meaningful trends in TLC implementation.

## Introduction

The Teacher Leadership and Compensation (TLC) program has been in place since 2014 and is used in every district across the state of Iowa. TLC generates a lot of positive feedback (as shared in districts' annual reporting), but there is limited information to date on the impact TLC has on student outcomes. To gain more insight into TLC's influence on student outcomes, Region 9 with the Iowa Department of Education (the DE) conducted a needs assessment in spring 2020. Specifically, this needs assessment focused on the impact of the TLC program on students' early literacy outcomes as measured by the FAST [Formative Assessment System for Teachers]. To gather this information, Region 9 conducted 48 interviews and focus groups in a sample of 14 districts with high year-over-year growth rates on the FAST. For more information on the methodology of the needs assessment, see Appendix A.

This resource summarizes the findings of the spring 2020 needs assessment, sharing two main types of insights into TLC: (1) approaches to how TLC supports student growth on the FAST in these select schools and districts and (2) best practices for effective TLC implementation as observed or recommended by teacher leaders. This resource organizes these findings by the four goal areas for TLC that districts report on annually:

1. **Attract and Retain:** Attract able and promising new teachers by offering competitive starting salaries and offering short- and long-term professional development and leadership opportunities, and retain effective teachers by providing enhanced career opportunities.
2. **Collaboration:** Promote collaboration by developing and supporting opportunities for teachers in schools and school districts statewide to learn from each other.
3. **Professional Growth:** Reward professional growth and effective teaching by providing pathways for career opportunities that come with increased leadership responsibilities and involve increased compensation.
4. **Student Achievement:** Improve student achievement by strengthening instruction.

The final section of this resource provides considerations for the DE, districts, schools, and teacher leaders based on these findings and focused on ensuring the success and sustainability of the TLC program over time.

# TLC Needs Assessment Findings

To gather information on the impact of the TLC program on students' early literacy outcomes, staff from Region 9 asked teacher leaders and principals four questions about their work in interviews and focus groups: (1) what was going well in their TLC implementation, (2) what the focus of their TLC work has been, (3) what best practices they have seen or would recommend, and (4) examples of impacts they have seen from their TLC work, particularly on student learning. Several major themes arose in the analysis of interviewee and focus group participant feedback, including best practices for collaboration and professional learning, a focus on curriculum and data analysis, and positive impacts on teaching and learning. To provide a holistic picture of TLC implementation, the findings in this report are organized into four sections, grouped thematically under each of the four TLC goal areas:

## **Attract and Retain**

Best Practices: Teacher Leader Relationship Building

Focus: TLC Roles

Impact: School Culture

## **Professional Growth**

Best Practices: Professional Development for Teacher Leaders

Focus: Curriculum Implementation

Impact: Instruction

## **Collaboration**

Best Practices: Collaboration Structures

Focus: Data Analysis

## **Student Achievement**

Impact: Student Growth and Achievement

The findings included in each section are classified by whether they address best practices, the focus of teacher leader supports, or the impact of TLC on teaching and learning.<sup>2</sup>

Each of these sections includes both quantitative findings (in graphs) and qualitative findings (in bullet points). Each quantitative graph includes three figures:

- Number of files (i.e., the number of interviews or focus groups) that included feedback on the topic covered in the graph
- Number of references (i.e., the number of individual mentions, ideas, or takeaways) on the topic covered in the graph

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<sup>2</sup> Please note that while interviewees and focus group participants did discuss the impact of collaboration, these findings are similar to and therefore grouped with the findings on the impact of professional growth on instruction. Likewise, please note that the student achievement goal area focuses solely on impact, as related best practices and focus areas are discussed in the other three sections.

- Number of schools in which teacher leaders or principals shared feedback on the topic covered in the graph

Overall, the needs assessment included 48 files, 1,441 references, and 29 schools in total. Although the qualitative findings do not always include numbers, they provide insights into meaningful themes, perspectives, and takeaways about TLC (including illustrative quotes). Aside from a few positive examples of improvements in student achievement associated with TLC, no personally identifying information has been included to protect the confidentiality of interviewees and focus group participants.

## Attract and Retain

In the TLC goal statements, the DE describes attract and retain strategies as “offering short- and long-term professional development” (i.e., led by teacher leaders) and “enhanced career opportunities” (i.e., teacher leader roles).<sup>3</sup> Although interviewees and focus group participants did not explicitly mention recruitment and retention, three related themes emerged across interviews and focus groups as teacher leaders and principals described their work: teacher leader relationship building, teacher leader roles, and school climate.

### Best Practices: Teacher Leader Relationship Building

When describing what was going well in TLC implementation, the focus of their work, and best practices, teacher leaders often emphasized the importance of building positive relationships for their work. Many teacher leaders shared that they work hard and intentionally to build relationships with the teachers they support and acknowledged that building trust and relationships takes time; several teacher leaders shared that they dedicated their entire first year of TLC implementation to relationship building before focusing on specific content or goals. Likewise, some teacher leaders shared insights on how they built positive relationships with principals as they worked together to provide instructional leadership across the school.

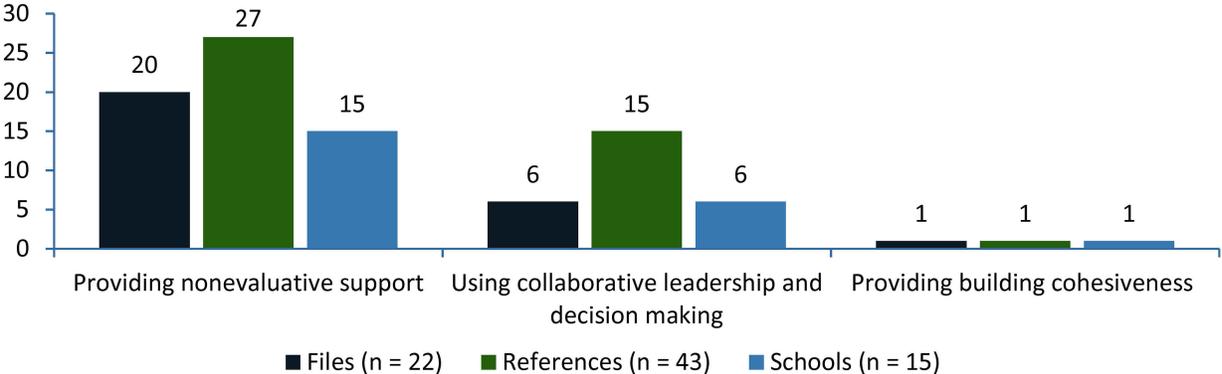
### Relationships With Teachers

As shown in Exhibit 1, teacher leaders shared that having their role be non-evaluative and collaborative made building relationships with teachers easier, as teachers felt engaged and respected as equals.

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<sup>3</sup> American Institutes for Research. (2016). Iowa's Teacher Leadership and Compensation Program. Washington, DC. Retrieved from <https://educateiowa.gov/sites/files/ed/documents/TLCReport-December2016.pdf>, p. 1.

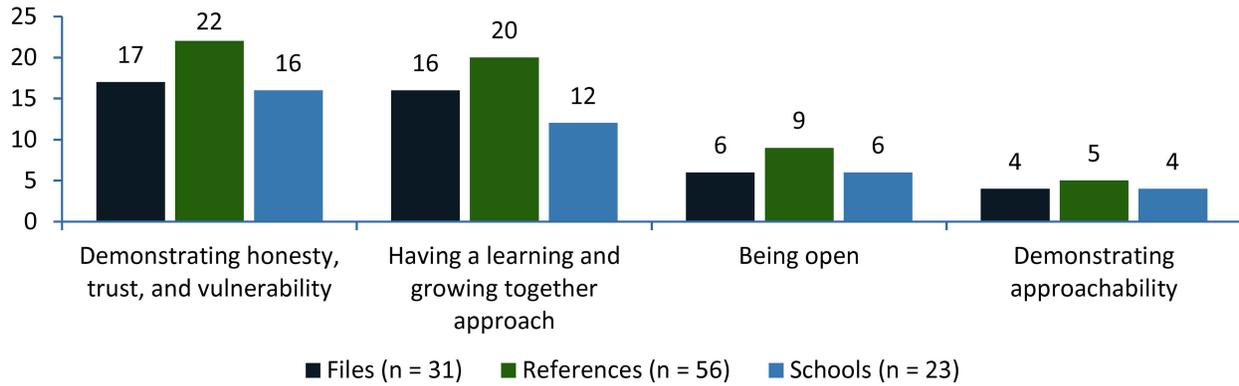
**Exhibit 1. Teacher leader roles and responsibilities that help build positive relationships with teachers**



**Non-evaluative support:** One teacher leader’s strategy for emphasizing to teachers that their role was non-evaluative was to avoid any documentation in the first few weeks of work together, instead focusing just on having conversations together. This teacher leader did not bring paper, pens, laptops, tablets, or other writing tools to the teacher’s classroom to help them feel at ease sharing challenges or questions they felt reticent to admit they were having (and thus did not want documented). Another teacher leader described non-evaluative support as recognizing teachers’ efforts, saying, “part of our role is to highlight the strengths of other teachers... It's not us observing you and critiquing, it's us noticing all the hard work teachers are doing.”

**Using collaborative leadership and decision making:** Teacher leaders often described their collaboration with teachers around decision making as “being on the same page” or “on the same team,” emphasizing their shared goals and shared expertise in their work together. For example, one teacher leader shared that she and her colleagues “all feel like they are bringing something to the table.”

As shown in Exhibit 2, teacher leaders also shared specific strategies that they used to build trust and rapport with teachers.

**Exhibit 2. Teacher leader strategies for building relationships with teachers**

**Demonstrating honesty, trust, and vulnerability and being open:** Some teacher leaders shared that being honest about their own mistakes and misconceptions along the way (i.e., showing vulnerability) helped build trust and made teachers feel more comfortable sharing their own questions or challenges.

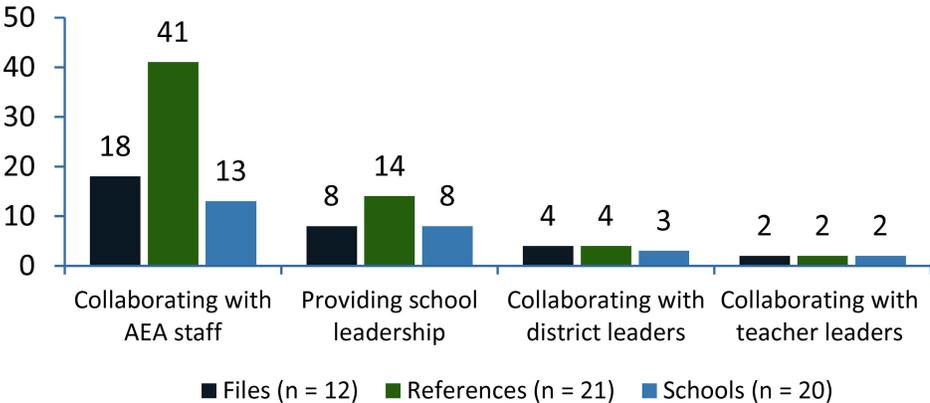
**Having a learning and growing together approach:** Some teacher leaders explained that it was helpful to not present themselves as an expert but instead to share their own strengths, challenges, and learnings over time. Teacher leaders also described this as an iterative process in which teacher leaders committed to “figuring it out together” with the teacher(s). Some teacher leaders expressed that they believed they were working toward a common goal with teachers rather than directing the improvement process. While teacher leaders acknowledged the importance of having both content and leadership expertise in their roles, teacher leaders also acknowledged that teachers were more receptive to a shared-learning approach (regardless of teacher leaders’ expertise).

**Demonstrating approachability:** Some teacher leaders in professional learning community (PLC) strategist roles described how perceived approachability matters, as they have the opportunity to have more informal conversations with teachers where they can provide guidance without teachers feeling nervous or intimidated as they might with an administrator or coach. One teacher leader shared that, “it’s [a] lot easier to hear advice or structured guidance from your teammates than it is from a coach or a principal because it feels there’s less pressure. That has helped with our collaborative mentality.”

### *Relationships With Administrators*

As shown in Exhibit 3, some teacher leaders shared that their roles and responsibilities included collaboration or shared work with other teacher leaders, principals, district leaders, or area educational agency (AEA) staff.

**Exhibit 3. Teacher leader roles and responsibilities that require building positive relationships with principals**



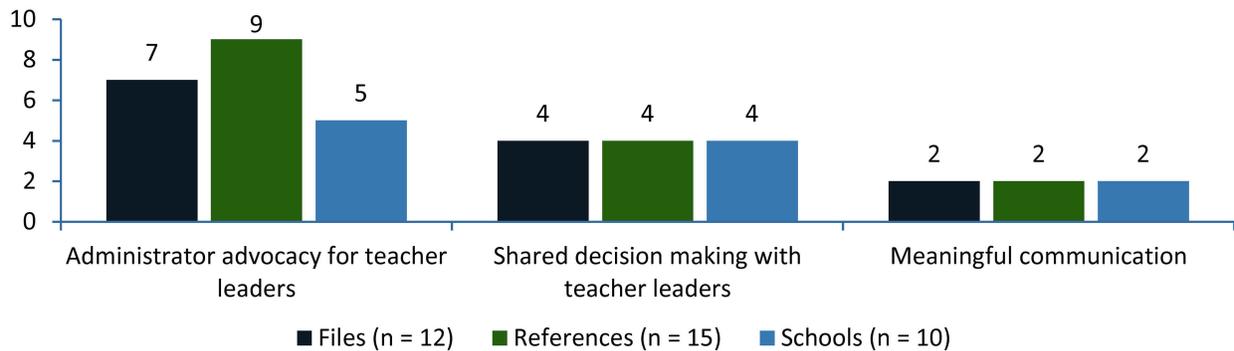
**Collaborating with AEA staff:** See pages 18-20 of this resource for more information on collaborating with AEA staff.

**Providing school leadership:** Teacher leaders and principals both discussed how teacher leaders taking on academic leadership responsibilities gave the principal more time to manage other issues (e.g., behavior). One teacher leader shared that, “if there weren't coaches, I do not know how a principal would ever get it all done.”

**Collaborating with district and teacher leaders:** A few teacher leaders shared that it was helpful to collaborate with district staff or other teacher leaders. One teacher leader discussed how they collaborated with other teacher leaders in different roles (e.g., technology lead, reading coach, PLC strategist) to understand all the nuances of curriculum implementation, including the technology-based elements and learning from each other.

As shown in Exhibit 4, interviewees and focus group participants shared several helpful strategies for building positive rapport and relationships between teacher leaders and principals.

#### Exhibit 4. Administrator strategies for building positive relationships with teacher leaders



**Administrator advocacy for teacher leaders:** When describing how principals advocated for teacher leaders, one teacher leader described how their administrator emphasized that the role was non-evaluative and helped set clear expectations for what the teacher leaders would do and help accomplish.

**Shared decision making with teacher leaders:** A few teacher leaders described how being part of shared decision making and purposeful conversations helped them feel respected by the principal.

#### Focus: Teacher Leader Roles and Responsibilities

When describing what was going well in TLC implementation, the focus of their work, and best practices, teacher leaders often shared information about their roles and responsibilities.

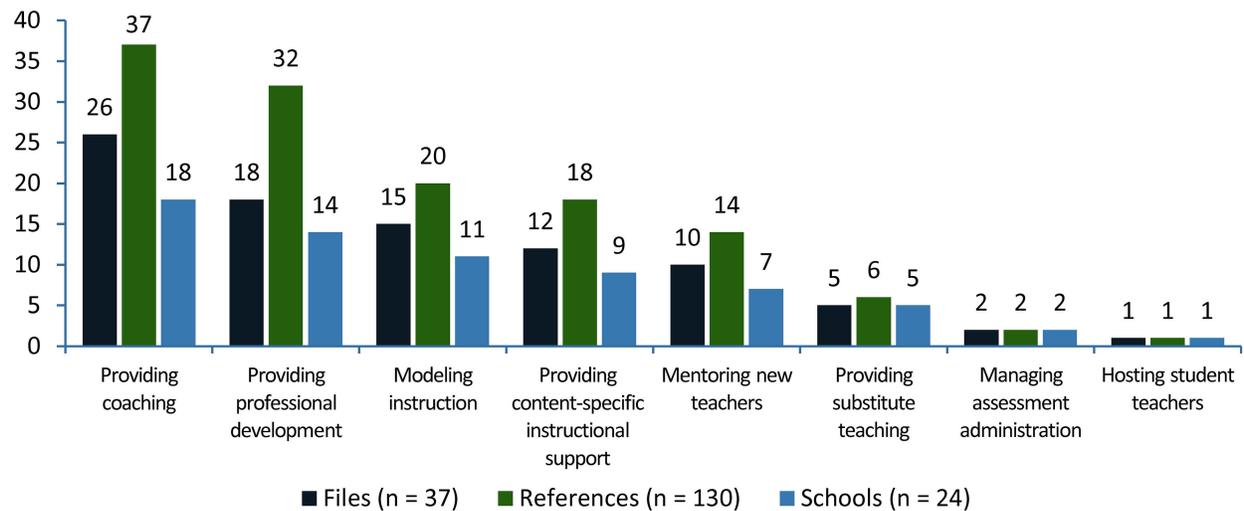
Although interviewees and focus group participants did not discuss how their roles impacted recruitment or retention for either teachers or teacher leaders, they did describe how these responsibilities were focused on helping teachers feel supported and successful in their work, which may influence recruitment and retention.

#### Teacher Leader Responsibilities

As shown in Exhibit 5, teacher leaders described a variety of responsibilities, which were not always exclusive to one type of teacher leader role (e.g., instructional coaches, professional learning community (PLC) strategists, model teachers, etc.). For example, providing professional development as a responsibility was mentioned by a variety of types of teacher leaders. Most of these responsibilities directly addressed instructional improvement (i.e., providing coaching, providing professional development, modeling instruction, providing content-specific instructional support, and mentoring new teachers); however, a few teacher leaders mentioned that they also served as substitute teaching on occasion.

Teacher leaders often described their role across multiple responsibilities as helping teachers improve their craft and working together with teachers to help students learn. Most teacher leaders described these responsibilities positively, expressing the belief that these responsibilities led to helpful and rewarding supports both for themselves and for teachers. The one exception was substitute teaching, which was not generally seen as appropriate for the teacher leader role except when it gave teachers the opportunity to observe a model teacher's or other colleague's instruction.

### Exhibit 5. Teacher leader responsibilities



#### Providing coaching:

- **Coaching cycle length:** Teacher leaders shared that having shorter coaching cycles (e.g., implementing a lesson with a pre- and a post-reflection conference) allowed for more specificity and flexibility for teachers in requesting support.
- **Coaching engagement strategies:** Several teacher leaders shared that once teachers saw the improvements others made during coaching cycles, new and experienced teachers overcame their initial hesitation and often requested more than one coaching cycle. In one district, teacher leaders shared that model teachers participated in coaching cycles first to help ease other teachers' apprehensiveness about what the process would be like. However, several teacher leaders also shared that when there were no teachers willing to engage in coaching cycles within a certain grade band (often because many teachers in that grade are new), it was challenging to engage teachers in coaching. Model teachers reported participating in coaching cycles first to provide comfort to other teachers who are more apprehensive about the coaching cycle process. Despite this one potential remedy to lack of teacher buy-in, several coaches expressed the challenge of new coaching cycles that are

required in each grade level when there are no teachers willing to open their classrooms voluntarily in that grade level.

- **Coaching assignments:** One teacher leader indicated that the grade level requirements often take time away from another grade level teacher who may request support. One teacher leader also suggested that teachers want content experts in their rooms to support those areas but sometimes instructional coaches may not have a background in math, which makes the teacher less confident in the teacher leader's ability to support them in that content area.
- **Coaching focus:** One teacher leader shared that coaching cycles allowed teacher leaders to get a sense of where students were in their learning and where further supports could be targeted across grade levels (based on common misconceptions and struggles).

**Providing professional development:** Several teacher leaders described how they worked to meet any teacher request, such as researching resources or strategies to meet a classroom need. Likewise, some teacher leaders shared how they worked to scaffold research and professional development materials to meet teachers' needs, such as creating graphic organizers for key concepts. One teacher created a Google form at the end of the year to gather feedback from teachers on whether they feel comfortable with their professional learning and what they might improve.

**Providing content-specific instructional support:** Several teacher leaders shared the importance of content-specific supports, such as designating coach roles for reading and math respectively, for ensuring that teacher leaders can easily provide support in their area of expertise rather than having to be a "jack of all trades," which reduced the quality of the supports they could provide across multiple content areas.

### *Teacher Leader Role Design*

When describing their roles, teacher leaders also shared their perspectives on whether it was better to have more or less flexibility in teacher leader roles and responsibilities. However, responses were mixed, without a clear indication whether fixed or flexible teacher leader roles were considered better. Eleven interviewees or focus group participants shared that having clear and concrete responsibilities outlined in the teacher leader role was beneficial in their context; conversely, five interviewees or focus group participants shared that having less defined and more flexible teacher leader roles was beneficial for them. For example, one teacher leader shared that a more defined role was helpful because it reduced duplication, saying,

“When I was a mentor teacher, I tried to talk with my mentee about different things and often the coach had already taken care of that conversation. It was fine, but we were unsure who is supposed to be doing what. [I would recommend] making sure that there's a definition of who does what and have less overlap.”

However, another teacher leader shared that a more flexible role was helpful because it allowed them “the complete freedom to be more responsive to what my teachers need.” Another teacher leader described the benefits of a flexible role in terms of its effect on recruitment and retention, saying,

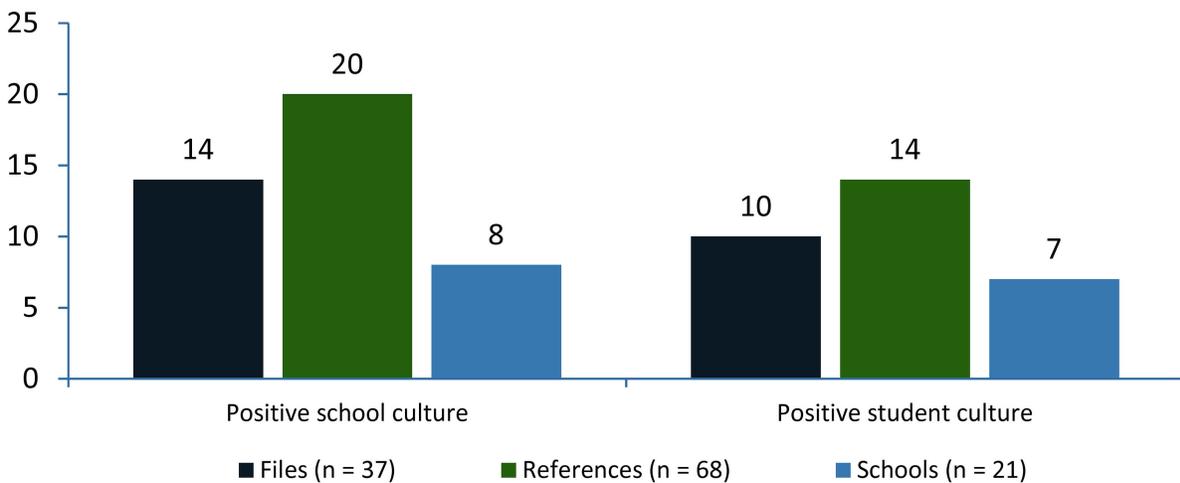
“I like the flexibility of our roles. We have our big goals and our focus areas, but there's also the flexibility to help [a teacher] if their students just don't seem to get something. Being able to go in and help a class get back on track is nice, and we're not seeing so much burnout or turnover [as before].”

One teacher leader felt it was important, whether the teacher leader role was flexible or not, to define the focus of the teacher leaders' work, saying “our elementary coaches want to sit down and figure out what our role consists of and what we're focusing on so we can make [teaching and learning] better. Otherwise, we are just gliding over everything [with teachers] and can't go in depth on anything, which hurts teachers' growth.”

### Impact: School Culture

As shown in Exhibit 6, one of the major positive impacts of TLC that interviewees and focus group participants described was the impact on school culture.

**Exhibit 6. Impact of TLC on school culture**



**Positive school culture:** Many teacher leaders shared that by promoting a growth mindset and collaboration, they helped to cultivate a more positive school culture. According to one teacher leader,

“I think it's our environment where failure is an option—a good option—because it shows you what doesn't work. When you learn after every failure, you, you get this better atmosphere where mistakes are welcome and it's just a way that you work together to fix things.”

Likewise, another teacher leader shared that, “the atmosphere is better, more supportive, and upbeat across the school because we have that mindset of just learning and growth. I don't think teachers feel judged. We have more of a school culture that is a safe area to learn and be vulnerable and ask for help since implementing TLC.” Another teacher leader clarified that collaboration structures (see page 14 of this resource) helped teachers get to know each other better and feel more comfortable sharing questions or advice with each other.

One teacher leader clarified that having a more supportive atmosphere helped school staff focus more on students' needs than adults' needs, saying,

“We have to keep adjusting and looking at what's best for our kids. A lot of teachers ask, ‘what is best for kids?’ rather than ‘what is best for me or easiest for me?’. Teachers really want to focus on what's best for kids.”

**Positive student culture:** A few teacher leaders shared that they helped to create a better school culture for students. For example, one teacher leader explained that, “The TLC process has really enabled teachers to connect with their students a little bit more through increased social emotional supports.” Likewise, another teacher leader shared that having multiple adults working across classrooms gave students multiple options for support, saying, “if they don't feel comfortable talking to me as a teacher, maybe they feel comfortable talking to somebody that they've seen in our classrooms.”

## Collaboration

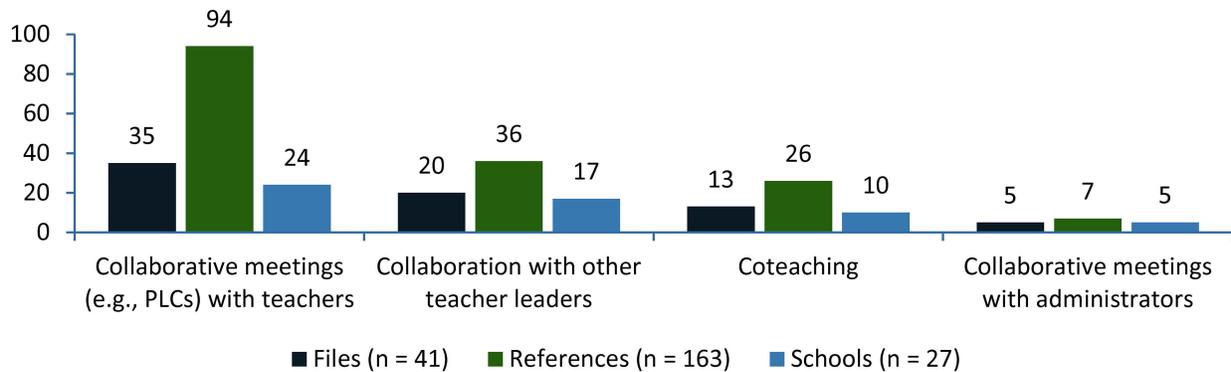
In the TLC goal statements, the DE describes collaboration as “opportunities for teachers in schools and school districts statewide to learn from each other.”<sup>4</sup> For teacher leaders, promoting collaboration can take a variety of forms, such as facilitating teacher meetings, working one-on-one with other teachers, or connecting with other teacher leaders or principals to share success stories and best practices across multiple schools or districts. Region 9 did not explicitly ask all interviewees and focus group participants about collaboration but did ask about the focus of teacher leader supports. Across interviews and focus groups, two themes related to collaboration emerged: collaboration structures and collaborative data analysis.

### Best Practices: Collaboration Structures

#### School-Level Collaboration

As shown in Exhibit 7, the most common collaboration structure used was a regular collaborative meeting such as a PLC meeting or grade-level team meeting, but some teacher leaders also shared that they collaborated through co-teaching assignments. Teacher leaders also shared more about collaboration with other teacher leaders than their collaboration with principals.

**Exhibit 7. School-level teacher leader collaboration structures**



#### Collaborative meetings (e.g., PLCs) with teachers:

- Asynchronous PLC collaboration:** Teacher leaders found that creating opportunities for asynchronous collaboration, such as emailing the PLC team for ideas or advice on how to help a student, helped them spread their knowledge beyond their school. One teacher leader noted, “I just feel like when things work and you share it with someone else, that

<sup>4</sup> American Institutes for Research. (2016). Iowa's Teacher Leadership and Compensation Program. Washington, DC. Retrieved from <https://educateiowa.gov/sites/files/ed/documents/TLCReport-December2016.pdf>, p. 1.

makes it work for the whole district and not just for your own little corner of the world.” Similarly, another teacher leader shared how they videotape their coaching sessions and ask other teacher leaders for feedback.

- **Balanced horizontal and vertical teaming (including PLCs):** Teacher leaders described the importance of balancing grade-level team meetings and vertical team meetings based on school needs. A few teacher leaders described how grade-level team meetings were critical for their work, sharing that focusing on the “essentials” for their grade level helped improve curriculum implementation. Alternately, other teacher leaders shared the importance of vertical alignment for ensuring that instruction to the standards was aligned across grade levels. One teacher leader shared their strategy for balancing both kinds of collaboration:

“Our vertical learning has one lead teacher from each grade level team, which has been nice and streamlined. Instead of having everybody on the teams all meet together and having six people or seven people talk all [at] the same time, with one teacher from each grade we get to know what’s happening in the classrooms of other grades and then take that information back to our own team. It makes it a little bit easier and more efficient for me to not be taking up everyone's time.”

- **PLC frequency:** Teacher leaders emphasized the importance of having shorter and more frequent PLC meetings because it creates a sense of camaraderie and “brings a sense of ‘these are all of our kids,’ not just ‘this is my class.’” One teacher leader shared that having set weekly PLC time helped them more effectively plan how to be “productive and collaborative” week to week.
- **PLC meeting facilitation best practices:** Teacher leaders shared best practices for facilitating PLC meetings effectively, including the following:
  - *Consistently using an agenda:* “It is so easy to veer off and start discussing a student or something that's happening in the classroom, so we try to stick to the agenda and the time allotted.”
  - *Setting meeting norms:* “When you get four or five individuals with ideas to share, you want to hear them all, so we went back and redid our group norms [for the PLC]. That was really helpful because technology would sometimes be an issue (e.g., somebody might be on their phone). By holding people accountable really helped maximize our 45 minutes together.”

**Collaboration with other teacher leaders:** One teacher leader described videotaping their coaching cycles to request feedback from other teacher leaders. Other teacher leaders

described collaborating together to create consistent language and professional development materials because the continuity was helpful to teachers.

**Co-teaching:** Although co-teaching was not as frequently mentioned as other types of collaboration, those teacher leaders who did co-teach with colleagues were emphatic in their praise for the model. Several teacher leaders shared that co-teaching made it easier to meet student needs “right away” and be “fluid” in their supports. Other teacher leaders shared that co-teaching helped them make an impact for more students. One teacher leader shared that,

“Co-teaching has changed a lot. We reach way more kids than I used to alone. My first year doing Title I, I only met with three kids. Now, through co-teaching, I get to work with all of the kids, not necessarily just the kids that are behind. I think that has made the world of difference. I don't ever want to go back to the other way.”

Another teacher leader shared that, “being able to push in and co-teach is huge because with two of us in there, we can definitely help more students. We can differentiate more and have instant feedback from a colleague. We're both seeing the same thing, what works well and what's not working at all.” In addition, one teacher leader described how co-teaching helped them check their expectations about what teachers could feasibly do, saying:

“Now that we're full released, one big concern is that it's really easy to have great ideas but not really understand the day-to-day work of a teacher. When you're not in the classroom every day, it's easy to lose focus of what you can't really do with 28 kids in the room. Co-teaching labs where we teach one class of the day helps.”

### ***AEA-Level Collaboration***

Most teacher leaders and principals also engaged in collaboration through their AEA: all but one large district discussed AEA collaboration to some extent. Most references to AEA collaboration were positive, emphasizing that AEA collaboration has played a “huge” role in their success. However, teacher leaders and principals from different districts described different types of collaboration with AEA staff:

**AEA networking:** For teacher leaders in small districts, AEA-provided opportunities for coaches to network and collaborate with each other were considered helpful because these coaches were often the only ones in their school building.

**AEA professional development:** Content-specific professional development from AEAs was considered helpful across several districts of varying size; specifically, teacher leaders named professional development on guided reading, running records, and how to build trusting and supportive relationships as particularly helpful. Teacher leaders also shared that recently AEA-led book studies have been helpful for their ongoing professional growth.

**AEA consultation supports:** Specific supports provided by AEA consultants were also considered helpful, including unpacking key learning standards, mapping out the instruction components to include in literacy blocks, or answering questions that arise throughout the year. For example, teacher leaders from Linn-Marr School District shared that staff from Grant Wood AEA have modeled lessons or taught actual lessons based on their local diagnostic data so that their teacher leaders and teachers could see how these instructional strategies could be applied in their context. Likewise, a teacher leader from a different district shared that AEA support has been “a continuous process through the year,” noting that AEA staff regularly follow up about the usefulness of AEA professional development.

**AEA data analysis support:** One small district shared that AEA support for data analysis was particularly helpful. Teacher leaders shared that the AEA provided critical support for data reviews to ensure students’ needs were accurately identified as well as fidelity checks to ensure that students’ needs were being consistently addressed. Teacher leaders also shared that AEA staff regularly came to team meetings to listen to and help address teacher concerns based on data, helping to unpack and summarize data in ways teachers could understand. Teacher leaders shared that this support from the AEA helped them ensure that data was kept and tracked long term.

**AEA special education support:** A few teacher leaders shared that the AEA provided critical support on special education, meeting regularly as special education “teams” and helping teacher leaders stay up to date on changing legal requirements. This AEA support allowed teacher leaders to work “smarter not harder” in identification and intervention processes for students with disabilities.

**AEA forms and processes:** One teacher leader shared that they worked closely with the AEA to develop forms and processes to support consistency across coaching cycles with teachers.

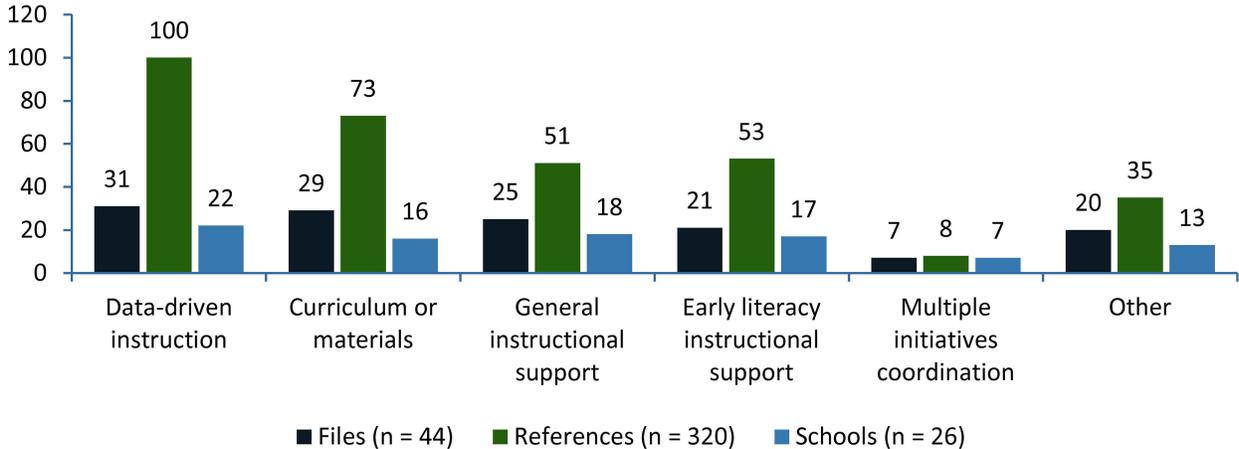
It is worth noting that although AEA collaboration was seen as mostly positive, a few teacher leaders attributed their success to being able focus on their specific school and district needs rather than relying on the AEA for direction or training. These teacher leaders shared that being able to eventually move their professional learning to the district or school level allowed them to get more specific and detailed in how to best support their teachers. Having flexibility and autonomy on how to use AEA supports was important for these teacher leaders in ensuring their work with teachers would be successful.

## Focus: Collaborative Data Analysis

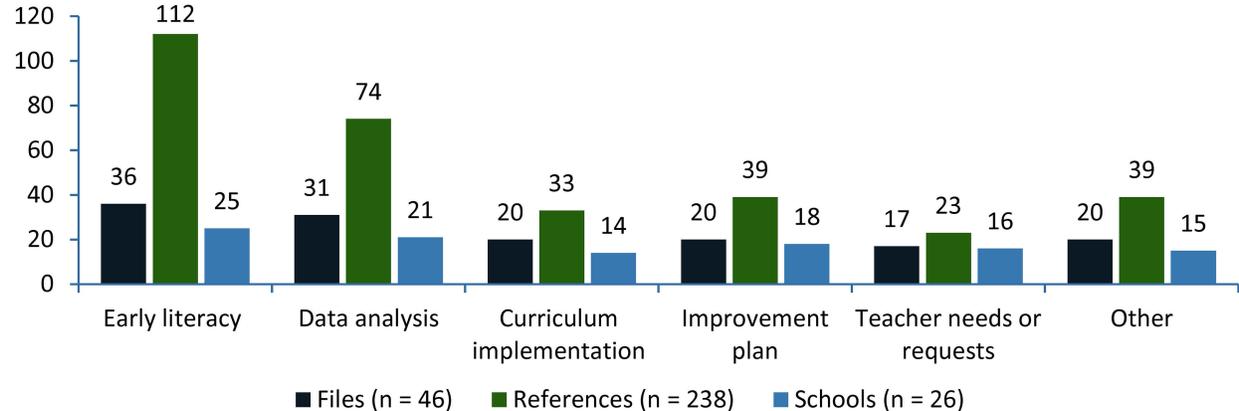
When teacher leaders and principals described their collaboration processes and activities, they often focused on how they used data to inform decision making. As shown in Exhibit 8, support

for data-driven instruction was the most frequently mentioned type of support provided by teacher leaders across interviews and focus groups. Likewise, when Region 9 asked about the focus of teacher leaders' work, data analysis was the most common response (see Exhibit 9).

**Exhibit 8. Types of teacher leader supports provided**

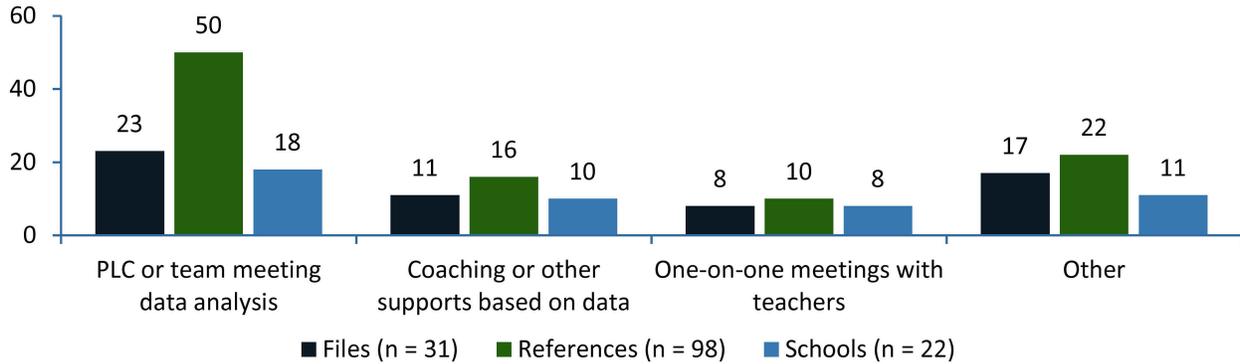


**Exhibit 9. Types of focus area topics for TLC supports**

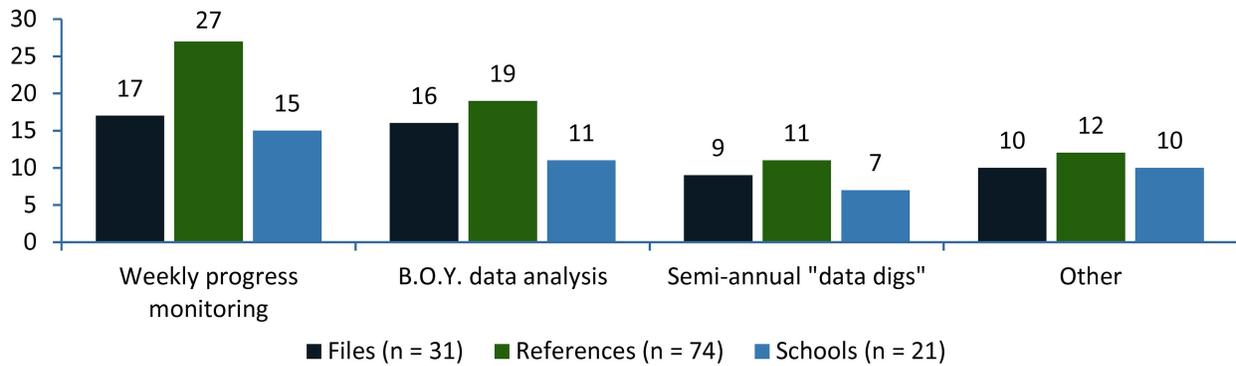


As shown in Exhibits 10 and 11, teacher leaders shared several ways in which they supported data-driven instruction. Teacher leaders primarily described analyzing progress-monitoring data in weekly PLCs or other collaborative meetings but also described semi-annual FAST “data digs” with principals and beginning-of-the-year data analysis to determine instructional priorities, or meeting one on one with teachers to look at their student data as needed. Although not focused specifically on data analysis, teacher leaders also reported basing their coaching or other instructional supports on needs identified through data analysis. In many cases, teacher leaders reported taking on the bulk of data analysis in their schools across these various activities.

**Exhibit 10. Types of teacher leader supports provided focused on data**



**Exhibit 11. Teacher leader participation in data meetings**



**PLC data analysis:** When describing their data analysis work within PLCs or other collaborative meetings, teacher leaders in most schools focused on analyzing progress-monitoring data. Teacher leaders tended to be generic in their descriptions of data analysis. Most teacher leaders did not describe their process for analyzing progress-monitoring data, and those who did provided only general, high-level descriptions. For example, one teacher leader described their process as follows:

“We collect like baseline data because the, you know, where we're at currently with that. And then we select strategies that will help us hopefully improve that. And so then we take data to see if we are improving and if so, then we'll stick with those strategies. Or if we aren't, then we might change the strategy. So it's really just to make improvements for the teachers that student achievement improvements in the long run is our goal.”

Similarly, another teacher leader described their process as follows:

“Three times a year we look at screener scores and set goals on how to move kids, then every 6 to 8 weeks we look at graphs and interventions to make instructional decisions.

We ask, 'Is it working? Is it not working? What do we need to do?' and try new interventions. Data is like what we live."

A few teacher leaders reported using other kinds of guiding questions to help teachers understand and reflect on data during PLCs or other collaborative meetings, such as the following:

- Which students have mastered concepts and which have not?
- Which students may need additional interventions?
- Which students are proficient overall and which are not?
- What universal interventions and strategies can be used to address common student needs?

One teacher leader shared that collaborative data analysis helped them understand why their students weren't succeeding on state tests, despite some scores indicating that they were doing well, and target instructional improvements accordingly.

"We sat down a few years ago and realized our FAST scores were the worst in the district for our grade level, where under 30% of our students were proficient. We didn't have enough knowledge at the time to even realize what that meant. We had students who were reading 80 sight words a minute when they only needed to read 20 per minute to be proficient, so we thought we were ahead. But our students weren't able to demonstrate other phonemic awareness skills like segmenting words. We hadn't realized that there was such a disconnect between proficiency on specific skills and overall proficiency on the FAST in their overall composite score. So as a team, we worked on improving skills like segmenting and blending words through interactive writing. We did a lot of one-minute formative assessment checks on segmenting, blending words, and letter sounds, then used interactive writing to really bring all those skills together. By the next spring, we saw huge growth in those specific skills—we knew exactly what our kids needed and where they needed to be. That was one of the most powerful things for our team to see—how much we could raise those kids coming in with no knowledge at the beginning of the year and turning them into readers."

**Coaching supports:** One teacher leader shared that coaching cycles allowed teacher leaders to get a sense of where students were in their learning and where further supports could be targeted across grade levels (based on common misconceptions and struggles).

Surprisingly, despite teacher leaders' focus on data-driven instruction, few teacher leaders were able to share any data or information about trends in their progress-monitoring or other formative data over time. For example, one teacher leader describing the needs of teachers in their building said, "I don't have any data to support it. I just know those are the needs." Likewise, another teacher explained, "we have a billion spreadsheets, but we don't ever run percentages [to look at growth over time]. We just focus on proficiency." A few teacher leaders indicated that although they provide coaching or other support to teachers, they do not have access to progress-monitoring or other formative data, which can make it difficult to use data to regularly inform their work with teachers or assess the impact of their supports on student learning.

For more information on teacher leaders' articulation of data trends, see the Student Achievement section on page 31. For ways to help teacher leaders improve their ability to summarize data trends, see the Considerations for TLC Sustainability section on page 36.

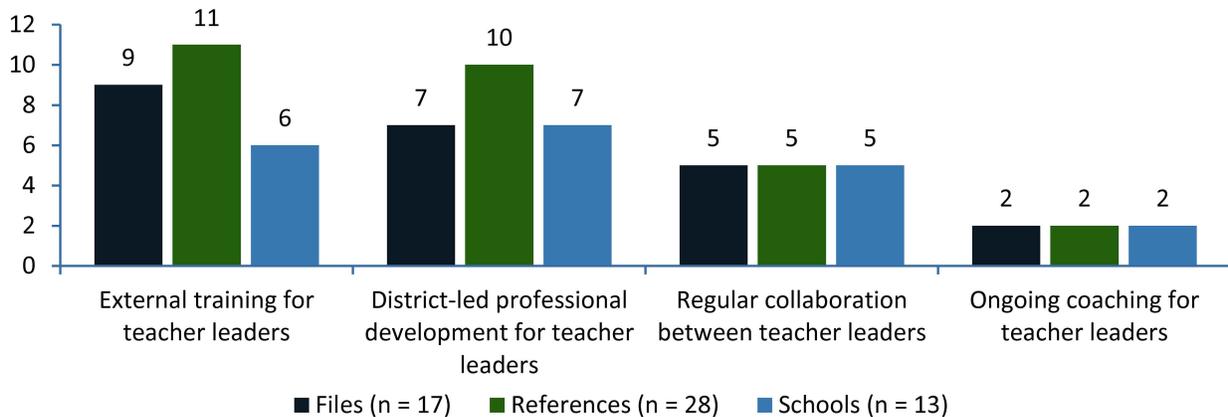
## Professional Growth

In the TLC goal statements, the DE describes professional growth in connection to “effective teaching,” made possible through the “increased leadership responsibilities” of teacher leaders;<sup>5</sup> therefore, most teacher leader roles used across Iowa (e.g., instructional coaches, PLC strategists, model teachers) provide instructional supports designed to help teachers be effective. Although Region 9 did not explicitly ask all interviewees and focus group participants about professional growth, Region 9 did explicitly ask about the focus of teacher leaders’ supports and activities, which prompted teacher leaders to describe how they promoted other teachers’ professional growth in priority areas. Three major themes related to professional growth emerged across interviews and focus groups: professional development for teacher leaders, curriculum implementation, and instructional impact.

### Best Practices: Professional Development for Teacher Leaders

As shown in Exhibit 12, several teacher leaders described the types of professional development they engaged in themselves to improve their own practice as a teacher leader. Teacher leaders were positive about their professional development, recognizing that it was important for them to have the knowledge and skills needed to help others. One teacher leader shared that, “a coach cannot hold all of the knowledge. If early literacy is going to be a focus, that coach needs to spend some time in professional learning to get that knowledge. It would be difficult to lead a building on an early literacy initiative if you don't hold any knowledge about effective practices.”

**Exhibit 12. Teacher leader professional growth structures**



*Note.* Only small and medium size districts reported attending external training for teacher leaders.

<sup>5</sup> American Institutes for Research. (2016). Iowa's Teacher Leadership and Compensation Program. Washington, DC. Retrieved from <https://educateiowa.gov/sites/files/ed/documents/TLCReport-December2016.pdf>, p. 1.

**External training for teacher leaders:** Several teacher leaders described how attending trainings when they first implemented TLC helped to clarify their role and the purpose of TLC, which helped them jump into the work quickly. However, some teacher leaders shared that more recent trainings were particularly helpful, such as AEA-led book studies, external content trainings (e.g., literacy-focused) provided by universities, or trainings on a new literacy curriculum. It is unclear whether these trainings were available for all teacher leader roles, differentiated by role, or only available to instructional coaches.

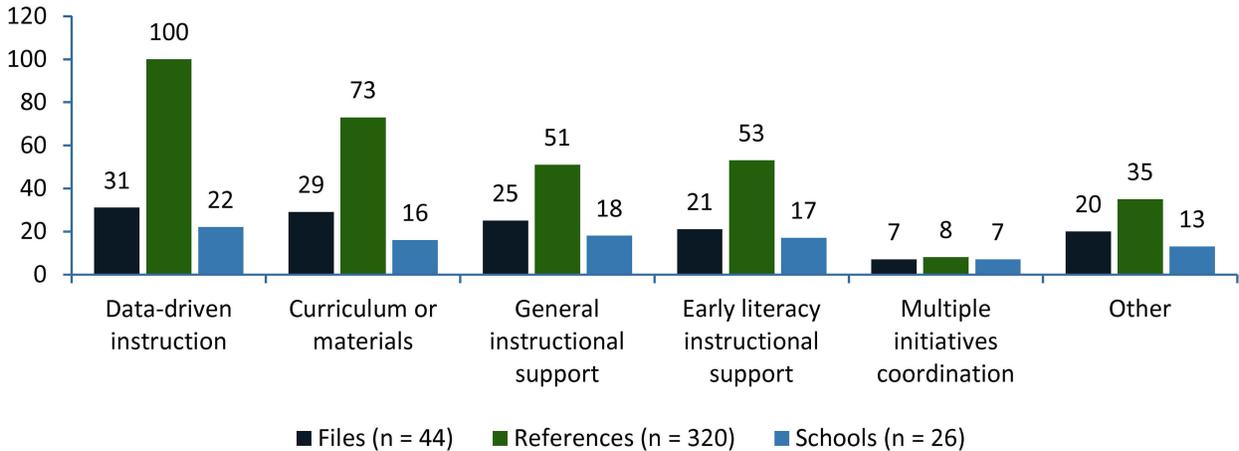
**Coaching for teacher leaders:** A few teacher leaders shared that it was helpful to have a “coach of coaches.” For example, one principal shared that,

“To just have one coach in each building would have fallen flat if it was just the principal overseeing the TLC program. We wouldn't be as successful as we are now if it wasn't for our [teacher leader] coaches. We wouldn't have moved forward in our PD team or been as prepared in our collaboration if that person wasn't coaching all these teacher leaders. As a principal, you have all the best intentions, but I'm being pulled a lot of different directions. It is awesome to have somebody whose blood, sweat, and tears is poured just into TLC.”

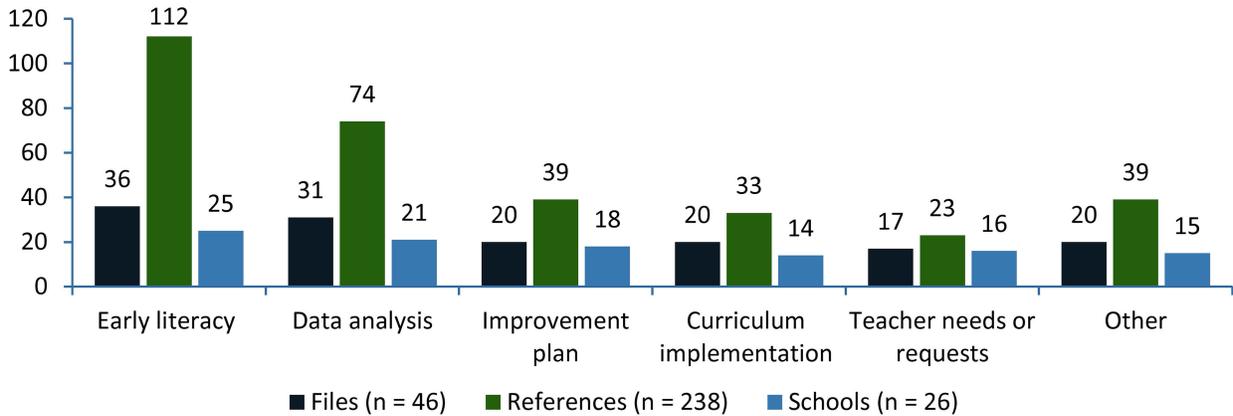
### **Focus: Curriculum Implementation**

When Region 9 asked about the focus of teacher leaders' work, responses were not always consistent across school staff, with some interviewees and focus group participants sharing multiple foci or goals and some sharing different goals than their colleagues at the same school. However, nearly all schools mentioned curriculum, data analysis, and early literacy (which makes sense, given that these districts were chosen for their early literacy growth scores on the FAST). Exhibits 13 and 14 are the same as Exhibits 8 and 9 from page 19, showing curriculum implementation as the second-most common type of support provided and a focus area for the majority of schools (with data-driven instruction being the most common type of support).

**Exhibit 13. Types of teacher leader supports provided**

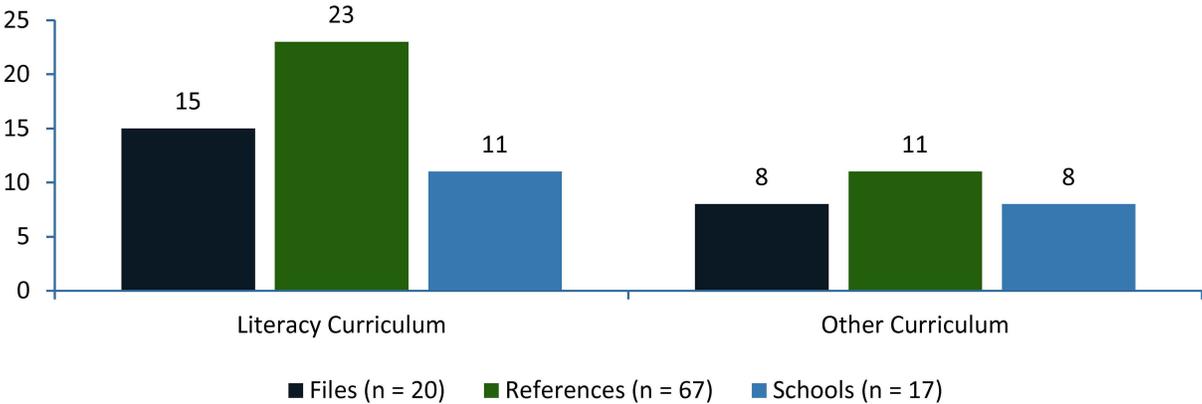


**Exhibit 14. Types of focus area topics for TLC supports**

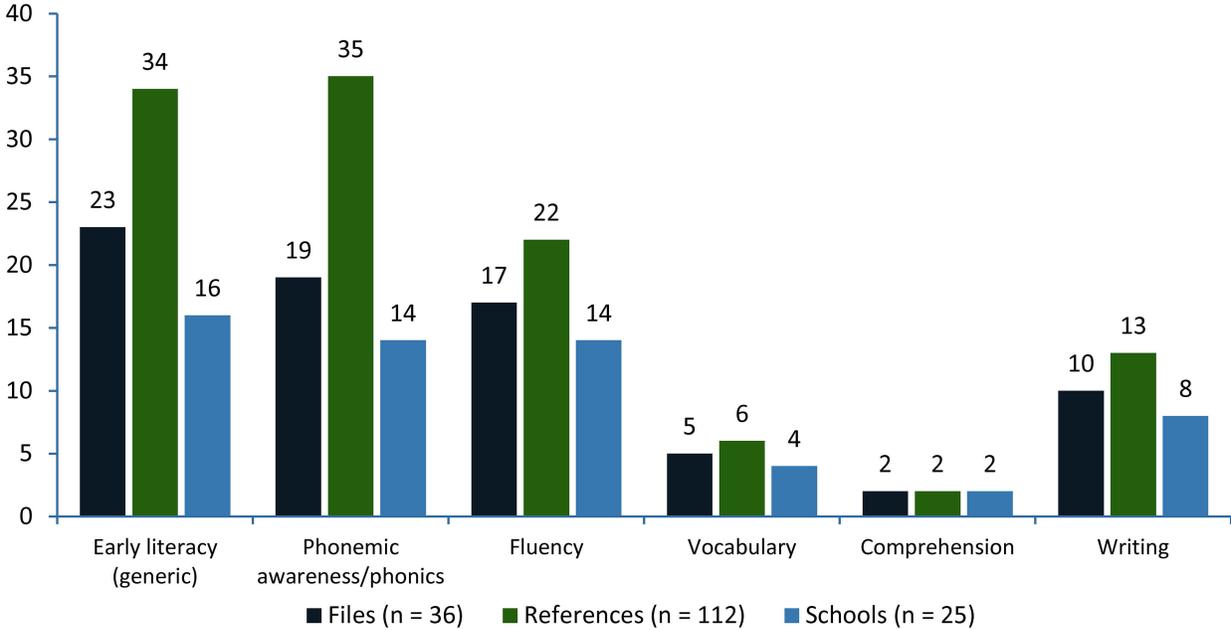


Most interviewees and focus group participants discussed multiple types of curriculum, but most often focused on their literacy curriculum (see Exhibit 15). Although many teacher leaders discussed early literacy holistically, phonics and phonemic awareness was the most common literacy component on which teacher leaders focused (Exhibit 16). In describing the implementation of their literacy curriculum, some teacher leaders discussed how they had recently adopted a new literacy curriculum specifically to improve the quality and consistency of phonics instruction across the school.

**Exhibit 15. TLC focus on curriculum implementation: Types of curriculum**



**Exhibit 16. Early literacy component focus areas for TLC supports<sup>6, 7, 8</sup>**



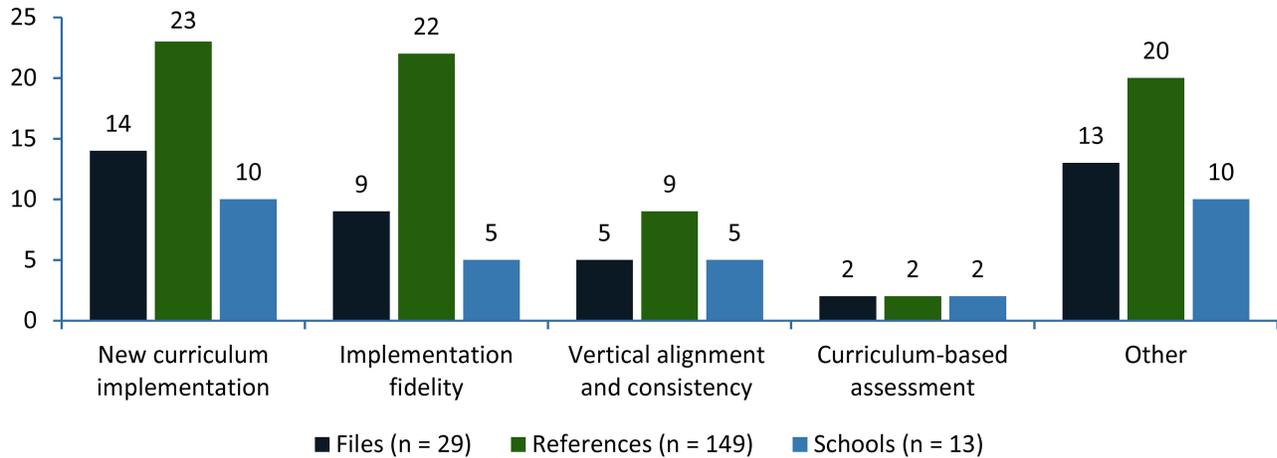
<sup>6</sup> Note. The “Big Five” components of reading as defined by the National Reading Panel and other research (see footnote 6) are Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension. Phonemic Awareness and Phonics are combined in this graph because the educators included in this needs assessment did not meaningfully differentiate between these skills when discussing their early literacy focus. Writing is also included in this graph as a key early literacy skill, as more recent research (see footnote 7) has shown that early writing skills can predict children’s reading success in later years.

<sup>7</sup> Mehta, P. D., Foorman, B. R., Branum-Martin, L., & Taylor, W. P. (2005). Literacy as a unidimensional construct: Validation, sources of influence and implications in a longitudinal study in grades 1–4. *Scientific Studies of Reading, 9*(2), 85–116. National Reading Panel. (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

<sup>8</sup> National Early Literacy Panel [NELP]. (2008). *Developing Early Literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel*. Washington, DC: The National Institute for Literacy.

When describing their supports for curriculum implementation, many teacher leaders described focusing on curriculum implementation fidelity, including teaching to grade-level standards and using instructional materials consistently across classrooms and schools. Teacher leaders shared that because implementation fidelity requires a deep understanding of learning standards and their rigor, many also worked to ensure instruction was vertically aligned across grade levels (see Exhibit 17).

### Exhibit 17. Types of TL supports around curriculum or materials



**Implementation fidelity:** Only a few teacher leaders from the same school provided specific examples of how they helped support curriculum implementation, which were providing professional learning on the curriculum, using implementation fidelity rubrics, and creating a universal sequence of priority standards across grade levels. These teacher leaders shared that they used a “hands-on” approach to supporting teachers, often co-teaching lessons with teachers rather than simply observing and providing feedback.

**New curriculum implementation:** Several interviewees and focus group participants attributed the successful implementation of their new curriculum to the support of multiple types of teacher leaders. Model teachers piloted the new curriculum in their classrooms before it was implemented schoolwide, which allowed them to work through any challenging components, offer advice and guidance to other teachers, and provide demonstrations. For example, one teacher leader shared that,

“The model teachers the first few years were hugely important because they were implementing all our writing units of study with fidelity, so other teachers really wanted to come in and see what that looks like (e.g., how they could provide that small- or large-group instruction). When we moved to using language study, we asked model teachers to try it out and see the impact it was having before other teachers tried it in

their classrooms. Model teachers then became the ones that were really pushing for the program because they saw it impacting their students.”

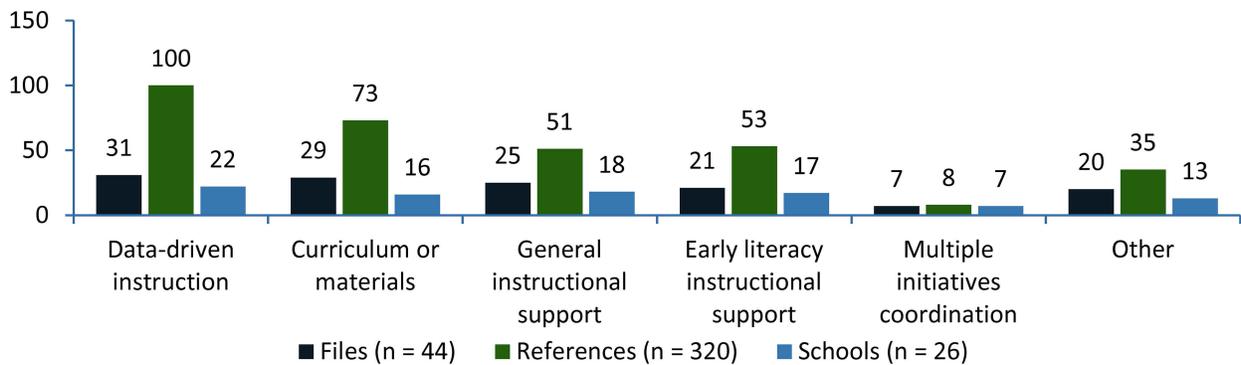
Coaches also worked to become “experts” in the new curriculum during its implementation, modeling lessons and answering questions from teachers. In one district, a principal reflected on how they used coaching cycles for curriculum implementation purposes, saying “Our coaches are supporting teachers in learning how the materials work and then doing coaching cycles, observing in classrooms, and co-teaching with teachers to help them make sure that they’re using the materials as they were designed to get the biggest impact on student achievement.” Teacher leaders described providing supports such as fidelity checklists, translation of curriculum materials into different home languages, modeling lessons, or training on curriculum-based assessments. Teacher leaders noted that their support helped put teachers at ease, reducing their stress levels and saving them time.

## Impact: Instruction

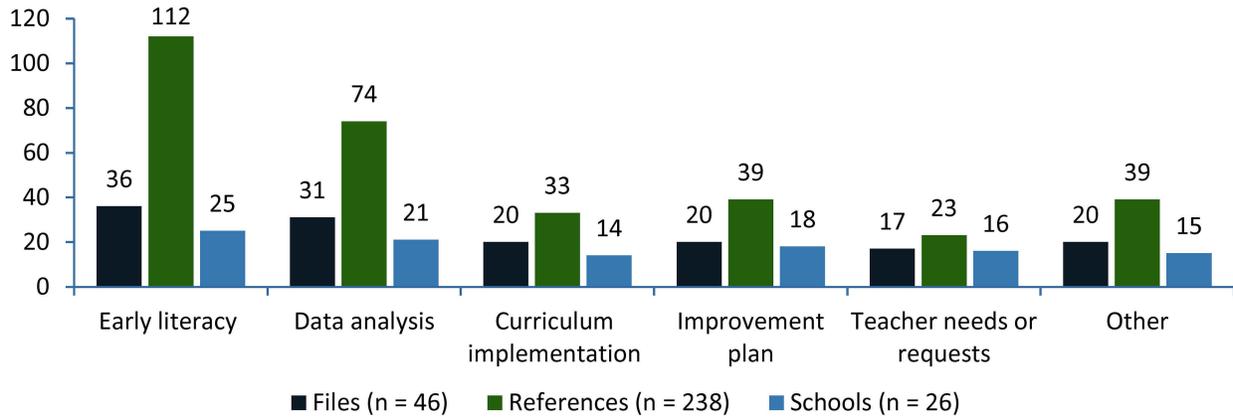
### Instructional Supports

In previous sections, Exhibits 8 and 9 and their duplicates (Exhibits 13 and 14) showed the types of teacher leader supports provided as well as the focus or topic areas for these supports. Building on the previously shared findings for data analysis and curriculum implementation, this section provides findings related to teacher leaders’ direct instructional support. As shown in Exhibit 18,<sup>9</sup> some teacher leaders described how they focused their supports on providing more tailored instructional supports. Some teacher leaders focused on early literacy-specific strategies, while others focused on more general strategies. For those teacher leaders who offered more general supports, these typically aligned to teacher needs or requests rather than a specific focus area (see Exhibit 19).

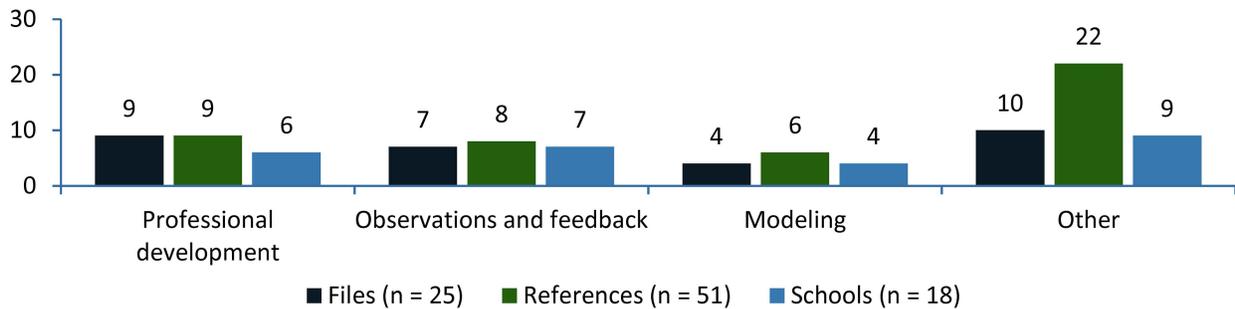
**Exhibit 18. Types of teacher leader supports provided**



<sup>9</sup> Exhibits 18 and 19 replicate Exhibits 8 and 9 in the same way that Exhibits 13 and 14 do.

**Exhibit 19. Types of focus area topics for TLC supports**

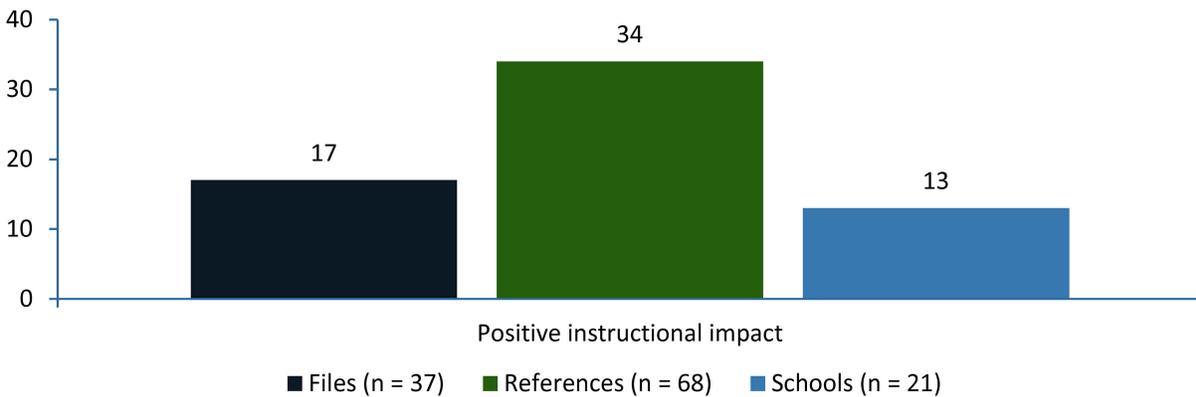
Although teacher needs and requests varied, there were some common strategies that teacher leaders often supported, such as classroom management or routines. Likewise, teacher leaders shared a few common approaches for sharing general instructional supports: modeling, conducting observations, and leading professional development (see Exhibit 20).

**Exhibit 20. Methods for providing general instructional support**

Teacher leaders shared that instructional support—especially more general or teacher-specific support—was often provided as part of coaching cycles, in which instructional coaches work closely with a teacher over a period of several weeks. One principal acknowledged that coaches spend a “tremendous” amount of time in classrooms working with teachers throughout the coaching cycle. Teacher leaders described coaching cycles as ways to share best practices with both new and experienced teachers.

***Instructional Impact***

Many teacher leaders shared how these supports around instructional strategies, coaching, and other supports (e.g., curriculum and data analysis supports), led to observable improvements in the quality of teachers' instruction (see Exhibit 21).

**Exhibit 21. Positive impact of TLC on instruction**

Several interviewees and focus group participants reflected on the significant and positive impact that coaching cycles have on the quality of instruction within the classroom. Many teacher leaders also made the connection between the importance of coaching cycles on student achievement, one attributing score growth to the focus on small groups that has been targeted through both PD and coaching cycles.

“We've made growth for the last five years because of our intentionality. We hold high expectations and have made tweaks to our instruction through coaching cycles. Teachers will say over and over that they don't feel confident in reading instruction because it's not necessarily linear and is very complex. Teachers will say they need support in guided reading, knowing where kids are at, and knowing where to go next. A big piece of our growth is coaching cycles and focusing on what specific teachers need.”

Several teacher leaders who are also classroom teachers indicated that they would not be the teacher that they are today without the support of coaches during coaching cycles. One teacher leader shared an example of a previously struggling teacher who rose to the top of her grade level after a coaching cycle. Likewise, another teacher leader described how the improvements they made through the coaching cycle helped the teacher move out of probation.

Given that improving instruction and building positive working relationships were a major focus for teacher leaders' work, it is clear that they have seen success from their efforts with teachers. It is worth noting, however, that fewer than half of the schools included in the needs assessment had teacher leaders who shared that they had seen evidence of improvements in culture or in teacher effectiveness. Because not every district uses an instructional framework or regularly gathers formal teacher evaluation data, it can be challenging to identify evidence of

instructional improvement alone. Instead, many teacher leaders must look to student growth or achievement data to assess their impact on instruction.

## Student Achievement

The final TLC goal statement is “improve student achievement by strengthening instruction.” This goal<sup>10</sup> is important because although there has been a wealth of positive feedback about the TLC program since its initial implementation in 2014, stakeholders across Iowa want to know more about how TLC is helping students learn. To date there has not been a significant change in student achievement on the Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress (ISASP) since TLC was implemented; however, an increasing number of districts have reported meeting their student achievement goals in annual reporting, indicating that there may be changes in student learning taking place that are not being captured by the ISASP alone.

To better clarify ways in which TLC affects student achievement, Region 9 asked interview and focus group attendees to share examples of how they have seen TLC lead to student growth. Because the needs assessment focused on districts that had already been identified for high year-over-year growth rates on the FAST, Region 9 and the DE knew that these districts were making a positive difference on student learning and wanted to know more about how TLC influenced their growth.

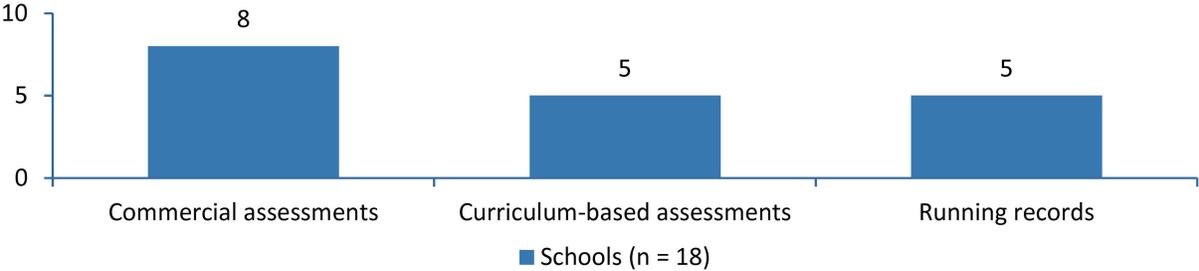
## Student Achievement Trends

In addition to the FAST, which provides summative student growth and achievement results, districts also used various formative early literacy assessments. Exhibit 22 shows the types of formative early literacy assessments that interviewees and focus group participants described.

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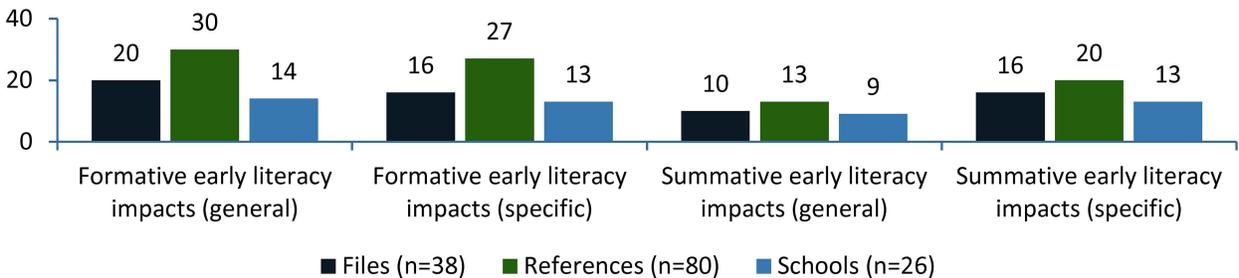
<sup>10</sup> American Institutes for Research. (2016). Iowa's Teacher Leadership and Compensation Program. Washington, DC. Retrieved from <https://educateiowa.gov/sites/files/ed/documents/TLCReport-December2016.pdf>, p. 1.

**Exhibit 22. Types of formative early literacy assessments<sup>11</sup>**



Although interviewee and focus group participants were asked to gather specific examples of student impact data in advance, many shared that they were either not able to access the data due to COVID-19 school closures, unfamiliar or unsure of what the data showed, or found it difficult to summarize trends in student learning over time. Many interviewees and focus group participants who were unsure or unable to provide specific examples provided more general descriptions of TLC’s impact on student learning. For example, one teacher leader said, “I don't have anything concrete as far as numbers go, but we have noticed over the years that we are starting to see a little bit of an increase in our students reading on or above grade level because we are getting more support to teachers.” However, many other interviewee and focus group participants were able to share more specific examples, whether on the literacy component, the type of assessment data, their methods for graphing data, or other details. Exhibit 23 shows the trends in the specific and general early literacy examples shared by interviewees and focus group participants.

**Exhibit 23. Trends in specific and general early literacy examples**



<sup>11</sup> Note. Commercial assessments mentioned included MAP, FastBridge, Phonological Awareness Screener for Intervention (PASI), PrePass, and the Informal Decoding Inventory. Curriculum-based assessments included unit assessments, Panorama assessments, and Heggerty assessments.

## Student Achievement Examples

The following examples were shared by interviewees and focus group participants to describe the impact of their TLC work on student learning. These examples are not meant to be comprehensive but rather illustrate how TLC can play a role in student achievement. Note that some details have been excluded to protect teacher and student confidentiality.

### Council Bluffs Community School District

Staff from an elementary school in Council Bluffs Community School District shared that they sometimes face challenges in promoting student growth due to high rates of poverty in the community and high student turnover year to year. To help support student growth in early literacy, teacher leaders used coaching cycles to help improve writing instruction. During an 8-week coaching cycle, teachers and teacher leaders consistently reviewed student writing samples alongside other early literacy data (e.g., phonics assessment results); as a result of this data analysis, teachers and teacher leaders created groups of students called “skills groups” based on the kinds of additional practice they needed. At the beginning of the cycle, only about 25% of students in the classroom were able to successfully complete a grade-level writing assignment, but by the end of the 8 weeks, more than 85% of students were able to successfully complete a similar writing activity.

### Davenport Community School District

At an elementary school in Davenport Community School District, one teacher leader met with teachers individually throughout the year to review student data and plan both universal and targeted interventions. By collaboratively reviewing data prior to the beginning of the school year, teachers knew which students needed the most support right away and could adjust instruction immediately. The teacher leader reviewed data with teachers after each benchmark period, helping teachers determine ongoing student supports and setting goals for student achievement. At the end of the school year, teachers came together to collaboratively review their data and celebrate their successes.

In reviewing student data, the teacher leader noticed that there were some significant differences in student performance based on whether teachers implemented a sight word program with fidelity:

- Teachers who did not implement the sight word program with fidelity had students who showed less than 6% average growth in proficiency by the end of the year.
- Teachers who mostly implemented the sight word program with fidelity had students who showed an average of 15% growth in proficiency by the end of the year.

- Teachers who learned how to implement the sight word with full fidelity had students who showed an average of 21% growth in proficiency by the end of the year.

### **Linn-Mar Community School District**

At an elementary school in Linn-Mar Community School District, teacher leaders worked to implement a new curriculum to support more rigorous and consistent phonics instruction. Along with this new curriculum, teacher leaders helped teachers implement a new lesson plan template in which they spent 3–5 minutes reviewing phonemic awareness and 5 minutes reviewing phonics before asking students to try to read a piece of text. In the past, teachers usually saw student scores on formative assessments go down between fall and winter; however, after implementing the new curriculum and lesson plan template, students' scores went from 63% proficient in the fall to 80% proficient in the winter and 90% proficient by the spring, which was the greatest average student growth they had ever seen. Teacher leaders attribute this growth in part to the high-quality instructional materials and consistent scaffolding of literacy concepts.

### **Marshalltown Community School District**

At an elementary school in Marshalltown Community School District, teacher leaders helped identify a new, high-quality literacy curriculum and supported teachers in implementing it with fidelity. Teacher leaders used PLC time to help teachers learn about the curriculum, review diagnostic data, and group students based on the interventions they needed over time. Teacher leaders attribute their improvements in student learning to the new curriculum and its consistent implementation. This year, students in an early grade went from 37% proficient to 63% proficient between fall and winter, which was the first time they had seen such a large growth rate during the fall semester. Further, the students who were proficient in the fall and the winter have maintained their growth and continued to show proficient scores on formative assessments through the spring. This growth has been encouraging to teachers and shown them that their hard work has put them on track to make a difference for students.

### **Sheldon Community School District**

At an elementary school in Sheldon Community School District, teacher leaders worked hard to build positive relationships with teachers, providing encouragement during coaching cycles, and helping teachers to collect and analyze progress-monitoring data regularly, with a particular emphasis on phonics and fluency. Teacher leaders also observed lessons and communicated across different staff (e.g., interventionists, English language instructors, and classroom teachers) about student needs. As a result of their efforts, the elementary school has seen an

11% increase in proficiency in the fall and an 8% increase in proficiency in the spring between 2014 and 2020.

### **Waterloo Community School District**

At an elementary school in Waterloo Community School District, teacher leaders worked to implement strategies to motivate students to succeed. For example, a teacher leader worked to bring in therapy dogs for students to read to on a regular basis. This intervention was wildly popular with students, helping to raise attendance, calm students and create a happy environment, and help students build confidence in reading. Likewise, teacher leaders challenged their teachers to meet a goal set by the district to have 80% of students know 150 top sight words by winter break. One teacher leader created a large board in the hallway covered in paper gumball machines, and every time a student was able to successfully read all 150 sight words, they could add their own paper “gumball” to their class’ “machine.” As soon as 80% of students in each class had mastered the 150 sight words and “filled” their gumball machine, the class earned a party. This strategy was highly motivating, leading to students and teachers often stopping in the hallway to review their progress on the board. Teachers and teacher leaders also helped set up a “sight word room” in which students could read sight words while jumping, skipping, bouncing on a trampoline, or other actions. In the end, these strategies paid off as classrooms met their sight word goal on time.

Teacher leaders at this elementary school also helped implement a new, high-quality literacy curriculum and focused on improving phonics and fluency instruction in particular. Teacher leaders helped reduce the time burden on teachers by conducting diagnostic assessments and working long hours with teachers to analyze data to inform interventions. Teacher leaders also attended professional development on high-quality writing programs, then trained teachers in the school on how to implement the program in their classroom. In addition to high growth in their FAST scores, teachers also saw significant growth in students’ writing performance. In 2018–19, only 9–29% of students scored proficient across the writing rubric, but in 2019–2020, 18–43% of students scored proficient across the rubric.

## Considerations for TLC Sustainability

The 2020 needs assessment revealed many ways in which TLC has helped improve teaching and learning across Iowa; however, for TLC to continue to be a sustainable long-term program, it is important for schools and districts to share how they are leveraging TLC to promote measurable changes in teaching and learning. The following six considerations are for school and district leaders who may wish to strengthen, refine, or recalibrate their TLC implementation approach:

1. Consider which students are most in need of support
2. Consider measures that can best capture student growth
3. Provide teacher leaders with targeted professional development on data use and evidence-based practices
4. Share successes and best practices via annual TLC reporting
5. Help teacher leaders analyze and share information about student learning trends over time
6. Provide time for teacher leaders to grow professionally
7. Consider innovative teacher leader roles

**1. Consider which students are most in need of additional support.** The spring 2020 needs assessment focused on districts with high year-over-year growth rates on FAST, which meant that Region 9 and the DE knew these districts were seeing positive, quantifiable differences in student learning. Several other districts across Iowa have not seen any positive differences in their aggregate state test data over time, despite using many teacher leadership best practices and receiving ongoing positive feedback about their TLC work. Schools and districts can benefit from looking more closely at their TLC implementation to determine whether they are providing the type and “dosage” of instructional changes that will make a measurable difference in student learning. For example, students who are further behind grade level or have persistent learning or behavioral needs (including students with disabilities) typically need more targeted interventions or evidence-based instructional strategies, yet teacher leaders who primarily focus on improving whole-class instruction or simply using strategies they have used in the past may not be helping teachers make the instructional changes they need to help these students grow.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Zumeta Edmonds, R., Gandhi, A. G., & Danielson, L. (Eds.). (2019). *Essentials of intensive intervention*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Schools and districts, regardless of their overall performance on state assessments, may benefit from looking closely at which students are most in need of additional support and how TLC can help teachers better reach these students. Likewise, teacher leaders can engage their teachers or PLC teams in root cause analysis exercises<sup>13</sup> to uncover where they might target their efforts to promote measurable improvements in student learning. Teacher leaders can also research which evidence-based strategies may be the best fit for struggling students. Throughout the school year, teachers and teacher leaders may collaborate through PLCs or other collaboration structures to analyze student growth over time (to determine if student performance is improving at a sufficient rate) as well as student proficiency rates on benchmark assessments (to determine if students are meeting achievement standards).

**2. Consider measures that can best capture student growth.** Historically high-performing districts that have not seen quantifiable increases in student growth or achievement since implementing TLC may still have made positive differences in teaching and learning outcomes. However, these positive outcomes may not be easily quantified by state standardized tests. For some districts, it may be difficult to quantify student growth using standardized assessments if their students are already close to the achievement “ceiling” and unable to demonstrate much growth on these assessments.<sup>14</sup> High-performing districts may consider reporting on other types of student achievement, such as the number of students reading above grade level or the time needed for students to be able to independently apply their learning without direct or guided instruction from their teacher.

**3. Provide teacher leaders with targeted professional development on data use and evidence-based practices.** When TLC was first implemented, many teacher leaders engaged in professional development about how to be an effective teacher leader. Many skills required for teacher leader roles (e.g., adult learning, meeting facilitation) are different than the skills needed to be an effective teacher, which is why these initial trainings were important for TLC's early success. However, there are other skills that, while required for teacher leader roles, are often overlooked or assumed to be had even if the teacher leader has never received any training or education on these skills. For example, teacher leaders rarely receive in-depth training on how to organize and analyze multiple data sources long term, yet teacher leaders are often tasked with leading data-

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<sup>13</sup> For more information on root cause analysis exercises in school improvement, see the resource from the State Support Network, *Using Root Cause Analysis as Part of the Continuous Improvement Process in Education*.

<sup>14</sup> Betebenner, D.A., & Linn, R. L. (2010). Growth in student achievement: Issues of measurement, longitudinal data analysis and accountability. Retrieved from <http://www.k12center.org/publications.html>.

driven instruction across multiple classrooms or grade levels.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, few teachers have received training on how to appropriately find and identify evidence-based practices;<sup>16</sup> instead, many teacher leaders rely on sharing their personal experiences without exploring other options. Schools and districts can help teacher leaders provide higher quality supports by providing professional development on these or other skills that principals may assume teacher leaders already have. Teacher leaders can also pass down these skills to other teachers, helping to improve teacher skill and autonomy as well.

**4. Share successes and best practices via annual TLC reporting.** For TLC to be sustainable over time, it is important for schools and districts to be able to learn from each other's successes and replicate best practices where appropriate. One way that the DE can help to facilitate cross-school and district sharing is through the annual TLC reporting system. If districts include more detailed or specific implementation and outcome data through annual TLC reporting, the DE can synthesize reporting data and share trends, success stories, and best practices across the state. For districts to include more detailed or specific data in TLC reporting, district staff may need to go beyond standardized test data and gather more formative impact data from teacher leaders. Likewise, district staff may need to gather insights from teacher leaders on implementation strategies and best practices. As leaders of data-driven instruction and collaborative work, teacher leaders are uniquely positioned to share these insights into how teacher leadership is making a difference in student learning over time.

**5. Help teacher leaders analyze and share information about student learning trends over time.** For teacher leaders to share best practices and success stories within or beyond their district, teacher leaders need to be able to easily and succinctly articulate the important aspects and impact of their work. For example, a teacher leader can share:

- Whether the ways in which student learning needs are identified and addressed have changed or been strengthened over time
- Whether the number of students performing at grade level (i.e., proficient) at each benchmarking period has increased decreased, or stayed the same as previous years

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<sup>15</sup> Datnow, A., Park, V., & Kennedy-Lewis, B. (2013). Affordances and constraints in the context of teacher collaboration for the purpose of data use. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 51(3), 341–362.; Horn, I. S., Kane, B. D., & Wilson, J. (2015). Making sense of student performance data: Data use logics and mathematics teachers' learning opportunities. *American Educational Research Journal*, 52(2), 208–242.; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development. (2011). *Teachers' ability to use data to inform instruction: Challenges and supports*. Washington, DC: Author.

<sup>16</sup> Brown, C., and Zhang, D. (2016). Is engaging in evidence-informed practice in education rational? What accounts for discrepancies in teachers' attitudes towards evidence use and actual instances of evidence use in schools? *Br. Educ. Res. J.* 42, 780–801.

- Whether students are growing at a faster, slower, or consistent rate over time and whether students behind grade level are growing fast enough to reach proficiency in a reasonable time period

Beyond sharing best practices and success stories with other districts, it is important for teacher leaders to be able to analyze and communicate about student data to prioritize the most important aspects of their work for improving student learning and prevent a focus on the aspects of teacher leadership or collaboration that are simply well-liked or easy to implement. For teacher leaders who are school-based, principals can help teacher leaders better articulate the impact of their work by reviewing data together and ensuring that instructional priorities and supports are appropriately aligned. Districts can help teacher leaders better articulate the impact of their work by improving or increasing professional development on data use and communication. In addition, AEAs may work with schools and districts to help them identify and craft impact statements to include in annual state reporting that clearly articulate how TLC has influenced student learning over time.

**5. Create conditions for building trust and positive relationships.** To successfully support teachers and promote student learning gains, teacher leaders need to be able to have open and honest dialogue with teachers about their challenges and supports needed, and what they need to address them.<sup>17</sup> This kind of open and honest dialogue can be difficult for teachers to engage in for a wide range of reasons and in many school contexts, but especially if they are teaching in a school that has historically had more authoritarian leadership or high-stakes accountability.<sup>18</sup> Teacher leaders need to be able to invest time and effort into gaining the trust and respect of teachers, which often happens outside of typical teacher leader responsibilities such as observation or meeting facilitation. Schools and districts can help teacher leaders prioritize relationship building by ensuring that teacher leaders have time to offer teachers customized supports, such as researching evidence-based strategies, gathering high-quality instructional materials, co-teaching lessons, or providing targeted interventions. When teachers routinely see that teacher leaders are able to offer them meaningful supports that save them time or frustration, they may be more likely to open up about their questions and challenges without fear of judgement.

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<sup>17</sup> Leading Educators. (2015). *Building bridges: Connecting teacher leadership and student success*. New Orleans, LA: Leading Educators.

<sup>18</sup> Hoy, W. K., Smith, P. A., & Sweetland, S. R. (2002). The development of the Organizational Climate Index for high schools: Its measures and relationship to faculty trust. *The High School Journal*, 86(2), 38-49.; Lombardi, E., Traficante, D., Bettoni, R., Offredi, I., Giorgetti, M., & Vernice, M. (2019). The Impact of School Climate on Well-Being Experience and School Engagement: A Study With High-School Students. *Frontiers in psychology*, 10, 2482.

**6. Provide time for teacher leaders to grow professionally.** Teacher leaders often spend significant time and energy focusing on teacher needs, yet to be successful in their role teacher leaders also need to be experts in their content area, in evidence-based instruction, in data use, and other key leadership skills (e.g., interpersonal skills).<sup>19</sup> Schools and districts may consider designing teacher leader roles to ensure they have time to develop the expertise they need to be successful in their role. Teacher leaders can expand their knowledge and skills without relying only on external professional development; for example, teacher leaders can use some of their time to research curriculum, compile evidence-based practices appropriate for their student population, disseminate key findings from recent research and expert publications, conduct a resource or instructional materials audit, or observe other teacher leaders' work.

**7. Consider innovative teacher leader roles.** As TLC has evolved since 2014, some districts have begun using more innovative teacher leader roles, such as technology coaches or social-emotional learning specialists. Districts can consider creating more innovative teacher leadership roles to help support new long-term goals or better meet changing student needs.<sup>20</sup> Districts can also consider adapting teacher leader roles to be more innovative or simply more specific in their focus; for example, districts may focus teacher leader roles on student-led instruction, assessment and data use, or cultural competence. As many schools use more virtual options in the 2020–21 school year, districts may also consider adapting teacher leader roles to better support virtual instruction, individualization, assessment, and engagement.

## Next Steps

In the 2020–21 school year, Region 9 and the DE will continue to partner to explore how TLC promotes best practices and influences student learning. Region 9 plans to conduct additional outreach to understand educator perspectives on TLC, identify best practices, and understand meaningful trends in TLC implementation. To share best practices, success stories, ideas for improving TLC, or insights into local TLC implementation, please contact Lora Rasey or Scott Dryer from the DE at [lora.rasey@iowa.gov](mailto:lora.rasey@iowa.gov) or [scott.dryer@iowa.gov](mailto:scott.dryer@iowa.gov).

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<sup>19</sup> Lumpkin, Angela; Claxton, Heather; and Wilson, Amanda (2014). Key Characteristics of Teacher Leaders in Schools. *Administrative Issues Journal*: Vol. 4 : Issue. 2 , Article 8.

<sup>20</sup> Leading Educators. (2015). *Building bridges: Connecting teacher leadership and student success*. New Orleans, LA: Leading Educators.

# Appendix A. Needs Assessment Methodology

## About Needs Assessments

As a federally funded Comprehensive Center, Region 9 is able to help state educational agencies (SEAs) gather feedback through needs assessments to meaningfully inform SEA activities. Needs assessments conducted through the Comprehensive Center Network are similar in some ways to qualitative research studies (e.g., conducting focus groups, requiring Institutional Review Board review), but needs assessments also differ from qualitative research studies in many ways. Although a needs assessment may generate important insights and considerations, it is not intended to produce specific findings or contribute to a research base.

The needs assessment conducted by Region 9 with the Iowa Department of Education (the DE) in spring 2020 was designed to gather information on the impact of the Teacher Leadership and Compensation (TLC) program on students' early literacy outcomes as well as information on best practices for TLC implementation.

## Needs Assessment Sample

To gather information on the impact of TLC on early literacy, Region 9 conducted interviews and focus groups in select districts and schools. The sample of districts was selected from a list of the top 39 districts in Iowa with the highest year-over-year growth on FAST [Formative Assessment System for Teachers]. Of these 39 districts, Region 9 sampled 14 districts representing each area education agency (AEA) across Iowa and a mix of small, medium, and large districts (see Exhibit A1). This sample also included those with the top five highest growth rates in FAST data.

**Exhibit A1. Needs assessment sample districts by area education agency and size**

District Size	Area Education Agency								
	Central Rivers	Keystone	Grant Wood	Great Prairie	Green Hills	Heartland	Mississippi Bend	Northwest	Prairie Lakes
<b>Small (&lt;1,000 students)</b>	Grundy Center	Clayton Ridge			Nodaway Valley	Adair-Casey		Sheldon	
<b>Medium (1,000–5,000 students)</b>	Marshalltown		Washington	Davis County		Adel DeSoto			Humboldt
<b>Large (&gt;5,000 students)</b>	Waterloo		Linn-Mar		Council Bluffs		Davenport		

*Note.* Gray squares indicate that no district was included in the sample for that size range in an AEA.

Lora Rasey from the DE put Region 9 staff in touch with district TLC leaders in the 14 districts with high-growth early literacy. Then, Region 9 staff asked these district TLC leaders whether they would be willing to put us in touch with up to three elementary schools of their choice in the district, including the principal and up to three teacher leaders, for an interview at their convenience. In some districts where the district lead or principal identified more than three teacher leaders, Region 9 conducted focus groups rather than interviews. Region 9 conducted interviews and focus groups in 29 schools in total, with one to six schools included per district. The names of the schools and the individuals who participated in interviews and focus groups are not included to protect their confidentiality.

Exhibit A2 shows the types of teacher leader roles of interviewees and focus group participants, organized by district size.

**Exhibit A2. Types of teacher leader roles by district size**

Districts With <1,000 Students	
Instructional Coach	PLC Strategist
Special Education Coach	Grades 3–5 Reading Interventionist
Technology Coach	Student Achievement Coordinator
Mentor Teacher	Lead Teacher
PLC Strategists (by grade)	TLC Lead Team Member
Guidance/At-Risk PLC Strategist	Literacy Coach
	Model Teacher
Districts With 1,000–5,000 Students	
Coach	Professional Learning Team Member
Literacy Coach	Instructional Coach
Model Classroom Teacher	Professional Development Team Member
Districts With >5,000 Students	
Literacy Instructional Coach	Elementary Innovator
TLC Classroom Strategists (by grade)	Coach

## Needs Assessment Methodology

Region 9 staff used a standard protocol to guide interviews and focus groups, using prompts as needed to clarify or elicit further feedback from the teacher leaders, principals, and/or district staff who participated in interviews or focus groups. The standard protocol had five questions:

1. From your perspective, what is working well in your TLC program?
2. What has been the focus of your TLC work?
3. What implementation best practices have you seen being used in your TLC work? Or what other successful strategies would you recommend related to TLC?
4. Can you share examples how your TLC program is impacting student outcomes?
5. Is there any additional information you would like share about your TLC program?

Region 9 staff conducted 48 interviews and focus groups in total at the convenience of participants between March and May 2020. Each interview or focus group lasted approximately 30–60 minutes.

Beyond interviews and focus groups, Region 9 staff also conducted a document review of TLC implementation plans, TLC reports, and report card data for the 17 sample districts.

To conduct the initial analysis, Region 9 staff used the qualitative research software NVivo to code and analyze the information from interviews, focus groups, and documents. Region 9 staff coded information using the analysis structure shown in Exhibit A3.

### Exhibit A3. Needs assessment coding structure

Best Practices	
Node	Description
Quotes	Compelling or succinct quotes about best practices
Teacher leader knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes, or dispositions	General development or use of specific knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes, or dispositions of teacher leaders
Teacher leader selection process	Selection criteria or hiring process for teacher leaders
Teacher leader training or professional development process/design	Specific training or professional development support structures or resources for teacher leaders
Teacher leader role design and responsibilities	Type of teacher leader role (e.g., coach, mentor), caseload, work assignments, and so on

Best Practices	
<i>Node</i>	<i>Description</i>
Instructional framework implementation (National Institute for Excellence in Teaching or other)	Training on, integration of, or championing for instructional framework or teaching standards, or use of observation rubric or walk-throughs
Teacher leader support for curriculum and/or intervention implementation	Training on or support for implementation of curriculum, instructional materials, or specific interventions (e.g., reading rounds, finger blending)
Collaboration structures	Professional learning communities, coteaching, grade-level teams, building-level teams, individualized education program teams, and so on
Relationships	Rapport, trust, communication, and so on with colleagues and stakeholders
Teachers and teacher leaders	Rapport, trust, communication, and so on between teachers and teacher leaders
Administrators and teacher leaders	Rapport, trust, communication, and so on between principals and teacher leaders
Alignment of improvement plans or priorities	Aligning or focusing the work of teacher leaders to priorities, student subgroups, or outcomes in improvement plans, district vision, or priorities
Other	All best practices or implementation recommendations not coded at other best practice nodes
Early Literacy Paired Analysis	
<i>Node</i>	<i>Description</i>
Quotes and data points	Compelling or succinct quotes about the role of teacher leaders in promoting early literacy outcomes; compelling data points to share on the positive impact of teacher leaders on teaching and learning
Focus	
School or district improvement plan	Early literacy focus of teacher leaders' work as aligned to existing school or district improvement plans, visions, priorities, and so on
Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI)/Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) status	All references to identified for improvement: CSI, TSI, or Additional Targeted Support and Improvement status
Data analysis	Early literacy focus of teacher leaders' work as determined by schoolwide data analysis

Early Literacy Paired Analysis	
Node	Description
Early literacy component	All unspecified references to early literacy focus (no subcomponent)
Phonemic awareness	All references to phonemic awareness, phonics, and so on as a focus area for teacher leader support for early literacy
Fluency/guided reading	All references to fluency, guided reading, and so on as a focus area for teacher leader support for early literacy
Vocabulary	All references to vocabulary as a focus area for teacher leader support for early literacy
Comprehension	All references to reading comprehension as a focus area for teacher leader support for early literacy
Curriculum implementation	Teacher leader support for use of new or improved curriculum for early literacy/literacy
Teacher needs/requests	Teacher leader support based on specific teacher needs or requests
Other	All references to the focus or design of teacher leader supports not coded at other focus nodes
Teacher Leader Intervention/Support	
Curriculum/materials	Teacher leader training or support for using new or improved curriculum or high-quality instructional materials on literacy
Data-driven instruction	Teacher leader support for continuously modifying instruction and interventions based on ongoing and individualized data analysis
Instructional strategies	Teacher leader coaching, support, or professional development for teachers using specific evidence-based strategies or effective instructional strategies related to early literacy
Early Literacy Paired Analysis	
Node	Description
General instructional support	Teacher leader coaching or support for teachers on general instruction not directly related to early literacy (e.g., classroom management, general teacher needs)
Multiple initiatives coordination	Teacher leaders helping to streamline or coordinate implementation of multiple initiatives at once for both teachers and principals, such as simultaneous adoption of an instructional framework, curriculum, new intervention program, new professional development program, new instructional model (e.g., personalized learning), and so on

Early Literacy Paired Analysis	
<i>Node</i>	<i>Description</i>
Other	All references to the direct support, coaching, mentoring, and so on provided by teacher leaders to teachers not coded at other intervention/support nodes
Other intervention/support	Professional development, training, or support provided to teachers on early literacy but not provided by teacher leaders (e.g., district-led training on early literacy concepts)
Culture/relationships impact	Change in school culture or relationships attributed to the work of teacher leaders
Instructional impact	Significant, summative change in teachers' instruction attributed to the work of teacher leaders (in response to the question about impact or describing overall impact, not individual changes, as part of the description of the types of teacher leader supports provided)
Formative Data/Impact	
Early literacy	All references to formative data showing evidence of student growth or improved learning in early literacy
Other	All references to formative data showing evidence of student growth or improved learning in general (not early literacy focused)
Summative data/impact	Do not code (organizing node)
Early literacy	All references to summative data showing evidence of student growth or improved learning in early literacy
Other	All references to summative data showing evidence of student growth or improved learning in general (not early literacy focused)
Other	
<i>Node</i>	<i>Description</i>
Challenges	All references to implementation challenges, double-coded to content (e.g., challenges of roles and responsibilities double-coded)
Plan changes	All references to TLC plan changes, double-coded to content (e.g., plan changes for teacher leader roles and responsibilities double-coded)

Region 9 staff also tagged information from interviews, focus groups, and document analysis by AEA, district, district size, and participant role.

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