

# Building a Sustainable Structure to Elevate Teacher Voices

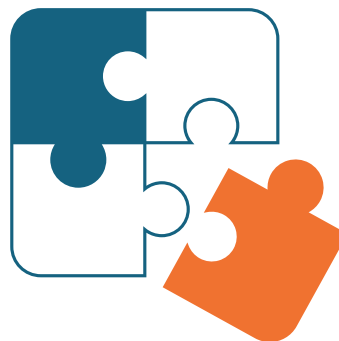
**A Guide for School and District Leaders**  
**December 2017**





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## Introduction

### Benefits of a teacher advisory

Teachers are experts in their classrooms. Each day, teachers make hundreds of decisions that impact students—which content to cover, how to make it engaging and relatable, what types of supports each student will need to be successful—as well as determining what students have learned and where additional teaching needs to occur.

But teachers' expertise also extends well beyond their classroom walls, and can play a valuable role in the design, refinement and implementation of policies and programs impacting all students in their school or district, others within the teaching profession, and the education community at large.

Empowering teachers and engaging them in decision-making:<sup>1</sup>

- Boosts job satisfaction;
- Increases collaboration and opportunities for leadership; and
- Keeps teachers in the profession.

The federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) calls out opportunities for ongoing stakeholder engagement from teachers. Stakeholder feedback was prominent in crafting the Massachusetts ESSA plan, and state officials noted it will continue to play a “prominent role” in implementation<sup>2</sup>. As state agencies look for more input from districts and schools, teacher advisories at all levels can provide critical input from those who work with students each day.

Tapping into teachers' expertise requires the same thoughtful planning and implementation as creating a well-structured unit for students. District leaders should begin with the end in mind, considering their purpose for engaging teachers in an advisory capacity. District leaders can use this guide to reflect on where teacher input would be most valuable and build an approach for effectively engaging teachers that complements and helps to support the district's goals.

This guide outlines key considerations for districts and other organizations seeking to establish and/or refocus a group of teacher advisors to achieve meaningful outcomes for the school, district or organization, and the teachers involved.

### What's in a Name?



Teacher Advisory Board? Teacher Advisory Cabinet? Teacher Advisory Group? Teacher Council? There are many options and it mostly comes down to preference. “Board” and “Cabinet” have stronger associations with formal entities (e.g., school boards, mayoral cabinets), whereas “Group” sounds less formal. One idea is to select a short-term title and then ask the teachers to select an official name. For the purpose of this guide we use Teacher Advisory.

<sup>1</sup> For resources supporting these findings, see: Richard D. Kahlenberg and Halley Potter, *Why Teacher Voice Matters*. (American Federation of Teachers, 2014–2015) accessed June 13, 17, [https://www.aft.org/ae/winter2014-2015/kahlenberg\\_potter\\_sb](https://www.aft.org/ae/winter2014-2015/kahlenberg_potter_sb;).; Leading Educators, *State Teacher Leadership Toolkit: Created by States, for States* (2017), accessed on June 13, 2017, <http://www.leadingeducators.org/state-teacher-leadership-toolkit>.; Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning (TELL) Massachusetts Survey, *Design, Validity and Reliability* (2014), accessed on June 13, 2017, [https://tellmass.org/uploads/File/MA14%20val%20rel%20brief\\_topost.pdf](https://tellmass.org/uploads/File/MA14%20val%20rel%20brief_topost.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, *Massachusetts ESSA Plan Executive Summary* (2017), page 14, accessed on August 31, 2017, <http://www.mass.gov/edu/docs/ese/accountability/annual-reports/essa-plan-exec-summary.docx>.



## Why Build an Advisory?

Teacher advisories can benefit large or small organizations, from schools to districts to state agencies to non-profit organizations and foundations.

Most often, an organization forms a teacher advisory to gather teachers' input or feedback on general or specific ideas or policies. Teacher advisories provide a unique and important opportunity for decision-makers to hear directly from the teachers who are often responsible for implementing policies or utilizing programs on a regular basis. Successfully and meaningfully engaging teachers can also help to strengthen the relationship between district leaders and classroom teachers, and build teacher support for a district's

new leadership or policy change.

Running an effective teacher advisory will take time: to plan, recruit and select participants, manage communications, and ensure that you meet your group's goals. Someone closely tied to key decision-makers at the school, district or organizational level should be tasked with managing this advisory to ensure its work remains aligned to and is able to inform decision making at the highest level.

### **Not ready to commit to an advisory?**

There are many ways to gather teacher input and build relationships if you aren't ready or don't have the capacity to launch a full-blown teacher advisory. Among the possibilities:

- Consider convening one to three focus groups of teachers over the course of the school year
- Send out periodic surveys for teacher feedback
- Set up informal opportunities such as a series of brown bag lunches or morning coffee chats at schools throughout the district. These gatherings could range from having no agenda (more of a listening tour) where teachers share what's important to them to having a general theme or a couple questions to discuss issues on which the district is seeking feedback.

Regardless of approach, the goal should be to give teachers an opportunity to be heard on issues that are important to them and their students.

### QUOTE

“For the first nine years of my teaching career, my focus was within the four walls of my classroom. In my tenth year I got involved in MA DESE’s Teacher Advisory Cabinet (TAC). I had no idea that such groups even existed, but once I was part of one, I was hooked. It rejuvenated me when I didn’t even know I needed it. **Now I see a whole new landscape of opportunities for teachers beyond the classroom** that can give us new skills, knowledge, connections and inspiration that ultimately help us be even better in the classroom.”

—Kevin Cormier,

7th and 8th grade math teacher, North Middlesex Regional School District, previous member of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s Teacher Advisory Cabinet



## Teacher Advisory Design

### Start with the end in mind: Establish a vision

- Why are we establishing a teacher advisory?
- What will we gain from engaging teachers?
- What will teachers gain from the experience?

### Getting started

Setting a clear purpose for a teacher advisory is the first step. It is important to invest time up front to articulate the vision and goals of this effort before getting started: this will drive other decisions about the group's structure, membership and outcomes. Being upfront and transparent about the purpose of the group is also critical for recruiting new members and keeping them engaged long-term.

### Consider first why you want to engage teachers:

- Is it to ensure policies are well-designed so they are more likely to be implemented well?
- Is it to improve the district's relationship with teachers?

- Is it to position teachers as leaders through a change in curriculum, assessment or other policy?

Whatever the reason, it is important to be clear and candid. Clarifying the group's purpose up front helps teachers to understand the purpose of the engagement, what they can expect to get out of the experience, what topics will be up for discussion and debate, and what topics will not. This level of clarity helps drive recruitment and selection, since different teachers will naturally be drawn to different topics and purposes.

Relatedly, it is important to be clear, and model early and often, that teachers' diverse, honest viewpoints are welcome, even when they run counter to the opinions of the majority of the group or the organizers.

The following set of potential teacher advisory objectives may be combined or evolve over time, but they represent some potential goals and objectives around which to frame teacher advisories. These examples range in scope, ranging from more organization-directed purposes, such as sharing information and updates, to more teacher-directed purposes, in which the teachers determine the agenda and help to design or inform the development of new policies.



# TEACHER ADVISORY GUIDE

## Teacher Advisory Design

**Table 1 // Potential Objectives for a Teacher Advisory**

MAIN PURPOSE	TEACHER ADVISORY GOALS	MASSACHUSETTS EXAMPLES
Sharing Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Inform teachers about policies and programs</li> <li>→ Provide updates and opportunities for Q&amp;A</li> <li>→ Position members as ambassadors for sharing information with larger teacher community</li> </ul>	<p>The Boston Foundation’s Teacher Advisory Board includes sessions on the Boston Foundation’s work and has also included a module about grant-making and education investments. This helps teachers to gain an understanding of the work the Foundation does and the ways it impacts students in Boston. Each year, Teacher Advisory Board members are authorized to conduct due diligence and award a small grant at the end of the grant-making module, allowing them to experience firsthand the challenges and joys of grant-making.</p>
Sharing Points of View	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Discuss current events or other topics that are timely and relevant in order to better understand teachers’ perspectives</li> </ul>	<p>After a day of school visits, the Boston Foundation’s Teacher Advisory Board members shared their reflections using a modified “Restorative Justice Circle” protocol that allowed each teacher to share his or her thoughts in a safe, supportive environment. This protocol allowed all Teacher Advisory Board members and Boston Foundation staff to learn from each other’s points of view on a topic about which group members had differing opinions.</p>
Collecting Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Give teachers a chance to provide input on current or new policies and programs</li> <li>→ Listen to teachers’ reactions and concerns</li> <li>→ Create a two-way feedback loop to allow teachers to both receive information and provide feedback</li> </ul>	<p>As the district headed into receivership, incoming Lawrence Public Schools Receiver Jeffrey Riley established a 100-member Teacher Leader Council to help him connect monthly with teachers from around the district face-to-face. He valued the time to listen to teachers’ perspectives about the changes going on in the district and used the time to share news, gather and respond to questions, and clarify common misconceptions before he shared information with the district as a whole.</p>
Designing Alternatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Empower teachers to make or suggest changes to current policies or programs</li> </ul>	<p>The Five District Partnership charged teachers on its Teacher Advisory Board (TAB) with redesigning the network’s monthly newsletter into a format that was easier for teachers to digest. The teachers suggested removing photos and colorful logos, since those often caused the newsletter to end up in their spam folders. This simple step ended up being tremendously helpful, and readership increased as a result of TAB members’ input.</p>
Teacher-Driven	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Broad parameters might be given, but teachers ultimately decide the topics to focus on</li> <li>→ Can lead to the creation of new policies or programs</li> </ul>	<p>The Revere Educators Leadership Board (RELB) is a shared decision-making body comprised of teachers and school administrators. The RELB and its seven councils are responsible for policies and programs across different content areas such as recruitment and professional development. Over the last four years, the Teacher Leadership and Career Ladder Council researched peer assistance and review models. As a result of their work, a peer assistance model called Colleague to Colleague is being implemented in the 2017–18 school year.</p>



## Teacher Advisory Design

### Benefits for Teachers

To get teachers excited about joining—and staying in—your advisory, it's important to ensure that their engagement is meaningful and their time is well spent. If it's possible, you should offer a stipend, professional development points or some other type of compensation, but there are many other potential benefits to teachers that may also be reason enough for them to participate. These include:

→ **A chance to influence decision-making directly.** This is most important—and a real game changer for the profession.

Too often teachers report being asked to join committees to “make decisions that have already been made.” A district can explicitly work against this stereotype by offering authentic opportunities for teachers to be a key part of the policy development, decision-making and implementation process.

→ **A different kind of professional development.** Learning about the inner workings of a district and how policies and programs are crafted is valuable knowledge that teachers won't learn in the classroom. This can be an empowering experience as they learn the value their expertise and unique perspectives can bring to decisions that impact their school, district or even statewide policy decisions.

→ **An expanded professional network.** Teachers are hungry to make connections to other teachers. This also holds true for getting to know people in the central office. Teachers don't often get to interact with people in administration, so advisories can provide a chance for people who don't always share the same point of view to get to know one another and add some nuance to their relationships.

→ **A chance to tell their story.** Depending on the group's purpose and structure, being part of the advisory may give teachers a chance to share their experiences by writing a blog, speaking publicly, co-authoring an op-ed, participating on a panel, or being interviewed. These activities won't appeal to every teacher, but for those who are excited to share their stories, this can often be a gateway to future opportunities.



→ **A resume booster.** Teachers can and should proudly highlight their involvement in an advisory on their resume.

→ **A pathway to additional compensation or other benefits.** If funding is available, teachers could be compensated for their time. It is also important, however, to consider the optics of paying participants because some may interpret this as the teachers being paid to give their endorsement or “rubber stamp.” Other types of compensation could include professional development credit, dinner or snacks provided at the meetings, donated gift cards or classroom supplies.

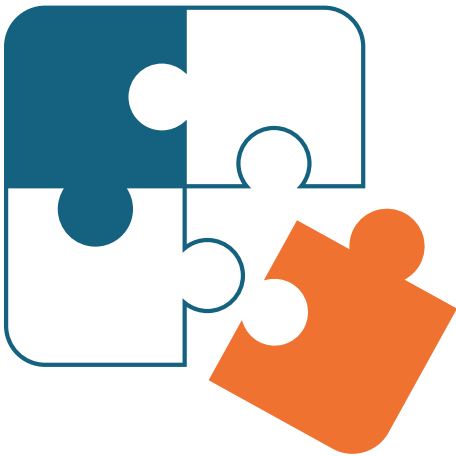
#### QUOTE

“Coming to Lawrence as Receiver, I knew it would be critical to hear directly from teachers about their experiences, their goals and their vision for how we can all work together on behalf of our students and families. **Teachers are the most critical factor in education**, and we need to do a better job of listening to them and involving them in district decision-making.”

—Jeffrey C. Riley,

Superintendent/Receiver, Lawrence Public Schools





## Expanding Beyond Classroom Teachers

Throughout this guide, we have named “teachers” specifically as members of advisory groups and cabinets. Of course, you may want to define “teacher” more broadly to include other educator roles such as guidance counselors, student support positions, or educators who work primarily with teachers, such as instructional coaches, curriculum directors or principals. Again, the composition of your group depends on your objectives. What do you hope to gain from this group? Answering that question clearly will help you figure out the right composition.

For example, the Revere Educators Leadership Board (RELB) is purposefully comprised of teachers, principals, union leaders and central office leaders. This composition allows for a mix of perspectives and allows multiple stakeholders to be at the table from the very beginning as ideas are discussed and developed. The resulting ideas are vetted thoroughly by all parties, resulting in strong buy-in and implementation.

## Recruitment and Selection

### Getting the right people at the table

- Who will join your group, and how will you find them?
- What skills and dispositions will help your group thrive?
- How will you recruit and select teachers to join your advisory?

### Membership goals and targets.

Finding teachers to join your advisory is critical to its success—especially when you are just getting started. Once you’ve identified the purpose of the teacher advisory, consider who needs to be represented and the skills and expertise they should possess. For example, if the group will focus primarily on curriculum decisions, it is important that members demonstrate clear knowledge of and experience with content standards. If the focus is on policy decisions that impact educators across roles—classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, coaches, department heads, etc.—then it will be a priority to have each of these roles represented.

As you embark on the recruitment and selection process, be clear on who needs to be part of the group to meet its intended goals. With this membership base in mind, you can then be flexible in other areas such as the group’s size. Providing a range of “15–20 members” or “up to 25 members” gives you flexibility to choose the highest-quality candidates rather than focusing on quantity.

### QUOTE

“Students, schools and districts benefit greatly from teachers who have the opportunity to be part of advisory groups in addition to their role in the classroom. This type of work increases teachers’ job satisfaction.”

—Lisa Caponigro,

5th Grade Teacher, Revere Public Schools, member of the Revere Educators Leadership Board and previous member of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s Teacher Advisory Cabinet



## Recruitment and Selection



### Developing Members' Background Knowledge and Building New Skills

Depending on whether the skills and knowledge you are seeking will be easier to find (e.g., teachers with curriculum development expertise) or harder to find (e.g., teachers well-versed in education policy), you may need to think about how you can build up teachers' skills and background knowledge. For example, when the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education launched their Teacher Advisory Cabinet, they sought feedback on the implementation of the new state teacher evaluation framework. To most effectively engage in these conversations, teachers needed a baseline understanding of which decisions were made locally in schools

or districts and which ones were made at the state level; to accomplish this, the Department created "Policy 101" activities in early meetings. In one activity, cabinet members broke up into groups and sorted policy decision examples into several categories to represent the levels at which policies are made: federal, state, district, school and classroom.

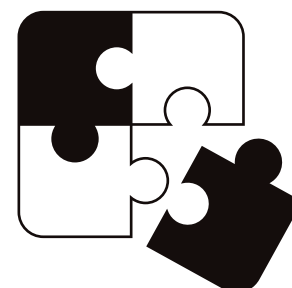
Participants reported that the activity was helpful and empowering once they realized how many decisions that were important to them were made locally. Some cabinet members may have come in with more knowledge than others, but this activity still allowed everyone to engage and build on their policy knowledge.

### Ensuring Diversity Along Multiple Dimensions

As you build out your advisory group, consider how diverse perspectives, backgrounds and experiences will add value to the group. The best ideas will emerge when people with differing points of view are able to weigh in, add suggestions and point out potential pitfalls. When thinking about recruitment and selection, be sure to consider how you will attract a diverse group of teachers.

Define diversity broadly, including:

- Grade level and subject
- Area of expertise
- Years of experience
- Age, race/ethnicity and gender
- School type
- Geographic location of school within the district





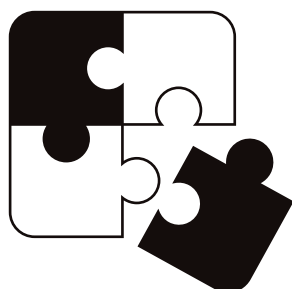
# TEACHER ADVISORY GUIDE

## Recruitment and Selection

**Table 2 // Participant Characteristics**

As important as seeking participants with particular skills and knowledge, it is critical to look for people with the right characteristics to ensure the meetings are content-rich, candid and productive. These are some characteristics that you might seek:

CHARACTERISTIC	OVERVIEW	TIP	SAMPLE APPLICATION QUESTIONS
Solutions-oriented	Look for teachers able to move beyond critique to proposing solutions. The ability to propose alternative suggestions that take existing boundaries and limitations into consideration is challenging, but will lead to more productive discussions.	Ask applicants to respond to a policy or program by describing its benefits and drawbacks, and to propose one to two solutions to the identified drawbacks.	What do you see as the primary benefits of a policy mandating weekly contact between teachers and families? What does you see as the drawbacks? Propose one to two ways to mitigate these drawbacks.
Ability to be a nuanced and analytical thinker	Policies and programs are often intended to meet the needs of large groups. Within a district, policies may have to apply across K-12 students or to educators who are new to the profession and those who have 20 years of experience. Teacher advisory members need to understand the bigger picture, grasp different perspectives and be able to play out a range of scenarios that consider intended and unintended consequences.	Propose a scenario in which the applicant must respond from more than one perspective.	Imagine we did away with homework. How would different stakeholders react—teachers, students, parents and principals? Choose two perspectives and discuss how they would both argue for and against a no-homework policy.
Well-connected and respected by others	To feel confident about the group's feedback and members' ability to share information with their colleagues, select teachers who have a strong reputation among their peers. Additionally, select teachers who are part of several networks (union, instructional leadership team, new teacher mentors, etc.) and who demonstrate the ability to work collaboratively.	<p>Allow teachers to nominate a colleague to apply for the teacher advisory. This will increase the number of applications you receive, and can also provide a good indication of peer support when you review the applications.</p> <p>In addition to a nomination process, you may consider having a recommendation letter as part of the application. It could be completed by a supervisor or a colleague.</p>	Describe a time in which you worked with a group of colleagues to achieve a goal. Include a challenge the group encountered while working together, and the extent to which the group successfully achieved its goal.





## Meeting Structures And Routines

### Make the most of your time together

- How can you get the most out of your meeting time?
- What structures can you implement to create predictability and foster a high-functioning team?

**A wide array of meeting structures and agendas can be effective. Some elements to consider are:**

**Pre-work.** Teachers appreciate a heads up about the coming meeting's content. This can include a simple agenda overview, an article to read or actual work to do, such as adding comments to a shared document or providing written feedback ahead of the meeting. Build in the expectation of pre-work from the beginning by including it in the application (e.g., members can expect to spend one to two hours between meetings to complete pre-work, respond to emails or finish group work from a prior meeting).

**Objectives.** Set clear objectives for each meeting by defining what will be accomplished at the end of the meeting. For teachers, this is similar to setting out teaching objectives for a lesson. State the objectives clearly at the beginning of the meeting (and in the pre-work), and revisit them at the end to ensure they were achieved and to recap what the group accomplished/learned.

**Norms.** Collaboratively develop group norms at the first meeting to define how you will interact and communicate with one another. Revisit them at the start of each subsequent meeting and amend as needed.

**Icebreakers.** Advisory members will want to get to know one another and their meeting facilitators beyond just their content-based work. Many teachers see great value in connecting with other teachers in different schools, grade levels, subjects, etc. Spend a few minutes at the beginning of each meeting to do introductions and quick icebreakers to build personal connections.

**Tip:** Designing icebreakers can be a great way to include teachers in planning your advisory meetings. Teachers often have great ideas for icebreaker activities that they can share and lead for the group.

**Updates.** Begin each meeting by closing the loop from prior conversations. Teachers will appreciate a candid summary of “what happened next” (and will understand that not all of their recommendations will move forward). They will also benefit from understanding the processes and unexpected twists and turns that often arise when complex matters are being decided. This simple step will pay dividends toward helping teachers see that their input and perspectives are valued and have been heard.

**A mix of whole-group and small-group time.** Well-run meetings that are developed to maximize discussion will almost always feel engaging to participants. Break up the time between whole-group, small-group, pair and individual work to minimize the amount of lecture time at each meeting, and to ensure that all participants have an entry point to engage in the conversation.

**Protocols and graphic organizers.** Facilitation tools like graphic organizers and consultancy protocols can help to ensure that meeting time is well-spent and that conversations have clear outcomes. Teachers are masterful at designing lessons that engage students and therefore can often recommend protocols or structures like graphic organizers that can be replicated or tailored.

**End-of-meeting survey.** Use a brief survey as an “exit ticket” at the conclusion of each meeting to capture ideas and feedback from all participants. Reserve five minutes at the end of each meeting to give participants a chance to share additional thoughts on a discussion topic, ask questions, suggest ideas for future meetings or follow-up communications, and provide feedback on what worked—and didn't work—at the meeting. This feedback can be used to inform the planning for the next meeting and ensure that the advisory structure continues to evolve and improve.



## Logistical Considerations

### Planning for implementation

- What does this look like in practice?
- What details do you need to consider to get started?

Once the group's goals are established, they will guide the implementation details. Below are some logistics to consider when setting up an advisory. Don't forget to communicate these logistics in the recruitment and selection materials so applicants are aware of the commitment and expectations.

#### Size of the Group

Tailor the size of your group to match the overall purpose behind why you're pulling them together. If you want the group to design a new program, it is probably better to work with a smaller number of more deeply engaged teachers; if you're sharing information or collecting feedback, you could benefit

from a larger group with more diverse perspectives.

Generally, 15–20 people is a manageable number. That size allows for whole-group and small-group discussions and strikes a balance between feeling impersonal and having awkward silences that might occur with a smaller group.

You might also want to consider starting off with a “pilot” year that will allow you to work with a smaller number of teachers at first, and then build to a larger number over time.

#### Frequency and Length of Meetings

The meeting schedule and frequency of meetings should be determined based on the length of time the advisory has committed to, and the urgency of the topic(s) at hand. For a commitment of at least one school year, five to six meetings works well. This gives enough time for teachers to get to know each other and members of the district leadership, and also allows teachers some time to get up to speed on the content being discussed and to feel comfortable sharing their ideas. More frequent meetings, especially with a smaller group that has a more targeted purpose or shorter time commitment, may also make sense.



## Logistical Considerations

Plan for meetings to last between two- and two-and-a-half-hours. This allows time for small and whole group discussions along with icebreakers and meeting feedback. Shorter meetings risk becoming information sessions; longer meetings can lead to fatigue.

### Meeting Schedule and Location

The timing of teacher advisory meetings can vary widely, affecting the types of benefits provided to members. For a district-run group, it may make sense for the meetings to occur during the contracted school day, which would require the district to offer substitutes. Meetings could occur outside of the school day, particularly if you offer professional development credits or stipends to honor the teachers' time. Meetings could also occur in the evenings to avoid conflicts with school schedules. Ultimately, there are pros and cons to consider for all of the options.

Everyone appreciates snacks at meetings at any time of day; lunch should be served at meetings that meet at around noon; and evening meetings should include dinner. Try to establish a consistent meeting day and time (e.g., always on a Tuesday from 4:00–6:00 p.m.) so that teachers can plan other trainings and engagements around the scheduled advisory meetings.

### A Few Examples:

→ The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Teacher Advisory Cabinet meets about five times a year, and meetings occur from 2:00–4:30 p.m. Department staff initially selected this time block, and then the teachers confirmed it was a good time during the pilot period. Most teachers needed to leave school early to attend the meetings but did not have to give up too much of their personal time. In the application, teachers indicated support from their districts to provide release time and coverage when necessary.

→ The Boston Foundation Teacher Advisory Board meets monthly from 5:30–7:30 p.m., allowing teachers to complete their school days, enjoy the provided dinner and free parking, and get home at a reasonable time. The Foundation pays for parking to make getting to and from the meetings more convenient for teachers.

→ The Five District Partnership and Revere Educators Leadership Board meetings occur during the school day or on early release days every other month, allowing teachers to stay within their contracted hours.

## QUOTE

“One challenge of adding more voices into decision-making is that the pace of change will naturally slow a bit. However, when you consider what is best for kids, it is always authentic change—not lip service—that matters. Only teachers control what actually happens in the classroom. **The worst thing we can do as leaders is belittle or undermine teachers' ability to really own student achievement.** My advice to other administrators is: have faith and take the time to build trust. If you empower teachers to take real leadership, your kids will achieve at levels some once said were impossible.”

—Dianne Kelly, Superintendent, Revere Public Schools



## Logistical Considerations

### Length of Commitment

Advisory members should be expected to commit to a set number of meetings, or a set period of time for which they will remain on the advisory. At minimum, this commitment should give enough time for teachers to gain familiarity with district leadership and decision-making processes, become knowledgeable about the content and topics being discussed, and develop camaraderie as a group. One school year might feel most logical, but other options could include appointing members for a two-year term or staggered terms (see below). If possible, stay open to the group's thoughts on how the commitment may continue or change over time.

For example, the DESE Teacher Advisory Cabinet started as a six-month pilot. Based on the success of the pilot, the Cabinet continued into the next year and expanded its membership. Teachers from the pilot were given the option to continue for a full second year, and all but one teacher (who moved out of state) decided to continue. These teachers became the “veterans” and were able to demonstrate the group norms, answer questions, and speak to the value and credibility of the Cabinet to the incoming group of teachers. Though not original-



## Scaffolding Teachers' Participation

Teachers can sometimes exhibit a “confidence gap” with regard to their understanding of their own value on advisory groups. Teachers feel comfortable leading in their classrooms and maybe even within their grade-level teams or schools. That confidence, however, can sometimes dwindle as they step outside of their classrooms and engage with district or organization leaders and policymakers. Therefore, district leaders need to reaffirm the value teachers bring to the table and provide them with an initial orientation and ongoing support to enable them to effectively engage in conversations at the system level.

→ Help them understand the value of their day-to-day perspective. Some teachers can feel intimidated to speak up in leadership groups because they are worried that what they share will be attributed to “all teachers” feeling a certain way. Assure them that they are there to represent their individual experiences. No one can argue with their lived experience, and they should feel confident sharing their perspectives.

→ At the same time, there is some natural tension regarding the balance between individual experiences and big picture thinking. District leaders make decisions and implement programs that impact a wide variety of teachers, students and schools. Advisory groups are intentionally diverse because of the need to hear from different perspectives. Remind members that, although they speak from their personal experiences, they still need to be able to step back and consider the broader landscape.

→ Teachers may need a quick primer on some of the topics, context or language in order to contribute meaningfully. Sharing agendas ahead of time and offering short pre-work assignments can give teachers the chance to gain the necessary background without losing valuable time during the meeting “talking at them.”



## Logistical Considerations

ly planned, the Cabinet became a two-year commitment with staggered terms. (One thing to note: teachers only committed for one year at a time and were invited back for a second year as long as they regularly attended meetings and actively contributed.)

Additionally, you should consider how much time this commitment will require of teachers outside of meetings and communicate that up front. Do you expect them to respond to emails, or complete readings or other work before the meetings? Will they need to share information or collect feedback back at their schools?

## Leading Your Advisory

Deciding who will lead the work internally within the school, district or organization is a critical decision. Strong facilitation and interpersonal skills are important, and ideally the person leading this work should have some experience as a teacher. The group could be led by two people with complementary skills and experience, such as a current teacher and a district staff member. The facilitator(s) should have the following attributes:

**Good Listener.** This is a must-have quality and cannot be prioritized enough. Regardless of how the opportunity is framed, teachers get involved in leadership opportunities to make their voices heard. They need to feel (and see evidence of) district leaders, policymakers and organizations listening to and responding to them. (Even if that means communicating that something is not going to follow teachers' recommendations. See more on that in the Outcomes section.) Additionally, the facilitator needs to be able to listen to different perspectives from the teachers, make connections, and help the group see the bigger picture.

**Speaks the Language of Teachers.** The facilitator needs to be able to understand what teachers are talking about (or at least learn to do so quickly). Advisory facilitators frequently find themselves needing to “translate” district leaders' language and jargon. For example, terms like “data-driven” or “student outcomes” can lead to an unintended focus on standardized



assessments, when, instead the conversation is really about “how do we know what students are learning?”

**Effective Planner.** Using time efficiently, varying the meeting structures, and using protocols all help to build engagement. The facilitator should maximize the time for teachers to speak and share so that district leaders are more often in listening mode than in speaking or presenting mode.

**Knowledgeable.** The facilitator must provide accurate information and know enough to answer questions and connect teachers to resources for further information if necessary.

**Strong Relationship Builder.** The person should also be willing to put in the time and follow through to get to know teachers, gain their trust, and advocate for them. This includes responding to emails, hopping on the phone, or going for coffee. It's even better for the facilitator to get into teachers' classrooms and learn more about their day-to-day work.

**Detail-Oriented.** Small things also need to be in place to communicate the value of the group and their time. This includes making sure teachers' names, schools and roles are accurately displayed on name cards, planning sections of content with specific amounts of time in mind so the meetings start and end on time, and keeping track of questions or resources mentioned and following up with individuals after the meeting.





## Capturing Impact

### Sharing what you learn

- How will you know you have achieved your goals?
- How will you communicate the work of the teacher advisory?
- How will you build teachers' efficacy and empower them to share information back at their schools?

One of the most frequently overlooked activities of a teacher advisory is communicating its impact and outcomes. Outcomes can range from creating a new, teacher-designed professional development program to sharing a written update from each meeting to publishing a summary of the full year of work. The outcomes don't need to be flashy or grandiose. In fact, some of the strongest outcomes occur when a district recognizes what they learned from the teachers involved and acknowledges that they have more work to do.

Reviewing feedback data after each meeting and at the end of the year should prompt ongoing reflection, including on the district's original vision for the advisory. Consider these questions:

- Are we getting what we had hoped for from the group?
- How is the advisory adding value to our work, and how is it providing value to the teachers involved?
- Are we strengthening relationships between teachers and district leadership?
- How can we expand the impact of the advisory and build on the work?

**Table 3 // Ideas for Capturing Impact**

STRATEGIES FOR CAPTURING IMPACT	TIPS AND EXAMPLES
Administer end-of-meeting surveys	<p><b>Potential questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Was the amount of information covered “meaty” enough?</li> <li>→ Did you feel like your voice was heard? Was the meeting a good use of your time?</li> <li>→ What additional questions or topics would you like to cover next time?</li> </ul>
Administer end-of-year surveys	<p><b>Potential questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Would you recommend this experience to a colleague?</li> <li>→ What would you change about the advisory?</li> <li>→ What should we continue to do?</li> <li>→ What should we do differently?</li> <li>→ What did you learn from this experience?</li> <li>→ How did being part of the teacher advisory impact your thoughts on how decisions are made?</li> <li>→ Would you want to continue to sit on this advisory?</li> </ul>
Collect quotes and anecdotes from members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Jot down memorable quotes from members during meetings.</li> <li>→ Collect anecdotes from survey responses and interviews.</li> <li>→ Post quotes on a teacher-facing district webpage, include them in your end-of-year teacher advisory summary or in a letter to advisory members from the superintendent.</li> <li>→ Ask members to talk about their experiences at in-person gatherings such as school committee meetings, PD days, faculty meetings, etc.</li> </ul>
Summarize discussions and reporting broadly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Consider disseminating through district-wide newsletters, professional development days, faculty meetings, newsletters, etc. For example, MA DESE publishes an annual report that details the outcomes of the teacher and principal advisory cabinets on their website.</li> </ul>



### Conclusion

**Establishing a teacher advisory can be deeply rewarding and requires deliberate planning, execution and reflection.** When done well, everyone benefits—relationships are built between district leaders and teachers and from teacher to teacher, teachers learn and share their expertise beyond their classrooms, and district leaders develop stronger policies and programs with insight and knowledge from teachers. All of these components drive progress toward our ultimate goal: improved student learning.

#### Learn more about the examples highlighted in this brief:

- Five District Partnership's Teacher Advisory Board
- Lawrence Public Schools' Teacher Leader Cabinet
- Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Teacher Advisory Cabinet
- Revere Educators Leadership Board  
<http://www.revereps.mec.edu/Content/62> or <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/leadership/RevereCaseStudy.pdf>
- The Boston Foundation's Teacher Advisory Board

#### Want to share feedback on this resource or spread the word about your advisory?

Reach out to us at [www.theteachercollaborative.org](http://www.theteachercollaborative.org) or @TheTeacherCoLab.

### About the Authors

**Maria Fenwick** is the founder and executive director of the Teacher Collaborative. Maria is a former Boston Public Schools teacher and has worked extensively with local education leaders from nonprofits, foundations, districts, charter schools and state government to engage teachers. **Kat Johnston** is the director of programs at the Teacher Collaborative and is also a former teacher. With experience in nonprofit management and state-level policymaking, Kat has worked with teachers and district leaders to support novice teachers and develop teacher leadership opportunities.

Together, they have worked with hundreds of teachers across Massachusetts. They are passionate about designing innovative and outcome-driven opportunities for teachers to share their expertise and make schools better places for students to learn.





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