



## Job Design: An Integrated Approach to Creating Effective Teacher and Principal Leadership Roles

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### Introduction

U.S. Department of Education Effective Educator Development (EED) grantees are implementing systems of support for teachers and principals to improve the effectiveness of their teaching and leadership practices. These systems of support often include new teacher and/or principal leadership roles, such as coaches, practice specialists, or support colleagues, that provide job-embedded professional supports to teachers and principals and create opportunities for professional advancement. These leadership roles are critical in elevating the effectiveness of teacher and principal professions and supporting retention of effective educators who desire to take on additional roles and responsibilities within the profession.

The individuals in these leadership roles face challenges in adequately supporting teachers and principals due to the constraints of high workload and job demands, lack of time to complete tasks, and lack of prioritization of their work (Margolis & Huggins, 2012; Friedman, 2011) – similar to what classroom teachers and principal building leaders face in their own jobs (Bogler & Nir, 2015; Levin & Bradley, 2019). These working conditions and lack of job support often result in stress and burnout (Beusaert, Froehlich, Devos, & Riley, 2016; Mawhinney & Rinke, 2019).

At the same time, many EED grantees face substantial challenges in supporting teachers and principal leaders to stay in their positions – challenges shared by the broader classroom teacher and principal professions (Ingersoll, Merrill, Stuckey, & Collins, 2018; Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Studies link the relationship between stress and burnout resulting from high job and work demands to job turnover and turnover intent (Mawhinney & Rinke, 2019; Ryan et al., 2017).

This brief is designed to support EED grantees in creating and implementing effective teacher and principal leader roles and positions that take into account the principles of job design. The brief outlines the importance of effective job design, describes the *job design framework* and its relationship to the broader *job and work design framework*, and provides initial guidance – including guiding questions – for applying the framework to current or new leadership roles.



## Definition of Teacher and Principal Leaders

In this brief, the following definition is used for a teacher and principal leader:

A **teacher or principal leader** is a job position at the school level that allows a teacher or principal to voluntarily be selected for part-time or full-time released duties in order to serve as an instructional leader focused on improving instructional practices in schools (*adapted from Heneman, Milanowski, & Finster, 2016, p. 2*).

This definition also includes leadership positions in which a teacher or principal may take on duties in addition to their regular job. This definition is consistent with the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) and Teacher and School Leader (TSL) Incentive Programs' frameworks on teacher and principal career ladder positions, which are school-based instructional leadership positions designed to focus and improve instructional practice to improve student learning outcomes.

Example titles of these types of positions include master teacher, mentor teacher, demonstration or model teacher, instructional coach, principal coach, principal support colleague, and principal effectiveness specialist. The job goals, content and description, and objectives differ by grantee and program.

## The Importance of Effective Job Design

One promising approach to address job-related stress and burnout is to adopt a job design approach to teacher and leadership roles. Job design is both a framework and a field of research that focuses on designing work so that the characteristics of a job support workers' health and well-being, and also support the effectiveness of their job performance (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Karasek, 1979; 1981). Supporting teachers and principal leaders with balanced job design – such as appropriate levels of autonomy and control over the pace of their work to offset the negative effects of high workload – may influence both their ability to be effective in their jobs and increase their likelihood to stay in their positions.

Job design is well-established in the field of organizational studies (Parker & Wall, 1998; Parker, Wall, & Cordery, 2001) and well-tested in research and practice across a variety of public and service-based settings for over 20 years (Carayon, 2009). Further, this framework has been successfully adapted to education and teacher leadership roles. A previous study found this framework was effective in codifying the factors and interactions influencing teacher data use (Kraemer, Geraghty, Lindsey, & Raven, 2010); the framework was adapted to a project funded by the Teacher Incentive Fund program studying Teacher Support Colleagues, a teacher leadership career ladder position (Kraemer, 2015, 2016); and has been adapted to describe distributed leadership initiatives that focus on teachers' work (Mayrowetz, Murphy, Louis, & Smylie, 2007).

### What Is Job Design?

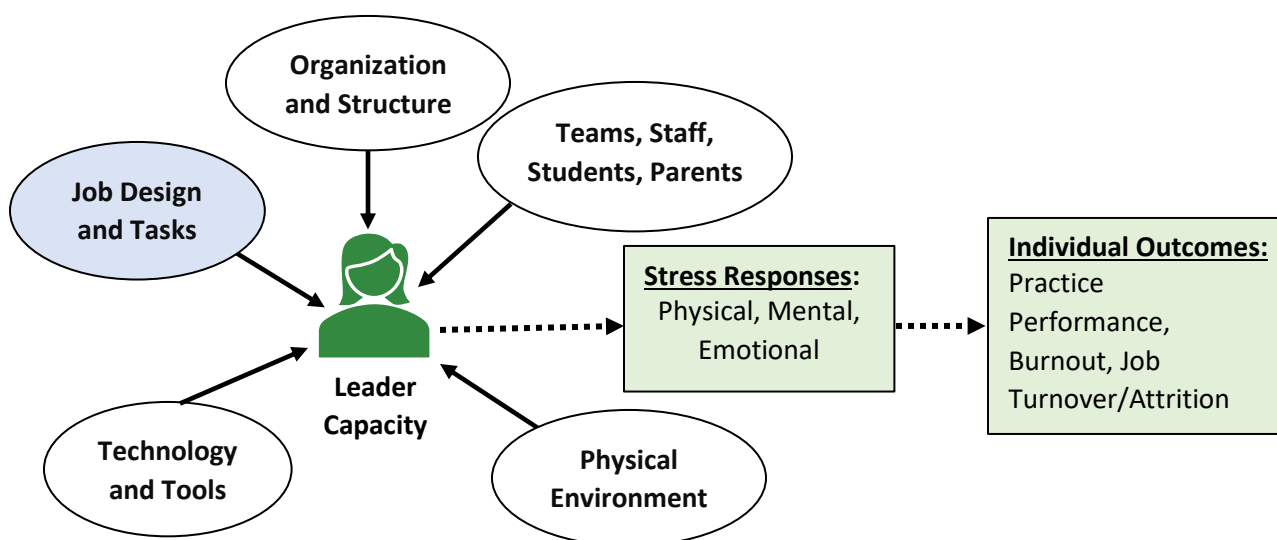
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## The Job and Work Design Framework: An Overview

Well-designed leadership roles using job design principles reduce leaders' stress responses and ultimately influence the reduction or even elimination of the job-design related burnout that hinders work performance and job retention.

The job and work design framework draws on two areas of research adapted from the field of human factors engineering and research in job and work design. The first is the "work system" (Carayon, 2009) and the second is "job characteristics theory" (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). The centerpiece of the framework lies in the conceptualization of the teacher or principal leader's job design and its influence on his or her job performance. Both areas of research are combined into a framework of "job and work design" outlined below.

*Framework of job and work design and its influence on stress responses and individual leader outcomes.*



The figure above depicts six factors that may influence the job and work design of teacher and principal leaders:

- **Leader Capacity** (e.g., skills, motivation, experience, competencies);
- **Job Design and Tasks** with specific features (e.g., feedback, job or task control, autonomy);
- **Organization and Structure** (e.g., school culture, trust, distributed leadership);
- **Physical Environment** (e.g., building layout, work station design);
- **Teams, staff, students, and parents** (e.g., other groups and individuals interacting with the leader and influencing his or her work); and
- **Technology and Tools** (e.g., student assessment data, evaluation data, computers, data systems).



The interactions among these factors can, over time, contribute to or inhibit the stress response and ultimately, work performance of the leader. The interplay of these factors produces a “stress response” that is experienced physically, mentally, and emotionally by the leader in the system. The stress response ultimately influences his or her work practice and performance, and feelings of burnout which may influence their “individual outcomes,” including their decision to leave the position, or even profession (adapted from Carayon, 2009; Smith & Carayon, 2000).

The job and work design framework is an integrated approach to designing and re-designing teacher and principal leadership positions. In contrast, many research-based approaches to understanding the influence of teacher leaders focus on a single factor, such as teacher collaboration (Vangrieken, Dochy, Raes, & Kyndt, 2015) or a small set of factors, such as teacher commitment and job satisfaction (Bogler & Nir, 2015). Adopting a more comprehensive and relational approach, such as the job and work design framework, allows the categories of factors that influence the teacher and principal leadership positions to be defined in relation to one another and contextualized to their settings.

### Job Design and Stress Response

*When an individual experiences a high workload, high task complexity, and very low levels of job autonomy (e.g., ability to set pace, priority, and amount of work), the individual will invariably begin to feel a stress response. While the individual's stress level rises, the ability to function and perform in his or her job decreases – irrespective of the individual's professional abilities or competencies. The problems lie within how well (or how poorly) the job is designed to support the individual leader's work.*

## Applying the Job Design Framework to Teacher and Principal Leadership Positions

All six categories of the job and work design framework influence teacher and principal leader performance; this brief focuses on how job design principles can be used to enhance the job design of teacher and principal positions – “the job design framework,” embedded within the blue-highlighted “job design and tasks” factor in the job and work design framework.

The job design framework is substantiated with job characteristics theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Job design theory identifies five job characteristics that are the main contributors to job performance, job satisfaction, and motivation: 1) skill variety, 2) task identity, 3) task significance, 4) feedback, and 5) job autonomy and control.

### *Application of job characteristics theory to teacher and principal leadership positions (adapted from Hackman & Oldham, 1980)*

Job Characteristic	Application to Teacher and Principal Leadership Positions
<b>Skill Variety</b>	Teacher and principal leaders support teaching and leading practices, participate in administrative decisions and committees, deliver differentiated professional development, and maintain expert knowledge about the educator evaluation system.

Job Characteristic	Application to Teacher and Principal Leadership Positions
<b>Task Identity</b>	Teacher and principal leaders work spans across many functions and processes of the school, from classroom teaching to administrative decision-making.
<b>Task Significance</b>	Teacher and principal leaders view their roles as critical to the success of teachers in the classroom and principals in schools to ensure student success; teachers and principals who are supported by their respective leader highly value the leader's role in supporting their practices.
<b>Feedback</b>	Leaders who support teachers or principals use feedback to assist in ensuring their work is done with high quality. Concurrently, teachers and principal leaders receive constructive and formative feedback from peers and supervisors to identify their own professional learning needs and improve their practices in supporting teachers and principals.
<b>Autonomy (job control)</b>	When teacher and principal leaders experience a high level of job autonomy, control over their work, and independence, they are better able to handle the fluctuations in task load and complexity of their work. Because their work is inherently complex and driven by specific teacher and school needs, principal and teacher leaders need the freedom to define their own efforts, timelines, and decisions, rather than relying solely on instructions from a supervisor or a manual of job procedures. When autonomy and job control are high, leaders experience a greater level of personal responsibility for their work performance.

When a job encompasses most or all of these job and task characteristics, internal work motivation increases, which eventually leads to higher employee productivity and effectiveness (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). The job design theory, within the context of the broader job and work design framework, provides a proof-of-concept for effectively designing teacher and principal leadership jobs so that both individual and organizational needs and objectives are met.

## Guiding Questions for Designing Teacher and Principal Leadership Positions

EED grantees considering adopting the job design approach may use the questions in the table below to guide their team's thinking and planning as they embark on designing or re-designing teacher and principal leadership positions. A useful starting place may be a job description, or a team may simply start with the table of questions and include job objectives later in the design process. The questions can guide *initial* planning and build the team's awareness of job design; the questions should also be used as an engagement approach with teacher and principal leaders to validate their learnings before finalizing any changes to a position.



*Guiding questions for designing or re-designing teacher and principal leadership positions  
(adapted from Hackman & Oldham, 1980)*

Job Design Elements and Definitions	Questions to Consider When Designing or Re-Designing a Teacher or Principal Leader Role
<p><b>Skill Variety:</b></p> <p>The degree to which a job requires a variety of activities and involves the use of a number of different skills and talents of a leader. Jobs that have a high degree of skill variety are seen as more challenging and enhance feelings of competence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the different types of tasks for the person in this role?</li> <li>• What are the top three priority tasks that are critical to this role?</li> <li>• What is the range of necessary skills and experiences for the person in this role? Is this reasonable?</li> <li>• What are the leadership competencies (e.g., skills, knowledge, and behaviors) a person in this role needs to know and demonstrate in the job?</li> <li>• Do potential leaders want to engage in a variety of tasks or focus on one or two priorities?</li> <li>• What are the activities that <i>teachers</i> say they would like support in? How would a person in this role support those activities?</li> <li>• How would leader activities vary by school, time of year, specific student population, or other relevant contextual factors?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Task Identity:</b></p> <p>The degree to which the job requires completion of a “whole” task or identifiable piece of work. This translates to leaders participating in the school system, rather than focusing on one part of the school. When there is a high degree of task identity, leaders may feel a sense of satisfaction, completion, and engagement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do the tasks of the leader “hang” together? Will the person in this role be able to complete the activities associated with supporting teachers across a range of professional learning opportunities?</li> <li>• Given the tasks and workload, can a person in this role balance activities and tasks they are responsible for?</li> <li>• To successfully engage in their work, does a person in this role need additional supports, such as changes to the schedule of the school day, additional resources, or more leadership engagement?</li> <li>• How will a person in this role be able to adjust their workload or tasks to complete their work, if needed? (See questions on Autonomy).</li> <li>• Are people in this role a part of school-level decisions? What unique perspectives would they bring to school-level decision-making?</li> <li>• How will you ensure that people in this role are a part of or made aware of issues at both the classroom- and school-levels?</li> <li>• How do people in this role contribute to strategic human resources strategies, such as in recruitment, induction, mentoring, and professional learning?</li> </ul>

Job Design Elements and Definitions	Questions to Consider When Designing or Re-Designing a Teacher or Principal Leader Role
<p><b>Task Significance:</b></p> <p>The degree to which the job has a substantial impact on the lives of other people and contributes to the school as a whole.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do people in this role enhance the professional learning of teachers?</li> <li>• How will you capture, and perhaps even measure, the impact of leaders on teachers' practices, school culture, and teaching and learning goals for the school and district?</li> <li>• How will you co-design (with leaders) a professional learning community for leaders so that their professional lives are enriched and supported by their colleagues?</li> <li>• How will the people in this role find meaning in their work?</li> <li>• How would a leader describe a meaningful contribution to teachers and their school?</li> <li>• Are there important school-based priorities that people in this role should contribute to?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Autonomy:</b></p> <p>The degree to which the job provides the leader with substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to make important job-based decisions, schedule the work, execute job-based functions, determine job priorities, and carry out the procedures used in the work. This is considered fundamental in building a sense of responsibility and confidence in the leaders. <i>Autonomy</i> is highly important to people in the work place. When <i>skill variety</i> is high, autonomy must also be high – if not – burnout, frustration, and a sense of feeling defeated may occur.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How much job control will a person in this role have?</li> <li>• How will you involve a person in this role in determining the priorities of their work?</li> <li>• How will a person in this role carry out their work? What latitude will they have to determine their schedule, sequencing of tasks, and relationship priorities?</li> <li>• Will the professional learning community provide an avenue for the person in this role to reflect upon what to change or improve in their job?</li> <li>• Will the person in this role have the job authority to make task or work changes when needed? How will they go about doing this?</li> <li>• Will people in this role have the confidence of the teachers they work with? (i.e., will they have the ability to have private and confidential conversations with teachers about their performance, and not share it with others?)</li> <li>• How will you ensure that a competent person in this role will feel trusted, respected, and that the school supports them in their job?</li> </ul>

Job Design Elements and Definitions	Questions to Consider When Designing or Re-Designing a Teacher or Principal Leader Role
<p><b>Job Feedback:</b></p> <p>The degree to which carrying out work activities provides the leader with direction and clear information about the effectiveness of their performance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will a person in this role receive feedback on their job?</li> <li>• How will a person in this role define “feedback” about their performance?</li> <li>• What are the formal and informal forms of feedback that will help people in this role understand if they are performing their job well?</li> <li>• How will you evaluate, along with people in this role, their ability to demonstrate competencies (e.g., knowledge, skills, and behaviors) expected of leaders?</li> <li>• How will you involve teachers in the feedback process for people in this role?</li> <li>• How will you develop a school culture in which job feedback is valued, useful to the person in this role, and used for ongoing support and improvement?</li> <li>• How will you demonstrate, on an ongoing basis, that people in this role are respected and have the confidence of school and district administration?</li> <li>• What are the forms of feedback that are meaningful to people in this role?</li> </ul>





## Conclusion

The job design approach is a useful approach to appropriately designing teacher and principal leadership positions to reduce stress and enhance important outcomes, such as the reduction of burnout that can influence job attrition and job performance. An important consideration is that within the job design approach, the emphasis is not solely on the competency or capacity of the individual, but rather how well (or how poorly) the job is designed to support teacher and principal leaders' health, well-being, and ability to perform their job well.

A growing body of research links the relationship between stress and burnout resulting from high job and work demands to job turnover and turnover intent (for examples, see Mawhinney & Rinke, 2019; Ryan et al., 2017). A job design approach may improve these outcomes. For example, research studies found that applying job and work design approaches to health care providers' work in medical systems reduced human error linked to adverse patient safety outcomes (for example, see Carayon et al., 2006).

The job design approach considers "the whole person" and leaders' lived experiences within their leadership role, rather than viewing them solely through the lens of competencies and job duties, which typically emphasize human resources management exclusively. While job descriptions and articulation of job duties and objectives are essential, these definitions lack the depth needed to effectively support leaders – ignoring the leader's interactions within the scope and realities of their work and how their work plays out across contexts, time, and different school environments. In adapting a job design lens to leadership positions, designers recognize that the design of leadership positions are adaptable and flexible to meet the needs of individual leaders.

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