

Five steps for building and sustaining role clarity



Below is a five-step process that district teams can follow to set and sustain expectations for principal-led instructional leadership across the school system.

Each step includes corresponding questions to assess for clarity and alignment before moving forward

Step 1

Agree on the core teacher-facing practices (i.e., the *what*).

Name, at the system level, the supports that every teacher will reliably receive (e.g., high-quality instructional materials, collaborative planning, coaching/feedback).

**TIP**

These practices should be relatively few to allow for focused, high-quality implementation.

What are the teacher-facing practices?

In one clear sentence per practice, describe the support every teacher will receive.

Step 2

Codify practices into observable expectations.

Set specific and measurable expectations for each practice. Spell out the purpose and focus, “what good looks like” (and “what it doesn’t”), expected frequency, required artifacts/evidence, necessary conditions, timelines, and how quality will be reviewed.

**TIP**

Clarify what must be held constant across the system and what can be customized at the school level (e.g., weekly planning with an approved protocol is constant; when it meets and who facilitates can flex).

How will we know the practices are happening (and improving)?

Include minimums (e.g., actions, cadence, artifacts), quality bar (i.e., “what good is/isn’t”), and evidence sources.

Step 3

Choose model(s) for role distribution (i.e., who-does-what).

At the system level, decide whether to implement one model of role distribution or support multiple models across schools. Spell out the non-negotiables, decision rights, and the support each model requires. Use chosen model(s) to identify who owns delivery for each practice at the school level, and document how responsibilities connect and transition so there are no gaps or overlaps—school leaders should facilitate this process for their individual campus.

**TIP**

If your system supports multiple models of role distribution across schools, the expectations for the practices should stay the same—only the distribution of responsibilities should differ.

What model(s) of role distribution will our school system support?

Choose what model(s) of role distribution you will support throughout the district; communicate that decision and your rationale to school leaders.

Who is responsible for delivering the practices at the school level?

Name the accountable owner and contributors and map role transitions.

Step 4

Make system responsibilities explicit: supports, conditions, and offloads.

Name what the central office will do to make the practices feasible and consistent, including:

- setting simple expectations and identifying practical tools,
- providing training, coaching, and aligned supervision, and
- taking work off school leaders' plates.

**TIP**

Explicit commitments from school systems make principals' work doable and signal that clarity is a shared responsibility, not just a principal's burden.

Who will prepare and support school leaders to effectively implement the practices?

Name the training, coaching, tools, and supervision needs and identify who, at the system level, is responsible for providing them.

What is coming off school leaders' plates (e.g., time protections, centralizing tasks, retiring duplicative forms)?

Identify tasks that can be more efficiently handled at the system level than the school level, and outline a plan to eliminate redundancies in compliance work.

Step 5

Build routines to monitor the work in action.

Set a predictable cadence (e.g., quick weekly checks, a monthly pulse, and a quarterly stepback), name who looks at what evidence (e.g., artifacts, brief observations, participation data), and decide how results trigger additional support (e.g., feedback to owners, targeted coaching, or system offloads).

**TIP**

Keep monitoring tools lean and make ongoing adjustments—celebrate wins, surface challenges, and update the plan for the next chapter.

How will we know the practices are happening (and improving)?

Describe the monitoring cadence, and name who is responsible for collecting, reviewing, and acting on evidence.



Learn from examples of clear and effective instructional leadership

Read our paper, [Systemwide Support for Stronger Instruction](#), to learn from examples of how high-performing school districts organize people, time, and resources toward a shared vision for instructional leadership.