

TEACHER CENTERS



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Overview

Teacher Centers comprise a statewide network of professional development providers that traces its roots back to Al Shanker, president of the United Federation of Teachers from 1964–1985 and president of the American Federation of Teachers from 1974–1997. Al Shanker envisioned a professional learning system organized and operated by teachers to improve their own educational performance. This vision became a reality in the 1970s with the use of federal funds, and when that funding expired in 1980 NYSUT secured state funding via the passage of Education Law 316.

Education Law 316 codifies how teacher centers are to be operated and provides the following guiding principles for their work:

- ◆ Assist educators in assessing and meeting the learning needs of students;
- ◆ Provide technology demonstration and training programs for educators;
- ◆ Promote educators' involvement in educational research to develop and produce curricula and supporting materials;
- ◆ Provide educators with training for the refinement of teaching skills;
- ◆ Provide an environment to foster sharing and increased understanding of resources, ideas, methods, approaches, information and materials among educators, and
- ◆ Train educators to prepare students to use technology and to teach the critical thinking and related skills needed for the changing world community.

Funding for teacher centers is through a state appropriation that requires annual legislative approval. The State Education Department (SED) is the administrator of the grant and oversees disbursement of teacher center funds.

Education Law 316 requires that a teacher center or consortium of center partners with a Local Education Agency (LEA) such as a school district or BOCES. Each LEA serves as the fiscal agent for the teacher center, i.e., the LEA processes the grant in accordance with the LEA's fiscal processes. A teacher center may serve educators in a single district, multiple districts and/or BOCES, or in the case of New York City, one teacher center provides professional development for educators in all five (5) boroughs.

Each teacher center is governed by a policy board that is required by Education Law 316 to include a majority of teachers appointed by the collective bargaining agent. Policy boards also include individuals designated by a center's LEA and include at least one representative from higher education,

a parent representative and at least one representative from the local business and industry community. The requirement that teachers comprise the majority of the board reflects the original principle behind teacher centers, “teachers teaching teachers.”

Policy boards are responsible for establishing the mission, goals, and strategic plan for teacher centers and recruit and employ personnel to carry out these missions, goals, and plans. Working in partnership with a center’s LEA and within its own bylaws, policy boards provide direction for the center’s PD programs and fiscal oversight to a center’s funds and expenditures while ensuring that all state and local reporting requirements are fulfilled.

Each Teacher Center has a director appointed by the policy board. Some centers have full-time directors, others half-time directors and other centers have directors who teach full-time and fulfill their duties as an additional responsibility. In 2014-15, more than 85% of all teacher center directors were part-time directors.

Historically, teacher centers have offered professional development related to the goals identified above. Since 2011, SED has required teacher centers to focus on the implementation of the NYS Board of Regents Education Reform Agenda. Specifically, SED required that teacher centers provide professional development centered upon the implementation of the Common Core Standards, the use of data to inform instruction, and the development of highly effective teachers through the implementation of state approved evaluation systems.

Regional Networks of Teacher Centers

The New York State Education Department has organized teacher centers into seven (7) regional networks: Long Island, Lower Hudson, Rochester, Southern Tier, Eastern Upstate, Far West and New York City. To access additional information on teacher centers located in each region, please visit the teacher center statewide website at <http://www.nysteachercenters.org/>.

Teacher Centers Q & A

1. What is the relationship between NYSUT and Teacher Centers?

NYSUT provides on-going advocacy for teacher center funding, including supporting the attendance of teacher center representatives at the Committee of 100. NYSUT also maintains a standing statewide committee which provides information to NYSUT on local teacher center issues and professional learning programs.

2. How is a Teacher Center different from other educational professional development providers?

As the majority of each policy board is appointed by the collective bargaining agent, teacher center programs tend to impact professional practice at the classroom level as determined by a local needs assessment. Teacher centers tap into the expertise of teachers, paraprofessionals, and other educators to develop and deliver their programs.

3. What are the funding differences between Teacher Centers and other professional development providers?

Teacher center funding is determined annually through the NYS Legislative and budget process. If money is appropriated for teacher centers, the State Education Department administers the funds and oversees the work of the centers. Teacher centers may also access in-kind services from their LEA and/or the districts who utilize their services. Teacher centers work with district Professional Development Teams to coordinate professional learning activities in a district or region.

4. Are there fees attached to Teacher Center services?

Teacher centers use their allocated funds to provide professional learning opportunities to educators that they serve. Each teacher center is unique and some centers charge fees to help offset the cost of certain programs or allow for successful programs to continue beyond the grant allocation from the state. Often, teacher centers jointly sponsor events to share costs and are thus able to increase the availability of professional learning opportunities to the educators they serve.

5. What is the relationship between the collective bargaining agent and a Teacher Center?

A Teacher Center grant application will not be approved by the State Education Department without the signature of the local president and the superintendent of the participating LEA. The collective bargaining agent of the LEA(s) is responsible for designating its representatives to serve on the teacher center policy board.

6. What is the relationship between the Local Education Agency (LEA) and the policy board?

The Local Education Agency (LEA) is the recipient of the Teacher Center grant – the LEA receives the money and ensures it is processed in accordance with the LEA’s established fiscal policies and procedures. The LEA has a representative on the policy board, often the superintendent of the LEA, and contributes to operation of the board as would any other board member.

7. For whom does a Teacher Center director work?

The teacher center director works for the policy board. Education Law 316 includes a provision which protects the rights and benefits of any teacher from a member district taking a staff position in a center which is associated with their school district, or who is from a component district of a consortia center (Ed Law 316, paragraph 7a). The center may contract with the employing district for the services of a teacher and reimburse that district for those services. The determination of the employment status must be agreed to by the LEA and the policy board.

8. Why does it appear that teacher centers offer differing amounts of professional development programs?

Individual teacher centers receive different grant amounts, thus centers with larger grants may be able to offer more programs.

9. How can I determine if my local is connected to a teacher center and if not, how can I connect my local with a teacher center?

Local presidents can visit the statewide teacher center website at <http://www.nysteachercenters.org/> to locate teacher centers in their regions. Contacting a teacher center director in your area is the most direct way to gain access to teacher center offerings and/or becoming a component district served by a center.

10. In addition to teacher center directors, who else can one contact for information on teacher centers?

Locals can contact the NYSUT Educational Services Department, specifically Glenn Jeffers, at gjeffers@nysutmail.org, or contact SED’s Program Coordinator, Dawn Graham, at Dawn.Graham@nysed.gov.

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