

ACCESS TO LEARNING SPECIALISTS FOR SMALL SCHOOLS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Small schools can access learning specialists through sharing arrangements.
- The intent is to enable all teachers to observe high quality teaching and learning from and with colleagues through collaborative inquiry.
- Small schools are defined as those with less than or equal to 80 students.

ROLE OF THE LEARNING SPECIALIST

From the commencement of the 2018 school year, the Victorian Government Schools Agreement 2017 introduces a new promotion position, the learning specialist, at the same level as the leading teacher classification.

The learning specialist role is aimed at building excellence in teaching and learning within the teaching service.

Learning specialists will be highly skilled classroom practitioners who continue to spend the majority of their time in the classroom.

Learning specialists will have deep knowledge and expertise in high quality teaching and learning. They will have a range of responsibilities, including facilitating school-based professional learning, teaching demonstration lessons, and mentoring and coaching other teachers.

Learning specialists will lead the learning of their colleagues and will be most effective when they work with other teachers.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR SHARING LEARNING SPECIALISTS

To guide small schools and networks in the development of their learning specialist arrangements, three guiding principles have been developed:

1. Small schools are encouraged to establish local sharing arrangements that will enable access to learning specialists, noting that arrangements will vary according to their size, geography and specific [Framework for Improving Student Outcomes](#) (FISO) goals. Sharing arrangements should operate within networks (or Areas if necessary) wherever possible.
2. Funds provided to small schools for learning specialists can be used to support sharing arrangements, to access classroom observation and collaborative practice, noting that (for small schools only) this may include purposes other than employing a learning specialist (possible approaches are outlined below).
3. Wherever possible, small schools are encouraged to use technology to facilitate virtual learning, observation, feedback and collaboration.

A SHARING APPROACH

Small schools face unique and diverse circumstances. Therefore, we want to encourage flexibility in accessing learning specialists and enable small schools to implement the best solutions for them.

The intent remains clear — to enable all teachers to have opportunities to:

- observe high quality teaching, provided by the learning specialist
- reflect on these observations and what it means for their own practice
- learn from and with colleagues through purposeful, evidence-based collaborative inquiry focused on improving student learning outcomes
- reflect on and refine their individual practice across the core areas of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment of student learning.

Networks should consider how they can support small schools within the network to access learning specialists.

Several possible approaches to accessing learning specialists are outlined on the next page.

SUGGESTED MODELS

A cluster of small schools appoints a learning specialist

A cluster of small schools could combine their funding to appoint a learning specialist in an employer 'hub' school within the cluster. A formal agreement would support the sharing arrangements between the schools.

The learning specialist would continue to spend the majority of their time in the classroom and would be available to demonstrate exemplary teaching practice to teachers visiting from other schools.

The learning specialist could also record examples of their teaching practice and have teachers observe lessons through the use of virtual technology.

The [staffing cooperation](#) guide applies to all schools, and provides information regarding employees working in more than one school.

Accessing learning specialists at larger schools

Small schools could access learning specialists employed at larger, geographically proximal schools. A formal agreement between the schools would support this arrangement.

The learning specialist at the larger school could be available to provide demonstration lessons and professional learning, including expert advice on teaching strategies.

Small schools could use their learning specialist funding to support teachers to access learning specialists.

The Victorian Professional Learning Communities initiative

A cluster of schools could apply to be a part of the Victorian Professional Learning Communities (PLC) initiative. Small schools could use their learning specialist funding to support the implementation of the PLC initiative.

The PLC initiative aims to provide the culture and structure teachers need to effectively collaborate and improve professional practice. There are strong links between the PLC initiative and the intent of the learning specialist initiative.

In addition to the learning specialist funding, schools part of the PLC initiative receive funding for casual relief teachers. This funding enables PLC instructional leaders to attend professional learning. Instructional leaders also receive support to lead teams of teachers and build the internal capacity of staff in using collaborative practices.

OTHER SUPPORTS

Schools are able to use their Student Resource Package to fund time release to focus on the improved delivery of high quality teaching and learning.

Further information about learning specialists can be found on the Department's website, see: [Professional practice elements](#) and [Learning specialists](#).

Please email professional.practice@edumail.vic.gov.au for more information on learning specialists.

For queries relating to funding for the learning specialist role and the Student Resource Package (SRP), please log a call through Service Gateway or email studentresourcepackage@edumail.vic.gov.au

You can also contact the helpdesk on 1800 641 943.

For questions relating to the Victorian Government Schools Agreement 2017, please contact the Policy and Employee Relations Branch on 9637 2454 or email employee.relations@edumail.vic.gov.au