

# NYSAFLT Professional Support Program

## Description and Guidelines

### 2009-10



## Program Goals

The goals of the NYSAFLT Professional Support Program are twofold: (a) to provide LOTE-specific support to teachers who do not have sufficient support in their current teaching situation or who desire additional support in LOTE teaching; and (b) to enhance mentoring and other forms of professional support at a local level.

## Program Participants

Participation in the NYSAFLT Professional Support Program is limited to NYSAFLT members. As participation in the program spans two calendar years (Fall 2009 through Spring 2010), participants must commit to maintaining their NYSAFLT membership both years.

Members may participate in this program by requesting LOTE-specific professional support or by volunteering to provide such support. The program is designed to meet the varied needs LOTE teachers have at the beginning of their career as well as at later points in their career. Some of the reasons a member may request professional support include, but are not limited to:

- Being in the first five years of LOTE teaching;
- Making a significant shift in LOTE teaching assignment;
- Embarking on a new LOTE-specific professional endeavor;
- Being the sole LOTE teacher in a building or district; and
- Being new to teaching LOTE in New York State.

The facilitator, Joanne O'Toole, is a co-chair of the NYSAFLT Professional Development Committee. She is responsible for coordinating, overseeing, and evaluating the NYSAFLT Professional Support Program and can be reached at [jotoole@nysaftl.org](mailto:jotoole@nysaftl.org).

## Requesting Professional Support

NYSAFLT members may request professional support by completing the on-line request in the Members Only section of the NYSAFLT website, [www.nysaftl.org](http://www.nysaftl.org), at any time. This form requires information regarding the member's teaching situation, his/her reason(s) for requesting professional support, areas in which he/she is seeking support, and his/her communication preferences.

## **Volunteering to Provide Professional Support**

NYS AFLT members may volunteer to provide professional support to a colleague by completing the on-line volunteer application found in the Members Only section of the NYS AFLT website, [www.nysafl.org](http://www.nysafl.org), at any time. This application requests information regarding the member's experience in providing professional support to LOTE colleagues, the areas in which he/she can offer support, and his/her communication preferences. NYS AFLT will call on volunteers when there appears to be a best profile match between their application information and that of the member requesting professional support.

## **Making the Match**

Using information from volunteer applications and requests for professional support, the NYS AFLT Professional Support Program facilitator will attempt to identify a best profile match. From the profiles, the facilitator identifies a colleague who appears to have the appropriate knowledge and resources to provide professional support to meet a particular requestor's needs. The volunteer is given the opportunity to review the request for professional support (exclusive of identifying information), after which he/she may or may not accept the role.

If there is no best, or appropriate, profile match, the facilitator may solicit additional volunteers. In the case that there is still no appropriate volunteer available, the facilitator will communicate to the member who is making the request that the NYS AFLT Professional Support Program cannot fulfill his/her request at this time and will offer suggestions and resources on which the member may draw.

## **Initiating the Relationship**

Once a volunteer has agreed to work with a particular NYS AFLT colleague, the facilitator will provide the volunteer the colleague's contact information. This initial contact should take place by telephone and should allow for both parties to articulate needs, availability, preferences, and limitations. It should also be an opportunity for colleagues to get to know one another personally, an important aspect of any ongoing relationship. The result of this conversation should be agreed-upon goals for professional support as well as agreed-upon modes and frequency of communication, with understandings of each other's preferences and limitations.

## **Professional Support Activity**

Professional support activity should proceed in the agreed-upon manner for as long as the requesting member needs the support, but no longer than one academic year. If a participant who has requested professional support determines that his/her needs have been met prior to the end of the 2009-10 school year, he/she is responsible for communicating this to the volunteer colleague as well as to the program facilitator. If a volunteer is unable to continue

to offer professional support, he/she should communicate this to the colleague who has requested support as well as to the program facilitator.

NYS AFLT recognizes that the pair may choose to continue their relationship beyond the 2009-10 school year; however, they will no longer be considered participants in the NYSAFLT Professional Support Program beyond the year in which they were paired. Throughout the duration of the relationship and beyond, both parties are expected to maintain confidentiality regarding the content of conversations and activities. See page 4 of this document for guidelines on carrying out professional support activities.

## **Addressing Mismatches**

NYS AFLT recognizes that, despite the use of a best profile match, there are times when a mismatch may occur between the volunteer who has offered to provide professional support and the member who has requested professional support. If, after attempting to resolve the concern(s) on their own, one or both of the participants feel that this is the case, it is their responsibility to contact the Professional Support Program facilitator, Joanne O'Toole, at [jotoole@nysaflt.org](mailto:jotoole@nysaflt.org). The participant(s) making contact should provide sufficient details to aid the facilitator's understanding of the situation. The facilitator may (a) offer suggestions and/or strategies that will facilitate the participants' efforts to resolve the concern(s) themselves, or (b) determine that the pair is a mismatch. If the facilitator deems the pair a mismatch, he/she will communicate this to both participants. The volunteer will then return to the pool of members available to provide professional support unless he/she wishes to withdraw from this capacity. The member requesting professional support will be re-matched, if he/she indicates a desire to be re-matched, and if another appropriate profile match exists. This is a one-time re-match. If the re-match is not successful, the facilitator will make suggestions regarding resources the member requesting professional support may draw on to support his/her needs and he/she will no longer be considered a participant in the NYSAFLT Professional Support Program.

## **Program Oversight and Evaluation**

To assess how well the program is achieving its stated goals and to determine what, if any, adjustments to the program may be necessary, the facilitator will periodically request feedback from program participants. Participants are expected to respond to the request for feedback in a timely manner. Participants may also provide feedback regarding the program to the facilitator at any time during and subsequent to their participation.

At the end of the academic year, the facilitator will request that participants complete an evaluation of the NYSAFLT Professional Support Program. This evaluation is intended to identify what participants perceive as valuable aspects of the program and the ways in which they believe the program could be improved to better meet their needs. Participants are expected to complete the program evaluation form in a timely manner. The facilitator will use program evaluation data to develop a report for the NYSAFLT Board of Directors and to suggest potential programmatic modifications.

## Program Funding

The NYSAFLT Professional Support Program is a volunteer program for which there is no funding and, therefore, no compensation. Member participation is on a voluntary basis. Consequently, it is recommended that participants seek the most cost-effective means of carrying out their activities.

## Professional Support Activity Guidelines

**Electronic communications.** The following guidelines are recommended for communication that takes place between participants electronically (i.e. - via email).

1. Participants should engage in three-part communications:
  - a. Part 1: The initiator's question or communication.
  - b. Part 2: The response to the question or communication.
  - c. Part 3: The reply to the response, which minimally acknowledges its receipt but may contain significantly more information.

In completing parts 2 and 3 of the communication, unnecessary lag-time in responding should be avoided.

2. Electronic communications should consist of two aspects, one being social in nature and the other focused on the content. Including a social aspect to communication helps build the relationship between participants that, in turn, facilitates future interactions.
3. Electronic messages should be written with clarity to facilitate mutual understanding and avoid miscommunication.
4. Electronic messages should be of a reasonable length—long enough to make questions and needs clear but short enough to not overwhelm the recipient.
5. Communication should take place in the mode(s) and with the frequency that have been agreed upon by both participants.

**Motivation.** The participant who has requested professional support should be proactive in seeking assistance and show a commitment to the relationship. Additionally, he/she should be accepting of the feedback offered by the volunteer, whether or not he/she is able or interested in acting on that feedback.

**Providing Feedback.** When advice is sought, volunteers should avoid telling the colleague who has requested professional support what to do, except in cases where there is only one correct answer (i.e. – grading a state assessment). Whenever possible, the volunteer should offer a menu of suggestions from which the colleague might choose. This empowers the teacher to think broadly about approaches to issues and to make choices that are most appropriate for his/her teaching context. Additionally, the volunteer should articulate the rationale behind his/her feedback to aid in the teacher's understanding and decision-making.

## **NYSAFLT Disclaimers**

Views expressed by volunteers are their own and do not necessarily represent the views of NYSAFLT.

NYSAFLT's Professional Support Program is intended to enhance mentoring and other forms of professional support at the local level, not to serve as a replacement for it.

Some participants may choose to participate in NYSAFLT's Professional Support Program as a form of professional development. While NYSAFLT encourages this and can confirm a member's participation in the program, it cannot provide an accounting of the number of hours that a member engaged in activity nor details of the collegial relationship or activities.