

Data tell the story of coaches' success

BY JOAN RICHARDSON



Joanie Esparza read the job description for the new position of “student achievement coach” for the Adams 12 Five Star Schools — and almost didn’t apply.

“There must have been 20, 25 different things listed there. I just thought, wow, you’d have to be able to walk on water to do all of that,” she laughs.

But, after 30 years in public education, Esparza had done just about everything — and learned a lot along the way. She has taught every grade from kindergarten through 5th grade, including a multi-age classroom. She has been a Title I teacher and an art instructor for migrant education programs. She has been the lead teacher for Adams 12’s summer school program. She has been a mentor for new teachers for seven years. She has been on the school improvement team and numerous district-level committees.

“When I broke it down and started assessing each piece, I felt that I had quite a few of those skills in place and that I had been a leader in

most of those areas,” she said.

But she was still skeptical until she learned about the professional development and coaching that she would receive in her new job. “That’s what would make this an outstanding opportunity,” she said.

The Adams 12 Five Star Schools in suburban Denver, Colo., created 38 student achievement coaching positions during the 2004-05 school year as a way to infuse support for teachers into every building with a focus on ensuring that all students would be proficient or advanced in math or literacy. Part of that commitment included doing an intensive week of professional development for the coaches before they began their new assignments, devoting three hours every Friday afternoon to learning with other student achievement coaches, and providing lots of on-site assistance and coaching from district-level staff developers.

Did the Adams 12 coaches make a difference? When results were reported for the 2004-

Joanie Esparza, left, is a mentor of Judy Brightwell, a new student achievement coach for the 2005-06 year. They meet here to discuss a contract map for their working relationship.

05 statewide assessment, the Adams 12 schools had made the greatest gains of any district in the metro Denver area.

Becoming a coach

Esparza was placed at Coronado Hills Elementary School, a Title I school with 500 students where she had taught several years earlier. The school’s staff also includes a literacy coordinator who spends half of her time coaching teachers plus the student achievement coach whose fulltime role is coaching teachers.

Esparza is highly regarded in Adams 12 for her work as a data coach, one of the nine roles identified by Joellen Killion and Cynthia Harrison (both former staff developers with the Adams 12 district).

Her work with data begins in a generalized way with each grade-level team. In weekly meetings, grade-level teams study data regarding student achievement in each subject area. Teachers know the grade-level target for students in every subject area. They review results from the statewide assessment or other relevant assessments in order to determine how well their students are doing when measured against those benchmarks.

“I organize data to look at what kind of instruction needs to happen and what kind of assessment we need to guide us,” she said.

By the middle of her first year as coach, Esparza was able to invite in the district’s data analyst who had produced individual teacher profiles regarding student achievement. Each teacher received his or her own profile but did not see other teachers’ profiles.

“They received this fairly well,” she said.

Esparza said she tried to keep the discussion focused on what staff development would benefit a teacher if he or she was struggling with a particular group of students.

During her first year, after working with data, Esparza offered to model lessons, co-teach, or just observe a teacher’s work. After each such experience, Esparza leaves a written record with the teacher and schedules a debriefing time that she calls a reflection. She prefers to do the reflection a day or two after the observation. “I don’t like to do it in the heat of the moment,” she said.

JOANIE ESPARZA

Position: Student achievement coach, Coronado Hills Elementary School, Denver, Colo.

District: Adams 12 Five Star Schools, Thornton, Colo.

Professional history: Began her career as a 1st grade teacher, later teaching kindergarten, 2nd grade, multi-age classrooms, and Title I. Became student achievement coach during the 2004-05 school year.

Education: Bachelor’s degree in elementary art education, Fort Hays State University; elementary education endorsement and masters in curriculum and instruction, Univ. of Wyoming.

Professional service: Served in a variety of leadership positions including school improvement team (including two years as facilitator), school leadership team, cohort leader (supporting teachers new to the building), dual language team, summer school lead teacher, professional learning community facilitator, and dual language team.

To continue this conversation, e-mail Esparza at Joanie.Esparza@adams12.org.

Although the building principal “highly encouraged” teachers to join the coaching, Esparza had to wait for an invitation from a teacher before she could pursue any of those options. “But the teachers who took me up on it were so positive. That led other teachers to open their doors,” she said.

Now, teachers who worked with Esparza experienced higher results on their statewide assessments. “They would say that it’s because of the practice of having a coach in the room,” she said.

By the end of the year, she had done in-classroom coaching or observation with half of the teachers and out-of-classroom coaching (problem solving, collegial conversations, resource development, data analysis, formal presentations) with about 75% of the teachers.

Her goal is to spend 50 to 60% of her time in teachers’ classrooms. She estimates that only about a third of her time last year was spent in that fashion.

“If it’s going to make a difference in their



A successful coach is someone who can develop relationships quickly, Joanie Esparza said.

**JOB DESCRIPTION:
Student
achievement coach**

[www.nsd.org/
library/BldgLevel
CoachJobDes.pdf](http://www.nsd.org/library/BldgLevelCoachJobDes.pdf)

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT COACH evaluation by staff

THESE ARE SOME OF THE ROLES OF THE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT COACH:

- Co-planning (working with a teacher or group of teachers to plan instruction)
- Classroom model/co-teaching
- Classroom observation/feedback — cognitive coaching
- Problem-solving conversations
- Data analysis
- Participate in small professional development groups (work with grade levels/departments or other small groups of teachers, team meetings ...)
- Resource development (preparing materials, gathering resources, working with teachers on ScholarsMart ...)
- Training



What has worked well with the Student Achievement Coach model this year?

What revisions should we consider for the Student Achievement Coach program in our building next year?

teaching, I need to be in their classrooms,” she said.

But building the relationships must come first, she said. A successful coach, said Esparza, is someone who can develop relationships really quickly. “The coaches who were moving into new buildings, they knew they were going to have to build relationships. But even if you were in the same building, you still had to build relationships because you weren’t a teacher any more. Your role had shifted and your perspective was different,” she said.

“I knew that it was going to take almost a whole year to get people to trust me. But for some teachers, it’s taken a lot longer than that,” she said.

When she made herself available for classroom visits, she had to assure teachers that she

would be observing and helping them reflect on their teaching but not evaluating their teaching. Like many coaches, she must stress again and again that she does not share her feedback to teachers with the principal or anyone else who does teacher evaluations.

“I knew there would be challenges but the challenges shifted. What were the challenges in the beginning were not the same as the challenges at the end of the year,” she said.

At the end of the 2004-05 school year, a number of teachers approached Esparza to learn if she’d be back during this school year. “It was clear to me that they thought it would be a positive thing if I came back. They valued what I did. And those who didn’t, well, I think I can get them on board next year,” she said. ♦

“I knew that it was going to take almost a whole year to get people to trust me. But for some teachers, it’s taken a lot longer than that,” said Esparza.

Student Achievement Coach position 2004 – 05

PLEASE MAKE A CHECK MARK FOR YOUR ANSWER AND WRITE COMMENTS TO CLARIFY ANSWERS AS NEEDED.

	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
<p>The Student Achievement Coach was available to support me whenever I asked him/her.</p> <p>COMMENTS: _____</p>			
<p>Training from the Student Achievement Coach, work with the Student Achievement Coach, or resources from the Student Achievement Coach helped increase the level of math implementation in my classroom.</p> <p>COMMENTS: _____</p>			
<p>Training from the Student Achievement Coach, work with the Student Achievement Coach, or resources from the Student Achievement Coach helped increase the level of my collaboration with colleagues.</p> <p>COMMENTS: _____</p>			
<p>Training from the Student Achievement Coach, work with the Student Achievement Coach, or resources from the Student Achievement Coach helped increase the student achievement of my ELL students.</p> <p>COMMENTS: _____</p>			
<p>The Student Achievement Coach has proficient facilitation skills.</p> <p>COMMENTS: _____</p>			
<p>The Student Achievement Coach has had training in the areas where I need Student Achievement Coach support.</p> <p>COMMENTS: _____</p>			
<p>I trust the Student Achievement Coach to be confidential about our conversations and our work together.</p> <p>COMMENTS: _____</p>			
<p>Coaching was based on my (the teacher's) needs and interests.</p> <p>COMMENTS: _____</p>			

Now that the Student Achievement Coach has been on the job for a year, it is time to make an evaluation.

Please rate your level of interaction with the Student Achievement Coach.
High activity is weekly, medium activity is bi-weekly, and low activity is monthly.

Classroom coaching activities			Out of classroom support – planning, gathering resources, etc.			Professional development (small or large group)		
LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH