

# 13 TEACHERS TEACHING TEACHERS™

FOR A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY OF TEACHER LEADERS

## ROLE: Data coach

## PURPOSE: To ensure that student achievement data drive decisions in classroom and school

BY JOELLEN KILLION AND CYNTHIA HARRISON

*Second in an eight-part series about roles of the school-based coach*

A relatively new role for instructional coaches is assisting teachers to look at student achievement, perception, demographic, and process data. In this role, coaches help teams of teachers and/or individual teachers to examine data, understand their

students' strengths and weaknesses, and identify instructional strategies, structures, programs, or curriculum to address identified needs. Analyzing school and department- or grade-level trends in the data is only the first step toward designing and adjusting classroom instruction to address the identified needs of students. Coaches frequently facilitate data dialogues with teams of teachers. Coaches often work with building administrators to identify necessary data to examine and ways to display the data so the analysis process with teachers is effective and efficient.

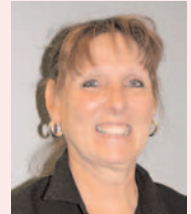
During data dialogues, coaches facilitate interaction about what types of data are being examined, what the data mean, and what the next steps are by asking probing questions to guide data analysis. When coaches focus conversations on data about student learning in a positive and productive way, the dialogue empowers teachers rather than threatens them.



**Our goal: All teachers in all schools will experience high-quality professional learning as part of their daily work.**

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**SCENARIO:**

**Data coach at work**

Nicky Romero, the student achievement coach at Cherokee Elementary School,\* works with the principal and assistant principal to plan the upcoming data conversation with 5th-grade teachers. Everyone knows they are a tough group and resist changing their classroom practices. The coach and administrators look through the 5th-grade data and identify trends and patterns. Following the meeting with administrators, Romero designs a data analysis protocol to use in the meeting with 5th-grade teachers.

Romero facilitates the meeting and invites the principal to explain the 5th-grade data and provide a short overview of the whole school's results. Romero gives the team a structured data analysis protocol to guide their examination of grade-level data. The 5th-grade teachers spend several hours examining data. First, teachers celebrate student successes and identify strategies

they believe contributed to those successes. The protocol then guides the team to identify gaps between what they want students to know and be able to do and actual student performance.

Next, teachers complete an advanced organizer (created by the coach in advance) that tracks individual student achievement in literacy and math. Teachers record each student's performance level and add comments about other factors that may influence a student's performance. Focused on student needs and with problem areas identified, Romero encourages teachers to examine their instruction, curriculum, and resources to find leverage points for addressing gaps in student learning. Teachers identify possible interventions, including flexible grouping, ways to differentiate upcoming lessons, and alternative instructional resources and strategies. As the teachers leave the meeting, they agree to meet with the coach and principal in five weeks to re-examine student progress.

*\* Fictitious person and school*

Creating opportunities to identify areas of need is the first step in planning how to address those needs.

**Knowledge and skills**

To lead data dialogues, coaches know how to establish a risk-free and blame-free environment that allows teachers to feel safe. Coaches require a thorough understanding of various types and forms of available data, an understanding of what each data source assesses, and what conclusions can be validly drawn from any data set. Coaches use strong facilitation and questioning skills to formulate appropriate questions and to guide teachers in examining data thoroughly and accurately. Coaches also know how to assist teachers to plan and take specific actions based on the data to alter their instruction.

**Challenges**

Coaches face four challenges in this role.

- The first challenge is **displaying the data**

**in user-friendly formats** which requires coaches to consider the level of sophistication of teachers in analyzing and interpreting data and adjusting the data displays to accommodate the variation in teachers' understanding of data.

- A second challenge is the coaches' **preparation to understand the data** before facilitating data dialogues. Coaches must prepare a protocol — a series of questions — to guide data analysis and interpretation and action planning.

- **Assisting grade levels or departments to make decisions based on the data**, the third challenge, is a necessary and difficult part of effective data dialogues. Coaches help teachers move beyond what the data mean to what actions will close the gap between where their students are and where they want them to be.

- The fourth challenge is **creating a non-threatening, supportive environment** that encourages teachers to be open and honest in data analysis. ♦

**9 roles of the school-based coach**

- Catalyst for change
- Classroom supporter
- Curriculum specialist
- **Data coach**
- Instructional specialist
- Learning facilitator (T3, Sept. 2005)
- Mentor
- Resource provider
- School leader

**T3 presents one role of the school-based coach each month.**

From *9 Roles of the School-Based Coach* by Joellen Killion and Cynthia Harrison

## Data tell the story of coaches' success

BY JOAN RICHARDSON



**J**oanie 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](mailto: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?**

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

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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><b>The Student Achievement Coach was available to support me whenever I asked him/her.</b></p> <p>COMMENTS: _____</p>   |     |        |      |
| <p><b>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.</b></p> <p>COMMENTS: _____</p> |     |        |      |
| <p><b>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.</b></p> <p>COMMENTS: _____</p>    |     |        |      |
| <p><b>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.</b></p> <p>COMMENTS: _____</p>       |     |        |      |
| <p><b>The Student Achievement Coach has proficient facilitation skills.</b></p> <p>COMMENTS: _____</p>   |     |        |      |
| <p><b>The Student Achievement Coach has had training in the areas where I need Student Achievement Coach support.</b></p> <p>COMMENTS: _____</p>   |     |        |      |
| <p><b>I trust the Student Achievement Coach to be confidential about our conversations and our work together.</b></p> <p>COMMENTS: _____</p>   |     |        |      |
| <p><b>Coaching was based on my (the teacher's) needs and interests.</b></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 |
|                               |        |      |  |        |      |   |        |      |

## Data can show if all of the efforts pay off in student learning

Last year, professional development at Mason Middle School\* included an eclectic array of programs. This year, the school improvement team recommends that professional development focus exclusively on higher-order thinking skills. Some teachers wonder how that focus was identified.

“We looked at data about student performance on state, district, and schoolwide common assessments and analyzed teachers’ assignments,” explains Cherylynn Sanchez, the school’s staff developer, “and discovered that students are rarely using higher-order thinking skills. The questions they are missing on some of the assessments involve analytic and interpretive thinking.”

To address this problem, the school improvement team recommends that teachers adapt their assignments to include higher-order thinking, teach students how to think analytically and creatively, and assess students’ thinking skills. The professional development plan addresses these three areas.

For staff development to improve student learning, staff development leaders want the content and process of adult learning to align with the identified learning needs of students. Using a variety of data sources, both formal, such as state tests, and informal, such as classroom assessments, ensures that decisions related to data are more thorough and accurate than they would be if a single source of data were used.

After the focus for staff development is identified and a plan of action developed, data help the school improvement team, principal, and teaching teams know if their plan to incorporate

more direct teaching and assessment of thinking skills in the classroom is occurring. Analyzing a variety of data throughout the school year will help teachers know the results of their work and will help them make better decisions about the impact of their work on students’ performance on a variety of assessments.

Three times during the year — in October, January, and April — Sanchez asks teachers to bring one assignment and five student responses to the assignment to a faculty meeting. She organizes teachers into interdisciplinary, vertical teams. Each teacher presents his or her assign-

ment. Team members discuss the level of cognition the assignment requires. Next, each takes a sample of student work and determines if the work demonstrates the level of cognition expected and identifies their evidence. The discussion on each teacher’s assignment and student work takes about 10 minutes. Near the end of the hour-long faculty meeting, teams complete an anonymous summary sheet that identifies the levels of thinking their five assignments required and the number of students who demonstrated the appropriate level of thinking.

Sanchez collects the anonymous summary sheets and uses

them to determine if the assignments require a range of higher-order thinking skills and if students are successful in applying them. She uses these ongoing data to help her plan for the ongoing year-long professional development on higher-order thinking skills and to provide the school improvement team with evidence of progress toward the schoolwide goal. ♦

*\* Fictitious person and school*



Joellen Killion is director of special projects for National Staff Development Council.

### DATA-DRIVEN

Staff development that improves the learning of all students uses disaggregated student data to determine adult learning priorities, monitor progress, and help sustain continuous improvement.

For more information about the NSDC Standards for Staff Development, see [www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm)

**Protocol:**

A structure and guide for a group's conversation regarding a piece of student work.

## THE TUNING PROTOCOL: Got an hour? Here is an efficient way to examine student work

Examining student work has always been part of a teacher's job. But, in recent years, that practice has moved from being a solitary activity to being more collaborative work in which teachers learn about their practice by sharing with and listening to colleagues.

In the hierarchy of professional learning practices, examining student work would rank near the top because of the way that teachers work together to sharpen their practice to improve student learning.

**Background:** The Tuning Protocol was developed by the Coalition of Essential Schools to provide teachers with feedback on authentic assessments (exhibitions, portfolios, etc.). A teacher or team of teachers presents samples of student work and the context for the work. The presenter then offers a focusing question. After reviewing the work, participants offer feedback.

**Facilitation:** Can be facilitated by someone inside or outside the group.

**Time:** One hour.

### DIRECTIONS

|   |                         |
|---|-------------------------|
| <b>Presentation</b><br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presenter shares the student work and sets the context by describing the teaching/learning situation. Presenter poses one or two key questions to be answered.</li> <li>• As the presenter speaks, participants are quiet, taking notes.</li> </ul>                             | <i>Time: 15 minutes</i> |
| <b>Clarifying questions</b><br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants ask non-evaluative questions about the presentation, such as "What happened before X? What did you do next?"</li> </ul>  | <i>Time: 5 minutes</i>  |
| <b>Individual writing</b><br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants write individually about the presentation.</li> </ul>  | <i>Time: 5 minutes</i>  |
| <b>Participant discussion</b><br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presenter turns to one side and listens silently during this time.</li> <li>• Participants discuss among themselves, exploring issues raised during the presentation, striving to understand the situation, and raising possible answers to the questions.</li> </ul> | <i>Time: 15 minutes</i> |
| <b>Presenter reflection</b><br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presenter talks about the participants' discussion.</li> <li>• Participants are silent, taking notes as the presenter speaks.</li> </ul>  | <i>Time: 15 minutes</i> |
| <b>Debriefing</b><br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presenter and participants discuss both the process and the content of the protocol.</li> </ul>   | <i>Time: 10 minutes</i> |

SOURCE: Lois Easton, editor, *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning* (Oxford, OH: NSDC, 2004.)

For more information about examining student work visit [www.nsd.org/library/strategies/examiningwork.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/library/strategies/examiningwork.cfm)





[www.nsd.org](http://www.nsd.org)  
links you with  
information.

## A mini-guide to the NSDC web site

All NSDC members have full access to our archive of articles and other resources. The NSDC web site contains about 3,000 pages of information and includes more than 4,000 links within the site and to other web sites. And, each month, the number of pages grows as we add articles from our publications and learn about important work being done by others in the field of professional learning.

→ For information about any NSDC publication, you can go directly to this page. Here you'll find links to every NSDC publication and can quickly link to lists of articles published in each publication.

[www.nsd.org/  
library/publications/index.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/library/publications/index.cfm)

→ One of the most popular destinations on our web site is the Online Library which offers collections of articles on topics of particular interest to any educator involved in professional development.

[www.nsd.org/  
library/index.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/library/index.cfm)

→ Another frequently visited location on our web site are the pages that link you to everything related to the NSDC Standards for Staff Development.

[www.nsd.org/  
standards/index.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm)

→ Many members inquire about the location of the popular Professional Development IQ test.

[www.nsd.org/  
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