

Coaches lead in many ways

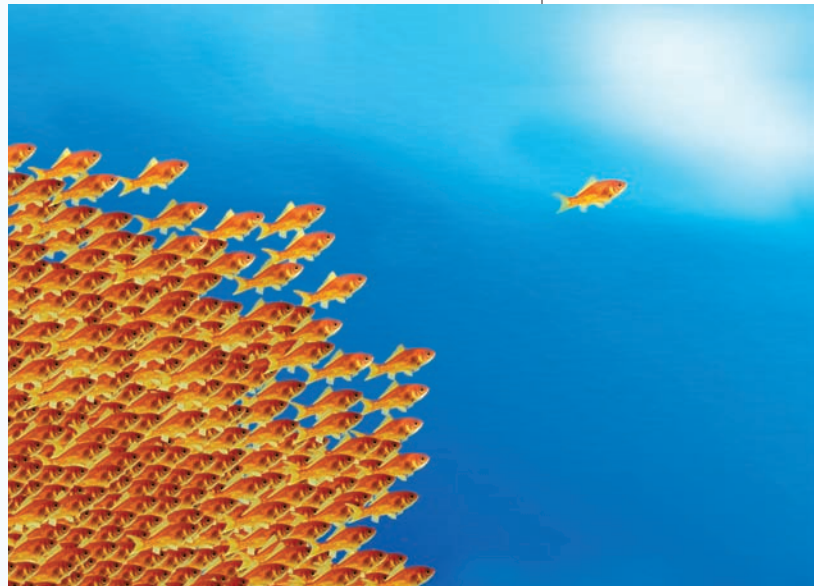
Coaches are leaders among their peers. As leaders, coaches have several key responsibilities. These responsibilities include:

- Clearly articulating the link between school and district goals for student achievement and the professional development support they provide teachers;
- Vigilantly monitoring the quality of the professional development available to teachers within the school;
- Continuously striving for improvement in curriculum, assessment, and instruction;
- Rigorously monitoring their own work to ensure that their work focuses exclusively on supporting teachers to deepen their content knowledge and improve their professional practice; and
- Constantly modeling the values and beliefs of the school through their attitudes and actions.

As leaders of learning among their peers, coaches provide explanations to teachers, the principal, parents, and other community members about the importance of professional learning and how it links to quality teaching and improved student achievement. They communicate how teachers' learning experiences directly support teachers' practice. They may be called on to demonstrate how professional learning helps a school or district reach its student achievement goals. They may write articles for staff or parent newsletters explaining the link between professional learning and student achievement and offer a theory of change, a road map that explains the sequence of actions that lead to the desired goals and the underlying assumptions that support the choice of this set of actions. They are ready to help all stakeholders understand how their work as coaches helps both teachers and the school

LEADERSHIP

Staff development that improves the learning of all students requires skillful school and district leaders who guide continuous instructional improvement.



meet student achievement goals.

As advocates for high-quality professional learning, coaches help teachers and the principal understand NSDC's Standards for Staff Development and use those standards to ensure that the professional development available in their schools is of the highest quality. They recommend that the school annually evaluate the quality of its professional development using instruments such as NSDC's Standards Assessment Inventory (www.nsd.org/standards/



Joellen Killion is deputy executive director of National Staff Development Council.

For more information about NSDC's Standards for Staff Development, see www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm

about/selfassessment.cfm) or the Innovation Configuration maps for the standards (Roy & Hord, 2003; Killion & Harrison, 2006). By assessing the quality of professional development annually, a school has data to determine how to improve the quality of its professional development, and the coach has information to guide his or her work with individuals or teams. Coaches are spokespersons for high-quality professional development, the kind that improves the learning of all students, and aligns his or her work with the standards.

Coaches focus the professional development they provide teachers either individually, in teams, or as a whole school, on the specific goals for student achievement set at the classroom, school, and district levels. To achieve these goals, coaches help teachers ensure that their classroom curriculum aligns with adopted district curriculum, that they frequently assess student learning to ensure that instruction targets student learning needs and preferences, that they choose teaching practices that are research- or evidence-based and frequently adjust those practices to meet student learning needs; and that they create classroom routines and structures that minimize disruptions and maximize student engagement. To accomplish these responsibilities, coaches might engage teachers in opportunities to learn new instructional and assessment practices, facilitate peer-review processes, such as the Collaborative Assessment Conferences or Tuning Protocols, provide demonstration lessons, co-teach, or observe teachers and offer feedback to help them refine their use of a particular instructional practice. Coaches might also facilitate teams of teachers in collaborative planning and lesson studies or analyses. Coaches may also coach, train, or support department, team, or grade-level chairs as they facilitate collaborative professional work.

Coaches rigorously monitor their own work to ensure that it focuses on improving student achievement rather than only improving teacher practice. Shifting the focus from teaching to learning keeps the coach's work targeted on the desired outcome. Coaches want to help teachers think about how what they know and do impacts what students know and do. Coaches make critical decisions about how they spend their time.

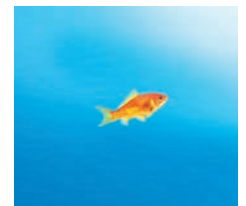
For example, they may spend more time early in the school year helping teachers access resources, yet leave behind that work to focus on actions that more directly impact teaching and learning. Some of these actions include facilitating learning experiences for teachers, engaging in collaborative team planning, developing and scoring common assessments, using data to plan instruction, observing and providing feedback to teachers. When coaches align their work with classroom, school, and district student achievement goals and engage in those interactions and support of teachers that is most closely linked with teaching and learning, they are more likely to realize greater results of their work.

Coaches constantly model the values and beliefs of the school through their attitudes and actions. They know that they are carriers of the culture and that others will look to them to be standard setters of normative practices. When coaches are positive and respectful of students, teachers, administrators, and parents, others may follow their example. When coaches demonstrate that they go out of their way to be helpful, others may notice. When coaches go above and beyond the expected, others might also. When coaches persist in solving complex problems, others will join in. Coaches lead through their actions and attitudes and model salient behaviors that support a collaborative professional culture.

Coaches practice leadership in all aspects of their work. As leaders, they have several key responsibilities in their schools and districts including supporting teacher professional development particularly in curriculum, assessment, instruction, and classroom environment; helping the school and its community understand the value of teacher professional learning and how it contributes to improvements in student achievement; using standards to assess and improve the quality of professional development within a school and district; and ensuring that they model actions, attitudes, values, and beliefs that support teacher professionalism and continuous improvement in student achievement. ♦

All NSDC books can be ordered through NSDC's Online Bookstore, store.nsd.org.

For more information about NSDC's package of standards-related materials, visit the web site at www.nsd.org/standards/about/index.cfm.



References

Killion, J. & Harrison, C. (2006). *Taking the lead: New roles for teachers and school-based coaches.*

Roy, P. & Hord, S. (2003). *Moving NSDC's staff development standards into practice: Innovation configurations.*