



Linda Sutphin is a science curriculum leader for the Mason City Schools in Mason, Ohio.

Coaches are the machine oil

Q How do you approach coaching differently at the secondary level?

When I first started (coaching) 10 years ago, people were pretty much teaching whatever they enjoyed teaching or personally felt necessary. There was little collaboration. Nobody knew what anybody else was doing.

The curriculum coordinators became that link.

We model and mentor; we observe all the teachers at least once during the year. We're not evaluative at all. We offer help and try to convince teachers that we're their resource if they have any problems or concerns. We get into classrooms, meet with the department chairs and administration. Teachers have asked to sit and plan with us. We work on assessments. We like to tell teachers at the beginning of each year, "We're your new best friends" and hope they take us up on that. We're advocates for teachers. We're still on a teacher contract; we're not administrators, and we make every effort to stay out of that role.

At the high school level, developing trust was the first step. After that, the teachers had to see a real benefit to being more collegial. At a large high school, teachers may teach the same subject but never see each other. By providing them time to sit down with a focus, we were able to bring that about. We went to the administration and asked for time for teachers to get together.

As a result of being given the time to sit down together and start talking — and the standardized tests gave us a focus on how we are teaching to the standards — then everybody had a goal in mind.

We (coaches) are like the oil for that well-oiled machine. We have a great district, great teachers and really great kids, and I don't know how much our results can be attributed to our positions. What I can say is that by perhaps the third year, we started to see how important these positions are to that machine. We were able to see the teachers starting to work together to achieve a common goal and see them value collaboration and continuity. It was making a difference to them. ♦

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