



## How do you approach coaching at a districtwide level?

As told to Valerie von Frank

**W**e have to be consistent with what we do in each building. Our department has goals and a focus, and we have to stick to that focus. We have planned a few initiatives this year, such as response to intervention. We also work with teachers to structure their days wisely and use data to drive decisions for kids' learning. I need to make sure that what I do in building A with teacher A is the same as what I'm doing in building B, with teacher B. It's more efficient that way.

### WE PLAN TOGETHER

To stay with our focus, our department, the department of teaching and learning, plans together. We meet twice a month for 1½ hours. We use the time for our own professional learning, as well as to talk about what we're spending our time on and to make connections in the work and plan. The department has directors of elementary curriculum, secondary curriculum, educational initiatives, data and testing, and federal programs, along with coaches in the areas of literacy, math, science, and social studies. As a department, we set goals for what we roll out to the buildings.

In addition, the other literacy specialists and I plan together. For example, when we are going to have data meetings, we create an agenda

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together. When we do follow-up days, often it's the same questions teachers have since we shared the same information in every building. We work to give the same message. We get together constantly on an informal basis to divide the work and come together after it is done so we can collaborate and share the same vision. Our vision is a department vision.

### TRAITS OF A GOOD COACH

It was helpful to be part of the interviewing team for the other literacy coaches. I knew the traits needed because I'd been doing the job. These traits help when you're a coach:

- Be a self-learner. Sometimes things are put on our plate that we have to figure out and learn ourselves. It takes a lot of initiative and going beyond to learn more deeply, because you're the one teaching it. Sometimes you don't get the professional development from outside; it's you reading and studying.
- Obviously you have to be able to relate well with others.
- You need to be organized. That's essential when you are serving

several buildings.

- You have to be flexible. Every day you plan, but you can get an email from a teacher, principal, or director and there goes your plan for the day. You also need to be flexible in your thinking to hear others' perspectives.

Our goal this year as a district is consistency. We're large, and we have to pay attention to communication and consistency. We see that as an opportunity to work closely together.



We have to support one another, and we have to have the support of the administration, or we would get nowhere. We can send the message, but then we need the backing.

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