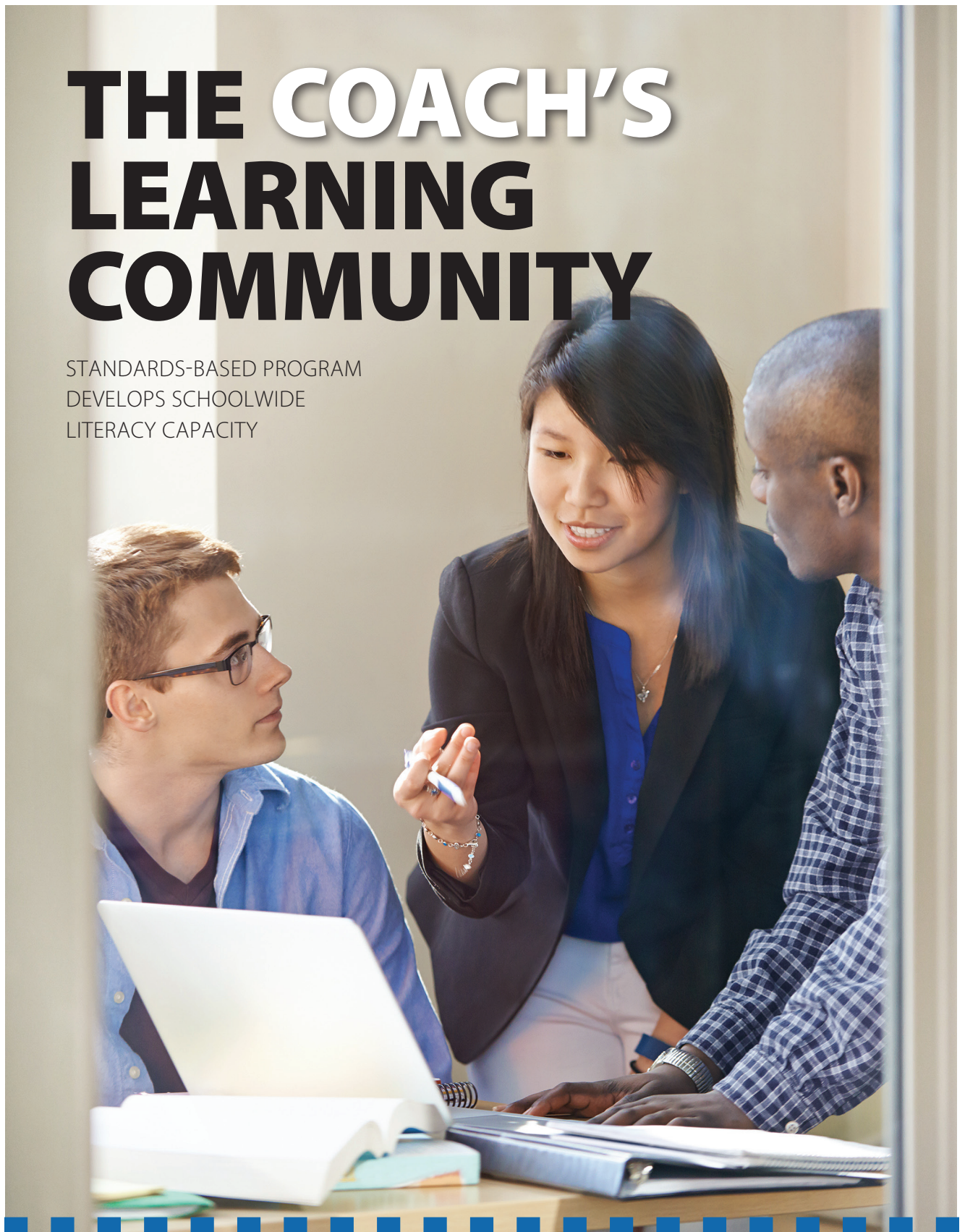


# THE COACH'S LEARNING COMMUNITY

STANDARDS-BASED PROGRAM  
DEVELOPS SCHOOLWIDE  
LITERACY CAPACITY



BY DIANE REITZ AND GENE E. HALL

**T**he challenges inherent in increasing student literacy outcomes are well-documented, especially in underperforming schools. These

challenges are made greater in schools that have high turnover in staff and in those communities with high populations of English language learners and greater poverty.

Improving student learning in schools with these challenges requires more than simply changing textbooks, replacing staff, or offering more one-shot teacher workshops. There has to be a comprehensive approach that includes strategies to facilitate individual teacher learning, schoolwide implementation of effective literacy strategies, and investment in ongoing internal and external resources and supports.

Through a federal literacy grant, the Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program aims to improve literacy achievement in pre-K-12 classrooms through implementing the use of full-time school-based literacy coaches. These coaches are assigned to the most struggling elementary, middle,

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and high schools to assist in improving literacy instruction and, ultimately, student achievement. However, simply placing expert teachers in the role of school-based literacy coach is not likely to lead to success. Even the most promising coach will need to develop new knowledge and skills to become an effective schoolwide literacy leader.

We have developed professional learning for literacy coaches that is grounded in Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011). Teachers selected to be literacy coaches already have a strong background in literacy instruction. They come to this role with well-established records of being highly effective teachers but don't know how to facilitate adult learning and be effective in working with all teachers and school administrators.

The coaches need professional

learning focused on developing their knowledge and skills related to understanding and facilitating change processes, learning models and theories about how organizations work, and developing techniques for coaching teachers. The process for developing these new areas of professional expertise is encompassed within a process of construction of a coaches' professional learning community.

In this professional learning program, each coach is assigned to a single school for one to two years. The professional learning includes all-day work sessions twice a month, book studies, homework exercises, leadership activities to be carried out at their schools, and ongoing, on-site coaching of the coaches with feedback.

### **DISTRICT AND SCHOOL CONTEXT**

The setting for the program is

# IDEAS

the Clark County School District in southern Nevada, a large urban district with a student enrollment of over 318,000 and extensive need for ongoing literacy support. Each school selected to receive a literacy coach has a large English language learners population, lower socioeconomic status, and persistently struggles in literacy achievement. These schools are nested within a feeder alignment pattern. In other words, the elementary schools feed to specific middle schools, and they in turn feed into a specific high school.

This strategy provides greater consistency in implementing the Striving Readers program goals: improving Tier I literacy instruction, implementing data-based decision-making teams, providing ongoing professional learning, using technology effectively, and providing intervention to struggling readers.

## HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS

Although the coaches are knowledgeable in literacy instruction, they continue to receive ongoing professional learning in current literacy and coaching best practices. However, coaches also need another form of literacy to be highly effective: the literacy of understanding change.

They require new sets of knowledge and skills to become proficient in the coaching process, such as developing a schoolwide view and understanding how schools function as organizations. Coaches need to develop a big picture in understanding the principles of change and how this knowledge can be applied to their coaching of individual teachers and the whole school.

The literacy coaches program is organized around five major strategies:

1. Using Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning as the guide in designing, implementing, and evaluating the Striving Readers coaches program.
2. Study of the change process in schools using elements of the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (Hall & Hord, 2015);
3. Study of schools as organizations using the four "frames" of Bolman and Deal (2013);
4. Bimonthly all-day workshops; and
5. On-site coaching of the coaches by project staff.

### 1. Using Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning as the guide in designing, implementing, and evaluating the Striving Readers coaches program.

As we developed the coaches program, Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning shaped our vision for adult professional learning and have been seamlessly integrated into every aspect of the Striving Readers program expectations. The seven standards are mutually supportive and provide a standards-driven framework for the coaches' professional learning program.

We believe becoming a highly effective coach takes time (two to three years) and requires regular meetings and on-site supports. Continuous improvement begins with learning new knowledge and skills through collaboration. Coaches need to engage in open sharing, problem solving, planning, and reflective dialogue. With the standards guiding us, we implemented our own professional learning community (a PLC for coaches).

A professional learning community is based in learning about, and applying, tools from change models and research. Our PLC is committed to the idea that adult professional learning is the key. Coaches have opportunities for continuous improvement, collective responsibility for learning, and ongoing feedback. In addition, a close look at formative data guides their discussions and helps coaches implement data-

based decision-making at their schools.

### 2. Understanding change and facilitating the process.

An important new area of learning is developing understanding of the change process as individual teachers experience it. As noted in the change literature, a school is not changed until the teachers within the school have changed. Therefore, effective literacy coaches need to be able to facilitate change in individuals and also facilitate whole-school change. Learning about change entailed seminars, book studies, and homework assignments. Much of the content centered around selected elements of the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (Hall & Hord, 2015). This strategy supports the Learning Forward standards on Implementation, Data, and Leadership.

### 3. Understanding schools as organizations.

As important as change is for each teacher, the whole school is the primary unit for change (Hall & Hord, 2015). Another important area of learning for coaches is understanding schools as organizations. In this case, the frameworks and book study were based in the work of Bolman and Deal (2013).

### 4. Bimonthly work sessions.

Coaches met twice a month. One day focused on literacy professional learning, and the second was devoted to becoming an expert in learning and applying knowledge about change process and schools as organizations. The table on p. 61 provides a summary of topics.

### 5. On-site coaching of the coaches with feedback.

Following Learning Forward's Learning Designs standard, we applied the research-based model of theory,



**PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR COACHES: TOPICS AND RESOURCES**

<b>YEAR 1: Entry and learning about change</b>	
Topics and Learning Forward standards	Resources
<p><u>INITIAL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING THEMES:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing relationships with teachers and administrators.</li> <li>• Learning how to be an effective coach and student-centered coaching.</li> </ul> <p>Learning Forward standard: <b>Learning Communities.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Instructional Coaching: A Partnership Approach to Improving Instruction</i>, Jim Knight, 2007.</li> <li>• <i>Mindset: The New Psychology of Success</i>, Carol Dweck, 2010.</li> <li>• <i>Student-Centered Coaching</i>, Diane Sweeney, 2013.</li> </ul>
<p><u>CONSTRUCTING AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHANGE PROCESS:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The context for coaches implementing change.</li> <li>• Change principles, Stages of Concern, Levels of Use, strategies and interventions (one-legged interviews).</li> </ul> <p>Learning Forward standards: <b>Leadership, Implementation.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Implementing Change: Patterns, Principles, and Potholes</i>, 4th ed., Hall &amp; Hord, 2015.</li> </ul>
<p><u>FORMING DATA-BASED DECISION-MAKING TEAMS.</u></p> <p>Learning Forward standard: <b>Data.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The Data Coach's Guide to Improving Learning for All Students</i>, Nancy Love, Katherine Stiles, Susan Mundry, and Kathryn DiRanna, Corwin Press, West Ed, 2008.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing a schoolwide perspective: Viewing schools through four frames.</li> <li>• Systemic change in schools and districts.</li> </ul> <p>Learning Forward standards: <b>Leadership, Implementation.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership</i>, Bolman &amp; Deal, 2013.</li> <li>• <i>Implementing Change: Patterns, Principles, and Potholes</i>, 4th ed., Hall &amp; Hord, 2015.</li> </ul>
<b>YEAR 2: Impacting the whole school</b>	
Topics and Learning Forward standards	Resources
<p><u>BECOMING A LEADER AND WORKING WITH LEADERS:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change facilitator style, theory X and theory Y, other leadership models.</li> </ul> <p>Learning Forward standard: <b>Leadership.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership</i>, Bolman &amp; Deal, 2013.</li> <li>• <i>Implementing Change: Patterns, Principles, and Potholes</i>, 4th ed., Hall &amp; Hord, 2015.</li> <li>• <i>Leadership: Theory and Practice</i>, 7th ed., Northouse, 2016.</li> </ul>
<p><u>LITERACY BEST PRACTICES:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vocabulary instruction for second language learners, close reading.</li> <li>• Using data-based decision-making teams.</li> <li>• Incorporating technology into the literacy curriculum.</li> </ul> <p>Learning Forward standard: <b>Implementation.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Academic Conversations: Classroom Talk That Fosters Critical Thinking and Content Understanding</i>, Jeff Zwiers and Marie Crawford, 2011.</li> <li>• <i>Text Dependent Questions, Grades K-5 and Grades 6-12. Pathways to Close and Critical Reading</i>, Douglas Fisher and Nancy Fry, 2015.</li> </ul>
<p><u>LEADERSHIP, THE BIGGER PICTURE:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applying and developing grounded skill in using change process and organization constructs.</li> <li>• The larger view: district, state, and federal context.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On-site coaching by project staff.</li> <li>• <i>Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership</i>, Bolman &amp; Deal, 2013.</li> </ul>
<p><u>ALL SESSIONS:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Debriefing of successes.</li> <li>• Reflections about challenges.</li> <li>• Reporting on experiences with applying constructs in their schools.</li> <li>• Critical discussions (learning from each other).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Striving Readers staff.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building sustainability within the school.</li> <li>• Developing an exit plan.</li> </ul> <p>Learning Forward standard: <b>Outcomes.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Striving Readers staff.</li> </ul>

# IDEAS

demonstration, practice, feedback, and coaching (Joyce & Showers, 2002) as we fashioned these adult learning sessions. Before on-site coaching of the coaches, we presented the research and provided definitions and rationale, followed by demonstration, practice, and simulated coaching and feedback.

For example, we used the Stages of Concern process, a part of the Concerns-Based Adoption Model, to identify staff concerns. Based on the results, coaches learned to conduct a change intervention called the “one-legged interview” in working with teachers and principals. Project staff provided ongoing on-site follow-up for the coaches. Coaches discussed and shared feedback and application of the new skills during the bimonthly seminars.

## TOOLS AND OUTCOMES

As we planned and implemented the professional learning for Striving Readers literacy coaches, we found that selected constructs and metaphors from change science could be applied in several ways. We used the same constructs that we were introducing to the coaches to plan, monitor, and evaluate implementation of the program. Two particularly useful tools were the Implementation Bridge and Stages of Concern.

## IMPLEMENTATION BRIDGE

The metaphor of the Implementation Bridge (Hall, 1999; Hall & Hord, 2015) provides a visual way of understanding that change is a process, not an event. See illustration above. *Creating* new programs and practices does not automatically lead to their being used. In most cases, change is not a simple matter of leaping across a chasm. Change takes time and needs support. Just as bridges can be short or long, so can be the *implementing* phase. Only with implementation success will



there be the possibility of long-term *sustaining* of the new way.

This Implementation Bridge metaphor turned out to be useful in several ways with the literacy coaches. They are engaged in moving across a bridge as they learn and grow as coaches. The teachers in their schools are moving across bridges as they learn new literacy approaches, and each school as a whole has to complete the journey across an Implementation Bridge. Also, the professional learning program for the coaches has had its own Implementation Bridge as all coaches, schools, and teachers learn and apply new knowledge and skills.

## STAGES OF CONCERN

One of the first change process constructs introduced to the coaches was Stages of Concern (Hall & Hord, 2015). We use this construct to illustrate aspects of the professional learning process for coaches. The Stages of Concern construct and data provided professional learning content for the coaches. The same construct was used for assessment of program progress and in evaluating implementation.

This research-verified construct describes the different feelings and perceptions that people have as they experience change processes. Seven Stages of Concern have been identified

that in combination comprise four major areas of concern:

- **Unconcerned** (*Stage 0*): There is little concern about the change and more concern about other things.
- **Self-concerns** (*Stage 1 Informational, Stage 2 Personal*): There is a need for more information about the change and worry about how making the change will affect someone personally.
- **Task concerns** (*Stage 3 Management*): Attention is on the time and tasks required to implement the change.
- **Impact concerns** (*Stage 4 Consequence, Stage 5 Collaboration, Stage 6 Refocusing*): The focus is on effects and consequences of use of the change on students or teachers.

Here are examples of concerns facing coaches and teachers in the program.

## COACHES

Coaches began their first school year as a literacy coach with more intense self-concerns: “I am missing my class of students.” “I wonder if I can succeed as a coach?” As they became engaged in their new role (moving out on their own Implementation

# IDEAS

Bridge), task concerns became more intense: “There is so much to do!” “I can’t do everything that I see needing to be done.” Only as the second year of experience unfolds did they have more impact concerns: “I am seeing my teachers now apply more of the assessment strategies, and I am better at providing them with models that they see being effective.”

## TEACHERS

At first, coaches could see that teachers had self-concerns about meeting and working with them: “How do I know that she is not evaluating me?” Coaches learned and practiced how to respond in ways that addressed teacher self-concerns.

Throughout, coaches have regularly assessed teachers’ Stages of Concern and used this information for making Concerns-Based interventions with individuals, teams, and across the whole school.

One outcome is that coaches now regularly think in terms of Stages of Concern and what it means for their actions, as well as for their own development.

## IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS

We also used data from the coaches’ Stages of Concern to adjust the professional development program and evaluate program implementation progress. The group showed changes in concerns from year one to year two, with fewer self-concerns and an increase in task concerns. This pattern suggests that there is positive growth in the first two years, but coaches will need more time and support to progress to having intense impact concerns.

An indicator of the program design’s success design is that Stage 5 Collaboration concerns were intense for both years. This demonstrates that the coaches were forming their own professional learning community.

## NEW LITERACY FOR COACHES

Overall, our experience with developing a professional learning program for schoolwide literacy coaches has been instructive. Each of the coaches has learned new knowledge and skills. They have seen positive growth in many teachers and administrators. We have found Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning to be a guiding framework for developing the coaches program.

The program contents about change process, organizations, and leadership are a new literacy for our coaches. Coaches now think in terms of Stages of Concern and what it means for their actions. And we have had plenty of aha moments along the way. For example, it takes time for coaches to learn new skills, and it takes time for teachers to become comfortable in working with the coaches. In a recent coach meeting, one coach said, “My second year as a coach is more solidified and defined. I am having more instructional conversations, and I am seen as an instructional leader at my school.”

Beverly Davison, a Clark County School District English language arts department chair, has seen the impact on teacher practice after working with a Striving Readers coach. “Those teachers were able to internalize the strategies and became better equipped to teach their students,” Davison said. “I noticed that the English language arts teachers were also sharing the engagement strategies with other teachers after they learned them.”

Laura Schwartz, a former Striving Readers literacy coach in Clark County, said she felt validated in her teaching and practice. “The opportunity to coach made an impact on student learning, but also how teachers think about teaching and their practice. Teachers appreciated our professional development in technology, foundational reading, writing, and

standards-based instruction. When the grant finished, I walked away as a coach and as a teacher knowing I made a positive impact on administration, teachers, and students. Having our own time for professional learning with the coaches was critical to the success of our coaching practices.”

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