

# Tools *for* LEARNING SCHOOLS

LEARNING FORWARD'S VISION: EXCELLENT TEACHING AND LEARNING EVERY DAY

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## COACHES' MULTIPLE ROLES SUPPORT TEACHING AND LEARNING

By Joellen Killion and Cindy Harrison

Since Learning Forward published the first edition of *Taking the Lead: New Roles for Teachers and School-Based Leaders* (2006), we've seen the body of evidence grow in support of coaching as a valuable strategy for promoting teaching quality and student success. Because coaching programs vary among districts and even among schools within a district, coaches' roles also vary greatly. Despite differences among roles, the coach's primary purpose is to improve student learning by providing direct support to teachers.

### CLARIFYING ROLES OF COACHES

Framing how coaches work with their colleagues is a major decision that school and district leaders face when they implement coaching to improve teaching and student learning. In the second edition of *Taking the Lead*, which draws on our research and work with hundreds of coaches, we discuss the importance of articulating coaches' complex roles before implementing coaching programs. We revisit the 10 coach roles that we identified in the first edition and elaborate on those definitions. We also offer leaders guid-

ance in creating conditions supportive to coaching.

Administrators clarify coaches' roles so that the daily work of coaching remains focused on achieving coaching program goals. While some variation is useful to respond to unique needs within each school, the greater the consistency

district coaching programs can show in coaches' purposes and work, the more likely those programs will realize positive results for improving teaching and learning. When district or school leaders implement coaching, they may consider how to use the coaching framework (Killion, Harrison, Bryan, & Clifton, 2012) to determine the purpose and goals of the program. It helps leaders

and planning committees specify which roles are most appropriate to achieve stated goals. In addition, planners may use the summary role framework to clarify what a coach does each day as well as the decisions he or she makes with a supervisor. The summary role framework is included in this issue of *Tools for Learning Schools* (pp. 5-7).

Naming the roles gives everyone a common language with which to consider the work of coaches. A recent report on coaching suggests that teachers demonstrate greater willingness to work with a coach when the coach's role is clear (The University of Florida Lastinger Center, Learning For-

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ward, & Public Impact, 2016). So, when leaders and staff are presented with coaching opportunities characterized by clearly defined roles, they may better understand the nature of potential support, be better able to examine their individual needs, and align roles and actions of coaches most effectively. Likewise, by using the language associated with each role, coaches can be specific in partnership-agreement meetings with principals and teachers about the scope of their work and options for support. Coaches can also account for their time by role and work with other educators to consider their highest priorities for coaches (see tool on pp. 8-9).

### TEN ROLES OF COACHES

The 10 roles of district or school-based coaches are:

1. Resource provider;
2. Data coach;
3. Instructional specialist;
4. Curriculum specialist;
5. Classroom supporter;
6. Learning facilitator;
7. Mentor;
8. School leader;
9. Catalyst for change; and
10. Learner.

Each of these roles is distinct; in real life, coaches typically fill multiple roles simultaneously. The number of roles is not what makes coaching difficult, rather it's the agility required of a coach to serve successfully in different roles. Juggling the demands of multiple roles and responsibilities; different individual teacher needs, goals, learning preferences, and personalities; classroom dynamics, daily schedules, and diverse curricula can be taxing. Coaches need to be flexible, yet consistent. Having support of strong fundamentals — clear coaching program goals, defined coach roles, knowledge and skills to fulfill those roles — allows coaches to act with consistency and accountability. Agreements between coaches and the administrators responsible for overseeing their work help to clarify roles and responsibilities (see pp. 15-19).

#### Learning Forward BELIEF

More students achieve when educators assume collective responsibility for student learning.

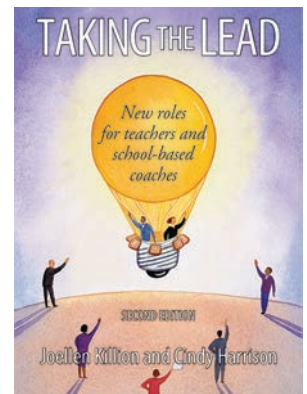
### CURRICULUM SPECIALIST: EXPLORING ONE ROLE IN DEPTH

All coaches typically have some responsibility to assist teachers with implementing the adopted curriculum. This role is particularly important for coaches serving in content-specific roles such as literacy or math coaches. Because many teachers have been consumers rather than developers

of curriculum guides, their understanding of curriculum may be limited. Content standards are evolving and becoming more rigorous. As standards shift student expectations from knowing about the content to applying the content in authentic ways, teachers may need help developing deeper understanding of the confluence of written, assessed, and taught curricula and content.

**Understanding curriculum.** Curriculum specialists support teachers in meeting their responsibilities to apply the adopted local- or state-adopted curriculum so that students achieve expected outcomes. Coaches sometimes begin their work with teachers with a fundamental lesson: understanding what a curriculum is and what it isn't. Curriculum describes the concepts and skills, the sequence in which they are taught, the key benchmarks for demonstrating achievement of the content—essentially what students are expected to learn — and when they are expected to learn it. Some districts and states specify broad curricula and then design assessments to measure student progress on and achievement of the standards. Districts, too, may provide teachers with pacing guides that define the specific point during a school year at which certain skills are taught and how they align vertically and horizontally within and across curricula. Even when districts provide such curricular tools, teachers are still responsible for accessing, understanding, and using them in the design of units of instruction and associated lesson plans. To do this, coaches as curriculum specialists support teachers in making decisions about the content of their lessons (see tool on pp. 11-13).

**Deepening content knowledge.** A significant responsibility of a coach is reinforcing and building teacher content knowledge so that the curriculum is accurately applied. Coaches may use this information to plan appropriate professional learning, model lessons, or co-teach. Or, working directly with teachers, they may share results-based coaching conversations to decide on the standards-based goals for student learning. Curriculum-specialist coaches help teachers sequence learning so that individual lessons complement and contribute to deeper learning of the key concepts. They encourage teachers to think about the developmental nature



The second edition explores 10 roles in depth and offers guidance to support coaching work effectively.

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of curriculum — what came before and what comes after specific units and lessons — and to determine the level of understanding required. Coaches as curriculum specialists also help teachers use the curriculum as they analyze assessment data and, when needed, determine how to fill gaps in student learning and to enrich or accelerate student learning.

**Spanning multiple disciplines for authentic learning.** College- and career-ready content standards emphasize the authentic application of learning across disciplines. Coaches help teachers integrate content from multiple disciplines so that student learning experiences are more meaningful and relevant to their daily lives. For example, secondary coaches may ensure that teachers of all curricular areas understand how to embed literacy within their content areas. A coach might use a unit-planning, lesson-planning, or weekly-planning template as she works with individual teachers or teams. Coaches might also help teachers unpack a standard to identify the essential knowledge and skills embedded within the standard and to determine how to sequence instruction on the knowledge and skills to ensure that students meet the standard.

**Designing assessments to measure learning outcomes.** Finally, coaches might use assessment frameworks to guide teachers in designing assessments that accurately measure the expected student outcomes at the appropriate developmental level. Many schools and districts have large-scale and benchmark assessments that measure student progress on and achievement of the defined curriculum. Coaches help teachers use the curriculum to (a) design assessments of student learning, including common assessments; (b) adapt their daily curriculum to make necessary adjustments to personalize and enrich student learning to ensure all students succeed; and (c) use the curriculum as a basis for formative and summative assessment of and reporting on student learning.

School- and district-based coaches have complex, multifaceted roles. Their broader goal, though, is simple: Coaches positively affect student learning by providing direct support to teachers. To increase the likelihood of success in your coaching program, use the following tools to define coaching roles, manage coaches work, and to support coaches in roles in which they need to help teachers implement an adopted curriculum with deep understanding of content, learning outcomes aligned with standards, and various forms of assessments.

**REFERENCES**

**Killion, J., Harrison, C., Bryan, C., & Clifton, H. (2012)** *Coaching matters*. Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.  
**The University of Florida Lastinger Center, Learning Forward & Public Impact. (2016).** *Coaching for impact:*



**“The role of curriculum specialist was especially intriguing to me, as I have been called on to spend a great deal of my time this year in this capacity. ... The primary function of this role is to ensure implementation of adopted curriculum, but I am struggling with the earlier stage of [the district’s] adopting curriculum, at least in a manner that communicates more clearly to teachers. Understanding the scope and sequence of and having access to district curriculum that is housed in many different locations have been particularly difficult.”**

— Aaron Knodel,  
*NBCT Instructional Coach, Sheyenne High School,  
 West Fargo Public Schools, West Fargo, North Dakota*

*Six pillars to create coaching roles that achieve their potential to improve teaching and learning.* Gainesville; Oxford, OH; Chapel Hill, NC: Authors. Available at <https://learningforward.org/docs/default-source/pdf/coaching-for-impact.pdf/>. ●