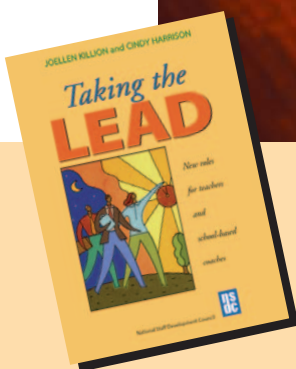




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**Taking the lead:
New roles for teachers
and school-based coaches**

By Joellen Killion and Cindy Harrison

This guide to school-based coaching is written by two educators who have developed coaching models and worked closely with dozens of coaches. They explore the complex, multifaceted roles played by teacher leaders and school-

based coaches, as well as examining district and school expectations, hiring practices, and deployment of these educators.

A companion CD-ROM includes dozens of tools that teacher leaders and school-based coaches can use in their work. One of those tools is a new set of Innovation Configurations for school-based coaches.

NSDC, 2006. Item B352.

Price: \$36, members; \$45, nonmembers

Web OF SUPPORT

STRENGTHENS THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOL-BASED COACHES

BY JOELLEN KILLION

To increase student achievement, schools and districts are hiring teachers as leaders to support peers in improving teaching and learning. Their roles are variously called coach, school-based staff developer, instructional specialist, or program facilitator. These new school leaders are respected as competent teachers, have demonstrated their success with students, and have credibility with both the school's principal and staff.

Yet though many have exceptional teaching skills, they seldom have a deep understanding of working with

adult learners, facilitating professional learning, and taking a broad view of the educational system. To develop their relationship with peers, their knowledge, and their facilitation and leadership skills, school-based coaches benefit from initial and ongoing professional development and support from professional associations, state departments of education, districts, and local schools.

Providing appropriate support helps school-based coaches transition from teachers of students to leaders of teacher learning. As leaders responsible for providing intensive support to their colleagues, school-based coaches are better equipped for success in this new role if they, too, have ample support.

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Professional associations, such as the National Staff Development

Council and content-area associations, share responsibility to guide the success of school-based coaches. NSDC supports states, provinces, local school districts, schools, and coaches themselves. In 2004, NSDC formed a school-based staff developer learning community that allowed more than 50 school coaches and others to participate in a national network and learning experience. Within that year, members spent six days learning a variety of skills related to building relationships and understanding professional learning, skills most classroom teachers who move into the role of school coach do not have opportunities to learn.

In addition, with a grant from the Wachovia Foundation's Teachers and

Support helps school-based coaches transition from teachers of students to leaders of teacher learning.

Excerpted from a new NSDC book.

Teaching Initiative, NSDC helps state departments of education design and provide support within their state to school coaches. The NSDC Coaches Academy provides ongoing support to coaches in state-supported academies for coaches in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, New Jersey, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Virginia, with six more states to be added. Other opportunities include learning strands within statewide conferences devoted to coaches and online resources.

STATE-LEVEL ORGANIZATIONS

Coaches integrate into their work an understanding of federal and state education policy, state improvement policies, and assessment programs. State-level organizations, such as state departments of education and states' NSDC affiliates, can work closely with coaches to keep them informed about changes in state policy and can provide networking opportunities.

State-level organizations provide primary support systems for coaches in two ways. The first is to ensure that schools and districts using state or federal funds for coaching meet established quality standards. Standards might address coaches' qualifications or preparation, their work, performance expectations, and performance evaluation.

The second is to ensure that coaches working within schools have access to information about state education policies related to accreditation systems, school improvement planning, content standards, and student assessment programs, knowledge fundamental to coaches' work. When

teacher leaders serving as coaches in schools have up-to-date information in these areas, they can more effectively help teachers and principals improve student learning.

Some states, including Florida, Virginia, and Georgia, have initiated statewide programs to support coaches. The Florida Association for Staff Development works closely with the Florida Department of Education and other organizations that have trained reading coaches that are assigned to elementary and middle schools within the state. The Virginia Staff Development Council has designed its own academy for school coaches based on NSDC's model and is currently offering the academy to coaches from several school districts. Georgia has established academic coaches, state-funded resource people who work in low-performing schools. The state set clear expectations for selecting, training, and deploying these coaches. In addition, Georgia created a certification program for master teachers who serve as academic coaches. The Georgia Department of Education works closely with the Georgia Staff Development Council to ensure that coaches complete the council's Academy for Staff Developers (levels I and II) and the state's own coaches academy. (See the December 2006 issue of *The Learning System* to learn more about how these organizations work together to promote coaching in Georgia.)

State-level professional associations can join other state policy makers to develop policies that help ensure the success of school coaches. They must recognize coaches as new school leaders who need ongoing professional development, are eager for cutting-edge information related to their work, and want to network with other coaches in their region or state.

SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Primary support for coaches

comes from the school district. Districts typically decide how to implement coaching, determine how to fund positions, begin the hiring and selection process, set parameters for coaches' work, provide coaches with professional learning opportunities, and design evaluations of coaching programs. Districts also work with principals to ensure that coaches' daily work focuses on improving teaching and learning and work with teacher unions to clarify the role of teachers serving as coaches.

Implementation. A district typically decides the scope of coaches' work and their tenure. For example, will coaches concentrate on certain disciplines or programs, or will they be generalists? Will they work in one or more schools? Will each school have a coach? May coaches serve in schools in which they taught? Do coaches work with individual teachers or with teams of teachers?

The length of a coach's tenure is another district decision. Some districts establish a term limit of five years to ensure that coaches do not become so distant from classroom practice that they lose touch with the reality of teaching. In setting limits, districts must consider the cost of developing and monitoring new coaches and how long it takes coaches to develop competence. Many districts find that coaching can be a viable step in a district's leadership succession plan as coaches then progress to administrative positions.

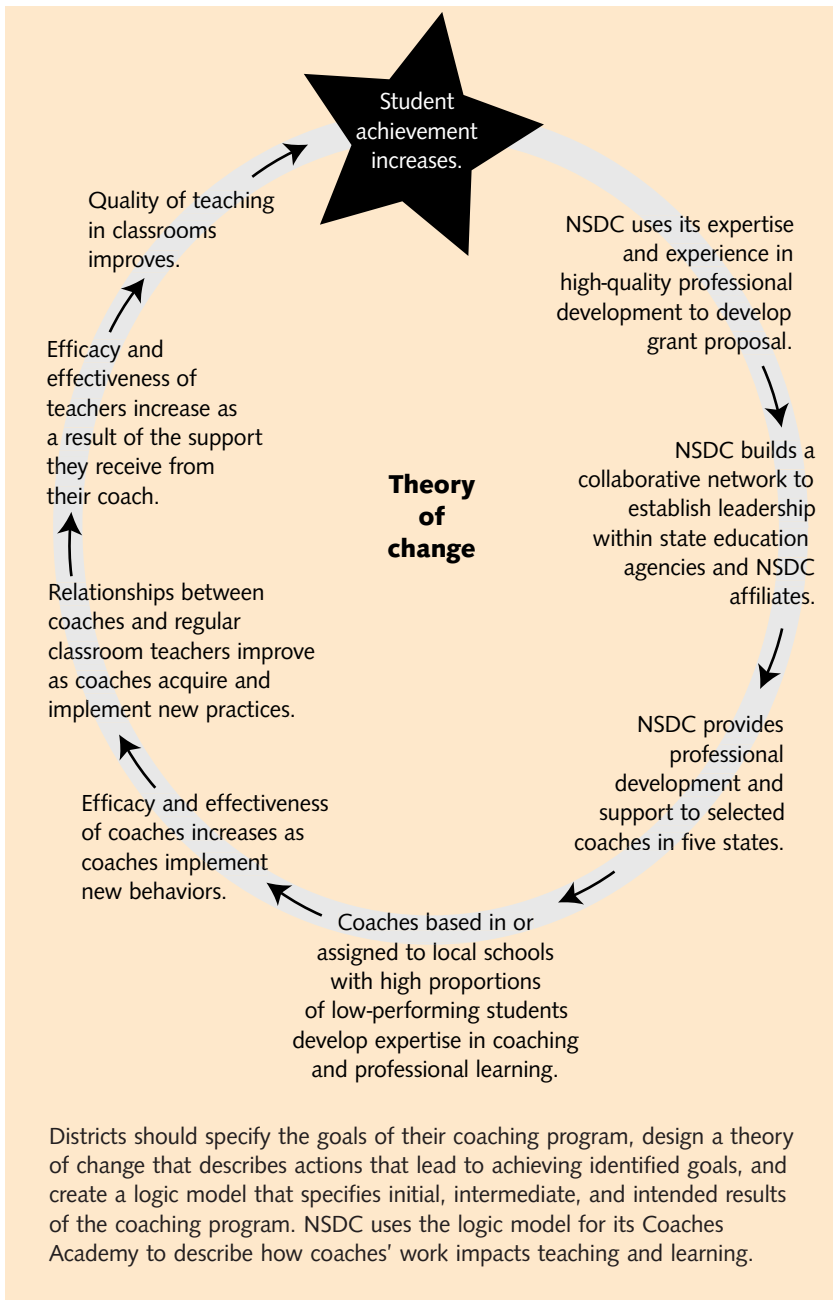
Funding. School districts determine how to fund coaching positions. Often, available funding impacts decisions about whether a coach works in one or more schools or serves full time or part time.

Placing coaches in schools is a significant investment for which districts expect a return in terms of student achievement. Most districts implement coaching programs as an intervention for underachieving schools

Join us

In Denver, Colo., July 15-18 for the third annual NSDC Summer Conference, "Converging Forces for School-Based Professional Learning." Register in early 2007 on the web at www.nsd.org.

Placing coaches in schools is a significant investment.



- Possess a deep understanding of the district's and school's curriculum and assessment program;
- Have demonstrated success as a leader of learning; and
- Have sound communication and organization skills;
- Are able to reflect and engage others in reflecting;
- Have success as a facilitator of professional learning; and
- Are committed learners.

Parameters. Districts establish clear parameters and policies, especially regarding confidentiality, for coaches' work. With no direct responsibility for students, it is easy for school administrators to pull coaches away from work with teachers for administrative, clerical, or substitute teaching tasks. Districts should guard against this to protect their investment in improving teaching and learning.

Districts set clear guidelines for confidentiality. Teachers who believe their interactions with coaches could be used for evaluation are less likely to seek a coach's assistance.

When confidentiality is unclear, coaches can be placed in an uncomfortable position between their principal, who most often is their immediate supervisor, and the teachers they serve.

In Adams 12 Five Star Schools in Thornton, Colo., the Educators' Association has a clause in its contract protecting data originating in teachers' observations of peers from being used in any evaluation.

Professional learning. Yet another critical area for decisions within a district is the extent of coaches' professional development. For example, do coaches receive intensive training before they begin their work as coaches and then meet weekly, biweekly, or monthly throughout the school year for extended learning?

Districts support coaches by iden-

and, as a result, use Title I or II funding to hire and place coaches in schools not meeting Adequate Yearly Progress. Occasionally, an individual school shifts staffing ratios to create a position for a coach.

Hiring and selection.

Occasionally, the district hires coaches and assigns them to schools, but most often, the school and district share in the selection. Schools follow an explicit selection process and involve other teachers in selecting a coach.

The selection committee establishes clear criteria to produce the best candidates.

For example, a district might seek coaches who:

- Have demonstrated success as a classroom teacher;
- Have a minimum number of years of experience;
- Are respected by peers and viewed as leaders;
- Are trusted by the principal and staff;

tifying a coach “champion,” someone to provide day-to-day support, intervene when policy and practice vary, and facilitate sensitive interactions between coaches and their principals. For example, if the coach’s position is designed to work with teams of teachers, and a principal assigns the coach to work with small groups of struggling students, the coach may ask a district “champion” to facilitate a conversation with the principal.

Evaluation. Districts also establish school coaches’ performance eval-

uations. Many districts have unsuccessfully attempted to use teacher evaluation systems for school coaches, but their work is more aligned with principals’ work, with responsibilities for improving instruction and student learning.

Coaches, as do all employees, require a regular performance evaluation guided by a set of performance standards.

Districts also evaluate the coaching program. Coaching is a significant investment and requires rigorous eval-

uation both to improve the program and to assess its impact. Districts frequently measure success by reviewing student performance — an insufficient guide. Districts can expect two outcomes from coaching: increased student achievement and a culture of professional collaboration that increases teachers’ sense of efficacy, job satisfaction, and teaching performance.

Districts should look at both areas, and perhaps others, to assess coaching’s impact.

1. Professional associations

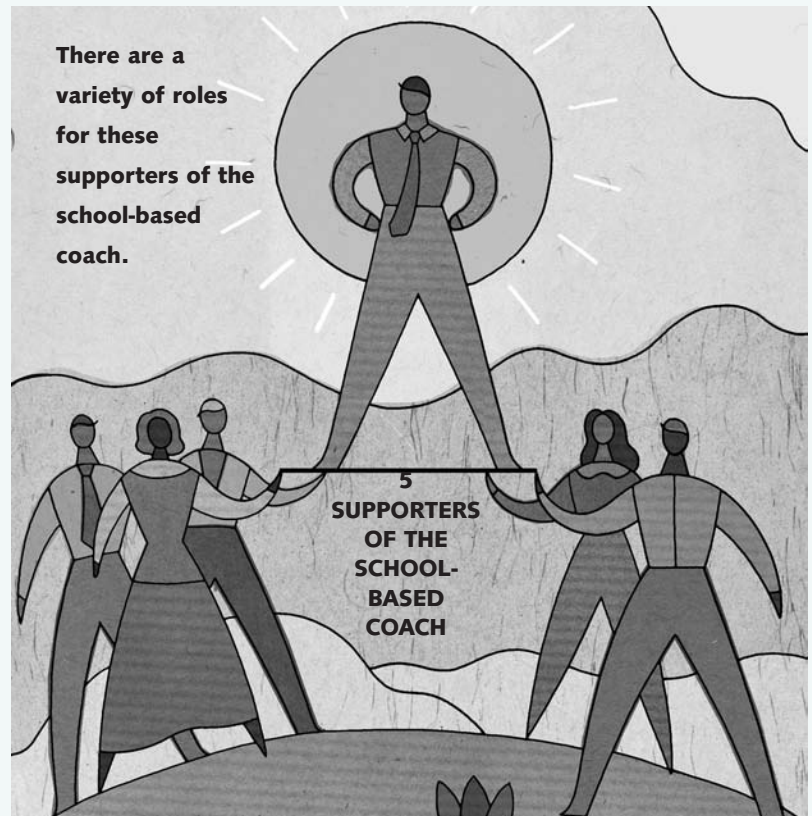
- Spearhead efforts in states to design and develop support systems for coaches.
- Serve as a clearinghouse for research.
- Provide access to stories of success.
- Provide networks for school coaches and those who support them.
- Recommend policies, practices, and resources.
- Monitor implementation of standards of quality.
- Include strands for school-based staff developers in statewide conferences.

2. State-level organizations

- Recommend state policies regarding the qualifications, work, performance expectations, and evaluation of coaches.
- Include strands for school-based staff developers in statewide conferences.
- Provide coaches access to information related to state education, school improvement, and data.

3. School districts

- Establish policies and procedures regarding the selection, deployment, work, performance expectations, and evaluation.
- Set criteria for and select coaches — moving hiring from school to district.
- Provide initial and ongoing professional development for coaches and principals in whose buildings they will work.
- Designate a coach “champion” who will assist, intervene, and provide personal support to coaches.



- Conduct evaluation of the coaching program.
- Establish work calendar that includes time for preparation and initial and ongoing professional learning.

4. Schools

- Select coaches based on competence and demonstrated expertise.
- Provide opportunities for the coach to contract with the principal and teachers.
- Ensure that coaches have opportunities to meet with teachers and principals.
- Provide working conditions including workspace, resources, and equipment for coaches to meet with success in their work.

5. Principals

- Introduce the coach to staff to establish credibility and describe the coach's work.
- Explain the agreement between coach and principal about teachers' access to the coach's services and confidentiality.
- Meet regularly with the coach to solve problems, address issues, and discuss his or her work, its impact, and ways to improve it.
- Support the coach's participation in national, state, and districtwide professional development.
- Tap district resource personnel, including the coach “champion” to resolve conflicts.
- Adhere to district and state policies regarding coaching.

The chart on p. 14 shows an NSDC model for describing how coaches affect teaching and learning.

PRINCIPALS

Once the district identifies a pool of coaches, the principal, often with

help from other school staff, selects the coach who best matches the school's needs.

Principals and coaches share equal responsibility for a coach's success. When the principal and coach are aligned in working to meet identified

school improvement goals, students and teachers benefit.

The principal is responsible for reaching a mutual agreement and clear understanding with the coach about the scope of the coach's work and confidentiality. The district may

set some of these expectations. However, if the district has not made some working agreements explicit, the principal works collaboratively with the coach to determine whether the coach will work primarily one-on-one with teachers or whether the coach will work mainly with teams of teachers. The principal makes the agreement public for all parties to review to reduce hidden agendas or misunderstandings.

The first public presentation of the coach to staff is a critical point. Whether the coach is a longtime staff member or new to the school, the principal's introduction signals his or her support for the coach. The principal may address several points in the introduction:

- The coach's work parameters; what the coach will and will not do;
- How teachers access coaching services;
- The coach's experience and areas of expertise;
- Ways the coach can help individuals and small groups; and
- Ways to share feedback about coaching services.

Coaches work closely with the principal and key staff leaders to determine which teachers, grade levels, or departments to work with.

Principals arrange teaching schedules that include common planning time to encourage and facilitate coach and staff interaction. The principal commits to district and state policies, as well as local agreements related to coaching. For example, if a coach's work is focused on teams of teachers, principals must honor that agreement and

not ask the coach to meet with individual teachers or to teach students. Principals respect coaches as profes-

Resources

- *Teachers Teaching Teachers* (T3), an e-newsletter published eight times a year by NSDC, shares information about the work of school-based coaches. For more information, visit the members-only area of the NSDC web site, members.nsd.org.
- The International Reading Association's position statement regarding the work of reading or literacy coaches is available at www.reading.org/downloads/positions/ps1065_reading_coach.pdf.

sionals and recognize that while there might be short-term gains by having a coach teach a small group of students, the longer-term and more significant impact of coaches working with teams of teachers will produce more substantial results. Principals protect coaches from distractions and forces that can pull them away from their primary work.

Principals also support coaches by ensuring that they engage in continuous professional learning. Principals often encourage coaches to join other teachers in professional development programs that align with school goals. Coaches may, along with their principals, engage in district professional learning experiences. Principals encourage coaches to attend district

coach meetings and other forms of professional development because they recognize that time invested in developing coaches exponentially increases their results.

Principals schedule time at least biweekly to meet with the coach to review their agreement and review the coach's work to determine any need for alternate strategies of support or areas of focus, to problem solve, to ensure coaches have access to the information and resources they want to do their job well, and to monitor the coach's work for performance evaluations and coaching program evaluations.

To be successful, principals' support is visible rather than invisible, tangible rather than intangible. A coach whose principal provides a small budget to purchase resource materials, for example, is more supported than one whose principal tells her, "I support you."

Working conditions that help ensure the coach's success include access to a private meeting place when needed, a telephone, computer, instructional and curricular resources, and storage for professional resources.

CONCLUSION

For coaches to be successful in their work and to contribute to improving teaching and student academic success, they depend on key stakeholders — associations, state agencies, districts, schools, and principals. Supporters help coaches understand what support is available, know how to access services and people, and give them permission to ask for support when needed. Many hands working together weaving a web of support help coaches feel efficacious, effective, and efficient in their work, and most importantly contribute to a culture of professional collaboration that helps students reach academic success. ■

Coaches need access to a private meeting place, telephone, computer, storage space, and resources in instruction and curriculum.