



RESEARCH REVIEW

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SURVEY SHEDS LIGHT ON THE STATE OF COACHING

Coaching is a popular and promising form of professional learning, with research evidence of its effectiveness for teachers and students (Kraft, Blazar, & Hogan, 2018). Surprisingly little is known, however, about the current landscape of coaching.

To close this knowledge gap, Learning Forward recently partnered with Digital Promise to survey more than 1,000 U.S. educators about their experiences with coaching. We aimed to learn more about the prevalence of coaching, financial and logistical support, and perceptions of its value. This information can provide a useful benchmark for coaching investments, against which we can plan and measure the outcomes of our ongoing advocacy and capacity-building efforts with districts and states.

Collaborating with Digital Promise, which works to build equity, access, and quality of learning opportunities to people at all life stages, helped us reach a national network of coaches, educators, and administrators committed to professional learning.

The report from the project, *Prevalence of Coaching and Approaches to Supporting Coaching in Education* (Van Ostrand, Seylar, & Luke, 2020), was released last month.



METHOD

Digital Promise and Learning Forward collaborated to design an online survey using validated questions from the Digital Promise Dynamic Learning Project, an effort to build the capacity of school-based coaches, especially in helping teachers incorporate technology into their teaching. The survey link was emailed to educators and education leaders last October, and 1,246 participants representing all 50 U.S. states responded.

Overall, 83% of respondents reported being engaged in coaching in a school or district, either in a coaching capacity or as a coachee. The remaining respondents were not engaged in coaching and therefore not included in subsequent analyses.

The majority of respondents in the analysis are coaches, followed by administrators, educators, and “other,” which included curriculum coordinators, instructional specialists, and special education support staff.

The majority of respondents are female, have more than 15 years of experience in K-12 education, and are distributed fairly evenly across grade levels K-12. Slightly more serve in school-based roles (55.1%) than district-based roles (44.9%).

WHO HAS ACCESS TO COACHING?

All survey respondents reported on the demographic composition of their school sites.

More than two-thirds of the respondents are from schools or districts with more than 40% of students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch, perhaps because they access Title I dollars for coaching support. Consistent with prior research on coaching prevalence, as reported in the December 2019 issue of *The Learning Professional*, more respondents worked in suburban

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and urban schools than rural schools (Learning Forward, 2019).

COACHES' WORKLOADS

Responses about the number of roles and the number of educators supported indicate a full workload for coaches. Many coaches reported serving in other roles in addition to their role as a coach: 40% of school-based coaches are also classroom teachers, as are 17% of district-based respondents. Nearly half of school-based coaches serve more than 16 teachers at one time, while 65% of district-based coaches serve more than 16 teachers concurrently.

FREQUENCY AND DURATION

More than half of teachers (55%) reported that they spend less than 30 minutes per session with their coaches; 40% spend 30 to 60 minutes per session, with the remaining 5% spending more than 60 minutes per session. This finding is concerning, given that the **Implementation standard** of Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning states that professional learning must be of significant duration to have a meaningful impact.

FUNDING

The survey results reveal that funding consistency is a challenge. Among respondents, fewer than half of coaches are funded at consistent rates: Only 43% of district-based administrators reported that coaches are funded multiyear, and 37% percent of school-based administrators said the same of their coaches.

While this is not a surprise, documenting such hurdles is important as we advocate for more sustained

ADDITIONAL COACHING RESOURCES FROM LEARNING FORWARD

- *Coaching Matters*, by Joellen Killion, Cindy Harrison, Chris Bryan, and Heather Clifton. Available at learningforward.org/store or order by phone at 800-727-7288.
- *Taking the Lead*, by Joellen Killion and Cindy Harrison. Available at learningforward.org/store or order by phone at 800-727-7288.
- *Coaching for Impact*. Available at learningforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/coaching-for-impact.pdf.
- December 2019 issue of *The Learning Professional* on coaching. Available at learningforward.org/journal/coaching.

funding for professional learning. The **Resources standard** in the Standards for Professional Learning outlines why consistent and meaningful investment in funding, human capital, and other areas is essential to high-quality professional learning.

SATISFACTION WITH COACHING

More than three-quarters of educator respondents find coaching valuable, ranging from somewhat to highly valuable. A similar percentage of educator respondents find coaching to have a positive impact on their practice.

However, for teachers, levels of satisfaction varied according to how much time teachers spend with their

coaches. Overall, teachers who spend more time with their coach are more likely to rate the coaching as valuable. For example, of those who found coaching valuable, 43% reported working with their coaches weekly while only 13% reported quarterly meetings with their coaches.

However, there is a troubling disconnect between these findings and those reported above that show fewer than half of teachers meet with their coaches at least biweekly and the majority spend less than 30 minutes per session with their coach. This calls into question whether coaching is receiving enough support and investment to make meaningful changes in teacher practice and student achievement.

Furthermore, Learning Forward and others have found that meaningful and engaging professional learning experiences can help support educator job satisfaction, particularly when those experiences support collegiality, reflection, and collaboration (Learning Forward, 2012), as reflected in the **Learning Communities standard** and the **Learning Designs standard**.

But if coaching experiences are not frequent and sustained, it may be difficult for them to meet these standards and therefore have a positive impact on teachers' job satisfaction, well-being, and retention.

COACHES' PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Almost 80% of coaches say their professional development is either very effective or somewhat effective. However, the survey question did not give a definition of "effective," leaving it up to respondents' interpretations. Encouragingly, more than three-

quarters of district-based administrators and school-based administrators reported that professional learning for coaches is multiyear and tailored to coaches' needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The report makes several recommendations for coaching efforts moving forward, including three that are particularly relevant for *The Learning Professional's* audience:

1. Teachers should have frequent and consistent time with their coaches.
2. Principals and district administrators should monitor coach workload and protect their time to be in classrooms and reflective time with teachers so they can have the greatest impact.
3. Long-term investments in coaching could help maintain

continuity from year to year, and federal and state funds dedicated specifically to coaching could make implementing this high-impact professional learning easier to sustain.

Overall, the results present a mixed picture of how well respondents' coaching experiences align with the Standards for Professional Learning. There are reasons to be hopeful about the prevalence and impact of coaching. But there is also room for improvement, particularly when it comes to making the investments necessary to ensure coaching is meaningful and effective.

We at Learning Forward are continuing to work toward ensuring those resources — financial, logistical, human, and other — are available to all coaches and teachers, and we applaud all of you who are doing the same.

REFERENCES

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- Learning Forward. (2012).** *Build higher levels of job satisfaction with professional learning.* Available at learningforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/build-higher-levels-of-job-satisfaction-presentation.pdf.
- Learning Forward. (2019, December).** Instructional coaching by the numbers. *The Learning Professional*, 40(6), 84.
- Van Ostrand, K., Seylar, J., & Luke, C. (2020).** *Prevalence of coaching and approaches to supporting coaching in education.* Washington, DC: Digital Promise. ■



Effective coaches impact student outcomes

Learning Forward's Instructional Coaches Academy provides comprehensive learning and ongoing guidance for coaches and the leaders who support them. We give coaches the knowledge and skills they need to support great teaching and learning.

Develop your coaches by developing skills in:

- Building relationships
- Leading professional learning
- Coaching individuals and teams
- Leading data-driven conversations
- Conducting classroom observations
- Applying a cycle of continuous improvement

Give your coaches the skills they need to excel.

For more information, visit consulting.learningforward.org or contact Tom Manning at tom.manning@learningforward.org.

