



COACHES NOTEBOOK

Joellen Killion

HELP YOUR COACHING PROGRAM ACHIEVE ITS POTENTIAL

For coaching to deeply transform practice, school system leaders must build, remodel, and maintain a foundation that ensures coaching will succeed.

While coaching programs have expanded and become a common approach to continuous learning for strengthening professional practice and student success, their infrastructures still need work. For coaching to deeply transform practice and push through to results for students, school system leaders must build, remodel, and maintain a foundation that ensures coaching will succeed.

In the new edition of our book *Coaching Matters* (Learning Forward, 2020), Chris Bryan, Heather Clifton, and I explore the elements that ensure coaching is successful. Extending the framework we presented in the first edition, we explain how school and system leaders can build, remodel, and evaluate their coaching programs based on a set of critical elements.

Taken together, these elements serve as the scaffold that any leader can use, whether implementing coaching for the first time, seeking to enhance a coaching program, or wishing to evaluate the effectiveness of a coaching program.

Here, we preview two of those elements: a defined purpose and goal for the program and a clear role for a coaching champion.

Surprisingly, many existing coaching programs are missing the first element of a defined purpose. This foundation should drive any subsequent decision on the selection and preparation of coaches, the specific roles they enact, and the work they do.

For example, a coaching program focused on implementing a new math curriculum is likely different in form and function from one focused on Tier 1 instruction. The math coaches' roles are likely to include curriculum specialist and instructional specialist more than resource provider or mentor.

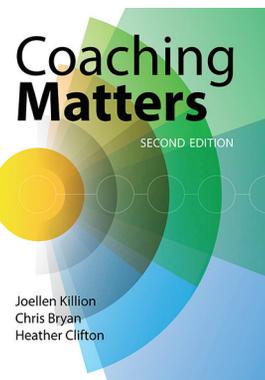
When hiring coaches to support math curriculum implementation, then, selection is likely based on proven expertise in math instruction. Preparation will likely include emphasis on the knowledge, skills, and understanding of a specific math curriculum, as well as curriculum implementation, facilitating professional learning, and planning for instruction.

On the other hand, in a coaching program focused on ensuring equity and quality in Tier 1 instruction, coaches will have as their primary purpose student success in all content areas. Selection is likely based on proven instructional expertise with an emphasis on adapting and differentiating instruction to meet student needs.

Because coaches will serve in the role of instructional specialist, data coach, learning facilitator, and classroom supporter, their preparation and ongoing professional learning should address those skills.

Of course, some school and system leaders want coaches who can fulfill both types of coaching described above, and many coaches do. Clarity about the multifaceted coaching program's purpose is still essential and gives direction to the numerous decisions those coaches make each day about how to interact with their clients, as well as decisions about how to focus coaches' professional learning.

In addition to a clearly defined purpose, coaching programs need a clearly defined role for the coach champion who oversees the program. Coach champions make sure coaching is aligned to the core purpose and goals and that coaches meet the expectations of their role.



***Coaching Matters, Second Edition*, is available in the Learning Forward Bookstore, learningforward.org/store.**

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for combining the best of all learning platforms and virtual tools, without abandoning the importance of social interaction in schools.

KEY ACTIONS

FOR EDUCATION LEADERS:

- Explore teaching and learning tools systemically to identify options for innovation.

- Hold technology platforms and tools to high standards.
- Build educators' capacity in leveraging technology for student learning and professional learning alike.
- Advocate for technology systems and solutions that will advance district goals.

Clearly, this year's back to school isn't what we all grew up with or

anticipated. Yet, despite the many challenges educators face right now, we are hopeful that these challenges will reveal new avenues to excellence and equity in teaching and learning. Our greatest hopes are inspired by the educators we see leading the way every day. Learning Forward is here to support you at every step. ■

BEING FORWARD / Linda Chen

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What are some of the biggest needs that remain in professional learning, aside from the immediate needs caused by the pandemic?

The biggest needs are at the intersection of adult and student learning. Professional learning has to be about adults feeling they have agency and empowerment through knowledge and experience, but it must also be inextricably tied to impact on student learning. It is our responsibility to ensure that every student thrives through the experiences we provide, and are able to do grade-level work and beyond to prepare them for their future.

Even in the context of this pandemic, there is quite a bit of focus on technology skills. How do we engage in professional learning — largely in a new mode virtually — to ensure that, as a result of our connection as adults, we can fully leverage opportunities to greatly advance student learning within this environment?

We have the opportunity to connect with students in a different way, in a more personalized and inclusive way, because we are teaching them directly into their homes. We

have the ability to know them better and tailor work through the efficiencies technology can provide.

What readings or resources have had a large influence on your career?

There are so many, but I'll start with the earliest reading that influenced my thinking on racial equity. During an undergraduate sociology course at the University of Washington, I was assigned a short article called "White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack" by Peggy McIntosh.

That piece impacted me and ignited the fire in my belly, if you will, around the importance of equity in education. It wasn't just the article itself; it was the rich discourse that my professor carefully designed and facilitated around it.

A few other more recent books include *Courageous Conversations About Race* by Glenn E. Singleton and *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* by Zaretta Hammond.

Another area that is important in my work is instructional leadership, and one reading I recommend is *Student-Centered Leadership* by Viviane Robinson. It centers on research showing that, of all the things principals

do, leading teacher learning and development has the biggest impact on student learning.

As a systems leader, I deeply believe that principals are the greatest lever to ensuring the success of every student at scale, particularly those students who have been historically underserved and marginalized.

What was one of your own most meaningful professional learning experiences?

By far, the best professional learning experience for me was when a staff developer came into my classroom and did demo lessons with my students. That showed me what was possible with my own students and showed me how to enact in my own classroom what I was reading and discussing in professional development.

That experience was powerful in the context of all the other professional learning pieces that allowed me to read, learn, discuss, reflect, teach, and ultimately have a positive impact on my students, which is what professional learning is all about. ■

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They have the vital task of ensuring that the infrastructure of the coaching program is sound, coaches have the necessary preparation and ongoing professional learning they need to succeed, there are both formative

and summative measures in place to continuously assess and evaluate the coaching program, and coaches have coaching and other forms of support to succeed in their roles.

In most cases, the responsibilities of a coach champion — often a central

office staff member — are added to an already-long list of duties.

For coaching to have its desired effect, the overall program must be sound and fully functioning. Clear roles and responsibilities are the first step. ■