



COACHES CORNER

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HOW TO COACH WHILE PERFORMING 'OTHER DUTIES AS ASSIGNED'

As schools grapple with teacher and substitute shortages, coaches are being called on to make up the difference between staffing needs and available educators.

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I'm hearing from coaches everywhere that they are feeling especially stressed and overwhelmed right now. It's not because of their coaching roles per se, but because of the "other duties as assigned" that are included in many coaches' job descriptions. If you are overloaded and questioning how much longer you can continue like this, you are not alone. You can get through this period with some straightforward strategies and support from your peers.

As schools grapple with teacher and substitute shortages, coaches are being called on to make up the difference between staffing needs and available educators. Many coaches are taking on duties from covering classes to serving as the class's teacher of record, from extra bus and recess duty to new committee assignments.

As master coach Heather Clifton pointed out to me recently, coaches are vulnerable to those "other duties as assigned" because they are not officially committed to a group of students waiting in a classroom yet they so clearly understand the needs of teachers and students and how to address them.

For the vast majority of coaches, this additional deployment into classrooms has not been accompanied by a shortened list of coaching responsibilities. It is truly *and* other duties, not *instead of*; so the work piles up.

How can you accommodate these increasing demands? Not by adding more things to each day's to-do list! Instead, take a strategic approach, carefully evaluating what is and is not possible, what items need to be prioritized, and, most importantly, how to manage others' expectations.

Here are some timely tips that experienced coaches have shared with me about navigating this challenging time:

Meet with your principal or supervisor to review expectations and ask for guidance in prioritizing work. Ensure that your supervisor understands the time-intensive items on your list, and then ask for his or her input in prioritizing those items, as well as input about which smaller to-do's can be shifted to others or temporarily put on hold. Being a good team player does not mean accepting more responsibilities without question; it means collaborating for the good of all involved.

Be transparent with teachers about your additional responsibilities and your priorities. Do so in a way that is informative and matter-of-fact, so they don't perceive it as complaining. Make your schedule more visible. If you have to shift the schedule of a coaching session, let the teacher know why. If you're a person who enjoys social media, consider tweeting or posting about your own learning and growth as a classroom teacher, recess monitor, or other new role.

Shift your coaching focus from individuals to teams. Or even better, shift to coaching



team leaders. Empower team leaders to continue the work and processes you've established with the team and coach into developing their coaching and leadership skills.

Streamline your coaching. Create protocols and processes that lead to desired results and can be followed consistently even when you are not present to lead the work. Then trust people to follow them or adapt them as necessary.

Establish alternative sources of support for teachers, especially less experienced teachers. It might feel rewarding to be needed by the teachers you support, but there is a hefty price for such gratification. Instead, build a web of support for teachers by connecting them with peers and other support staff with complementary expertise. This has the added benefit of building lasting networks of collegial interactions that benefit students as well as teachers.

As you juggle your many responsibilities right now, remember that flexibility is a key asset of effective coaches. One of our longstanding commitments is to be role models of how to learn and grow through challenges.

Set boundaries for your work and your time. If you've always been on call for your teachers, now is the time to define the kind of emergency for which a teacher should expect an immediate response from you. Clarify what constitutes a realistic immediate response. Define these for yourself and communicate them to teachers, and then consistently adhere to them. Changing habits (yours and others') takes time, but you've spent time helping teachers

become more intentional and reflective about their practice. Now you have an opportunity to give them space to practice that learning in a more independent way.

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You may secretly find yourself enjoying your new roles and tasks, especially working with students directly again. If so, you might feel a sense of divided loyalty or even guilt about that enjoyment. Don't worry about it. Relax and take it all in. Your heart is big enough to love more than one facet of your work, especially when you aren't overwhelmed and stressed by it all. ■

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The Equity Practices standard focuses on pedagogy to honor and address each student's needs. Professional learning that addresses equity practices helps educators focus attention to understanding students' lived experiences to build trusting relationships.

Learning to influence practice should help educators understand that the schools — and students — we left in March 2020 are not the same today. Society changed. People changed. The impacts of race, racism, and the blatant inequity that exists became clearer. Student agency blossomed into a mighty force that has to be reckoned with, not squashed, suppressed, or dehumanized.

The Equity Drivers standard focuses the learning designer on inspiring educators' critical self-reflection. Equity-centered professional learning requires a higher level of personal scrutiny than professional learning that is focused on

the delivery of academic content alone.

In my research, I have found that race-centered professional learning is most effective when the facilitators enter with the plan to understand and negotiate the emotional nature of race and understand that the application of learning is a long-term process for the facilitator and the participants (Ward, 2019).

This long-term process requires reflection. When that reflection is combined with academic and social and emotional content, the result is a beautiful combination of learning elements coming together to serve the equity needs of students, families, and staff.

The Equity Foundations standard requires the learning designer to base learning on the solid footing of an equitable vision for teaching and learning. Equity is rooted and grounded in the painful recognition that meeting all students' needs is not the current

standard. In fact, when the term "all" is used, it often erases the complexity of existing as a minoritized person in an inherently racist school system.

How will you apply these standards in your equity-centered professional learning this year? Start by designing your personal reflection time to make space for the planning necessary to do this work with attention to the beliefs, practices, and conditions to center students' needs during this stressful time.

REFERENCES

Brown, F. & Crow, T. (2021). Equity is front and center in revised standards. *The Learning Professional*, 42(3), 8-9.

Ward, A.M. (2019). *Researcher as witness: Pedagogical and curricular decision making in race-centered professional learning*. repositories.lib.utexas.edu/handle/2152/75801 ■