



HERE WE GO

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This issue is both a celebration of coaches and a reminder that they deserve support. Nurturing others in times of stress is an honor, and often deeply rewarding. But it is also exhausting.

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COACHES, WE SEE YOU

It's difficult to find reliable data about the number of educators employed as instructional coaches. Part of the challenge is that coaches have a wide variety of job titles and responsibilities. Learning Forward members list more than 125 coaching-related job titles, and coaches have so many diverse responsibilities that defining a coach's role is a necessary first step for any coaching program (Killion et al., 2020).

Coaches' responsibilities have only increased since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the face of new instructional modes, teacher absences, and other challenges, coaches now find themselves serving as classroom substitutes, bus duty monitors, helpers for student behavior issues, and more.

All of this additional work is occurring during a time of unrelenting stress and trauma. One study found that district leaders' top three concerns this school year are related to mental health, not just for students, but for teachers and principals (Diliberti & Schwartz, 2022). Another study documents that about one-third of teachers and principals have faced verbal harassment from students and about 15% have experienced actual violence (McMahon et al., 2022).

Though not named, coaches and other professional learning staff are reflected in those statistics, too. They are in the classrooms where traumatized students are lashing out, in professional learning sessions and informal conversations with staff who are struggling and anxious, and among the educators whose own burnout and mental health concerns are soaring. And too often, their work — and their challenges — go unacknowledged.

As my colleague Sharron Helmke (2021) has written, "Coaching's impact on [teachers'] successes is often left unspoken. That can leave coaches feeling underappreciated or even unsure about whether we're making a difference at all."

At the heart of this issue of *The Learning Professional* is the recognition that coaches are on the front lines, just like teachers and principals. Authors show how coaching is helping teachers and leaders meet the challenges of the pandemic so students can thrive. They share stories of how coaches are pivoting and learning from their unexpected duties.

But this issue isn't just for coaches. It's also for the principals, superintendents, and other leaders whose support is essential to coaches' work. It's for the teachers who can benefit from understanding the unique contributions coaches make to their development. And it's for all professionals who want to see examples of sustained, job-embedded professional learning.

This issue is both a celebration of coaches and a reminder that they deserve support. Nurturing others in times of stress is an honor, and often deeply rewarding. But it is also exhausting. Coaches, we see you. We appreciate you.



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