



THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL

THE LEARNING FORWARD JOURNAL

Just-in-time support for coaches pp. 26, 30

A pandemic pivot that improved coaching p. 40

Leaders benefit from coaching, too pp. 9, 52, 56

Tool: Where to start when everything feels urgent p. 72

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Building relationships



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Selecting learning designs

VOICES 7



5 **HERE WE GO**

By Suzanne Bouffard

Coaches, we see you.

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.

8 **CALL TO ACTION**

Coaching is embedded in Standards for Professional Learning.

By Tracy Crow

Begin exploring the revised Standards for Professional Learning with a look at two standards where coaching and coaches take center stage.

9 **LEARNING LEADERS**

Coaching plays an essential role in school leadership.

By Baruti K. Kafele

A school is more likely to succeed when it has a principal, assistant principal, and instructional coaches working together toward the same goals.

11 **DISTRICT PERSPECTIVE**

The right questions can sharpen our focus on equity.

By Nader I. Twal

A series of questions can prompt powerful coaching conversations across multiple professional learning formats.

13 **GROWTH & CHANGE**

Coaches help us become better selves and better educators.

By Jennifer Abrams

Coaches help us do the hard work to become the person we want to be to help students become the people they want to be.



14 **WHAT I'VE LEARNED**

Stay true to coaching principles, even in high-pressure situations.

By Shannon Bogle

A few key coaching moves can make a big difference in low-performing and other high-stress situations.

16 **MEMBER SPOTLIGHT**

Coaching support connects educators in isolated communities.

By Julie Donohue-Kpolugbo

Learning Forward membership helps this literacy consultant and coaching coordinator respond to her district's needs.

RESEARCH 17

18 **RESEARCH REVIEW**

By Elizabeth Foster

Myth-busting research sheds light on what works.

Researchers use evidence to refute six common myths about teacher professional learning.

20 **DATA POINTS**

Keeping up with hot topics.



FOCUS 21

COACHING FOR CHANGE

- 22 How 'tugboat coaching' propels one district forward.**
By Joellen Killion, Jeanne Spiller, and Brenda Kaylor
Kildeer Countryside School District 96 uses data to adapt its coaching program to respond to shifting currents and evolving needs.
- 26 Where coaches learn to coach.**
By Suzanne Bouffard
Through Learning Forward's Coaches Academy, coaches learn the skills to grow into their new roles.
- 30 In professional learning for coaches, one size doesn't fit all.**
By Kathryn Murrow and Betsy Leis
Orange County Public Schools in Florida tailors professional learning to coaches' roles and needs.
- 36 Strengths-based coaching supports teachers during COVID.**
By Karye Wells and Elizabeth Foster
A strengths-based coaching program for middle and high school teachers is helping educators respond to the demands and stresses of the pandemic.
- 40 Becoming a teacher again made me a better coach.**
By Ashly Skiffington
A coach reassigned to a virtual classroom during the pandemic shares what she learned about



p. 44

- the kinds of support teachers need and how coaches can provide it.
- 44 With the right strategies, coaches can leverage co-teaching.**
By Ryan Gillespie and Jennifer S. Kruger
A continuum of co-teaching strategies helps coaches and teachers navigate the complex process of shared instruction.
- 48 'Data' shouldn't be a dirty word:**
Coaches can use data to increase learning, engagement, and hope.
By Jim Knight and Michael Faggella-Luby
Data should be embraced, not shunned, because it can improve student learning and well-being, accelerate professional growth, and build teacher morale.
- 52 5 guiding questions build a strategic approach to leadership coaching.**
By Sarah Birkeland, Richard Lemons, Isobel Stevenson, and Robert Villanova
To see a return on their investment in coaching, district leaders should align coaching with an overall district improvement strategy.
- 56 Principals rediscover their joy and purpose through coaching.**
By Kay Psencik
Adding coaching to high-quality professional learning for principals increases the impact of their learning experience.



p. 56

IDEAS 61

62 Model classrooms can amplify coaching's impact.

By Jason Margolis
and Jill Harrison Berg

Model classrooms spread best practices and give teachers an opportunity to be lead learners among their colleagues.

66 Identity is at the heart of facilitating for equity.

By Candice Bocala
and RoLesia Holman

Transformative learning starts with transforming ourselves, using a three-stage approach to build and strengthen relationships across difference.



TOOLS 71

72 Where do you start when everything feels urgent?

Use an effort-to-impact matrix.
By Sharron Helmke

The effort-to-impact matrix is a simple but valuable tool for setting priorities and taking action.

UPDATES 75

76 The latest from Learning Forward.

- CEO to retire
- Standards kickoff week
- Conference keynotes
- Education funding
- Coaches Academy

80 THROUGH THE LENS of Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning.

81 AT A GLANCE Celebrating coaches.

ISAY

Atul Gawande

Surgeon, author, and public
health researcher



“E verybody needs a coach.
The greatest in the world

needs a coach [because] you don't recognize the issues that are standing in your way or, if you do, you don't necessarily know how to fix them. And the result is that somewhere along the way, you stop improving. [What great coaches do] is they are your external eyes and ears, providing a more accurate picture of your reality.”

— Excerpted from TED
talk, October 11, 2018,
[www.youtube.com/
watch?v=fCsGxPQw1s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fCsGxPQw1s)

ONLINE EXCLUSIVES learningforward.org/the-learning-professional

- **5 steps to maximize literacy coaching.**
By Emily Blinn and Sally Valentino Drew
- **Coaching practices to stem the looming principal exodus.**
By Lindsay Prendergast, Piper Nichols, and Angela Morton
- **A systemic approach to coaching in small, rural districts.**
By Kim Day
- **Professional learning should blend SEL and equity.**
By Jacy Ippolito and Rachelle Savitz



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HERE WE GO

Suzanne Bouffard

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.

Suzanne Bouffard (suzanne.bouffard@learningforward.org) is editor of *The Learning Professional*.

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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THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL

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INSPIRE. EXPRESS. ADVOCATE.

VOICES

BETTER EDUCATORS, BETTER SELVES

"Schools should be places where everyone — not just students — learns, matures, and develops. We should not solely be in the child development business. We should be in the human development business," Jennifer Abrams writes (p. 13).

To meet the goal of an excellent education for every student, educators have to keep growing. Coaching can help us grow to become better educators and better selves, this issue's columnists tell us.



Coaches are first and foremost learners, and they require the support and investment that every educator in the system deserves.

Tracy Crow is chief strategy officer at Learning Forward.

CALL TO ACTION

Tracy Crow

COACHING IS EMBEDDED IN STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

As Learning Forward releases the revised Standards for Professional Learning this spring, coaches may be wondering, “Where are coaches in the standards, and how do standards impact us?” Coaching is embedded throughout all 11 standards, and coaches play a key role in implementing each of them.

To begin an exploration of the revised standards, here are two where coaching and coaches take center stage.

THE IMPLEMENTATION STANDARD

The standard: *Professional learning results in equitable and excellent outcomes for all students when educators understand and apply research on change management, engage in feedback processes, and implement and sustain professional learning.*

Why it matters for coaches: Coaches are often a school or system’s chief implementation leaders for professional learning, with the collaboration of principals and central office leaders. They are responsible for supporting their colleagues in making sense of new knowledge and skills and moving new information into practice. The Implementation standard encapsulates the way that effective coaches understand and apply the principles of change and growth.

Coaches who embody the Implementation standard recognize that educators approach new learning and initiatives from different perspectives and with differing levels of readiness. They support each educator according to his or her individual needs, offering multiple avenues to practice and apply new strategies and skills, leading to meaningful and sustained implementation.

TO LEARN MORE:

Learning Forward is releasing Action Guides for educators in a range of roles, including coaches, to specify their responsibilities and the actions they’ll take to bring standards to life in schools and systems. Learn more about each standard at **standards.learningforward.org**.

THE LEARNING DESIGNS STANDARD

The standard: *Professional learning results in equitable and excellent outcomes for all students when educators set relevant and contextualized learning goals, ground their work in research and theories about learning, and implement evidence-based learning designs.*

Why it matters for coaches: To provide on-the-ground support for educators’ learning and growth, coaches must continually develop and share knowledge about evidence-based practices, emerging research, and how to use local data to inform improvement efforts. For example, effective coaches help educators understand the student data they’ve collected and use it to identify an area of focus for learning and improvement.

Using both the data and an understanding of learning theories, they help educators see how they might achieve their desired learning outcomes and help create a learning plan. When

Continued on p. 10





A principal has endless responsibilities, but some of the most important ones are to teach, inform, and inspire staff members so that they are continually and consistently growing, developing, and improving.

Baruti K. Kafele (principalkafele@gmail.com) is an education consultant, author, and retired principal.

LEARNING LEADERS

Baruti K. Kafele

COACHING PLAYS AN ESSENTIAL ROLE IN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

As a former athlete, I understand firsthand the importance of good coaching. Coaches are leaders. Their leadership improves individual players and the team as a unit. Imagine if an athletic team didn't have a head coach. The team would lack direction, guidance, structure, systems, and a central source of motivation and inspiration.

A school principal is like the head coach of the school, and the principal's leadership is every bit as important to the instructional team as an athletic coach's is to a sports team. A principal has endless responsibilities, but some of the most important ones are to teach, inform, and inspire staff members so that they are continually and consistently growing, developing, and improving. There's a tremendous amount of coaching inherent in the principal's leadership.

Like athletic coaches, though, principals can't do that work alone. They must be supported by a cadre of leaders, including assistant principals and instructional coaches, who nurture the growth of teachers and other staff. Effective coaching must be embedded in their roles, too, and in the culture of the school as a whole.

THE PRINCIPAL AS HEAD COACH

School administrators have so many responsibilities that we often lose sight of the coaching role. Early in my school leadership career, I would find myself in reactive mode because I thought that responding to crises and new stimuli was my role — it's what principals do. I had to grow into the coaching role, into empowering others and reimagining the culture of the school.

During my administrative internship, my mentor said to me, "The purpose of your supervision of your teachers will be their continued improvement in instruction."

That message didn't resonate with me at the time, but it did when I received my first student assessment results as a principal, which were not good. Slowly but surely, I became a coach of my staff. Over time, that work shifted the culture, and that shift freed me up to become the principal that I not only needed to be, but also wanted to be: an instructional leader.

Coaching must be a priority that can never be violated. Students cannot learn optimally if their teachers are not performing optimally, and teachers cannot perform optimally without direction and support. Although teachers can benefit from other forms of professional learning, direct coaching in the context of a solid, collegial relationship with a leader is one of the best ways to learn. An athlete can read books, attend camps, and view videos, but none of this will equate to effective direct coaching. The same is true for educators.

THE ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL AS ASSISTANT COACH

The assistant principalship is the most misunderstood and underused position in all of education. There is no universal understanding or agreement about what an assistant principal does. It is my unwavering contention that the assistant principal should be involved in all aspects



of school leadership. The assistant principal should be as well-rounded a leader as possible, in part because the assistant principalship is often a steppingstone to the principalship.

Coaching is one important way for assistant principals to prepare for the principalship. Assistant principals should be additional instructional leaders in their schools, and I remind assistant principals that if they supervise and evaluate teachers, it is nonnegotiable for them to be effective “assistant coaches.” Taking on this role helps their current school and the school they will one day lead as principal.

It therefore must be a priority of the principal to coach assistant principals and, in turn, help them develop their own coaching skills. As convenient as it is to relegate assistant principals to full-time disciplinarians or cafeteria monitors, that model will not result in optimal performance of children in classrooms. The roles of principal and assistant principal as coaches can never be minimized. You show me a school where principal and assistant principal coaching are either minimal or nonexistent, and I will show you an underperforming school.

THE INSTRUCTIONAL COACH IS VITAL, TOO

School leaders are not the only ones who can provide modeling, support, and guidance. Instructional coaches have that responsibility as well. Instructional coaches are valuable resources for teachers and leaders.

Assistant principals should be additional instructional leaders in their schools, and I remind assistant principals that if they supervise and evaluate teachers, it is nonnegotiable for them to be effective “assistant coaches.”

They have the training, skills, and time (when coaching is implemented well) to support professional growth and improvement in their schools. But for them to achieve their potential, principals and assistant principals must work in close concert with them, with a common vision and mutual respect.

From my observations, this is often not the case. When I speak about instructional leadership, administrators frequently talk with me publicly and openly about whatever questions, concerns, and challenges they are facing. But instructional coaches approach me privately because many of them don’t feel comfortable expressing their concerns with their administrators present. It suggests that they don’t feel fully supported by their principals, and that’s a problem for everyone in the school. Of the concerns and challenges coaches express to me, two of them are particularly salient and relevant to school leaders.

First, because coaches are not administrators, some teachers don’t respect coaches’ expertise or feel they

need to participate in coaching. In situations like this, school leaders have to set clear expectations for teachers’ engagement in coaching, and, to do so, they must understand why teachers might not see the value instructional coaches bring. For example, some teachers are reluctant to work with someone in the same bargaining unit, whom they see as a peer. This is why it is vital for principals to reinforce coaches’ credibility.

Second, instructional coaches often feel they are working in isolation from the administrative team, in part because school administrators are so overwhelmed that they have little time to collaborate with them. For this reason, I tell administrators that there must be an ongoing collaboration between instructional coaches and administration. Not only does this help coaches do their jobs, but it provides administrators with vital information about what goes on in classrooms.

WORKING AS A TEAM

For instructional coaching to work optimally, it must be an intentional and integral component of the school culture. No one person can do that alone. Just as an athletic team is more likely to win when it has a head coach, several assistant coaches, and position coaches who work with specific athletes on targeted skills, a school is more likely to succeed when it has a principal, assistant principal, and instructional coaches working together toward the same goals. ■

CALL TO ACTION / Tracy Crow

Continued from p. 8
they embody the Learning Designs standard, coaches are well-positioned to serve as facilitators of various learning designs and support their colleagues in developing essential knowledge and skills.

STANDARDS HELP COACHES GROW

In approaching their engagement with Standards for Professional Learning, among coaches’ most important responsibilities is prioritizing their own growth. To fulfill the roles

described above, coaches are first and foremost learners, and they require the support and investment that every educator in the system deserves. An excellent first step is in-depth study of the revised Standards for Professional Learning. ■



DISTRICT PERSPECTIVE

Nader I. Twal

THE RIGHT QUESTIONS CAN SHARPEN OUR FOCUS ON EQUITY

Coaching is one powerful way to ask questions and create a supportive space for processing the deep thinking they provoke.

Stories have the power to humanize those around us. They provide insight and data that numbers alone can't communicate. I have often spoken of this power in the professional learning I lead, and I did so in the last issue of this journal. But what I never realized until recently was how deeply my own story, rooted in my upbringing and my family's culture, shaped my approach to education and leadership.

Growing up, when my siblings and I would do something that brought the family honor, my parents would say (in Arabic) that we "lifted their heads." The saying connotes that our choices and our success caused them to stand taller, knowing that what they sowed in us reflected well on the family. My family's Jordanian culture, like many Middle Eastern cultures, is deeply steeped in honor and shame. Each individual has a responsibility not only for himself or herself, but also for the family name.

What surprised me was not that I had internalized this value, but how it expressed itself in my professional life. My district had contracted with an outside organization to engage us in two years of professional learning on design thinking. My colleagues and I were working through a challenge about how to temper our identities as experts in the field with our need to be lead learners who may not have immediate answers.

During one of our discussions, the topic of professionalism came up, and I spoke with great passion about professional attire, explaining my belief that how we choose to dress at work communicates our respect (or lack thereof) for the work environment. Though many at the table agreed, including my leader at the time, she asked me one question that caused me to pause: "Do you think you feel as passionately about this as you do because of your culture?"

She then told her own story of being married to someone from a different culture who was horrified when she would go to the grocery store in her "house clothes." She explained that as a minoritized man, her husband never felt he had the luxury to dress down for fear of feeding negative stereotypes that people from his background are unkempt and "less than." She articulated how this helped her see her own privilege, as a woman who fit the mainstream culture's definition of "normal" or "appropriate."

That conversation made me realize that so many of the standards and rules that we hold dear may be influenced by our cultural biases. It was a moment of critical consciousness, a moment that caused me to consider how my race, culture, and home of origin have shaped my beliefs about teaching and leadership, including the ways that honor and shame have framed many of my ways of being at work.

That moment transformed the way I view my own role as a district administrator and equity



TO LEARN MORE

Visit www.liberatorydesign.com to learn more about Liberatory Design and download the resource guide.

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leader because it provoked three dimensions of what adult learning expert Jack Mezirow (2003) called transformative learning: critical self-reflection (internal awareness of values, biases, and beliefs), critical discourse (meaningful conversations to challenge perspectives), and praxis (change in practice).

Mezirow (2003) described transformative learning as “learning that transforms problematic frames of reference — sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets) — to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change” (p. 58). But how are we to surface those frames of reference? I was lucky that my leader asked me the question she did. How can I — and you — ask questions that encourage such thinking?

Coaching is one powerful way to ask questions and create a supportive space for processing the deep thinking they provoke. Meaningful coaching conversations start with inquiry, and I have found the following coaching stems helpful in moving me from theory to inquiry to practice in my own equity leadership journey.

The questions, which can be used in multiple professional learning formats, are built on and adapted from a resource guide from the developers of Liberatory Design, an approach to addressing

equity challenges and change efforts in complex systems (Anaissie et al., 2021).

Critical self-reflection:

INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY CONSIDER...

- Who am I? How do I define myself to others? Why might I prioritize these identity markers?
- How do I understand the role and work of a leader? How might this perspective be shaped by my culture?
- What blind spots might I have, and who can I talk to to surface them? How does that manifest in my actions? How does it impact others?

Critical discourse:

COLLECTIVELY CONSIDER...

- Based on my identity, what are my and our team’s relationships to opportunity and institutional power? How does that relate to the opportunity and power of the people most impacted by our work?
- How might cultural norms be triggering unconscious biases in our work?

Praxis:

INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY CONSIDER...

- What inequitable patterns of

experience and outcomes are playing out in our system? How do we know? Are we only using quantitative data, or are we also considering “empathy data” (the deeper understanding we gain from people’s stories, contexts, or lived experiences) from the field?

- What might need to change in the way I do my work for those who are least served by our system to be seen and heard?

These questions can lead to powerful conversations, but those conversations will not take root and create impact if our coaching moments remain transactional, with one person transmitting information to another. Rather, they should evoke deep thought about underlying assumptions and beliefs that frame how we see the world. It is a harder path, but the outcomes tend toward equity. These conversations, realizations, and changes take time, but they are worth the investment.

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GROWTH & CHANGE

Jennifer Abrams

COACHES HELP US BECOME BETTER SELVES AND BETTER EDUCATORS

Schools should be places where everyone — not just students — learns, matures, and develops.

When I work with school leaders and their teams, I always share this belief: Growing into who we can become is a lifelong journey that never ends. Usually, there is pushback. Some will ask, “Shouldn’t education leaders be there already? That’s why we got the job, right?” Others will say, “I have so much on my plate as it is. How could I find time to grow?”

While I agree there is a fundamental level of competence and professionalism that should be expected of all school leaders, I also believe that our development as professionals is never complete. We should always aspire to be better selves and better educators.

We should model for those we teach and lead what it means to be a work in progress and stretch at our edges. Schools should be places where everyone — not just students — learns, matures, and develops. We should not solely be in the child development business. We should be in the human development business (Abrams, 2021).

In this ongoing process of growth, coaching is invaluable. Working with a coach can and should be considered for the following reasons.

THE WORK WE DO IS TOO COMPLEX TO GO IT ALONE.

The work of teaching and leading is complex and nuanced. Sometimes we get lost in the day-to-day work, and we don’t see what we don’t see. Sometimes we get stuck in one perspective when we should take a bigger view, from the trees to the forest to the canopy.

Coaches can help us move from micro to macro and back again. In the midst of all the laws, mandates, strategies, protocols, and discussions we need to navigate, they can help us make time to pause, reflect, and redirect. Coaches can also help us understand our overwhelm, find some structure in our perceived chaos, and help us remember what our goals were to begin with.



WE CAN AND SHOULD CONTINUE TO GROW, EVEN AS WE GROW MORE EXPERT IN OUR FIELD.

Often as we move into our fifth or 10th or maybe even our 20th year in a profession, many of us consider becoming a coach but often don’t think about finding a coach for ourselves. Coaching offers an opportunity to have a thought partner who holds a safe space for us one-on-one as we find our voice around a given topic, no matter if we are novice or veteran in our positions.

We all can grow cognitively, psychologically, and spiritually as we move past being able to grow physically. And we must, especially in education, where the challenges are always evolving. Working with a coach offers us a sounding board, someone who gives us space to find our voice and work through our challenges so we can learn to approach our work with others with more strength and understanding.

Continued on p. 15

Jennifer Abrams (jennifer@jenniferabrams.com) is an independent communications consultant and leadership coach.



How do we proceed with intentionality and follow the conventional wisdom of “going slow to go fast” when the need is urgent and the requirements are pressing?

Shannon Bogle is director, networks & academy at Learning Forward.

WHAT I'VE LEARNED

Shannon Bogle

STAY TRUE TO COACHING PRINCIPLES, EVEN IN HIGH-PRESSURE SITUATIONS

If you have ever worked in a school that is being overseen by an organization not linked to the district (e.g. a state receiver or external operator), you understand the unique challenges that teachers and leaders in such schools face every day.

One of the challenges is that state mandates and externally imposed structures can compromise a teacher's sense of autonomy, as they leave teachers with little to no say in the instructional process. Because teacher efficacy has a meaningful effect on school and student outcomes (Donohoo et al., 2018), that's a problem for everyone involved.

Instructional coaches have an important role to play in this situation because it is our job to build teacher efficacy and capacity or, as a school leader once told me, to help teachers improve enough to “coach yourself out of a job.” But how do we as coaches help teachers build their sense of efficacy while maintaining the vision of the leaders we work with? And how do we proceed with intentionality and follow the conventional wisdom of “going slow to go fast” when the need is urgent and the requirements are pressing?

In my experience, there are a few key coaching moves that make the most impact in low-performing and other high-stress situations.



Focus on one small but highly effective change idea at a time. When deciding what to change, place all the teacher needs on an effort-to-impact matrix (see p. 72). Start with low-effort, high-impact changes to get quick wins and build teacher confidence, then move into high-effort, high-impact changes. When considering impact, be sure to ask yourself: How or to what degree will this change impact students?

Home in on implementation of the change idea. There is very little time to collaboratively plan with teachers, so focus your limited time on discussing how the identified change fits into the lessons teachers are planning. It can be tempting to address other urgent student and staff needs, but staying focused now can free up time and energy later.

Provide quick, actionable feedback several times a week. When trying to make instructional changes on a tight timetable, it is essential for teachers to see whether what they're doing is working and, if not, to change it. Consider using a coaching-in-the-moment model, in which the coach intervenes during instruction in the least invasive way possible.

This model includes whisper coaching, stepping in to model a portion of the lesson, asking a strategic question to students, or using predetermined signals to alert the teacher of an action they may want to add or abandon.

And remember, when you visit classrooms, never skip the debrief. Even if you only have a few minutes, you can use the following questions to help teachers identify actionable next steps:

- What did you do differently?
- What difference did it make for students?
- What did you learn from this?
- What will you do with this learning beginning tomorrow?

Share feedback from state or external walk-throughs with teachers.

Often, those who oversee the school's improvement initiatives conduct walk-throughs without teacher engagement. This can leave teachers wondering if the work they have put in is being noticed, and it deprives them of valuable information.

Even when teachers do see or hear the feedback, it can feel overwhelming or disconnected from their direct work. Connect the dots by reviewing the upper-level feedback with teachers and discussing action steps that fit into the coaching work you are already doing.

My experience also suggests something to avoid doing. When we are under pressure to get immediate results, coaches can be tempted to take over the instruction or decision-making by telling teachers what to do or doing

LEARNING FORWARD'S COACHES ACADEMY

Learning Forward's researched-based Coaches Academy fosters the development of skills that allow coaches to address organizational needs while meeting teachers where they are by fostering relationships based in mutual respect and resulting in collaborative learning that improves outcomes for all students. For more information, visit services.learningforward.org/services/coaches-academy/

the all-important reflection work for them. But this ultimately has a negative impact on a teacher's sense of efficacy. It also masks the problem so when the coach is deployed elsewhere, that problem could potentially re-emerge and get worse.

As you are working with educators in high-pressure situations, remember to stay true to the key principles of effective coaching. And remember that

Learning Forward is here to support you through our Coaches Academy and other resources and programs.

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GROWTH & CHANGE / Jennifer Abrams

Continued from p. 13

COACHES HELP US PROJECT THE SELVES WE WANT TO BE.

Educators do far more than deliver content; we model for students what it means to be fully human and to live out our values. Students are watching us and learning from how we respond and react to the situations and people around us. As one teacher with a popular Instagram account recently reminded all of us who have the privilege to be in classrooms, "Somebody is learning how to be a person by watching you. Let that sink in" (mrscowmansclassroom, 2020). To be the models we want to be, and to live our values out loud, we have to understand what those values are and how other people are — or are not — perceiving them based on our actions. Coaches can help us with both of those things.

Coaches can serve as sounding boards, so we can discuss our possible

choices for our actions and their implications. Then when we have settled on an authentic and solid next step, we often feel more assured of our values and decisions.

Equally important, they can help us determine if we are communicating those values and decisions. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (1983) said that, instead of learning from textbooks, we should learn from "text people" — in other words, we learn most about the world and our place in it from reading each other.

Our words, gestures, and actions are constantly being read and interpreted by others. But are they being interpreted the way we intend them to be? Coaches can help us do the hard work of examining those questions and making necessary shifts to ensure that we are expressing outwardly the person we want to be so that we can help students become the people they want to be.

We all need to be the humane, growth-oriented person we want others to see. Working with a coach helps us look at our challenges with a broader perspective, find new strategies for handling them in growth-producing ways, and help us become the person we want to be.

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“The coaching work I continue to build with Learning Forward has resulted in increased support on the ground to respond to the challenges of COVID.”

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Julie Donahue-Kpolugbo

COACHING SUPPORT CONNECTS EDUCATORS IN ISOLATED COMMUNITIES

Julie Donahue-Kpolugbo is district literacy consultant and instructional coach coordinator for the Beaufort Delta Divisional Education Council (BDDEC) in Inuvik, Northwest Territories, Canada.

Her role in professional learning: I support literacy programming and instructional coaches in nine schools in eight small, isolated communities, some of which are fly-in only. Our schools are in the Beaufort Delta region on the homelands of the Gwich'in, Inuvialuit and Metis people. In Canada, Indigenous populations have been chronically underserved and experience a tremendous amount of intergenerational trauma stemming from egregious historical treatment. Through the local government and Indigenous governing bodies, educators are engaged in ongoing learning about equity informed by the work of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

How Learning Forward supports her work: I have been collaborating with Learning Forward since 2019 to support our instructional coaching program in BDDEC. In the 2021-22 school year, we are working with a Learning Forward facilitator and resources, meeting quarterly, sometimes in person and sometimes virtually.

Given the number of new coaches this year, we started with coaching fundamentals, including elements of understanding the roles of a coach, coaching conversations, listening skills, relationship development, observations, and how to advocate for professional learning in the local school.

I also meet once a month or as needed with literacy coaches, other literacy leaders, and my colleague, Shawn Feener, math and science consultant, does the same with math coaches and leaders. Because the coaches and communities are so isolated, connecting them as a network in an ongoing way is vitally important to our ongoing improvement and impact efforts.

How she first got involved with Learning Forward: A colleague of mine, Adam Wright, went to the Learning Forward Annual Conference in Vancouver in 2016 and came back inspired and enthusiastic about the potential Learning Forward could bring to our work.

Through the conference, we found out about the Learning Forward Academy. Adam and I were both accepted to the Academy Class of 2019. It took a lot of lobbying to our senior administration and government to allow us to travel out of the country for intensive professional learning, but it was worth it.

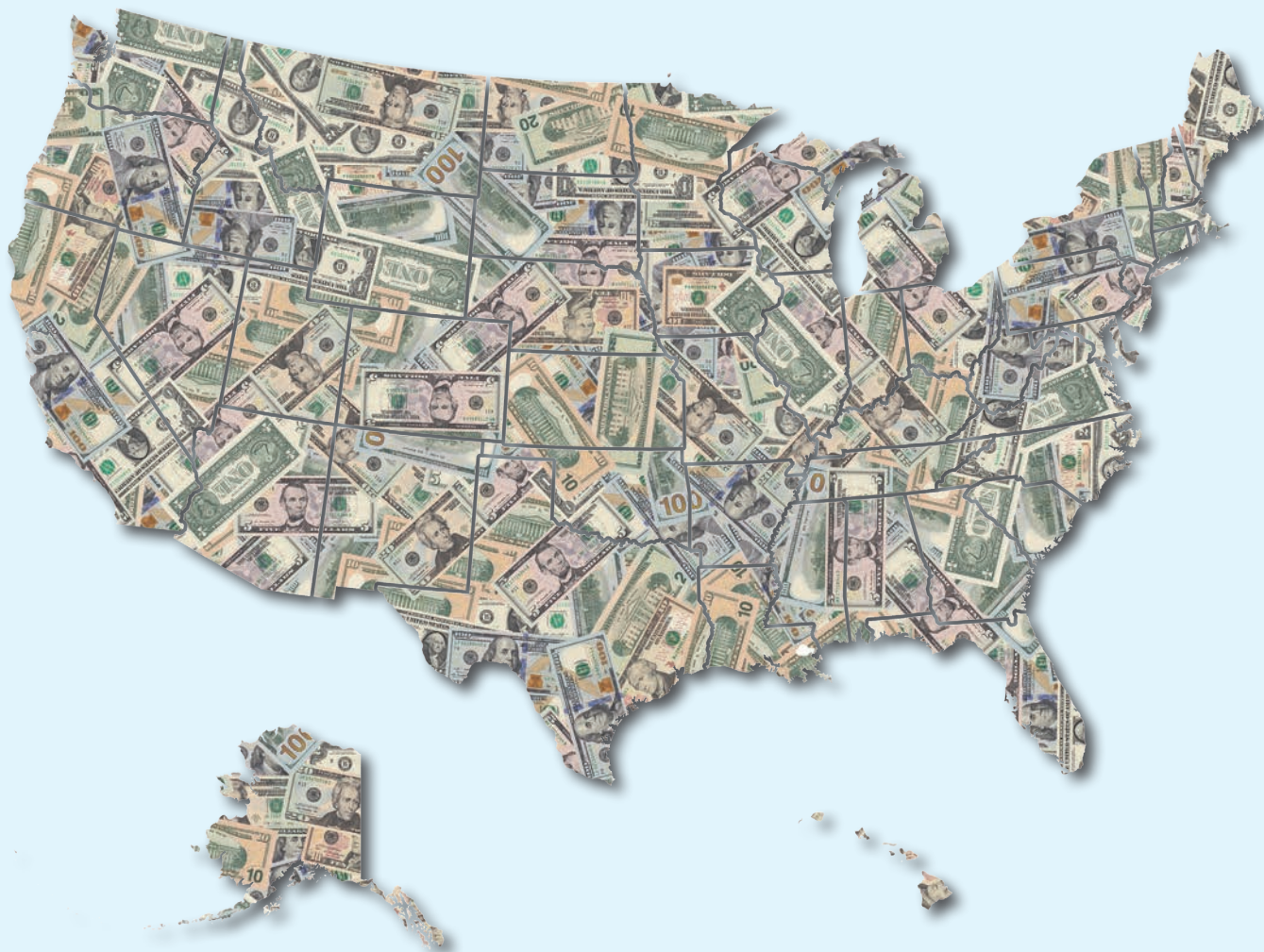
Why she found the Learning Forward Academy valuable: The Academy grounded us in theory and expertise that allowed me to plan for transformative change in literacy in my district. It taught me about how to better collect and use data and apply change theory to make my work more strategic and sustainable.

Up here in the North, transience of the workforce is such a struggle and has a direct impact on our students. If we can help educators feel more supported and improve the working environment for them, they are going to feel more joy and engagement; they will stay longer and provide much better-quality, consistent learning environments for students.

In addition, because the Academy and Annual Conference connected me with experts in the field who would speak with me about our district's specific program implementation challenges and our vision for transformative change, that allowed me to bring more credibility to the work I try to do and convince leaders in my district and communities of its value. ■

EXAMINE. STUDY. UNDERSTAND.

RESEARCH



TRACKING FEDERAL RECOVERY FUNDS

A new online resource tracks how U.S. states and districts are spending federal recovery funds. Its aim is to help educators identify promising practices they can apply in their own settings. It includes state-by-state spending plans, deep dives into four states' plans, and emerging best practices from districts and states as reviewed by experts.

The website, called EduRecoveryHub, is a collaboration between the Collaborative for Student Success, the Center on Reinventing Public Education, and the Edonomics Lab at Georgetown University. **Learn more at edurecoveryhub.org.**



RESEARCH REVIEW

Elizabeth Foster

MYTH-BUSTING RESEARCH SHEDS LIGHT ON WHAT WORKS

► THE STUDY

Hill, H.C., Papay, J.P., & Schwartz, N. (2022, February 15).

Dispelling the myths: What the research says about teacher professional learning. Research Partnership for Professional Learning.

Elizabeth Foster (elizabeth.foster@learningforward.org) is vice president, research & standards at Learning Forward. In each issue of *The Learning Professional*, Foster explores recent research to help practitioners understand the impact of particular professional learning practices on student outcomes.

Professional learning leaders are sometimes faced with skepticism about the expected impact of an investment in professional learning. Long-held myths and outdated notions about sit-and-get professional learning can act as barriers to thorough planning, appropriate funding, and sustained implementation of professional learning efforts.

Dispelling the Myths: What the Research Says About Teacher Professional Learning is a research brief that offers a direct, easy-to-read summary of evidence-based truths that practitioners can use to better understand the issues at hand and share with others as a way to advocate for effective professional learning.

The brief was published by the Research Partnership for Professional Learning (RPPL), a coalition led by the Annenberg Institute at Brown University that focuses on building the evidence base about professional learning that leads to improved outcomes for teachers and students. Through deliberate testing of multiple options for professional learning approaches and designs, RPPL's goal is to understand professional learning's effect on teacher and student learning.



MYTHS VERSUS TRUTHS

The brief names six common myths about teacher professional learning, then refutes them with the evidence-based reality.

Myth 1: Professional learning is a waste of time and money.

Truth: Evidence shows that professional learning can lead to shifts in teachers' skills and instructional practices and significantly improve student learning.

Myth 2: Professional learning is more effective for early career teachers and less effective for veteran teachers.

Truth: Professional learning has been shown to support teacher development at all levels of experience.

Myth 3: Professional learning programs must be job-embedded and time-intensive to be effective.

Truth: Programs of varying lengths and formats can produce wide-ranging effects, depending on how intentionally and effectively they are structured.

Myth 4: Improving teachers' content knowledge is key to improving their instructional practice.

Truth: Professional learning programs that target specific instructional practices are more likely to shift student learning than those with a focus on increasing content knowledge.

Myth 5: Research-based professional learning programs are unlikely to work at scale or in new contexts.

Truth: Programs can have positive effects across a wide range of schools, and strong implementation can help sustain effects at scale.

Myth 6: Districts and schools should implement research-based professional learning programs with no modifications.

Truth: Although educators should practice fidelity first, adaptation within guardrails is an important second step for making the learning relevant.

Each of these truths is presented with references to specific studies so that readers can delve into the specifics.

IMPLICATIONS

Learning Forward's experience supports the authors' assertion that "deeply rooted beliefs about effective teacher learning are not always supported by the most up-to-date research evidence." Our work is designed to keep stakeholders current with the field and in the habit of reflecting and revising their approaches as needed.

We aim to lower the many barriers to staying up-to-date, including educators' lack of time for and access to journal articles and the temptation to stick with what has always been done. The research cited in this brief can help us — and you, our readers — continue to lower those barriers.

For instance, in correcting the myth that professional learning is a waste of money, the researchers cite a recent meta-analysis of 60 studies on instructional coaching. That analysis found that "the difference in effectiveness between teachers with instructional coaches and those without was equivalent to the difference between novice teachers and teachers with five to 10 years of experience" (p. 3). This finding is useful for all of us in helping policymakers and budgeters overcome a narrow definition of professional learning as workshops or professional development days.

At the same time, the research brief can help those of us who are knowledgeable about effective professional learning recognize that we, too, have biases and blind spots. For example, professional learning leaders often call for professional learning to be job-embedded and sustained, but this paper puts the necessity of such structures under examination.

While the researchers acknowledge

that more time for professional learning means more opportunities to deepen educator learning, they point to research that found no difference in outcomes for programs that lasted over several semesters versus programs that concentrated the same number of hours in a shorter time frame.

They also note that while earlier studies pointed to the importance of professional learning being part of the workday over an extended period of time, newer studies provide a more nuanced look at this question, noting that professional learning that takes place away from the regular workday (such as during a summer institute) is sometimes more likely to boost student learning.

This is not to suggest that time and intensity of professional learning don't matter, but rather it reminds us that we may need to re-examine and rearticulate our definitions of sustained and job-embedded and also carefully consider when these design elements are more and less applicable. That spirit of reflection and openness to change are, after all, essential for professional learning leaders.

STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

RPPL's approach to examining professional learning data and using it to inform practice is consistent with Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning. Looking to evidence and research is a concept woven throughout the standards, especially in the **Data** and **Learning Designs standards**.

The Data standard encourages educators to ground professional learning in evidence that it will achieve the intended goals and also reminds us to look at how context may influence results. Learning Designs speaks directly to understanding and effectively applying research, especially with regard

to how the planning and design of professional learning contributes to its quality, relevance, and effectiveness.

Several of the specific myths explored in this brief are relevant to the **Implementation standard**, especially those about the challenge of scaling research-based programs (myth 5) and the need for strict implementation fidelity (myth 6).

For example, the researchers report that two recent studies found professional learning implemented with some "adaptation with guardrails" had more of a positive impact on student outcomes than strict fidelity to the program design. As a result, the researchers recommend that educators begin by implementing the design as intended and then adapt as necessary, depending on factors such as educators' knowledge of students' needs and how the design aligns with or diverges from a school or district improvement plan.

Understanding the Implementation standard can help learning leaders get beyond the myths to recognize what matters in implementing professional learning, including what should be maintained and what can be adapted. This can help leaders feel confident to seek out approaches that have been shown effective in research studies, even if those approaches do not match exactly the population or context described in the research.

With the release of the revised Standards for Professional Learning this month, now is an ideal time to lift up research on professional learning designs and implementation. The articulation of long-held professional learning myths and research-based clarifications of those misunderstandings shines a light on the importance of being deliberate and intentional about how research and evidence inform professional learning decisions. ■

DATA POINTS

71% OF TEACHERS WANT ONLINE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Learning technology company D2L commissioned a survey of teachers' needs for and perceptions of online professional learning. According to responses from 850 teachers and 127 administrators (a small fraction of those invited to participate), almost three-quarters of teachers reported wanting access to online, on-demand professional learning, and 55% said their interest had increased since before the pandemic. Yet only about a third expected their districts to provide such support.

Interestingly, although 84% of administrators saw time as a barrier to offering more professional learning, just under half of teachers agreed, "suggesting that teachers may be more willing to commit their time to flexible learning options than administrators expect," the survey report said.

bit.ly/3u6mjYQ

61% OF SCHOOLS ATTRIBUTE VACANCIES TO COVID

According to the most recent data from the U.S. Department of Education's Institute for Education Sciences, about 45% of public schools have vacancies in teaching and other staff positions, and 61% of public schools with at least one staff vacancy reported that the COVID-19 pandemic was the reason for the vacancies.

But another analysis, by Chalkbeat, of data from five U.S. states and 19 large districts, found that teacher turnover is comparable to before the pandemic. Learning Forward will continue to track new data as it is available.

bit.ly/3wilsGI

bit.ly/3N0pQ3Q



\$25 BILLION IN ESSER FUNDS SPENT ON STAFF

A report from FutureEd shows how more than 3,000 districts and charter organizations are spending their COVID-19 relief funding. The \$25 billion allocated to teachers and staff will include about \$2.2 billion to support teacher recruitment and retention. About \$1 billion has been allocated to professional learning. \$794 million, or nearly 7% of the staffing total, has been allocated to hiring psychologists and other mental health supports. The highest share of the money (\$31 billion) is dedicated to academic interventions, and an additional \$26 billion will be spent on school facilities and operations.

bit.ly/3JkKyZF

9% MORE TEACHERS OF COLOR RECRUITED THROUGH GROW-YOUR-OWN

A recent study found positive outcomes of alternative teacher preparation programs that followed a "grow-your-own" approach of recruiting and supporting people from the local community of the school. The programs were designed by TNTP and implemented in partnership with urban school districts with high percentages of students of color and from low-income families.

Every one of the programs recruited more people of color than districts' typical recruitment efforts did. On average, across programs, the teachers recruited were 52% people of color compared with 43% for other new teachers. Teacher retention and student achievement in these teachers' classes were comparable with other new teachers.

bit.ly/3MWDIf7

60% OF ALTERNATIVELY CERTIFIED TEACHERS STAY

A 15-year study of Texas new teachers' retention in the field found that teachers who had attended traditional preservice preparation programs (i.e. at a college or university) were more likely to stay in the profession long-term than those who had attended an alternative certification program. Among teachers in traditional public schools, 67.5% who were traditionally certified remained after five years, compared with 60.6% of those who were alternatively certified. Among teachers in charter schools, the numbers who stayed were 55.9% to 48.4%. Among the whole sample, only 61.8% remained after five years, suggesting that the leaky teacher pipeline continues to be a problem, at least in Texas.

bit.ly/3u693n4

INFORM. ENGAGE. IMMERSE.

FOCUS

COACHING FOR CHANGE

JOIN OUR TWITTER CHAT ON COACHING

Learning Forward will host a Twitter chat with **#EduCoach** on **May 4 at 8 p.m. Eastern time**. Join us along with authors from this issue of *The Learning Professional* and the #EduCoach community to discuss articles from this issue and the latest in coaching. Bring your reflections, recommendations, and questions to share. To join, follow the #EduCoach hashtag at the time of the event.

To receive notifications about this and other events, follow us on social media **@learningforward** **#TheLearningPro**.





How ‘tugboat coaching’ propels one district forward

BY JOELLEN KILLION, JEANNE SPILLER, AND BRENDA KAYLOR

The instructional coaches in Kildeer Countryside School District 96 (KCS D 96), outside Chicago, are like tugboats, a key part of a maritime navigation system.

Just as tugboats nudge and guide barges and ships that need steering

assistance to navigate tricky waters, the coaches nudge and guide educators to navigate toward school and student learning goals. Just as tugboats read and respond to currents, weather, and load, the coaches read and respond to students’ and schools’ needs and progress.

And as tugboats coordinate with other tugboats to reach the same destination, the coaches collaborate with one another within and across schools and with other parts of the guidance system (district and school improvement plans, student data systems, curriculum, human resources,

Just as tugboats nudge and guide barges and ships that need steering assistance to navigate tricky waters, the coaches in Kildeer Countryside School District 96 nudge and guide educators to navigate toward school and student learning goals.

professional learning, and leadership), to maintain a clear focus on their common destination of student success.

When two or more tugboats work together, it is essential that the tugboats collaborate to move toward the same identified destination. If any tugboat's directional heading is off the mark of the intended destination, it foils the entire team's efforts.

Although research (Kraft & Blazar, 2017; Kraft et al., 2018; Kraft & Hill, 2020) confirms the impact of high-quality coaching on student academic achievement, mustering the power of coaching to achieve maximum impact in the day-to-day reality of schools can be challenging.

Sometimes, it can feel like district waters have too many ships moving in different directions and at different speeds. Yet, the "tugboats" in KCSD 96 are overcoming those challenges and leveraging the power of coaching to ensure every student and educator is moving toward the same harbor — common goals for student success.

What's their secret? A deep commitment to data-based continuous improvement. Unlike many coaching

programs that go unchanged for years, leaders in KCSD 96 long ago decided that they would use data to adapt the coaching program to respond to shifting currents and evolving needs.

To resist complacently accepting the status quo, district coaching champions, the assistant superintendent, and directors who oversee the coaching program regularly analyze data to understand current strengths and opportunities for growth to ensure high levels of achievement for all students. The district team uses a combination of quantitative (student achievement and growth data) and qualitative data (coach interviews, coach, principal, and teacher surveys, case studies, and observations) to analyze areas for improvement.

Now in the district's 12th year with coaching, KCSD 96 leaders have identified three key factors to ensure that its coaching program and coaches nudge and guide all staff toward districtwide success:

- Coaching roles and responsibilities require continuous refinement and clarification;

- Job-embedded coaching aligns with the district's and schools' goals; and
- Coaching support extends beyond a subset of classroom teachers to include all educators who directly contribute to student learning.

SHIFTS IN ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Shifting coach roles and responsibilities based on current data is essential to keeping the coaching program — and the district — on track. One example of how KCSD 96 leaders have done that is in their approach to supporting English learners.

Student achievement data collected over several years showed that English learners were less likely to meet expectations on the Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR), the state assessment and accountability measure, than their peers. Additional data collected from classroom teachers, language development teachers, and administrators suggested that a contributing factor was the district's approach to supporting English

learners, through a co-teaching model that embedded a language development teacher for one hour a day in classrooms with high concentrations of English learners.

Student achievement data and input from principals, teachers, and language development teachers indicated that the available amount of support in classrooms was insufficient to meet teachers' growth or students' language development needs. The co-teaching model intended to build teacher capacity to integrate language learning practices throughout the day, yet both classroom and language development teachers communicated that they wanted more direct support for students. Implementation of the co-teaching model created a tug-of-war between direct support to English learner students and building teacher capacity.

Based on this discovery, the district shifted from a co-teaching model to a coaching model. In the coaching model, language development teachers function as coaches; they continue to work in classrooms with high concentrations of English learners, but their focus is on building teacher capacity to incorporate effective instruction to ensure that English learners access instructional content effectively throughout the day. Acting as tugboats, they nudge and guide the teachers' practices so that all students have access to effective instruction tailored to their learning needs throughout the day.

But in their ongoing data analysis and in the spirit of continuous improvement, the district, after three years of implementing this model, has discovered that this shift is still not producing the level of student growth desired. Student achievement data, teacher and language coach input, and principal observations indicate that both language development coaches and teachers they support have struggled to shift from a co-teaching model to a coaching model.

Principals and central office staff noted that many teachers and coaches gravitated back toward the familiar co-

Shifting coach roles and responsibilities based on current data is essential to keeping the coaching program — and the district — on track.

teaching model in which one student group worked with the classroom teacher while English learners worked with the language development coach. As a result, a refined model to support English learners is emerging for the 2022-23 school year.

Another example of updating coach roles and responsibilities as a result of data collection and analysis involved content-focused coaching. The district coaches served as literacy, math, science, and language development coaches. Data — including coach logs, coach case studies, coach journals, time analysis, one-on-one meetings between coaches and coach champions, and coach and teacher input — indicated that content-focused coaches in literacy, math, and science focused more on developing teachers' discipline-specific knowledge and less on instructional practices.

This led district coach champions to create positions for six innovation coaches (iCoaches) whose role is to focus on highly effective instructional practices and who work side-by-side with other coaches and teachers to weave together content knowledge and pedagogical practices.

District leaders chose to have iCoaches emphasize two elements of highly effective teaching practice: engagement and differentiation. A team involving iCoaches, teachers, principals, and district leaders developed a district instructional playbook focused on these two areas and based on the research of experts including Robert Marzano and Deborah Pickering (2011), John Hattie (2008), and Spencer Kagan and Miguel Kagan (2015).

The iCoach team introduced the instructional playbook to teacher teams, then teachers individually identified an initial area for coaching support.

iCoaches then guided teachers to clarify and focus their cycle goals with data, including student achievement data and observations from classroom visits.

The initial plan was for all general education teachers to engage in a coaching cycle with an iCoach focused on the playbook. Then COVID-19 struck. The iCoach team, out of necessity, shifted its focus to ensuring that district teachers were prepared to continue rigorous instruction in a remote setting.

The creation of the iCoach role and the success of the instructionally focused cycles led to further thinking about shifting all coaching roles to focus more directly on instructional practice. Despite all coaches' and teachers' hard work, student proficiency and growth lagged behind expectations.

There were several contributing factors. Content-focused coaches worked primarily with teachers who volunteered, and they focused on what teachers perceived they needed to improve. As a result, the district leadership team recognized after reviewing data from coach cycle records, school improvement plans, and student fall, winter, and spring MAP proficiency and growth data that the tugboats were not all heading toward a common destination.

To affect teacher practice and ultimately student achievement, the district's coaches needed much greater clarity about how to leverage their efforts to achieve the intended goals. District coach champions began working to determine a clear destination and support for their powerhouse tugboats and other parts of the guidance system to pilot the ship toward that destination in a coordinated manner.

CONSISTENCY AND COHERENCE

With the recognition of the need for a common destination, district and school leaders began to focus on creating consistency and coherence. They started by having coaches gather observational data from every classroom

to determine which highly effective instructional practices were most and least prevalent. Along with that data, research (e.g. Dyer, 2015; Marzano & Pickering, 2011) helped district and school leaders narrow their focus to fostering student engagement.

With a clear focus on engagement, it was now possible for coaches and the teachers they support to achieve consistency and coherence. To fulfill that possibility, coach champions, principals, and coaches worked to re-envision school improvement planning.

Previously, district leaders acknowledged that school improvement planning was a significant pathway to student success, but school leadership teams often considered school improvement efforts as distinct and separate from other efforts, especially coaching. With guidance from district leaders, the school leadership teams, coaches, and principals discovered that coaching could exponentially power up schoolwide efforts to achieve school improvement goals — if, and only if, coaches and teachers aligned the focus of their coaching interactions with the school's improvement goals and the needs of educators and students.

School administrators quickly recognized the importance of intentional alignment and made it a priority to move all parts of the school-based system, including general education, related services, special education, coaching, and administration, in the same direction as the district system.

To do so, each school incorporated a school improvement goal for student engagement into the 2021-22 school year plan. District leaders and coaches worked collaboratively to develop tools to build coherence, consistency, and clarity, including Innovation Configuration (IC) maps on engagement and coaching.

The IC map on engagement specifies the district's definition of student engagement, what it looks like in practice, and the numerous decision points for teachers about how to foster

School administrators quickly recognized the importance of intentional alignment and made it a priority to move all parts of the school-based system in the same direction as the district system.

engagement. It also guides educators to self-assess their practice and use that assessment as the basis for a coaching cycle goal.

The IC map on coaching guides coaches to focus and assess their practice and increase the frequency of direct classroom support. It also shapes the focus for coaches' ongoing professional learning, which occurs several times a month in large and small groups. Both IC maps are also used to inform coaching team conversations, principal and coach conversations, and district leader and principal conversations.

Coaches leaned on the newly developed IC maps and found that the common focus on engagement created synergy among schools and built increased opportunities for lateral learning across teams and classrooms. Teachers reported value in instructional cycles. "I am learning so much from you and loving everything," said teacher Abby Heuer. "This has been so beneficial for my kids. ... I would love to find a time to meet consistently and plan for these kinds of things."

COACHING FOR ALL

Today, all staff members who work directly with students are immersed in coaching cycles focused on the district's highly effective practices goal, even those who do not traditionally have access to coaching, such as occupational therapists, social workers, speech and language pathologists, psychologists, and general education teachers in areas such as music, art, and physical education.

Every staff member now understands what coaching is and how it supports

educator growth and development, and staff across departments and roles are benefiting from expert coaching that guides them to implement engagement practices appropriate to their environment. Perhaps most importantly, all staff are now recognized as contributors to school and district goals and student success.

An essential element of this universal approach to coaching is ongoing professional learning for coaches and those who supervise and support them. Each new coach participates in a two-year preparation program, and all coaches engage in monthly whole- and small-group professional learning designed to extend and refine coaching practices and meet emerging needs.

Coaches and principals within each school meet regularly to align their efforts and monitor progress. Principals and district leaders also participate in the coach preparation program and rotate into the two-year program every three years. This keeps central office and principals connected to the coaching program and the coaches.

Coaches gain a sense of confidence when they know principals understand their work, speak the same language about coaching, and have opportunities to engage in purposeful dialogue about coaching. Some principals have participated in the coach-preparation two-year program as many as three times and find that they gain skills they can apply in their supervision and coaching of staff and new insights about coaching and how to leverage it to support student learning and the school's improvement plan. Central office and principal engagement in the coaching preparation program keeps coaches and administrators navigating toward the identified goals.

VISIBLE RESULTS

Early indications from informal data collected from classroom walk-throughs and teacher, coach, and principal input suggest that classroom

Continued on p. 29



Where coaches learn to coach

BY SUZANNE BOUFFARD

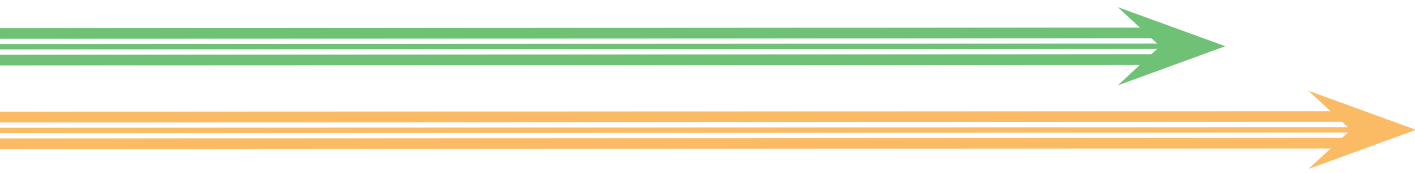
Most of today's instructional coaches didn't start their careers planning to work one-on-one supporting other educators. Most of them started out as excellent teachers, focused on the learning needs of young people. And although the best coaching

programs select coaches based on their listening, reflection, and facilitation skills, new coaches rarely have formal preparation in supporting adults.

To help coaches grow into their roles, Learning Forward's Coaches Academy provides personalized support to districts and states. Offered both in person and virtually, the Coaches

Academy builds coaches' knowledge and capacity through facilitated sessions with an expert coach, collaborative learning communities, tools and strategies tailored to the district's or state's needs, and individual support for coaches and their supervisors.

Like coaches themselves, the academy aims to bring out the best



in everyone who participates, and it evolves over time through reflection, responsiveness, and a commitment to growth. Most recently, that growth has included pivoting to virtual offerings during the pandemic and helping coaches build their professional networks beyond local geographic boundaries.

DEFINING THE ROLE OF COACHES

Among the thousands of educators who have participated in the Coaches Academy are about 500 coaches from North Dakota, who enrolled in the program through the state's Teacher Support System. The North Dakota Coaches Academy began in 2010 after the state issued a mandate for all schools to employ coaches to support K-2 reading instruction. Since that time, the state's coaching program has grown as districts have built their capacity and come to see the powerful impact coaching can have.

Erin Jacobson, the North Dakota Teacher Support System's coordinator, believes the Coaches Academy has been a big part of that success. She points to the academy's focus on coaching fundamentals as key factors. Participants "come for the lens of what coaching is and what the basics are," she says of the 40 to 100 coaches and principals who voluntarily participate in the academy each year.

"Coaches get hired without necessarily having a clear idea of how to start," she says, and sometimes they end up "shooting themselves in the

foot — for example, by providing too many resources to new teachers" instead of helping teachers learn to find answers themselves.

Her colleague, assistant coordinator Marijke Leibel, adds, "It gives them resources and guides what the expectations are. Without the Coaches Academy, the coaches' roles would not be nearly as organized or focused."

Coaches Academy participants from other states and districts agree that understanding the roles of a coach is an essential part of the academy, and one that has a big impact on practice. Meta Rome is a Title I district academic coach in Cobb County School District, the second largest district in Georgia. Rome says one of the most important lessons she and her colleagues have learned from the program is that, even though coaches are often seen as jacks-of-all-trades, they don't have to fill all their roles at the same time.

Participants learn about the 10 roles of coaches outlined in the books *Coaching Matters* (Killion et al., 2020) and *Taking the Lead* (Killion & Harrison, 2017), including coach as resource provider, data coach, classroom supporter, and more. They learn to apply tools that help coaches assess their roles, allocate their time, and align with principals over role expectations.

The recognition that they don't have to fulfill all the roles at once has been an aha for Cobb County coaches, according to Sakinah Dantzler, Title I district academic coach. It has also been

a relief, especially during the pandemic, when Dantzler, Rome, and the local coaches they support have seen teachers' and students' needs rise across their 45 Title I schools.

In North Dakota, that recognition has been complemented by an improved understanding of coaching among principals. Jacobson says that more and more principals have been voluntarily attending the Coaches Academy and finding it helpful to have time with their coaches to discuss what their partnership will look like.

She sees the impact of that collaboration spreading across the state: "Talking about the coach-principal partnership is part of what North Dakota coaching programs are expected to do. Because so many people have gone through the Coaches Academy, many districts do that on their own now."

In the North East Independent School District (NEISD), in San Antonio, Texas, professional learning leaders have applied the knowledge they've gained about coaching roles to create an instructional coaching handbook designed to help everyone — administrators and teachers as well as coaches — understand what coaching is and isn't. Clarity, common language, and defining roles are essential first steps for any coaching program, says Jennifer Gutierrez, NEISD's executive director of elementary curriculum and instruction, who coordinates the district's work with the Coaches Academy.

PERSONALIZING LEARNING TO COACHES' NEEDS

Although all Coaches Academy cohorts and facilitators cover coaching fundamentals, each academy is tailored to participants' needs. In Cobb County, facilitator Joellen Killion initially worked with Rome and Dantzler to assess the district's coaching needs and construct a plan. Then she worked with the school-based coaches as well as a team of nine from the professional learning office.

This staged process led to a focus on helping coaches improve professional learning communities (PLCs). Killion helped the coaches determine how to structure the PLC process, including what to discuss and when, using a sequence of reflection questions. Rome says this has led to many positive changes in how coaches approach the PLC process.

"Before, they acted as the facilitators. They thought they had to be there all the time," she says. "Now they have moved along a continuum to a gradual release model. They are giving the baton to the teachers more and building the capacity of the leads of those teams."

Dantzler adds that meetings have become more focused and strategic and that the focus on roles has led to an epiphany for her and some of the coaches. "The aha was realizing that I don't have to go through one reflection question in the sequence at each meeting," she says. "I can extend a question over multiple sessions to go deeper and wider."

In NEISD, the Coaches Academy has taken on a slightly different focus. The district has recently focused on helping coaches support teachers' efforts to tailor their student support by strengthening Tier 1 instruction, shifting from remediation to acceleration, integrating Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), and analyzing student work in PLCs.

Gutierrez says that this has helped coaches foster conditions that allow for deep reflection of instructional

practices and learning. That, she adds, helps teachers "take risks and feel safe to adjust the approach due to the robust conversations that take place while celebrating and recognizing growth."

Gutierrez says this focus on providing tailored support to coaches also helps her and her district colleagues plan monthly instructional coaches meetings, where they can "support our coaches based on campus needs and continue to provide them coaching tools through a continuous cycle of improvement model." In these meetings, coaches can apply and practice the skills they've been learning with one another.

REFLECTING ON GROWTH

"The Coaches Academy makes you reflect," says Erin Jacobson, and that is by design. Every session and discussion is constructed to model reflection and help coaches develop the habits and skills to nurture other educators' reflection.

The learning symposium, the culminating project of the academy, embodies this spirit of reflection. Throughout the Coaches Academy, participants work toward the final symposium, setting a learning goal for themselves, determining what evidence they can gather to demonstrate they are moving toward the goal, and planning how to present that learning to their peers. During the symposium, the community comes together to share and reflect, using a discussion protocol. In North Dakota, leaders invite a range of stakeholders, including senators, school board members, principals, and others, to participate.

Jacobson describe the symposium as a way for coaches to be held accountable for their learning. "When I was a coach, I didn't necessarily know if I was making an impact," Jacobson says. Now she realizes that it's important to collect evidence of impact, not only to demonstrate the value of coaching to the school board and administrators, but also to help coaches themselves feel valuable and stay motivated.

Jacobson worries about the potential for coaches to feel burned out, and she believes this kind of reflection can help with turnover. Although she acknowledges that some coaches feel nervous about presenting at the symposium, she frequently repeats the words of facilitator Cindy Harrison: "No one is grading you."

PIVOTING DURING THE PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic created challenges for coaches just as it did for other educators, but it also created opportunities.

In most locations, the Coaches Academy shifted to a virtual format, which has created more accessibility for some participants. The North Dakota Teacher Support System doubled the number of slots it usually offers because it could have multiple groups, and it also helped coordinators think more flexibly about how to reach educators across the state.

Going forward, it is considering a hybrid model, which will include in-person sessions at the beginning and end of the school year, with virtual sessions in the winter, when inclement weather makes travel across the state difficult.

And the pandemic has changed more than logistics. In Cobb County, Meta Rome says she and her colleagues have learned to extend more grace to themselves and their colleagues. She says that working with the Learning Forward facilitators has helped them recognize that they can't do everything at once and that they need to take time to recalibrate based on the varied readiness levels of their schools, educators, and students.

Sakinah Dantzler adds that because "we were all building the plane while flying it" during remote teaching, "it became OK to not know. I believe the pandemic gave us room to try different approaches and methods and to say that we don't know everything yet."

ONGOING GROWTH

The ultimate value of the

Learning Forward Coaches Academy, participants and facilitators agree, is nurturing coaches' ongoing growth and development.

"As continuous learners, professional learning for coaches allows the growth process to continue and informs schoolwide change," Dantzler says. "It helps us improve professional learning for our colleagues and meet our goals for students."

North Dakota's Marijke Leibel says the Coaches Academy empowers coaches and, as a result, "we've seen a lot of leaders emerge."

That investment in continuous learning is a key mindset for coaches

and all professional learning leaders. As Rome says, "Everyone needs a coach. Coaches, coaches of coaches, principals — everyone." And when she reflects on the opportunity the Learning Forward Coaches Academy has provided for that, she says that the impact is evident in the growth of skills and expertise she has seen among coaches.

North Dakota's Erin Jacobson agrees and sees this as a crucial moment for coaching. "Teaching has only increased in complexity, so it makes sense that we need to increase our support for teachers," she says. "Coaching is a positive way to do that. And when you have a good structure

and capacity, it can make a very big impact, not just for teachers, but for students."

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How 'tugboat coaching' propels one district forward

Continued from p. 25

implementation of student engagement strategies is increasing, as is the sophistication and depth of engagement strategies in student-educator interactions.

Coaching cycles focused on student engagement began in October, and teachers want more opportunities to repeat those cycles, especially now that they have had their first ones. Conversations among teachers and between teachers and coaches about student engagement are specific, data-driven, and guided by the IC map. Teachers are using the IC map to expand their understanding about engagement strategies and self-assess their practice.

Related services staff, now viewed as valuable contributors to school improvement goals, are experiencing coaching for the first time. Principals are engaging in classroom walk-throughs to identify and monitor student engagement strategies. Each school's leadership team uses its school's improvement plan and the IC maps for engagement and coaching to develop short-term commitments, actions that teams and individuals will take, to lead toward the broader school

improvement goals. Leadership teams use interim student achievement data to assess if their actions are affecting student success and use the data to adapt their actions.

The ship is making steady progress under expert guidance from leaders and navigational assistance from tugboat coaches. All hands are on deck, contributing to a coordinated effort to use the essential tools, expertise, and determination to reach the destination of student success.

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In professional learning for coaches, one size doesn't fit all

BY KATHRYN MURROW AND BETSY LEIS

Although instructional coaches are deeply committed to continuous improvement, they rarely have access to professional learning themselves. Rarer still is differentiated professional learning that meets coaches where they are in their careers and their professional growth.

In Florida's Orange County Public Schools, we recognized that, just as we accentuate the importance of differentiated instruction for our students, we need to design professional learning to provide instructional coaches with strategies and structures tailored to their needs and levels of experience.

We created differentiated

professional learning that is grounded in the district's teaching and learning framework. It uses scaffolds and accelerated learning principles to improve instructional support and is designed with adult and student social and emotional learning (SEL) needs in mind.

At the same time, we recognized an opportunity to foster school

In Florida’s Orange County Public Schools, we recognized that, just as we accentuate the importance of differentiated instruction for our students, we need to design professional learning to provide instructional coaches with strategies and structures tailored to their needs and levels of experience.

administrators’ coaching knowledge and skills. Administrators play a different role in instructional improvement than coaches, in part because they have evaluative responsibilities. But they can and should embed coaching practices and systems in their work with teachers. This can help them model best instructional practices and, just as importantly, support a culture of continuous improvement.

We designed administrator-focused professional learning that aligns with the coach-focused professional learning and allows administrators to coach the teachers they evaluate, keeping their adult SEL needs in mind, to promote high-quality instruction that attends to student social and emotional needs.

Aligning all these pieces — the evaluation framework, coaching support, and administrators’ support — is essential, and it can be a challenge in a district the size of ours, which serves over 205,000 students and employs over 13,000 instructional personnel. Our professional learning structures enable us to share a unified message on the standard for instruction.

OUR FOCUS: INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES GROUNDED IN SEL

To ensure that the coaching — from both coaches and administrators

— is aligned with district goals for student outcomes, the professional learning focuses on implementing coaching cycles using the district’s evaluation framework. Our district refers to the framework as the *vision of instruction*, and our evaluation systems team uses this core document as the driving force behind our work and professional learning for instructional and administrative personnel.

Historically, many educators have viewed teacher evaluation frameworks as separate entities from daily instructional practices in classrooms, begrudgingly accepting them as a requirement but not viewing them as helpful resources. Too often, the frameworks are looked at intermittently throughout the year at best, typically right before a teacher is being observed or only when outlining an action plan at the beginning of the year.

But in Orange County Public Schools, we see the evaluation framework as the backbone of our work. The vision of instruction lays out the expectations for teachers and therefore drives how we observe and evaluate teachers. It makes sense, then, that it should also drive coaching and other forms of professional learning.

Having this vision of instruction so deeply entrenched in our district

promotes alignment among teachers’ planning efforts, professional learning, instructional delivery, and observations that result in a final evaluation score. This eliminates a disconnect between evaluation and everyday pedagogical practices.

Our approach also intentionally addresses the SEL needs that have become pronounced since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. We emphasize why and how coaches and administrators should attend to teachers’ SEL needs — for example, by leveraging social awareness to understand the demands teachers are facing and how these demands impact their interactions and behaviors. We recognize that educators cannot model SEL competencies or expect their students to acquire these skills if they have not received adequate experience embodying them and understanding their importance in establishing an optimal learning environment.

We also address student SEL needs with our coaches and administrators. We provide them with tools and structures they can introduce to their teachers to integrate student SEL needs into planning and instruction. This promotes teachers deconstructing standards and evaluation framework elements they are using to determine

the appropriate SEL competencies students must personify to be successful in their acquisition of standard concepts.

OUR APPROACH: DIFFERENTIATED SUPPORT

While the frame of the professional learning is consistent for everyone, we differentiate the specific focus and activities so that coaches and administrators are engaged in learning that is appropriate to their experience and knowledge.

Our introductory offering is catered to emerging coaches — instructional staff who have completed or are in the process of completing the district’s Facilitative Coaching Series. These participants may be coaches or curriculum resource teachers who want to develop their fundamental coaching knowledge as they leverage their instructional leadership skills.

Our advanced coaching option is extended to participants who have completed the Facilitative Coaching Series and have completed or are in the process of completing the district’s Advanced Coaching Academy, our instructional coaching certification program offered in partnership with the University of Florida Lastinger Coaching Institute. These coaches have extensive experience in conducting coaching cycles coupled with a strong grasp of pedagogical knowledge that allows for a more specific and focused approach to coaching practices and structures.

Finally, our administrator offering is targeted to assistant principals because, in our experience, the best administrators are those who implement coaching practices, allowing them to effectively provide support and feedback to teachers as they evaluate their instructional delivery throughout the year. This learning opportunity is offered through a district-based principal preparation program that enrolls assistant principals.

A notable benefit to our instructional design is that it allows

a participant to engage in all three professional learning opportunities throughout his or her career, with each opportunity catered to the participant’s specific role, knowledge, and responsibilities. As participants advance through district-provided instructional coaching prerequisites, they can simultaneously advance through our professional learning offerings.

This provides paramount parallel support and resources for these educators as they support teachers and allows them to seamlessly transition into an administrative role with a robust coaching lens, as many of our coaches’ next steps in their progression of leadership is to transition to a school leader or district administrator role.

Here we explain the content of each of these tracks, including each track’s main deliverable: an artifact generated by participants as a result of the learning that demonstrates mastery of content and application of learning in a relevant context. We summarize the highlights in the figure on p. 33.

Emerging coaches

Emerging coaches participate in Coaching Classroom Instruction Through the Framework, where they make explicit connections between the district’s evaluation framework and formative coaching cycle. After engaging in a simulated coaching cycle with fellow coaches, they replicate that process with a teacher at their school.

The fundamentals of social and emotional learning rooted in the CASEL framework (CASEL, 2017) are intentionally embedded into the professional learning, both from an adult lens and a student lens. This allows for coaches to model appropriate SEL competencies in their conversations and provides guidance for teachers on explicitly planning instruction for student SEL needs.

Our district evaluation framework highlights instructional strategies aligning to SEL competencies, showing our teachers how social and emotional learning is embedded into classroom

practices and must be considered when planning.

At this level, coaches conduct a coaching cycle with a teacher and document it. They use our district’s coaching observation tool, which incorporates our evaluation framework from a nonevaluative coaching lens, and provide feedback on dominant instructional strategies observed. They also generate a reflection so they can process the experience and refine their structure for continued implementation.

To provide feedback for coaches, we generated an implementation and impact survey that solicits teacher feedback on the coaching cycle and their perceptions of how it is likely to impact their instruction and future practices. Our team reviews these observations and provides additional actionable feedback so that coaches also experience being coached.

The biggest takeaways are the fluency our coaches build with their knowledge of the evaluation framework and supporting teachers in effectively using the framework and their increase in actionable, objective feedback aligned to our evaluation framework.

Advanced coaches

Advanced coaches have a working knowledge of the coaching cycle, so we are able to engage them at a deeper and more specific level. This advanced learning, Coaching Classroom Instruction Through the Framework for Advanced Coaches, provides instrumental opportunities for coaches to shift their perspective to a leadership lens, identify their own leadership styles and strengths, and build relationships with their administrators when engaging in the coaching cycle, a benefit for coaches who want to take the next step in leadership.

The main focus of learning for advanced coaches is to develop and refine data-based structures to substantiate the deliberate practice process within their schools. This process involves selecting an

COACHING CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION THROUGH THE FRAMEWORK

Professional learning differentiation



Emerging coaches

CRITICAL CONTENT:

- Instructional framework development
- Introduction to coaching cycle
- Observation-based data collection
- Structured feedback
- CASEL framework
- SEL competencies within standards-based instruction

PREREQUISITES:

- OCPS Advanced Coaching Academy completed/in progress
- Active OCPS Certified Observer status



Advanced coaches

CRITICAL CONTENT:

- Deepening knowledge of instructional framework
- Scenario-based coaching with SEL considerations
- Data triangulation, analysis, and synthesis
- Deliberate practice-focused feedback
- SEL connections to leadership style
- SEL competencies to facilitate coaching conversations

PREREQUISITES:

- OCPS Facilitative Coaching Series completed
- OCPS Advanced Coaching Academy completed/in progress
- Active OCPS Certified Observer status



Administrators

CRITICAL CONTENT:

- Evaluative instructional framework
- Coaching cycles within the evaluative process
- Contextual data analysis
- Measurable feedback for improvement
- Adult SEL strategies to support teacher growth
- SEL competencies to facilitate evaluative pre- and post-conference conversations

PREREQUISITES:

- Current assistant principal
- Enrollment in OCPS Preparing Future Principals Academy
- Active OCPS Certified Observer status

Source: Orange County Public Schools

instructional strategy within the evaluation framework and deliberately and continuously engaging in growth using that strategy. All teachers engage in the deliberate practice process throughout the year as a requirement for their final evaluation.

We home in on this process because it's required for all teachers and can therefore be used as a gateway for our coaches to work with resistant learners. The objective nature of data provides a nonthreatening avenue for growth mindset and eliminates the bias and critical nature of observations that might have been previously present for reluctant learners.

Data is difficult to refute, so we

encourage our coaches to approach reluctant or hesitant teachers emphasizing objective data to establish collective responsibility and mutual trust. To this end, we support advanced coaches to develop their skills in data analysis and application.

Before attending, advanced coaches complete a data synthesis report so they can learn to aggregate evaluative data and conduct classroom observations to determine macro- and micro-level trends that will inform future decisions.

We teach them to use a data triangulation methodology, in which they determine trends through multiple data sets (teacher evaluation data, qualitative and quantitative classroom

observation data, and SEL data through districtwide surveys). This practice encourages objectivity and should be more common, but we have not seen it implemented with fidelity in the district.

We also support the coaches to use SEL competencies while completing a mock scenario of a critical conversation with administrators to advocate for teachers. Many of our coaches tell us that they do not usually have structured safe practice opportunities to engage in critical and often uncomfortable dialogue that is crucial in their role.

As they engage in the role-play, they are able to see and hear what adult SEL competencies look and sound

like in various contexts. We encourage them to consider their teachers as they engage in this process — to apply the learning to the people they know and are supporting so that they can glean as much relevant practice as possible from the activity.

The final piece is a coaching cycle with a teacher focusing on the deliberate practice process. The coaches post their observation data and actionable, objective feedback in our observation system, where we access their feedback and provide support. We also require them to document a candid conversation with their administrator, explaining their leadership style uncovered in our learning. We encourage them to partner with their administrator for support in cultivating their identified strengths as they replicate these coaching cycles.

Administrators

Coaching Classroom Instruction Through the Framework for Administrators shows aspiring principals how they can integrate coaching cycles into their evaluative processes and use those best practices to help their teachers grow, simultaneously establishing a culture of trust within their schools.

We link the coaching cycle components to the specific components of a formal evaluation, showing how they do not need to be separate processes or entities when enacted correctly. By showing assistant principals how to coach teachers through the preconference, observation, data analysis, and post-conference processes, they are able to synthesize coaching practices with their evaluative role.

We provide them multiple role-play opportunities with their peers so that they are able to safely practice the structures through various lenses, understanding the impact of this integration from both a teacher and administrator perspective.

This particular professional learning opportunity homes in on trust and shared ownership, both integral to

Participants leave every professional learning experience with a document providing an overview of how the learning acquired may be transferred to their role.

coaching as an administrator and ensuring that the process is carried out with fidelity. This encompasses a heavy emphasis on SEL competencies and conversations where administrators may be shifting their role on a continuum from expert, to colleague, to mediator of thinking, all while keeping adult SEL needs at the forefront of those conversations to promote trust, shared ownership, and positive relationships throughout the dialogue.

Administrators conduct a simulated virtual classroom observation and practice making a data display based on their observations, a first for some assistant principals with no coaching background. This prepares them to replicate the process with their teachers as they conduct observations throughout the year.

Assistant principals leave excited to implement coaching practices within their required evaluative observations, knowing that their intentional focus on coaching will allow them to build positive and lasting relationships with their teachers and help them cultivate a growth mindset throughout their campus.

IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT

One standout practice of our department is that participants leave every professional learning experience with a document providing an overview of how the learning acquired may be transferred to their role. This allows participants to conceptualize the application of knowledge.

We also send this document to all participants' supervising administrators. We want administrators and executive leaders to understand what their

instructional and administrative personnel learned and how they are able to apply it in their role to support and encourage them as they engage in the application process.

While the first page of the document outlines how the participant may apply his or her knowledge, the second page outlines specific leadership moves administrators can take to support implementation of the learning. We link these leadership moves back to evidences within the school and district leader evaluation frameworks so that, as administrators and executive leaders support participants, they provide evidence of their leadership skills.

We solicit feedback after every professional learning opportunity. Feedback from coaches indicates that they are continuing to find innovative ways to leverage SEL competencies with the adults they work with to build trusting partnerships that will positively impact students.

One coach articulated how she uses social awareness by asking each of the teachers she works with how they best interpret data and how they would like their data displayed when being provided feedback from classroom observations.

By taking in their perspectives on feedback representation, that coach is also developing positive relationships and able to practice her own responsible decision-making through making reasoned judgments on how to represent data for various teachers.

Multiple coaches described how they demonstrated self-awareness, changing their questioning techniques and stems for various teachers based on their interactions and the coaches' observations about the teachers' receptiveness to feedback.

By altering the way they posed questions, the teachers each received support catered to their knowledge and needs, resistance declined, and they were able to move forward in their coaching cycle, implementing the necessary strategies and shifts to see instructional change.

In professional learning for coaches, one size doesn't fit all

We are also able to measure the impact of our professional learning opportunities through our district's observation system because the professional learning is aligned with the evaluation framework and observation process. For example, if a coach chooses to work with a teacher on his or her deliberate practice process, we are able to see the observations and feedback surrounding that instructional strategy, and we are also able to see how the assessing administrator rated that teacher in formal and informal evaluations to determine the effectiveness of support.

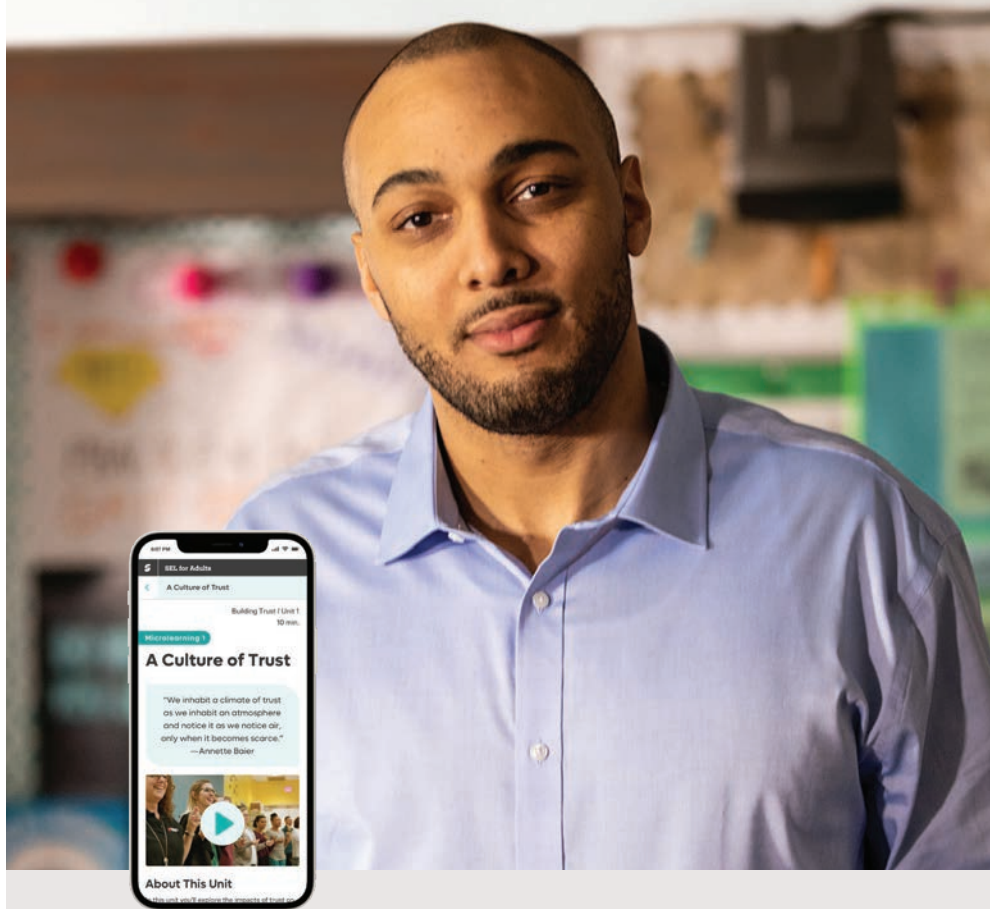
A coach's work is never done, and neither is ours. We continue to explore ways that we can support our instructional coaches and administrators as they work alongside teachers to increase the quality of instruction, attend to the social and emotional needs of students and staff, and improve the climate and culture of their schools.

Amidst current challenges, it is critical that our schools and classrooms evolve as communities where everyone feels welcomed, supported, and safe. Through the explicit linkage of instructional and coaching best practices infused with SEL, participants in these differentiated learning opportunities are equipped with strategies to leverage relationship skills, social awareness, and self-management to cultivate a culture of continuous improvement and prioritize a positive school climate.

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Strengths-based coaching supports teachers during COVID

BY KARYE WELLS AND ELIZABETH FOSTER

Two years after the onset of the pandemic, COVID-19 continues to take a toll on educators' morale and well-being. Educators' needs for sick and bereavement leaves have increased, staffing and substitute shortages are worsening, and the occasional requests to cover another teacher's class or bus duty have become regular — and exhausting — occurrences.

At the same time, the need to

strengthen relationships between educators and students is growing. Isolation, anxiety, and dysregulation leave students vulnerable and educators stretched. The social and emotional needs of students *and* adults have become increasingly widespread and complex, leaving teachers overwhelmed and in need of immediate support.

Coaching, especially a positive and personalized program of coaching, is a way to provide that support. This article showcases how one evidence-based

model of coaching can help educators respond to the increased demands and stresses and associated changes in schools, relationships, and classroom dynamics.

The MyTeachingPartner-Secondary (MTP-S) program for middle and high school teachers is based on decades of research about effective coaching strategies, and it is the focus of a federal Education Innovation and Research grant from the U.S. Department of Education because of studies showing



Meg Ryan

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Becky Odajima

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Anna Savitsky

“Strengths-based is so critical. I honestly can’t imagine what it would be like right now to be doing some of the other types of coaching that I did [before] that were deficit-based.”



Destiny Woodbury

“[T]hey don’t hear a lot of positive things right now, so the strengths-based coaching is so important. It helps with morale and self-care.”

positive effects on teacher and student outcomes. It is also recognized by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) as an effective social and emotional learning (SEL) program.

MTP-S has features that make it especially relevant in the context of COVID-19. It is flexible; focused on relationships, which have been harder to build during the pandemic; and strengths-based, at a time when exhausted teachers are in need of positive reinforcement. Working with a coach, teachers watch multiple video clips of themselves in their classrooms demonstrating effective teaching practices, and those practices become the basis for reflection and dialogue with their coach.

In addition, it won’t overwhelm teachers with more work. Every two weeks, the teacher and coach repeat the same structured coaching cycle, requiring no additional work for teachers other than writing and conferencing for about 45 minutes. As a result, MTP-S has the potential to boost teachers’ morale without making them feel like they have yet another thing to do.

We spoke with veteran district coaches who use this program to talk about their experience using MTP-S with teachers before and during the pandemic. Meg Ryan, a coach in Louisa

County, Virginia, and Becky Odajima, a coach in Midway, Texas, are enrolled in a three-year research project to study student outcomes as a result of being in classrooms with teachers who are receiving MTP-S coaching.

We also talked with coaching experts Anna Savitsky and Destiny Woodbury, who train, support, and coach coaches on using the MTP-S model. These experts shared their insights.

How is MTP coaching different than other models you have experienced?

Meg Ryan: It’s very different for me because my other role for the county is working with all our new teachers. It is about survival mode more with the new teachers, so I like that MTP is strengths-based and guided by the teachers. They get to pick and choose what they want to look at. For me, those are very different ways to coach. [MTP] is more proactive versus reactive.

Becky Odajima: With the timeline [of coaching cycles] that’s put in place with this system, our teachers like the structure and the formalities of these pieces because they know what’s coming next. Right now, they are embracing that.

The other thing that is different about this model compared to others

is the focus on teacher strengths and the use of a framework focused on student engagement. Not very often does coaching and the emphasis on the depth of engagement work in the way this framework does. That is certainly the challenge right now: How do you engage kids who are apathetic about being here, tired, don’t have the capacity to stay engaged in a certain moment, or are out of routine or practice? The stamina to stay engaged is not there, so engagement is huge to get kids back to working.

Anna Savitsky: Strengths-based is so critical. I honestly can’t imagine what it would be like right now to be doing some of the other types of coaching that I did [before] that were deficit-based.

Are the conversations with teachers different now than they were pre-COVID-19? Are there different challenges?

Odajima: The group of teachers I work with is smaller now because of the attrition rate. Some have moved out of the district, they are out on leave, or they did not want to take on another thing. What they seem to be reaching out for now is a restart. They are looking to get back to work like they did in prior years before all the layers of things have taken their energy.

Ryan: One thing I’ve noticed is the relationship piece. With masks, there’s an inability to have effective group work. Kids aren’t talking as much, and the peer dialogue has really decreased. I know a lot of teachers who are normally great relationship builders, but the pandemic has made it much more challenging for them. Even that physical touch or a hug or a high-five that the kids want is missing, and I’m noticing big differences in that building relationship piece — teacher to student and also among the students themselves — so group work is a lot more challenging.

Are the conversations with coaches then also different?

Destiny Woodbury: What I do in my conversations with coaches is really take time in the beginning to talk about self-care. Every coaching conversation I have, I ask them, “How are you taking care of yourself?” and I create space for them to share about a challenge from the week or a joy because they are definitely going through a lot.

I use the first step of the coaching conversation to build relationship and rapport with the teacher. We care about each other. We are going to get to the work, but we are checking in on the personal first before the professional. The first step is so crucial. It has always been crucial, but it is more so now.

Savitsky: Coaches are also feeling stretched and stressed and in need of support. One of the biggest challenges this past year and past semester is staffing issues that are affecting coaches’ capacity to coach. The time they would have been coaching they now are filling in jobs because people are not there — whether people have left or people have to quarantine.

I’ve had lower engagement this semester than ever before. I’ve never had coaches [miss a scheduled session], and I am having that happen now. There was much more consistent attendance at the coaches’ training last year at this time. Due to staffing issues

RESOURCES

For more information about the MTP-S coaching program:

- **Foster, E. (2021, January).** *Seeing teaching through a different lens.* Learning Forward. learningforward.org/report/myteachingpartner-secondary-coaching-model/. This paper highlights three strengths of MTP coaching: the use of short video clips so teachers can observe and analyze their own instruction; the intentional focus on teachers’ successes in the classroom as a basis for coaching that is strengths-based; and the systematic attention to how classroom interactions can be used to improve student engagement and learning.
- **Flowers, J.A. (2019, December).** Accentuate the positive: Video can motivate teachers to improve their skills. *The Learning Professional*, 40(6), 36-39. learningforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/accentuate-the-positive.pdf. An experienced coach’s firsthand perspective on the power of the MTP coaching cycle.
- **Foster, E. (2019, December).** A window into teaching: With evidence-based coaching, teachers observe and reflect on student interactions. *The Learning Professional*, 40(6), 33-35, 40. learningforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/a-window-into-teaching.pdf. Excerpts from an interview with Robert Pianta, who developed the evidence-based MyTeachingPartner 1:1 Video Coaching program (MTP).

and everything else, there is not enough protection for coaches to engage fully. Sometimes coaches leave and then text me later to say, “Sorry, I got called to cover a classroom.”

Woodbury: There has been a lot of rescheduling of meetings by coaches. Coaches will tell me, “I have to go cover a class because this teacher is now out” or “we are missing 10 teachers on campus.” And there is more rescheduling with the coach and the teacher because coaches don’t want to take up a teacher’s planning period. So we have been modifying the cycles to make them faster.

How is MTP coaching supportive, especially post-COVID-19 closings? Can you give an example?

Ryan: Focusing on teacher strengths is an important piece. With COVID, the [district] administration has been focused on mitigation strategies, and they’re not as focused on the instruction piece. And when teachers are having these great lessons, it’s really uplifting for them to have

someone tell them that and to get positive feedback.

I’m not here to make sure their kids all have their mask over their nose and that they’re sitting three feet apart. I’m here to show you what good teaching is happening in your classroom and tell them, “Look how awesome you are!” and “You can do it!” and boost morale. Watching those clips of themselves in good, effective teaching moments is especially uplifting for them right now.

As for the relationship piece, I’m their favorite person they want to see, and they can’t wait for our conference. It’s that human connection. Being able to sit down and have a conversation that is not about COVID but on the fundamentals amidst everything else going on, they can see that effective instruction happening in their classroom.

Odajima: There is a really nice balance where teachers choose what to focus on for a cycle. It’s like when you attend a conference, you don’t usually hear anything brand new, but you’re reminded of things that you knew were good practice and those engaging

instructional practices. Teachers have choice within the coaching cycle to decide what they're going to work on and then they are reminded of what they are doing well, what it's called, and why we do it. The program itself is a nice balance of providing all the resources, but then giving you choice within that context.

Can you give an example of a particular practice that you've worked on with a teacher and the improvement you've witnessed? Was there an impact on student engagement?

Ryan: With my earlier cohort, I had a teacher who was really struck by the Regard for Adolescent Perspectives dimension [when a teacher provides autonomy and leadership opportunities for students, supports their ideas and opinions, and provides content that is useful and relevant to adolescents].

By giving the kids more choice, giving them a little bit of flexibility, and letting go a little bit, it really improved the relationships that she had with her students. The kids felt like they had more ownership of the class as the year went on because the teacher was inviting them in on some of the decisions, discussions, leadership, and direction.

This opened up the learning, and their engagement was much more effective. Then the other dimensions seemed to follow effortlessly from there. There was more peer dialogue, more instructional dialogue, more group work.

Odajima: For me, we were working on the cycle with a focus on Depth of Understanding [when teachers help students understand key ideas in a lesson by integrating skills, concepts, facts, and principles]. The teacher was allowing the back and forth [feedback loops] in dialogue happen where she continues to question students until they can fully get to a place of understanding. The teacher saw herself in the videos and noticed that she only asked safe questions because she wanted that control.

MTP-S TRAINING AVAILABLE

The MTP-S coach training program, which is free to high-needs districts, is available for the 2022-23 school year. There will be no data collection, and coaches may coach teachers in any subject area in grades 6-12. American Institutes for Research is leading the federally funded program. Contact AIR for more information at kawells@air.org or secondarycoachingproject@air.org.

We are talking about this in subsequent cycles and revisiting the concept of letting go and guiding. It has been neat to see this growth. When we let students have more dialogue, they are learning and remembering more, and we are seeing this engagement in her classroom.

I feel like my job as a coach is simply to hold up a mirror and let her see and discover what she is doing in her own teaching. In the video clips where the teacher watches her own practice and has the space to talk about what she wants to improve on, that is where the money is — allowing them to look and reflect on their own accord.

Woodbury: When coaches talk to me about their conversations with teachers, they tell me how excited the teachers were to hear that they were doing something well — they don't hear a lot of positive things right now, so the strengths-based coaching is so important. It helps with morale and self-care. When I hear that I am doing something really well and I'm getting clear on what it is that I am doing and the impact that it is having on kids, it makes me feel really good inside.

Odajima: I want to also add that the time is now for MTP. Teacher professional learning is needed because of people quickly coming into the profession with varying backgrounds,

and teachers may not be as highly qualified as years past. It is a very timely period for this type of professional development with coaching that focuses on student engagement strategies, structured cycles, tools, and resources to be infused in the school systems.

BENEFITS OF MTP-S

Key themes that came up in the interviews were that MTP-S helps teachers feel supported and motivated and that the consistent cycle is a welcomed structure during a time of uncertainty. The teachers are being heard and applauded for their efforts when most communication from supervisors has been in the form of directives that can make teachers fearful and stressed.

Teachers are learning how to expand the room for student voice and autonomy, which in turn creates a safe climate of student inhibition and productivity. The interviews suggest that MTP-S is helping teachers through its structure, focus on student engagement, and strengths-based approach.

MTP-S coach specialists also support newer coaches who are feeling pandemic overwhelm by providing personal check-ins, group coaching support calls, flexibility in cycle timelines, and plans for successfully meeting goals.

One of the key benefits of the MTP-S approach is the ability to be responsive to teachers' varied and shifting needs. As teachers adapt to a changing world, MTP-S coaches are there to listen to their needs, capitalize on their strengths, and keep teaching and learning moving forward.

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Becoming a teacher again made me a better coach

BY ASHLY SKIFFINGTON

At the start of the 2020-21 school year, six months after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic changed all our lives, I and the other instructional coaches in my district were temporarily reassigned to virtual teaching positions.

Because families could choose to

enroll their child in either distance learning or in-person learning, we needed more staff to fill teaching roles or step in for teachers who chose not to return to the classroom. I found myself teaching again, but in a way I had never envisioned — through a computer screen.

Learning how to teach using a

virtual format stretched my capacity and challenged some of my beliefs about curriculum and instruction. It also taught me a lot about the kinds of support teachers need and opportunities for me to provide it.

I returned to coaching this year with a clearer vision of my role as a coach and greater empathy and

Learning how to teach using a virtual format stretched my capacity and challenged some of my beliefs about curriculum and instruction. It also taught me a lot about the kinds of support teachers need and opportunities for me to provide it.

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compassion for those I serve. Becoming a teacher again has made me a better, more reflective coach.

Based on my recent teaching experience, I have made several changes that follow three big lessons that can be valuable for other coaches: Embrace a minimalist approach, embody a coaching mindset and a coaching culture, and establish an optimal learning environment.

Although the pandemic has created stress and engendered disillusionment, it has also created opportunities to do things differently, and these strategies can help us seize those opportunities.

EMBRACE A MINIMALIST APPROACH TO COACHING

Returning to the classroom inspired me to take a more minimalist approach to coaching than I had used

before. A minimalist approach to coaching isn't about doing less. It's about being strategic and thoughtfully differentiating professional learning experiences.

While I was teaching virtually, I became keenly aware that I needed shorter, more frequent planning and reflection opportunities. I wanted to streamline my planning, try new things, analyze their effectiveness, and feel empowered by my decisions to keep going or change course, and I wanted the professional support I received to reflect those goals.

Now that I have returned to coaching, those goals and needs I felt in the classroom are at the forefront of my work with principals, teachers, paraeducators and the growing cohort of teacher leaders in my district. Specifically, I aim to do the following:

- **Remove obstacles.** Suspend the urge to do more. Reflect on what's working and where opportunities for improvement exist. Removing the obstacles is far more powerful than putting more energy into the initiative (Nordgren, 2021).
- **Dedicate time for unlearning.** Unlearning is about ridding ourselves of old ideas and ineffective instructional practices. When needed, structured opportunities for unlearning can be a good investment because it creates space for new ideas to grow and prosper.
- **Make learning goals visible.** Goal-setting is crucial for both the team and the individual. Teams who align their

personalized learning goals with clearly defined student outcomes experience more success.

- **Be intentional.** Striving to get more out of doing less allows space for innovation. Clear goals coupled with intentional learning practices give adults more room to thrive.

At their core, these strategies are about helping teachers and other educators set aside the need for “rightness” and instead lean into the messy, creative, and rewarding work of teaching.

EMBODY A COACHING MINDSET AND A COACHING CULTURE

Stepping back into the classroom taught me that strong coaching models are built from the inside out and one size doesn’t fit all. Coaching programs should assist teachers in determining their own paths forward and implementing next steps in a meaningful and autonomous way. This process creates stronger, more self-directed practitioners (Costa et al., 2016).

Recently, my team and I learned Cognitive Coaching, an approach designed to help teachers explore their thinking and encourage them to tap into their internal resourcefulness. The learning revealed that on some level I had already been applying many elements of this work with my students.

As a mathematics teacher, I knew that a well-crafted question forces students to look inward. But as a coach, I was learning how to connect these skills and provide better support for adults to arrive at their own conclusions. Going back into the classroom reminded me that assisting others to think for themselves is the cornerstone of any coaching approach because it empowers adult learners to take action geared at effecting long-term changes in their practice.

Part of finding our way and empowering change in ourselves and the teachers we work with is embracing a growth mindset. As a coach, I knew

how important a growth mindset is to transforming teaching practices. But as a teacher, I was struggling to keep that in perspective while I felt like a beginner again.

I began to look inward toward my coach training and outward to my colleagues for the support I needed, not just to survive the school year, but thrive as an educator. I realized that everyone can benefit from becoming a beginner again because it empowers us to seek constant improvement and strengthens the connection among organizational goals, ground-level initiatives, and individual growth.

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As organizational researcher Francesca Gino has written, “People perform at their best not because they’re specialists, but rather because their depth of skill is accompanied by intellectual curiosity that leads them to keep exploring” (Gino, 2020).

Based on my experience in the classroom, I recommend coaches do the following to cultivate a coaching mindset and a culture that lifts up coaching:

- **Embrace being a beginner again.** Leaders should never become divorced from the profession they are leading. To understand the experiences of others and provide effective coaching opportunities, we must always remain willing to step back to where we once were. Growth is a journey, not a destination.
- **Establish protected time for coaching.** Instructional teams have a lot to discuss when they come together for collaboration, and it can feel overwhelming at times. Dedicated time for coaching conversations is vital

for making sure manageable, high-leverage ideas and teaching practices are exchanged.

- **Leverage peer coaching.** Peer coaching raises teacher efficacy and will emerge organically when a culture of coaching and professional improvement is foundational to the structure of an organization. When coaching is available to everyone at any time, a commitment to collective growth spreads. Improvement conversations shift outward and stronger, more collaborative teams are built.
- **Involve everyone.** Coaching is not a singular experience, nor should it be reserved for one singular group of people. It’s an approach that has the power to increase the cognitive performances and decision-making skills of all members of the educational community.

ESTABLISH AN OPTIMAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

As we finally, after two years of virtual meetings, begin to return to in-person collaborations, it is important that learning systems support teachers’ comprehensive professional wellness by facilitating connections among teachers. Those connections are some of the things many of us needed most during pandemic teaching.

I believe we do this by investing in a creative approach to structuring teacher collaboration time in a way that honors important brain research about learning. For example, research by Jo Boaler, education author and professor of mathematics at Stanford University, suggests that connection and collaboration are indispensable keys to learning that collaborative problem-solving is vital “for brain development, and for creating equitable outcomes” (Boaler, 2019).

Coaches can build collaborative learning environments with the following structures and routines:

- **Learning spaces.** The physical design of collaboration spaces within a school, department, or central office can play an important role in uplifting a culture of coaching and increase professional learning outcomes. These spaces should be designed with adults in mind. They should be well-organized, inviting, and provide a sense of separation from the competing stimuli of the profession. Additionally, professional resources and job tools should be centrally located and easily accessible.
- **Collaboration schedules.** Protected time for individuals or teams to gather, discuss, and construct new learning with their coach is essential. Helping school leaders prioritize and structure this time takes coordination and commitment. A powerful first step in this process may be to conduct a time audit. By getting a clearer picture of what goes into the daily business of teaching, we can remove obstacles and position professional learning as a strategy for enhancing professional wellness and overall job satisfaction.
- **Routines and protocols.** Effective professional learning communities begin by co-creating norms, designing student-centered agendas, and engaging in clearly defined routines and protocols. Routines provide predictability, and protocols can be used to foster a supportive and fun learning environment. Coaches and school leaders must be intentional about infusing adult social and emotional learning opportunities into carefully crafted collaboration time.
- **Transparency and communication.** For everyone to take advantage of

coaching's benefits, educators need to understand why it can transform their practice. Dynamic opportunities for coaching — such as collegial coaching, leadership coaching, community coaching, and meta coaching (coaching for coaches) — increase coaching's impact by extending its reach to all facets of the organization, elevating individuals and strengthening connections across a school or district.

KEEPING PACE WITH LEARNING

The landscape of education is evolving at a fast pace, and all educators must keep up and adapt by frequently shifting our lenses and changing perspectives. Career-long coaching is paramount for making those shifts and for organizational success — a fact that became especially clear to be when I returned to teaching without the benefit of a coach.

Coaching, if done well, can have a profound impact on collective decision-making skills, cognitive performances, and teacher efficacy. It can also re-establish pride and passion for the profession.

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Even though I'm back in my role as an elementary mathematics instructional coach, a lot remains unfamiliar this year. The pandemic has challenged us, but it has also encouraged us to reach within our school resources to enhance our professional growth in the service of student success.

Reflecting on my teaching and coaching experiences has given me a new perspective about what it means to be a learning leader. I work

daily to honor and implement what I've learned over the past two years through a structured, responsive, and compassionate approach to coaching that elevates and empowers the teachers I work with.

But I also recognize that long-term organizational growth comes from nurturing a learning system from the inside out and by communicating and supporting an adult-centered approach to coaching for all.

From the designers of teacher preparation programs to our elected boards of education members, school systems have a responsibility to ensure that we are working in concert with one another to recruit, train, develop, and retain quality educators who contribute to a culture of coaching.

Because teacher quality is the most important factor in student achievement, an ongoing commitment to dynamic professional growth models that centralize coaches as learning partners becomes the catalyst for improved student outcomes.

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With the right strategies, coaches can leverage co-teaching

BY RYAN GILLESPIE AND JENNIFER S. KRUGER

For teachers and coaches, co-teaching can be exciting, rewarding, and full of powerful learning. It offers teachers supported experiences to apply new knowledge in their own contexts, exemplifying

active engagement in job-embedded professional learning (Learning Forward, 2011).

However, co-teaching is often underused in coaching (Sweeney & Harris, 2016), in part because sharing teaching responsibilities during a

lesson can be complex and challenging. Co-teaching requires the coach and teacher to make continuous, intentional decisions about how and when to take the lead. This kind of decision-making requires strong communication between the teacher and the coach, clarity about

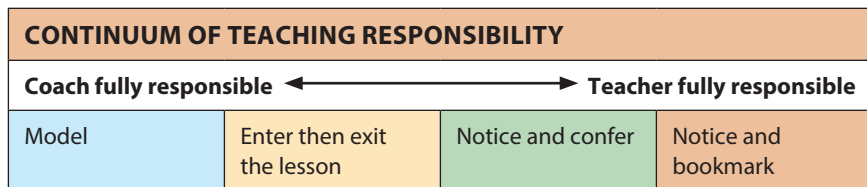
a teacher’s learning goals, and a deep understanding of possible co-teaching strategies.

As part of a project to help mathematics coaches facilitate content-focused coaching cycles, funded by the National Science Foundation (#2006263), we developed a deepened appreciation for the challenges and complexities of co-teaching. We noticed that existing coaching literature offered tips for co-teaching but lacked a comprehensive framework outlining a full range of possible co-teaching strategies.

To fill this gap and support the learning of the coaches in our project, we developed our own framework, calling it the continuum of teaching responsibility. We share this framework here, along with examples of how to use it that are drawn from our coaching experience. We aim to equip practicing coaches with language to make sense of the complex decision-making processes required of co-teaching and support other educators tasked with designing and implementing professional learning experiences for coaches.

CO-TEACHING IN A COACHING CYCLE

Learning Forward (2011) describes coaching as an effective form of ongoing, job-embedded professional learning for teachers. Most coaching models involve a three-part coaching cycle in which a coach and teacher collaboratively plan, implement, and reflect on one or more classroom lessons.



In our experience, a coach often acts as a lesson observer or helps students as a second teacher during the lesson. Given that a primary function of coaching is to help the teacher learn to use high-leverage instructional practices (West & Cameron, 2013), we believe a coach and teacher actively and collaboratively teaching together can better support the teacher’s learning.

We developed the continuum of teaching responsibility to help coaches make productive decisions when taking this active, yet more challenging co-teaching role during lesson implementation with a teacher. We describe intentional co-teaching strategies that range from the teacher having more responsibility for the act of teaching and facilitating lesson activities at one end to the coach having more responsibility at the other end, with strategies involving more equitably shared responsibility in the middle (see figure above).

Noncollaborative actions, such as the teacher and coach working with separate groups or individual students, do not fit our definition of co-teaching because such actions do not explicitly create collaborative learning opportunities for the teacher.

Here are the forms of co-teaching that appear on the continuum.

Model is a form of co-teaching in which the coach assumes the lead role in teaching the lesson. When modeling, the coach facilitates a portion of the lesson (e.g. launching a task) while the teacher focuses on the coach’s use of instructional strategies and the students’ responses and actions. The teacher records noteworthy events to discuss with the coach during the post-lesson reflective conversation.

In special cases, a coach may model an entire lesson, but a coach should most often model a single part of a lesson based on the instructional goals and learning needs of the teacher. Sweeney and Harris (2016) used the term “micro modeling” to emphasize the importance of a coach only modeling small portions of a lesson.

In a second form of co-teaching, *enter then exit the lesson*, the coach assumes teaching responsibility for brief moments (West & Cameron, 2013). To do so, the coach identifies critical moments in the lesson that can be leveraged to support teacher development and intentionally enters the lesson by taking responsibility for lesson implementation for a brief period of time. This is sometimes referred to as side-by-side coaching (West & Staub, 2003).

In the third form of co-teaching,

notice and confer, the teacher takes the primary teaching responsibility while the coach notices key moments of the lesson related to the student learning goals or the teacher's instructional goals (Sweeney & Harris, 2016; West & Cameron, 2013). In conferring moments, the coach and teacher pause their interactions with students to discuss possible actions based on what was noticed. Conferring with the teacher during the lesson also marks important moments to further discuss during the reflective conversation after the lesson.

The final form of co-teaching included in the continuum, *notice and bookmark*, also positions the teacher to assume the lead teaching role while the coach notices and records key lesson moments without talking with the teacher or students.

The coach then uses these “bookmarked” moments to catalyze discussion in the reflective conversation about the learning goals of the lesson or the instructional goals of the teacher (Sweeney & Harris, 2016; West & Cameron, 2013).

HOW COACHES CAN USE THE CONTINUUM

The goal of the continuum is to help coaches select the right co-teaching strategy to meet teachers' needs. As teachers learn to use new practices, they must move from initial awareness, through basic levels of proficiency, toward high levels of proficiency if the practice is to become embedded (Knight, 2007).

The continuum of teaching responsibility helps coaches strategically select forms of co-teaching based on a teacher's current level of proficiency with a practice and scaffold their co-teaching support over time to help teachers sustain this proficiency without coaching support. The following examples illustrate when and how a coach might choose to use each strategy along the continuum.

The model strategy is effective for providing teachers with mental images

The goal of the continuum is to help coaches select the right co-teaching strategy to meet teachers' needs.

of how a practice can be used with their students (Senger, 1999). For example, suppose a teacher participates in a professional learning course about facilitating whole-class summary discussions that productively synthesizes student thinking. She may learn some initial facilitation practices but lack the mental images of what these practices look like that are needed to transfer the broad pedagogical concept into her own practice.

Through modeling, the coach can provide the teacher with concrete images of what a summary discussion could look and sound like with the teacher's own students, as well as an opportunity to examine and reflect on the instructional practices used by the coach to facilitate this discussion.

The enter then exit the lesson form of co-teaching allows the coach to model high-leverage instructional practices during in-the-moment opportunities that arise during a lesson. It also allows the coach to publicly bookmark an important moment in the lesson so the moment stands out and can be prioritized during the reflecting conversation.

For example, if a teacher is facilitating a whole-class summary discussion and the coach notices many students are not listening to an important idea shared by a classmate, the coach may enter the lesson by asking the student to repeat their thinking and then asking for another student in the class to restate this idea (Chapin et al., 2013). After this brief exchange, the coach would exit the lesson and return the teaching responsibilities to the teacher.

This move would provide the teacher with a practical teaching strategy to increase student participation during class discussions

and highlight an important lesson moment to catalyze further reflection when the coach and teacher debrief.

Using notice and confer, the coach can demonstrate the act of noticing important, yet often subtle, events occurring within a busy classroom and help the teacher make connections between her instructional decisions and these student reactions and events. In doing so, notice and confer allows a coach to help a teacher move beyond simply doing the actions of an instructional practice to reach higher levels of proficiency in which the teacher makes intentional instructional decisions that are responsive to students.

For example, before a whole-class discussion summarizing the day's lesson, the coach and teacher might confer about the strategies they observed students using, which strategies to share with the whole class based on the learning goals, and what questions to ask that can help students make connections between the different strategies (Smith & Stein, 2018).

Notice and bookmark is best reserved for refining and fine-tuning practices a teacher is using proficiently. This strategy allows the coach to collect data that can be examined collaboratively during the reflection conversation. The act of using data during reflection supports the development of a teacher's reflective capacity as well as the refinement of the teaching practices.

For example, the teacher may be able to generate high levels of student participation by actively using the turn-and-talk discussion practice (Chapin et al., 2013). However, the teacher wants to ensure that these conversations are helping students think deeply about the content. To support the teacher in refining this practice, the coach can use the notice and bookmark co-teaching strategy to collect student quotes during conversations and later share them with the teacher to reflect on the impact of the practice and implications for the future.

Coaches can use any and all of the co-teaching strategies on the continuum to scaffold their support for teachers. Although a teacher's growth in using new practices is rarely linear, a coach can plan for an appropriate starting place on the continuum and gradually release the teaching responsibility to teachers over time by moving co-teaching activities to the right side of the continuum as proficiency increases. By doing so, the coach can ensure the teacher is learning in ways that allow the emerging proficiency to be sustained without explicit support.

NURTURING PARTNERSHIPS

Building an authentic and emotionally safe partnership with the teacher is an important aspect of productive coaching, as many teachers feel vulnerable in coaching situations and may not be comfortable making their practice public to others (Marzano & Simms, 2013). The continuum of teaching responsibility can support coaches to build and strengthen such partnership when co-teaching in at least two ways.

First, coaches can choose co-teaching forms in the continuum of teaching responsibility based on the teacher's social and emotional needs, as well as their instructional proficiency. These social and emotional needs include the teacher's feelings about new instructional practices, comfort level with coaching, and perceptions about their own learning needs. By being mindful of these important needs, a coach can efficiently build and strengthen a relationship with a teacher when co-teaching.

For example, even though a teacher may benefit from a coach modeling an unfamiliar practice, she might be leery about others taking over teaching duties, especially if she has had negative or controlling experiences with coaching in the past. In such a case, a coach might choose to only notice and confer during their first coaching cycle. This decision would honor the emotional safety needs of the teacher

Coaches can choose co-teaching forms in the continuum of teaching responsibility based on the teacher's social and emotional needs, as well as their instructional proficiency.

and still allow the coach to provide critical support in the moment so the teacher does not feel alone when experimenting with a new practice.

The second way the continuum supports the development of such authentic and emotionally safe partnerships is by providing a coach and teacher with common language to collaboratively design, and therefore share ownership of, co-teaching activities. For example, using a shared understanding of notice and confer, the coach and teacher can anticipate important classroom events to notice and critical instructional decisions they might make together when conferring.

The continuum also allows the coach and teacher to create clear boundaries and signals to avoid surprises that can quickly compromise relationships. For example, when using modeling or exit and enter the lesson, the coach and teacher can decide how and when the coach will assume teaching responsibilities and when the teaching responsibilities will be returned to the teacher.

LEARNING FOR COACHES AND TEACHERS

We designed the continuum of teaching responsibility to provide coaches and teachers with common language and a full range of possible strategies to share teaching responsibility when co-teaching. The continuum has been a useful and important tool for growing our own coaching practice as well as supporting other coaches learning to make sense of the complex decisions processes required of co-teaching. We encourage

others to use the continuum to ensure co-teaching is a safe, rewarding, and powerful learning experience for coaches and teachers.

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'DATA' SHOULDN'T BE A DIRTY WORD

COACHES CAN USE DATA
TO INCREASE LEARNING,
ENGAGEMENT, AND HOPE



BY JIM KNIGHT AND MICHAEL FAGGELLA-LUBY

Data is an inescapable part of our lives. We ask Siri the temperature before we decide which coat to wear when we leave the house in the morning, we keep an eye on the speedometer as we drive to and from work, and we might even use a sleep

app to gauge how effectively we sleep at night. Data is so deeply woven into the fabric of our lives that it is next to impossible to imagine what a data-free life would be like.

But despite the centrality of data in everyone's personal lives, when people talk about data in schools, their

comments are often negative. For example, aware of the negative feelings the word "data" evokes for many, coaches often try to find other ways to refer to it.

A certain degree of distaste for the word is understandable. In educational systems with an intense focus on



the group of students the data represents. And in worst-case scenarios, leaders sometimes share data in a way that erodes teacher morale, especially when scores are lower than hoped and teachers don't know what they can do to improve results.

But we believe “data” should not be a dirty word. In fact, we believe that gathering, interpreting, and sharing data are all essential parts of effective instructional coaching. Data should be embraced, not shunned, because it can improve student learning and well-being, accelerate professional growth, and build teacher morale.

Data can help teachers see their students' learning and well-being needs more clearly. For example, data on something as simple as the percentage of noninstructional time occurring in a classroom can lead to important insights into how learning is and isn't occurring during lessons. When teachers reduce noninstructional time by 20%, for example, that is comparable to adding a full-day of learning for students each week.

Data also accelerates professional learning by revealing what is and isn't working for students. A simple exit ticket collected at the end of a lesson that asks students to respond to a content-related question can help teachers see whether they need to adjust their instruction — for example, by providing more feedback, modeling new skills, or giving students more opportunities to practice with a partner — so that more students succeed. When students and teachers both see progress, real learning can occur.

Finally, the way data is shared during coaching can build morale by fostering hope. As psychologist Shane Lopez (2013) has explained, hope has three dimensions: goals; pathways to the goals, which involve monitoring progress and making adjustments; and agency, our “perceived ability to shape our lives” (p. 25).

Data is central to all three dimensions. That is, data helps teachers

identify preferred futures or goals by making the invisible visible. Data helps people see if their pathway to a goal is working or needs to be modified. And finally, data helps build agency (in both students and teachers) by helping people see their progress as they move closer and closer to identified goals.

As Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer (2011) write, “Of all the things that can boost emotions, motivation, and perceptions during a workday, the single most important is making progress in meaningful work.” In a very real sense, when they share data effectively, coaches build hope in others.

DATA RULES

Data takes many forms in schools, but if teachers and coaches intend to reap the benefits described above during coaching, schools must gather and share data effectively; sadly, too often, they do not. For the past two years, we have been studying how data can be used by teachers and coaches to increase learning and hope. We've summarized our findings in the following data rules.

Teachers should choose the types of data to collect and analyze. Teachers are more likely to embrace data and, therefore, benefit from it, when they choose it themselves. Coaches can ask teachers the simple question, “How will you know you've hit the goal?” as a helpful starting point for identifying what data to gather. If data is going to increase hope, it needs to be the kind of data that teachers see as important.

Measures must be valid. Data isn't helpful if it measures the wrong thing. Asking people to complete a multiple-choice quiz to assess their ability to ride a bike isn't nearly as effective as actually watching them attempt to ride a bike. Coaches and teachers should use the appropriate kind of assessment for the learning that is being assessed. For example, quizzes and checks for understanding might work well for assessing student knowledge, but

achievement scores, teachers can get the sense that numbers are all that matters and that learning is not nearly as important as test scores.

In some instances, educators feel that data isn't useful because standardized test results arrive too late in the school year to change practice for

rubrics are likely more effective for assessing skills.

Data gathering should be reliable.

Reliability means that different people get the same results when they gather the data. Within coaching, this means that the coach and teacher get the same results regardless of who collected the data. This is important because when people engage in dialogue about data, they need to be certain they are talking about the same things. Miscommunication is almost inevitable when data is not gathered reliably or when those involved have different definitions for the data.

Coaches and teachers should prioritize objective over subjective data.

Data is most powerful when it is objective. Although subjective data can be helpful, most of us find it easier to process factual data rather than someone's opinion. Furthermore, research suggests that observers often overestimate the validity and reliability of their observations (Buckingham & Goodall, 2019), so our subjective observations may not be as helpful as we assume.

Data is more useful when it is gathered frequently. One of the most important uses of data is to help teachers see whether what they are doing is working, and frequent data collection helps them make real-time connections between their practice and students' learning. Teachers who frequently give students exit tickets with questions about content, for example, are able to see if their teaching is working or if they need to make adjustments to how they teach so students master the content before moving on to new content. Also, data only builds hope when it shows teachers and students that they are making progress. For these reasons, we suggest data is gathered at least once a week.

Data should be easy to gather.

Since assessments need to be conducted

frequently, they need to be as easy to implement as possible. There are many excellent assessments that yield excellent data for teachers but aren't helpful because they are too difficult to implement regularly and reliably.

Data is most powerful when teachers are involved in gathering it. When teachers, rather than coaches or others, gather data, it cuts out the middle person, and data becomes more immediate and powerful. For example, if teachers watch video recordings of their lessons and code what types of questions they ask in class, it's more powerful than when coaches observe lessons and code the data and share it with teachers. When teachers see for themselves the impact of their teaching, they are much more likely to believe they and their students can achieve their goals.

KINDS OF DATA COACHES CAN GATHER

The data rules can be applied to the gathering of many different types of data, but during instructional coaching, three types are especially important: student achievement, student engagement, and instructional practices.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

We usually describe achievement data as either summative or formative. Teachers give summative assessments at the end of a learning period to get an overall measure of achievement and give formative assessments to measure student understanding at regular intervals during instruction.

Formative assessment is most useful for guiding professional learning since it provides timely data for instructional decision-making. Formative data can help coaches and teachers consider the following types of achievement.

Knowledge. Formative assessments of knowledge can include daily or semiweekly short quizzes or checks for understanding, such as exit tickets, response cards, Likert-scale responses, or other types of assessments that

teachers can use quickly and informally during teaching.

Other options include prompts being embedded within a set of Google slides or requiring a written response via an index card or sheet of paper placed on students' desks that the teacher can collect at the end of the lesson.

Skills. Checks for understanding are valid measures of learning, but they're less effective for measuring skills. Teachers and coaches are better off using rubrics to assess the extent to which students have mastered skills. The three essential components of a rubric include a set of evaluative criteria, quality explanations of criteria at specific levels, and a means of scoring.

Rubrics can be holistic, analytical, or single point in nature. *Holistic rubrics* employ a single scale with multiple criteria (e.g. capitalization, organization, punctuation) to assign a single score. *Analytical rubrics* provide criteria for each component of the assignment separately, leading to a total score but also clear individual component feedback. Finally, *single-point rubrics* are used to guide student self-assessment.

Big ideas. Teachers and coaches can use all the types of data described above to measure whether students have learned big concepts or principles. Analytic rubrics, in particular, can be used to assess more complex forms of student writing.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Instructional coaches may not immediately think of engagement data as important, but it is, in fact, essential, because lack of engagement is the main reason students drop out of school (see Knight, 2019, for more information on coaching and engagement). Unfortunately, engagement is often mistakenly seen as a single element. However, it is helpful to view the whole student and gather data on the behavioral, cognitive, and emotional elements.

Behavioral engagement is the most directly observable type of

engagement due to external behaviors during learning. For example, physical responses associated with engagement are easily observed when students are on task, using appropriate materials, challenged but not overwhelmed, and able to ask or answer relevant questions. Teachers can collect observable data on student disruptions or time on task during a particular learning activity (e.g. during circle time). Teachers might also use a clipboard with a seating chart to keep track of which students respond to questions and engage in group discussions.

Cognitive and emotional engagement is more challenging to observe. For example, it is difficult to observe how much mental investment (cognitive engagement) a student puts into a given activity before giving up. Similarly, it is tough to gauge the range of positive or negative emotions students experience during different parts of a lesson, including interest, anxiety, or happiness.

However, there are ways to get inside student thinking and feeling before, during, and after learning experiences. One excellent source of data on cognitive engagement is exit tickets, which ask students to share their thinking and, therefore, provide formative feedback. Typically, students respond to a prompt on a slip of paper, index card, or prepared worksheet (digital solutions are also helpful).

Similarly, admit slips, used to assess students' attitudes when they enter class, prompt students to share their thoughts about their interest in the lesson, their emotional response, or other helpful points of clarification before the start of class for immediate teacher attention.

Another alternative is the use of interactive journals, in which teachers and students write back and forth to each other. Finally, to learn more about their students' social-emotional experiences and reactions, teachers may use engagement interviews, probing students' belonging and connection, sense of safety, and hope.

INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

Gathering data that assesses student learning and engagement keeps the focus where it needs to be — on students — but teachers frequently want to adapt how they teach to help students succeed, and that requires teachers to look at their own practices. Two ways to do this include coding the questions teachers ask and recording the amount of teacher talk throughout a lesson. Teachers can gather this type of data by reviewing video of their lessons, and coaches can do it while observing teachers' lessons or reviewing data.

Teacher questions are vital components of classroom talk. When they are asked effectively, questions can support students' thinking and provide teachers with ongoing assessments of students' understandings. Data collected should include the type, kind, and level of questions asked. The two major types of questions are open questions — those that involve infinite correct answers (Who is your favorite author?) — or closed questions with specific, discernable answers (Who wrote *The Pearl*?).

Questions can be further categorized by kind: opinion questions that don't have personal or individual answers or right/wrong questions that must be answered correctly. Finally, teachers can assess levels of thinking required to answer a question by noting if the question focuses on student knowledge, skills, or big ideas.

Teacher talk refers to the verbal interactions that take place between a teacher and a student, or group of students, and is usually intended to facilitate learning. Coaches and teachers can assess three types of teacher talk: teacher monologue, involving no interaction with students; teacher-initiated interactive talk, involving segments of verbal interaction with students as initiated by the teacher; and student-initiated interactive talk, involving segments of verbal interaction with students as initiated by the students.

Alternatively, student-initiated

interactions may arise from individual student questions about the material and take the form of either prompted or unprompted opportunities from the teacher. Student responses may be individual or shared. To ensure that teacher talk does not dominate the learning environment, data can be collected to note timeframes for teacher talk only, guided practice with teacher-led student talk, and student talk only.

THE POWER OF DATA

All data is imperfect, and none of the forms of data discussed here is without limitations. However, moving forward with a little bit of light is better than moving forward in darkness. Data fosters student learning and well-being, guides teachers' professional learning, and builds hope. Data is not a dirty word — just the opposite. When coaches partner with teachers and gather data effectively, data is powerful, positive, and empowering.

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5

GUIDING QUESTIONS

BUILD A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP COACHING



BY SARAH BIRKELAND, RICHARD LEMONS, ISOBEL STEVENSON, AND ROBERT VILLANOVA

Leadership matters. In fact, research identifies leadership as second only to teaching in school-related factors influencing student achievement (Louis et al., 2010). As districts seek ways to improve the quality of school leadership, they often turn to coaching. And coaching can improve leaders' effectiveness — under the right conditions (Grant et al., 2009). Without the right conditions, coaching may offer advice or emotional support, but do little to effect change in teaching and student learning. To guarantee a return on the sizable investment entailed in coaching, district leaders must articulate how it will serve the overall improvement strategy and

design the intervention accordingly.

We have researched, designed, and engaged in leadership coaching for many years, from many angles and across many district contexts. We have been struck by how rare it is to see a leadership coaching model that clearly aligns with and supports district priorities. To help change that pattern, we have distilled the lessons we've learned into five key questions that can guide strategic planning for leadership coaching programs.

Here we share those questions, with examples of how we addressed them in one large-scale school improvement project, LEAD Connecticut, in which we worked with a varied group of stakeholders to articulate a strategy for

school turnaround, a corresponding vision for turnaround leadership, and a strategy for developing and supporting a cadre of school leaders equipped to carry out that vision.

1 What is your vision for effective leadership?

Most school districts are guided by an improvement strategy that specifies what leaders and teachers should do to reach student achievement goals. Some of those improvement strategies are clearly understood and palpable in the daily activities of administrators and teachers, while others are just words on a page. In every case, the improvement strategy carries within it, implicitly or explicitly, expectations about what

A clear vision aligned to district goals is key.

school leaders must do to carry it out. Making that vision of effective leadership explicit in the form of standards or competencies is a key step to ensuring that the strategy doesn't stay on the page.

Key decisions about what coaching should look like flow from that clearly articulated vision for effective leadership. Therefore, the more specific and bounded the vision is, the easier it will be to design a coaching system that complements it.

The LEAD Connecticut team drafted key leadership competencies for school and district leaders in turnaround settings (Partners for Educational Leadership, 2022a; LEAD Connecticut, n.d.). Each set of competencies focused on a handful of high-leverage leadership activities that research has shown drive school turnaround. They provided a much-needed anchor for all of the support that the state-sponsored initiative offered, including leadership coaching.

2 What aspects of that vision for effective leadership can coaching best support?

Once an understanding of what effective leaders do has been established,

consider how coaching can best support leaders in reaching that vision. Educational leadership is a complex job, with myriad skills necessary for success. Coaching, which is a personalized, interactive intervention, is better suited for developing some of those skills than others, and particularly skills related to reflection or cognition. Getting clear about which of the many critical leadership capacities coaches are meant to support will help them focus their work with school leaders on the highest-leverage skills.

In LEAD Connecticut, we opted to use whole-group professional learning to teach school principals procedures and concrete skills and identified only a small subset of habits of mind as outcomes for coaching:

- Principals learn how to think strategically and intentionally about the connection between their leadership and student achievement.
- They learn to challenge their own and others' assumptions about what is possible.
- They learn how to be reflective practitioners.
- They learn to do this work independent of the coach.

We believed that principals best develop those habits through one-on-one questioning and feedback, things coaches are well-positioned to do. This theory of adult learning drove the decision about which competencies to focus coaching on and the shape of the coaching itself.

3 Given the knowledge and skills your coaches will help develop in school leaders, what should the coaching look like?

The role of the coach is frequently vague and underspecified. Leadership coaches often are seasoned education leaders, retired from the role their clients now hold; they are accomplished professionals with many successes to their names. Surely, the logic goes, they know what they are doing, and to prescribe specific practices may seem presumptuous and unnecessary. It is tempting to simply let the coaches do their magic without interfering, especially when the leaders, who usually appreciate the rare opportunity for personalized support, are satisfied with it.

Yet when we avoid offering clear, explicit guidance, we diminish coaching's power. Coaches should not

be allowed to do whatever they choose, no matter how accomplished they are. Effective coaching programs develop a clear and specific set of expectations for coaches' practice, tied directly to the learning outcomes that they hope coaching will achieve and to their best guesses about how adults learn those things.

For example, after much research and discussion about how adults develop the habits of mind listed above, we created a vision for leadership coaching in LEAD Connecticut. This vision is described in 10 succinct standards, such as: The coach routinely connects the coaching conversation to the leader's strategic plans and related short- and long-term goals (Partners for Educational Leadership, 2022b). These standards are based on a model of learning that suggests, in part, that adults can become more reflective and strategic if they are supported in slowing down and clarifying the desired results of their actions.

We have found that this step in the process can be surprisingly challenging. It requires surfacing and interrogating a range of assumptions — about how adults learn, the tension between building leaders' long-term capacity and solving their immediate challenges, and what good coaching looks like in action. Even in the face of disagreement about what effective coaching should look like, we urge you not to gloss over the need to develop a shared vision.

4 Now that you have a vision for effective coaching, how will you ensure that coaches have the skills and knowledge to carry it out?

We observe that organizations and districts that have invested in clarifying specific learning goals for coaching resemble one another in at least one way: They do not view coaching as a simple task. They also recognize that effective coaching draws on more than personality and leadership experience; it draws on the skills and knowledge of a professional practice. Ultimately,

it is incumbent on the organization to ensure that coaches have the skills and knowledge to carry it out. Learning any new professional practice is challenging, and it may even require unlearning old practices.

The first step in ensuring coaches have the right skills and knowledge is to decide which qualities to screen for in the hiring process. Some qualities are more easily screened for than taught, like a reflective disposition or a learning orientation. In contrast, some other desired skills, like effective questioning techniques, can be taught and practiced. Taking time to sort the skills this way allows for the development of explicit hiring criteria and interview strategies.

LEAD Connecticut drew largely from a pool of retired principals and superintendents for its coaches, knowing their experience would lend credibility with clients. We knew we might not find candidates with that background who were also highly skilled at the types of listening, questioning, and feedback specified in our coaching model.

Those skills likely would need to be taught. Therefore, we screened for candidates who leaned towards helping the leader find a solution rather than dictating what they should do. We developed authentic scenarios and asked prospective coaches to role play during the interviews. We looked for those who demonstrated curiosity and asked thought-provoking questions and screened out those who immediately offered advice.

The second step is identifying which aspects of the coaching model will require training. Coaching is a professional practice, and learning a professional practice is hard. It requires practicing the practice, receiving feedback, and practicing again.

Teaching leadership coaches a professional practice can be particularly challenging. As noted above, programs often hire retired educational leaders as coaches. They spent their careers doing the job. The challenges their clients face

are often very similar to challenges that they faced in the past. And they often desperately want to see their clients succeed. The temptation to step in and fix problems directly — or give clients explicit directions about how to do so — is strong. Learning to check that temptation is challenging and requires commitment, practice, and feedback.

Time and again, we have been surprised by just how much training and practice is needed to develop a cadre of effective leadership coaches. After much experimentation and learning, we recommend the following:

- Share with coaches the district improvement strategy, the vision of effective leadership, and the model of effective coaching and help them understand the connections among the three.
- Model the desired coaching practice over and over again. Coaches can't enact a practice that they have not seen.
- Record and transcribe real or practice coaching sessions and allow coaches to examine them against the program's vision for effective coaching practice.
- Practice the practice in safe environments. For example, engage coaches in role plays followed by specific feedback about how well their practice aligned with the model of effective coaching.

5 How will you know if this coaching program is working?

Coaching a leader toward effective practice is complex work. We won't always have research to guide our models and decisions. Therefore, it is critical to approach our strategies as hypotheses and look for opportunities to gather data that will help improve those hypotheses and tighten training and support.

This should involve careful monitoring of the coaches' developing practice. We do not assume that coaches are doing exactly what we

trained them to do, even if we trained them well. Asking coaches regularly to reflect on their own practice is a good start, as they are likely to have ideas about what is working well and what is not.

However, if the coaches report that they are completely proficient at implementing the coaching model and have no further questions, we do not take that at face value. We are not suggesting that they are willfully deceptive; rather, we observe that effective coaching is surprisingly challenging and people are unreliable judges of their own efficacy. We must find ways to examine what, exactly, coaches are doing with clients.

At LEAD Connecticut, we did this by arranging for volunteer coach-client pairs to record themselves, then had the recordings transcribed with all identifying information removed. We examined the transcripts for alignment to the program model, identified the coaches' strengths and growth areas, and designed follow-up training for coaches around what we learned.

Studying whether coaches are successfully implementing the model provides important information but will not show whether the model itself is effective. Therefore, we suggest also studying the impact of the coaching on clients' leadership. This must go beyond simply gauging client satisfaction to look for improvement in the leadership practices identified as targets for coaching.

We do not underestimate the challenge in studying changes in leadership practice, nor in distinguishing the impact of coaching from other supports. We have struggled with how to do this effectively, ultimately choosing to collect imperfect data from a variety of perspectives, including leaders' own self-assessments against the leadership competencies at various points in time; their coaches' and supervisors' assessments of their practice against the leadership competencies; and clients' reports of the ways in which coaching was most

and least helpful in supporting their growth. Our lesson: Don't let the desire to collect perfect data impede the collection of good enough data; there is always something to learn.

FINDING BALANCE

Experience has taught us that designing, building, and continuously improving a coaching program for educational leaders requires balance in two key areas. The first is balance between coaches' professional discretion and fidelity to the coaching model.

Every coaching relationship is different. Coaches need enough discretion in deciding how to spend their time to allow them to build relationships, adapt to the client's context, and switch gears when a coaching session does not go as planned. Some discretion in decision-making is good. But offering coaches too much independence leads to idiosyncratic practice, diluting the power of coaching and its potential for supporting desired improvements. Finding this balance may take trial and error; dialogue between coaches and the leaders who design and run the program can help refine it over time.

Program leaders must also balance support and accountability. Effective leadership coaching — no matter the model — is complex. Learning to do it well is challenging and takes time. Coaches will need lots of guidance and empathy as they develop a practice. At the same time, coaching is a huge investment, and a system of accountability for how coaches practice (beyond client satisfaction) must be in place.

Continually learning about how well coaches are enacting the model, and holding them accountable for improving, helps protect that investment and ensure a strategic approach to coaching aligned with improvement goals.

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Principals rediscover their joy and purpose through coaching

BY KAY PSENCIK

P rincipals are feeling the stress of these tumultuous times. According to a recent report sponsored by The Wallace Foundation, principals report that, for the last two years, they have spent most of their time on

COVID-19 responses, teacher absences and retention, and designing online instruction (Clifford & Cogshall, 2021). They also feel the urgent need to catch students up academically and provide emotional support for students, staff, and parents.

Amid all these challenges, principals want to regain their purpose and return their schools to the core values of educating every student to high standards. They see professional learning as a way to address acceleration, biases in the school, use of curriculum

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materials, assessments of student learning, and instructional practices and to strengthen a culture of empathy and listening to help heal the widespread fatigue, anxiety, and grief (Clifford & Coggshall, 2021).

Principals cannot do this work and lead this learning on their own. Fortunately, coaching is a powerful approach to assist principals in being leaders of high-performing schools where students and staff thrive. More than just mentoring or shared brainstorming, coaching helps principals see new possibilities for themselves, their schools, and those they serve. Through inquiry and reflection, coach and coachee explore new ideas for meeting today's challenges.

Coaching and supporting principals is an important part of our professional services work at Learning Forward. For many years, we have recognized the significant role principals play in leading learning at their schools and increasing student success by increasing educator effectiveness. Our work in this area goes back decades.

For example, the Twin Tiers Principal Coalition, which started in Corning, New York, in 2003, engaged over 150 principals for more than 10 years in using the Standards for Professional Learning in leading learning communities. A study found that it resulted in principals gaining confidence in facilitating data and curriculum conversations with teachers and developing skill in using a variety

of learning designs (Resources for Learning, 2015).

Galveston County Learning Leaders in Texas and the Arizona Learning Leaders for Learning Schools projects are two of our other principal-focused models that were co-designed with states and districts, reaching hundreds of principals. We have designed numerous learning resources, including a collaboration with The Wallace Foundation to create materials and activities to support use of its PBS film, *The Principal Story* (Learning Forward, 2014). All of these learning efforts were grounded with The Wallace Foundation's work on effective principals.

From these projects and others, coaching emerged as a critical aspect of

personalizing support for principals. We learned that when coaching is added to high-quality professional learning for principals, the learning experiences become actionable.

Principals can explore strategies for implementing what they are learning that work for their specific staff and communities. Time and again, we and the principals we work with begin to see significant shifts in teachers' work and student learning. Through this professional services work, we continually gain new insights and learn new lessons.

In the last two years, since the start of the COVID pandemic, we have continued and deepened our commitment to learning from leaders even as we support them to engage in their own learning. As we reflect on education today, we have identified key themes about principals' current needs for support and opportunities for coaching right now.

Because the principalship is a microcosm of educational systems at large, these themes are reflective of the larger professional learning needs in schools and districts today. They are informative for us as we plan our work going forward, and we believe they can be informative for other educators and those who support them as well.

PRINCIPAL WELLNESS

What principals need more than anything right now is permission to take time to practice wellness for themselves. Wellness is basic to leadership. But the urgency and constant state of flux of the past two years have made it hard for leaders to remember that.

I have been talking with the principals I coach about the impacts of stress and the way our bodies relay messages about stress to those we work and interact with. After principals recognize those negative impacts, we work on strategies to help them find some peace.

For example, I am working with a team of principals in Cook County

What principals need more than anything right now is permission to take time to practice wellness for themselves. Wellness is basic to leadership. But the urgency and constant state of flux of the past two years have made it hard for leaders to remember that.

District 130 in Illinois who have not been giving themselves permission to take care of themselves. Through our conversations, they have committed to taking time for centering, deep breathing, and silence.

They have committed to taking walks around the school with the intent of experiencing what a great place the school is for children. The goal is to rediscover the peace, gratitude, and joy in being principals who serve children and adults.

I was working with a principal in another district who felt very down about her work and inadequate about her leadership. When I explored with her the challenges she was facing and her responses to them, she said she had no idea how to answer my questions.

I asked, "What do you do for fun?" She stared at me for the longest time. Finally, she said, "I used to play the piano every evening. Now, I get home, rush to start supper, then turn on the TV to watch the news. I feel I must know what is happening, but it just heightens my tension."

I asked her to walk me through her evening schedule minute by minute. As she did, she suddenly paused and said, "I don't have to watch the news!" She started a new practice: Start supper, then play the piano for 30 minutes. By our next weekly visit, she said that simply returning to what she loved for 30 minutes a day changed her attitude toward work. She laughed as she pointed out that the news was the

same at 10 p.m., but her day was now different.

The following questions can help the coach focus on the coachee's emotions and physical well-being:

- In what ways can you find time to be still, quiet, and reflective so that you can rejuvenate your energy?
- How might this help you renew your sense of purpose and feel deep gratitude for your opportunity to serve?
- What are the long-term consequences for you of not making time for yourself? What is the impact on your attitude toward your work? On your emotional and physical health? On your relationships? On your opportunity to achieve your purpose and goals for life in and outside of just work?

REBUILDING LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Principals aren't the only ones feeling stress, of course, and school leaders have a responsibility to guide their staff through the challenges to renew their passion for the work and help students achieve their potential. In many schools, staff learning communities have suffered from lack of time, abundance of urgent needs, and general sense of exhaustion.

Nurturing learning communities is central to all of Learning Forward's work, and we integrate it into all of our coaching. Knowing that nothing is the same as it was pre-COVID-19, I have been exploring with principals new approaches to rebuild their learning communities and refocus the work of those communities on students' needs.

Some principals don't want to start this work right now — they want to let things settle down. They remind me how different and challenging things are right now. During COVID shutdowns, some students forgot how to do school. Some adults did, too. After experiencing long periods of teaching and learning online, being in

a classroom still feels new, especially with COVID mitigation measures and the stress of political tensions over those measures.

But in this environment, learning communities are even more important. Educators need to connect with one another and lean on and learn from each other. In working with overwhelmed or resistant principals, I ask, “Are there ways to renew the learning communities so that adults are happier, smarter?” Often, we discover together that there are.

It’s important that we focus the work of learning communities on student needs. So, acknowledging that nothing is the same as it was pre-COVID 19, I explore with principals new approaches to rebuilding their learning communities that focus the work on their students’ needs. The first step is figuring out who students are now, how they’ve changed, and what they need.

While I was coaching principals in Galveston County in Texas, we explored how they could learn more about their students so that the school teams could set meaningful short-term goals. I asked questions like:

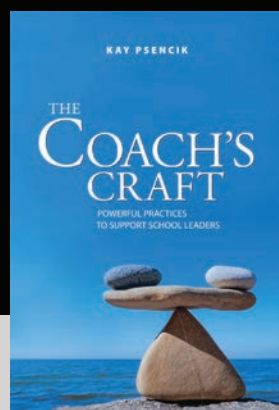
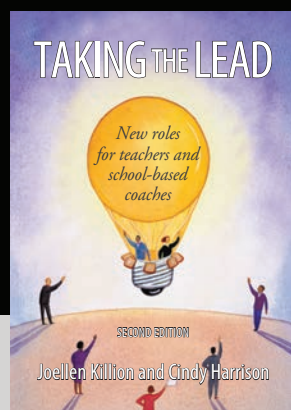
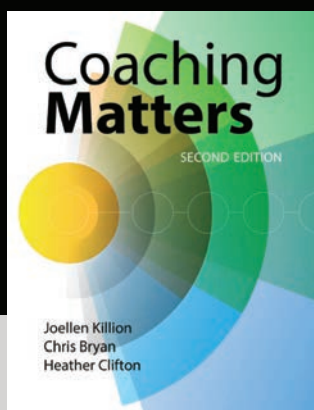
- Where have students historically not performed well in your school?
- What do we know about your students now? What data do we have that we might count on?
- In what ways can we chart this data so that we can understand what students and staff know and do not know?
- What do you think your teachers need from you to host meaningful data conversations?
- Where are logical curriculum materials, assessment strategies, and instructional strategies that would make the most sense to use right now?

Educators need to connect with one another and lean on and learn from each other. In working with overwhelmed or resistant principals, I ask, “Are there ways to renew the learning communities so that adults are happier, smarter?” Often, we discover together that there are.

Principals are extremely creative, and these strategic questions led the Galveston County principals to generate amazing ideas for their school families. They created new strategies for facilitating examination of curriculum materials, revising assessments, charting data, building high expectations for students and staff, engaging their

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instructional coaches in different ways, and implementing effective cycles of continuous improvement. All of these strategies involved collaboration among staff and strengthening the learning community.

EXPANDING PRINCIPALS' KNOWLEDGE

One of the joys of working in education is that we always have more to learn. In coaching principals, I emphasize that this is a positive thing and not reflective of weakness. I also emphasize that when principals model learning and expanding knowledge, it rubs off on teachers.

Last year, I worked with a middle school principal whose goal was to increase student achievement in language arts and math in his Title I school. His focus was on creating collaborative teacher groups engaged in intense work around state standards, using cycles of continuous improvement. The principal doubted that he would be able to get his teachers to engage in the work.

The process began slowly in October but quickly gained momentum and continued through the rest of the year. Teachers began to learn together about the standards, instructional strategies, creating assessments, and analyzing their data.

His own learning and growth, facilitated by coaching, was a key part of this. He said, "It was eye-opening to me how much I was learning about my students and about the math curriculum as I worked with the math teaching team. When teachers realized what I knew about students and what was expected of them, they began to pay greater attention to their own data and their understanding of the level of rigor students had to achieve."

This experience has allowed him and his teachers to gain confidence in their knowledge of standards and instruction. According to his supervisor, he has continued to work with the same team he started with but has now expanded the collaborative work to

more teacher teams.

I have also seen principals spread their learning to other schools and districts, exponentially increasing the impact of the coaching. For example, I coached two elementary principals from Mesa, Arizona, who were focused on engaging their school teams to analyze new curriculum materials and new state standards. When I traveled to Mesa to work with them, they asked me to stay for a meeting they were about to host with 15 other elementary principals, who had become interested in what they were learning.

Voluntarily, they formed a yearlong learning community focused on ensuring all their teachers understood the new standards and how their new curriculum materials would support them in teaching and learning. It was an amazing extension of work that began with two principals.

HELPING PRINCIPALS FIND THEIR INSPIRATION

It can be hard for leaders to find inspiration and joy when times are as stressful as they have been in the last two years. Coaching can help principals step back and rediscover their motivation or find new sources of inspiration.

For example, a colleague of mine was working with a principal who was frustrated by a team that seemed resistant to every idea he shared. Sensing that the principal's frustration and anger were threatening his morale, she asked, "Is there a team that gives you joy and energizes you?" The principal said that the 7th-grade math team inspired him because they work hard, learn together, and really commit to their learning and the success of their students.

The coach then asked, "What would it take for you to spend time with them today?" After reflecting for a few minutes, the principal cleared his calendar to make the time. When the coach checked in with him at the end of the day, the principal could not wait to share what a wonderful day he had had.

The coach could have worked with him on how to deal with the team that was frustrating him. That would have been a valid approach, and perhaps one that coach would choose to do at a later date. But she recognized that what he needed most at that moment was a boost of inspiration. That's one of the benefits of responsive coaching — it matches the right strategy to the right moment.

HELPING PRINCIPALS SOAR

Principals are skilled in many ways, but, like all of us, they learn exponentially when working with an expert coach. In my coaching, I always try to remember that principals became principals because they really want to see their students and staff soar. And I always try to stay cognizant of the fact that I became a principal coach because I want to see principals soar.

My Learning Forward colleagues and I focus our coaching on what matters in leading high-performing schools. Through coaching, we help others shape their own future and achieve their own goals. We bring comfort, optimism, increased effectiveness, and, most importantly, audacious hope.

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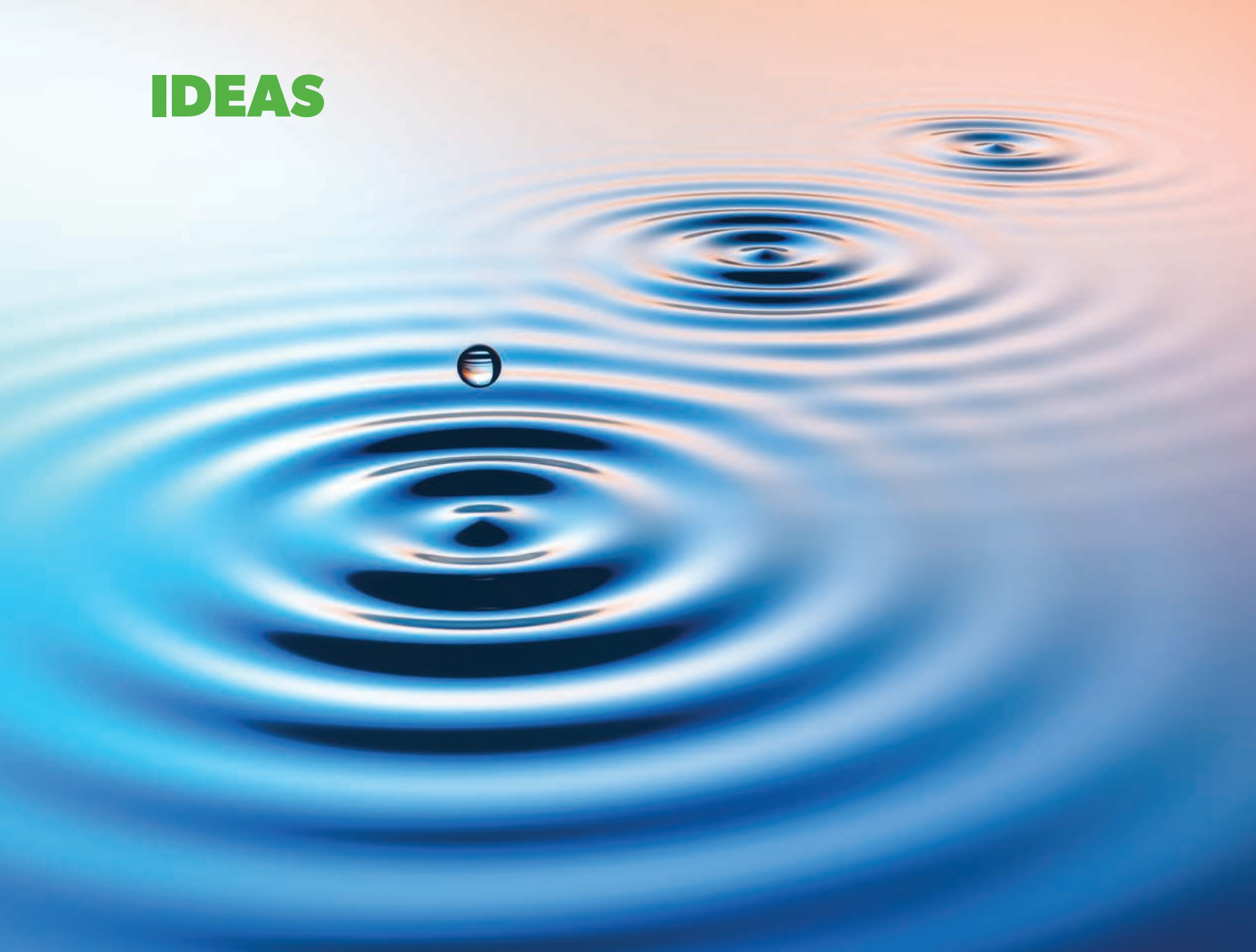
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LOOKING AT THINGS DIFFERENTLY

Sometimes, making change requires looking at things in a new way. Reflecting within ourselves, observing others, and connecting across difference can hold the keys to equity-centered learning (p. 66) and improved practice (p. 62).



Model classrooms can amplify coaching's impact

BY JASON MARGOLIS AND JILL HARRISON BERG

A school is much more than a collection of individual classrooms. Although teachers have an undeniable impact on the students in their classrooms, school culture and structure can effectively support or dramatically limit teachers'

capacity to grow — and, therefore, their students' capacity to learn. But the influence of school culture and structure on teacher practice is too often overlooked as a lever for improvement (Johnson, 2019; Quintero, 2017).

Fostering a collaborative and learning-oriented culture can improve

teachers' and students' success. One promising model for doing so is a professional learning approach we witnessed in 2018-19 as part of a larger study of teacher leadership programs (Berg et al., 2019): coupling coaching with model classrooms.

In model classrooms, teachers

who have participated in professional learning open their classroom doors and agree to have others observe as they work to integrate the targeted new approaches. Model classrooms, therefore, don't guarantee a window into high-level practice. Instead, they provide models of how to learn the practice. Model classrooms simultaneously give teachers an opportunity to be lead learners among their colleagues and power up the potential impact of aligned professional learning and coaching.

TRANSFORMING CULTURE

There's more going on than meets the eye in model classrooms. On the surface, individual teachers are simply observing as their colleagues model the process of learning to implement a targeted practice or approach. But model classrooms can also serve to influence organizational change and help transform the culture of schools for several reasons.

First, teacher-observers watch their model-teacher colleagues experimenting with new approaches in a way that demonstrates vulnerability on the part of the observed and compels reciprocity on the part of the observer. The experience strengthens trust and cultivates a learning stance among teachers so that teachers begin to feel willing to try something new and feel safe asking their colleagues for support.

Second, in school-based model classrooms, teachers learn in the presence of students who are just like their own. This can help strengthen teachers' sense of collective efficacy, as it demonstrates not only how this can be done, but it shows how the targeted instructional practice can be adopted or adapted *here* and meet the needs of *our* students (see Margolis et al., 2017).

Model classrooms also have

the potential to establish cultural expectations — for staff and students — that the school is a community of learners (Margolis & Doring, 2012). Not only do students see the host teacher demonstrating a willingness to try something new, but they see teachers striving to learn and to do so together. They're modeling the habits of lifelong learners.

At the same time, model classrooms empower teachers as professionals. In model classrooms, teachers demonstrate and grow their willingness to lead, share their expertise, and collaboratively build professional capital from the test kitchens of their own classrooms. Over time, this enhances their sense of teacher professionalism.

Despite their many potential benefits, model classrooms are rarely seen in U.S. schools. We were intrigued, therefore, by the use of model classrooms we observed in Bonaver School District (a pseudonym). Bonaver is a midsized suburban U.S. school district that grew concerned in 2015 about the quality of literacy instruction due to elementary reading scores. Leaders in the district wanted to amplify the impact of planned professional learning and coaching on literacy instruction and believed they could do so by tapping more teachers as leaders.

After convening a cross-stakeholder planning team and with guidance from the state's teacher leadership network, they resolved to add a model classroom component to their professional learning plan in 2016.

BUILDING MODEL CLASSROOMS

Bonaver School District sought to maximize the benefits of model classrooms when building their new literacy initiative. District staff selected literacy leaders from among the

district's teachers through a rigorous interview and observation process.

These teacher leaders continued in their classroom roles full time but added three new responsibilities, for which they received a stipend: 1) attending the district's literacy professional learning sessions; 2) collaborating with instructional coaches to present the material from those sessions to their teacher colleagues at the building level, and 3) putting that learning into action in their own classrooms while inviting others to come and observe them. They also convened regularly to receive role-relevant support from the district.

At the same time, the district reconfigured the existing instructional coach role. In addition to leading coaching cycles, helping teachers analyze data, demonstrating instructional strategies, and providing resources, the coaches now joined teachers in observing lessons in the literacy leaders' classrooms, led debriefs of those observations, and helped teachers use these reflections to set goals for their own coaching cycles.

LESSONS LEARNED

Education leaders in Bonaver integrated the model classroom as a powerful component of their instructional capacity-building plans by attending to three factors:

- Building structures that support cross-role relationships;
- Making the district commitment visible; and
- Taking creative approaches to time and funding.

Cross-role relationships

Bonaver's model strategically engaged multiple instructional leaders and prioritized efforts to support strong relationships with clear communication across roles. By design, literacy leaders

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and instructional coaches often worked side by side — participating in the same professional learning, leading professional learning collaboratively, and debriefing observations together.

One instructional coach said the shift was both individual and organizational. “My work with our literacy leader has made my role as an instructional coach a hundred times better. ... It’s not just the literacy leader in this building teaching our teachers. They’re [all] coming together.”

By facilitating formal meetings and informal interactions among educators who have different roles in supporting teachers’ growth, both the quality of the teacher leaders’ work and the relationships needed to enact the work were strengthened.

The district also provided protected time for literacy leaders to collaborate across schools and with coaches. This networked approach reduced the anxiety some literacy leaders felt when facilitating professional learning with colleagues. For example, many literacy leaders said they were nervous about leading whole-staff presentations, and the networking approach allowed them to meet and plan these sessions together so that they could play to their individual strengths and “cut the workload of who’s standing up there the whole time,” as one leader put it.

Similarly, communication routines with district administrators strengthened relationships and bolstered the sustainability and success of the program. A district administrator helped literacy leaders troubleshoot the new role, which they said helped to create more of a sense that “we’re all in this together. I’m learning it; you’re learning it.” This also allowed them to establish a relationship of shared ownership of the role and its improvement.

School-based administrators similarly benefited from two-way communication with literacy leaders. One principal who worked closely with the literacy leaders said, “I feel like it just really helps strengthen literacy

in my building having those leaders that are every day in the classroom, practicing and putting out what we’re talking about.”

Importantly, principals joined professional learning sessions led by literacy leaders as full participants alongside teachers. This allowed them to experience the educator learning process alongside their staff, which fostered shared language and instructional expectations across all grade levels.

Demonstrated commitment

Knowing that teachers’ buy-in is often affected by the frequency with which school initiatives seem to come and go, school and district administrators made several moves that gave educators confidence that this professional learning model is a priority — and teachers noticed.

Several teachers noted that teacher leaders were never pulled out of their teacher development work to be emergency subs in the building or for other noninstructional leader activities, as had happened in the past. They also witnessed district leaders responding with a problem-solving orientation to challenges they identified in the role.

Over time, the more school and district leaders’ commitments to the program continued to be visible in small ways such as these, the more people believed in it. One literacy leader described this phenomenon: “When we began, I can still remember teachers looking at me and being like, ‘Great, something else, something new that is going to last for a little bit.’ ... [But] as we’ve moved through the years, I’ve started to see teachers that were hesitant and closed off to this starting to open up and to try these things. ... I think it’s the balance and continuation and just sticking with it.”

Over time, the presence of the model classroom began to shift not only how teachers learned, but also how the larger organizational culture evolved, and administrators embraced and applauded the changes. One district

administrator described this shift in culture as creating an environment where communication and collaboration is “just expected ... it’s how professional learning is approached in the district.”

The culture shift around teacher learning enabled greater shifts in practice, as the commitment to model classrooms became stronger and stronger over time. Another administrator said that the organizational culture created for and by the model classroom was now directly impacting students with “better instruction ... because they’re all working together to create those lessons and prepare.” Sticking with and continuously tinkering with the model classroom was beginning to have a positive ripple effect throughout the district.

Sustaining resources

Of course, it was also essential that Bonaver provided the resources to support this new form of professional learning. First, administrators had to think creatively about scheduling so that all teachers would be able to observe in the model classrooms and debrief the observation with their coach. Rather than solely relying on substitute teachers, Bonaver brought other educators into class coverage rotations — including purposeful visits by school counselors.

In another case, the district stepped in to provide a full-time sub. One literacy leader who noted some variation across the district said that the principal was key in making this happen: “They have to believe in the program enough that they’re willing to get coverage for those teachers to be able to do it.”

Bonaver also had to think differently about budgeting. The districted shifted monies that historically had been directed elsewhere, including Title I and university partnership funding, to support this program by some leaders. One district administrator described it as a case

of budgetary will: “So there are CTE funds, there are IDEA, there are our general funds, and there are federal dollars, Title I, Title II, that for various things are utilized.” Another principal described the district’s decision as one of redirecting funds from buying external “frivolous programs” to investing in the school’s people.

CAUTIONS TO DISTRICTS

This case points to the great potential in a model classroom approach to instructional capacity-building and illustrates factors that can help school districts seeking to couple the model classroom approach with coaching and professional learning. However, we can learn as much from what didn’t go quite as well as what did.

We know, for example, that school-level preparation and intentionality for the model classroom visits was important. It’s not surprising, then, that when instructional coaches were not deliberate about making connections to coaching during and after the observation of the literacy leader, observing teachers were less engaged, had fewer look-fors, and were less focused. One literacy leader also reported hearing “horror stories from other people in the county about how people wouldn’t pay attention, or they were goofing off” during professional learning led by literacy leaders and instructional coaches.

This indicates that additional school-level efforts would have been helpful to secure teachers’ buy-in and assist all educators in understanding the compelling purpose and calculated coherence across professional learning, model classrooms, and coaching support.

Further, while Bonaver leaders sought to resource the program purposefully and creatively, in many cases it was not enough. Literacy leaders received \$2,000 per year and no guaranteed release time. Innovative efforts to provide additional funds or sub coverage were inconsistent.

While for some literacy leaders it wasn’t about the money and more about impacting change, for others the work became unsustainable. This left some schools with no applicants for the literacy leader positions available at crucial grade levels. In those cases, a literacy leader would often provide support to teachers beyond their own grade level.

The budgetary limitation that led to inadequate compensation relative to the work was a districtwide concern beyond the teacher leader program, with one administrator describing the situation as “trying to get blood from a turnip.” Thus, while the district had made progress in resourcing the teacher leader program and piloting ideas to provide requisite release time, there was still work to be done in institutionalizing this support to ensure sustainability of a quality program.

An additional related challenge was that teachers often wanted more time with the literacy leaders (who were still teaching) than the instructional coaches (who were no longer teaching). Teachers found interactions with literacy leaders more authentic because they were doing the same work as teachers, yet there was no formally designated time for these potentially high-impact conversations. So, while creative use of resources and scheduling helped to bring the model classroom to life, at the time of this study, Bonaver was still working to further evolve the program for greater impact and sustainability.

SEEING THE POTENTIAL

While Bonaver’s model classroom implementation was not easy or perfect, the case expands our sense of what instructional capacity-building can look like and the potential role model classrooms can play. District commitment to working through inevitable implementation challenges was key, as well as a willingness to engage in continual program refinement based on feedback loops about what was and was not working in practice.

Bonaver is not alone in its concern for the quality of instruction and its willingness to own the problem with systems-level solutions. To be sure, shifts in individual teachers’ practice are required, but school and district leaders play a key role in whether schools have the organizational structures and culture needed to support those shifts.

At this point, model classrooms are an overlooked potential component of district plans for instructional capacity-building. It is an approach that not only has potential to shift what teachers do, but also to transform how they think about their schools as a place to learn how to improve their practice together.

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Identity is at the heart of facilitating for equity

BY CANDICE BOCALA AND ROLESIA HOLMAN

Professional learning focused on racial equity in schools should transform educators' beliefs and interrupt inequitable outcomes for students. To ensure that it does, professional learning leaders must not only excel at typical facilitation skills — such as being aware of group dynamics, supporting inquiry, and creating

relationships — but develop a nuanced understanding of their own unique identities and how they influence the work.

We analyzed the reflections of practitioners who have deep experience in supporting educators to understand and address issues of racial equity. According to their own self-identifications, we interviewed

one Asian individual who identifies as transgender, two Black females, one Black male, one Latina female, one Latino male, three white females, and one white male.

Looking at how they facilitate professional learning about racial equity, we focused on how their understanding of identity comes into play in their facilitation, how they

Professional learning leaders must not only excel at typical facilitation skills — such as being aware of group dynamics, supporting inquiry, and creating relationships — but develop a nuanced understanding of their own unique identities and how they influence the work.

navigate co-facilitating across lines of racial or ethnic differences, and how they sustain themselves both personally and professionally.

We discovered that experienced facilitators of equity-centered professional learning engage in a sequential process to build and strengthen relationships across difference. Using a framework developed by the San Francisco Coalition of Essential Small Schools, this sequence includes work that they and their group members do introspectively and *alone*, within racial *affinity*, and *across difference*. Through our professional networks, we know that other organizations such as the National Equity Project also take a similar approach.

The process begins with individuals reflecting on their racial identities and life experiences and clarifying beliefs and values. After they have done this internal work, they can proceed to working in racial affinity, where they share experiences as race-alike identity groups and receive support, healing, and mentorship.

These steps prepare educators to come together across difference and have conversations to interrupt individual and collective practices that marginalize students who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color (BIPOC), creating barriers to educational equity and excellence.

To put this sequence into the context of a professional learning example, a group of educators might

begin their racial equity work by having each individual commit to journaling in response to carefully crafted prompts. They might write about characteristics of their personal identities that are salient to them and why or reflect on how their understandings of racial categories formed over time.

They would then join affinity groups with others of a similar racial or ethnic background. Affinity groups have many purposes: They serve as support communities, places to discuss challenges and commit to actions, or spaces to learn more about a group's history or culture. The affinity work serves as powerful preparation for when the educators from different identities come together to discuss issues such as the impact of racism on the school and community.

At each stage, it is essential to adopt working norms that guide how participants interact. To successfully guide others, facilitators should go through this sequence themselves.



INTROSPECTIVE WORK DONE 'ALONE'

Facilitators of equity-centered professional learning that addresses racism in a transformative way must

know how power, privilege, and oppression play out in American schools. It is critical for all professional learning leaders to pay attention to how their backgrounds, including racial, ethnic, and gender identities, influence their belief systems and actions, but this is particularly salient for those leading discussions about race and equity.

Because all our lived experiences, including traumas as well as joys, affect our understanding of the world, it is important to reflect on even the challenging or uncomfortable personal situations and interactions with those from a different racial background.

One practitioner in our study, a Latino male, said: “I think the work that I need to do alone is [identify]: What keeps me up at night? What am I scared to tell other people? Things like my biases, my insecurities, things I need to process by myself first and ruminate over them.”

As another facilitator who identifies as Asian and transgender described, “The work alone for me is understanding where my weaknesses are. And then really [thinking], what does it mean to dive deeper into those weaknesses?”

Facilitators also need to reflect on life events that have been harmful, especially those not yet processed and healed. These unresolved experiences block openness and clear thinking, making it difficult to help transform others. One Black male facilitator described this process of reflective healing: “You can only give what you’ve

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got. If I'm full of anger, hurt and pain, I'm not going to be a good facilitator. I've got to be in a place of healing and restoration, but I can't come to it with anger."

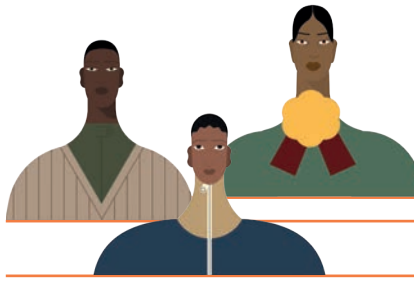
Many facilitators told us that they individually grappled with how they were socialized into white supremacy culture (Okun, 2021), recognizing that the things they were brought up to believe can lead to discrimination and marginalization of BIPOC communities. This was especially true for white-identified facilitators.

One facilitator acknowledged how her socialization affects her actions: "I've been conditioned as a white woman not to be direct, to get what I want through more manipulative means. So there's always a danger of slipping into that as a [facilitator] ... to imply something or just expect somebody to understand what we're saying when we're being vague."

Facilitators of color also mentioned the need to examine the messages they have internalized about themselves and other racial or ethnic groups. For example, one facilitator, a Latina female, said she is aware that her own identity influences how people see her, so she needs to examine the assumptions she makes about others: "I'm always hyper-aware of the way that people respond to me, especially across difference. ... I have to also interrogate my own responses. And I have to think about [it] when I am working with peers across difference."

Another, a Latino male, described the need to push back against bias, which he referred to as "anti-Blackness" that results from elevating white dominant culture. "I know in me there's servitude to white people because my mom cleaned her whole life, because my dad did gardening his whole life," he said.

"Because I've done that with them, I understand the struggle to survive. I felt this way until I became a teacher and realized that I really have to check my biases when I'm working with other people."



WORK IN AFFINITY SPACES

Affinity groups are spaces where individuals with the same racial or ethnic identity come together to share their experiences in a place where they create norms, feel safe to share deeply personal stories, ask questions, and not subject others from a different racial group to repeated microaggressions or behaviors exhibiting white supremacy culture and further marginalization.

For those who identify as BIPOC, affinity spaces provide a place to heal from racialized trauma, a way to create social capital and solidarity with others, and a space for them to share and receive guidance about how to navigate oppression (Pour-Khorshid, 2018; Tauriac et al., 2013). As one Latina female practitioner said, "You need a space to [talk] with colleagues who understand you, who are coming from that common denominator ... whether it's language, being children of immigrants, or first-generation living in this country, experiencing the United States together. ... You need to be in that community to make sense of it."

Another facilitator, a Black female, pointed out that the healing and community building that happens in affinity spaces must connect to some form of learning or action: "[There is] a Black affinity group in a particular school I'm thinking of where the teachers are so stressed, and all they do is de-stress. That's all well and good to celebrate and be together, but I think there has to be some learning, some movement ... because the kids need us to show up in the spaces that they're struggling with enhanced tools to help them."

For those who identify as white, an affinity space can be a place to process membership in a dominant white

identity and culture as well as a chance to see role models of anti-racist work from the white identity standpoint (Pour-Khorshid, 2018; Tauriac et al., 2013). One white female facilitator said that "in white affinity, I am using my white colleagues as mirrors to help me grow and to struggle with ideas, concepts, fears, judgments that I don't want to burden my BIPOC colleagues with."

Another white male facilitator said, "We need a space, no matter how we identify in affinity, where we can talk about the things that we would otherwise be afraid to talk about because it would be harmful or embarrassing."



WORK ACROSS DIFFERENCE

When engaging with others from different identity groups, facilitators of equity-centered professional learning emphasized the importance of building authentic relationships as well as the need to plan professional learning with explicit attention to power dynamics.

Building relationships

Building authentic relationships across racial or ethnic differences is a key lever in equity work. To embrace diversity and dismantle systems of oppression, we must relearn how to connect with one another's humanity.

When building relationships, the experienced practitioners emphasized two qualities: humility and vulnerability. Humility is taking an inquiry stance while being open to learning and hearing another person's perspective. As one white

female facilitator explained: “[Working across difference] is not about looking ‘different’ from the front of the room, it’s about valuing multiple perspectives in your work and finding ways to embrace them when they show up.”

The skill of listening is especially important to creating these relationships. One Black female facilitator described practicing listening skills through stories: “Everybody has an experience, and everybody wants to actually share that experience in order to be seen, heard, and valued — everybody.”

A white female facilitator pointed out that it was necessary to balance listening with speaking out: “For white people, when we are in an ‘across difference’ space, we should be listening, but also we can’t be silent. ... Know when it’s your listening time and know when it’s your time to express and be heard.”

Another facilitator, a Black female, connected the idea of vulnerability with being what she called “ego distant.” Taking the ego out of the relationship allows everyone to have “courageous conversations about how you show up in your racial identity, where you are on your own journey for liberation, and how you need, or want, to continue your growth and development.”

A facilitator who is Asian and transgender noted that putting aside

The skill of listening is especially important to creating these relationships.

One Black female facilitator described practicing listening skills through stories:

“Everybody has an experience, and everybody wants to actually share that experience in order to be seen, heard, and valued — everybody.”

one’s ego can help the group find a common purpose: “All of us come into this work from a similar place of putting aside our ego, looking at it as much bigger than just this organization ... wanting to build a bigger movement.”

Preparing for, executing, and debriefing facilitation across difference

The experienced equity practitioners all emphasized the importance of balancing power dynamics when co-facilitating with another person of a different racial or ethnic background. Because these discussions often bring up or reproduce racial power dynamics, co-facilitating transformative spaces for

equity requires intentional planning, implementation, responsive facilitation, and regular debriefing.

First, co-facilitators told us how they created plans and thought carefully about the roles each person would play and why. These decisions were based on an understanding of their own and participants’ identities. This involves considering “how each facilitator’s race intersects with their facilitation moves, including what they say, who they call on, and what they give attention to” (Ngounou & Gutiérrez, 2019).

For example, one white female facilitator explained that it required dialogue across difference to create an agenda that would work for people who identify as white as well as BIPOC: “Sometimes there’s tension when we have a different idea about what should happen, and usually the root of these come down to who we’re leaning toward [in] the work: white or BIPOC participants.”

She went on to explain that, when they discuss “who we need to lean toward in a certain section and why, we both have a deeper understanding of our goals and how to reach them.”

Additionally, co-facilitators should discuss the roles each individual will play during the session itself, considering power dynamics. A Black female facilitator described a time when racial and gender stereotypes



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were reinforced and not intentionally interrupted. “I was observing a white and Black co-facilitator, and the Black woman was literally getting the coffee and filling the glasses with water, and the white person was facilitating, and they called that co-facilitating.

“When we debriefed at the end, I questioned that set-up, and they had some lame excuse ... like [the Black facilitator] couldn’t stay the whole time. ... If that was the case, then I think that should have been said upfront because — particularly when you’re working across racial difference — when you see the person who comes from a marginalized racial group and they are moving the PowerPoint to the next slide or filling glasses of water, that speaks to a power dynamic that should never be allowed to exist in the name of [equitable] co-facilitation.”

Another facilitator who identifies as Black told us how she talks with white co-facilitators about whose role it will be to interrupt harmful discourse from participants: “We’ve talked explicitly about if somebody says something that is ridiculous or racist — OK, who’s the right person to respond? ... To my [white] colleagues’ credit, they take a lot of responsibility for being sure that they can model what it looks like to interrupt unproductive, racist, or otherwise insensitive or infuriating discourse.”

Finally, co-facilitators who plan equity-centered professional learning commit to debriefing after the event has ended. This begins with checking what each person is feeling or processing. Then co-facilitators might discuss how the agenda went, why they used certain facilitation moves, participants’ reactions, and implications for learning and future work.

As one practitioner said, “[We ask,] What did you do? Did we achieve our intention? Here’s what I was working on. How do you think I did?” She advised that co-facilitators “be open and willing to talk about that and to keep a racial equity lens present in that debrief.”

As one Latino male facilitator said, “Some people think that they’ve done all this work because they’ve read a book or because they’ve taken a workshop, but [they] have never done the internal work it takes to actually interrupt yourself.”

TRANSFORMING SELF TO TRANSFORM OTHERS

Professional learning that aims to address racial injustice will remain transactional, rather than transformational, unless facilitators’ intentions and planning are holistic and scaffolded through the sequence described above: beginning with introspective and individual work, reflecting with others in affinity, and then building relationships and taking action across difference.

As one Latino male facilitator said, “Some people think that they’ve done all this work because they’ve read a book or because they’ve taken a workshop, but [they] have never done the internal work it takes to actually interrupt yourself.”

The learning and reflection sequence that the facilitators in our study described can support anyone in growing toward a more anti-racist stance. One of many benefits of this approach is that it engages facilitators in modeling how to be aware of one’s own identity and work across difference.

As one white male facilitator said, “Besides having a good curriculum or a good experience, we believe that modeling is important because the modeling of that discourse, the modeling of that relationship [across difference], the modeling of that healing is essential because it is counter to what our system has fostered us to be doing day-to-day.”


Facilitating others to engage directly with issues of racism is challenging and

rewarding. By engaging in this learning alone, in affinity, and across difference, professional learning leaders can help educators make progress toward transforming learning spaces into places where students and adults can thrive, close opportunity gaps, and regain humanity and liberation for all.

As a Black female facilitator explained, “Our elders used to say, ‘Well, you can’t wring your hands and roll up your sleeves at the same time.’ So our work is about trying to help people keep their sleeves rolled up and stay moving.”

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The background of the page is a vibrant teal color. Scattered across this background are several magnifying glasses with black handles and silver frames. One magnifying glass is prominently positioned in the center, with its lens partially overlapping the word 'TOOLS'.

DISCUSS. COLLABORATE. FACILITATE.

TOOLS

NEW COACHING RESOURCES PAGE

Coaching is one of our readers' favorite topics, and it's the second most-searched term on the Learning Forward website. To celebrate and support coaches, we have created a coaching resources page on our website to help you find what you need more quickly and easily. Visit [learningforward.org/coaching](https://www.learningforward.org/coaching) for access to coaching tools, articles, infographics, and more.

WHERE DO YOU START
WHEN EVERYTHING
FEELS URGENT?

Use an effort-to-impact matrix



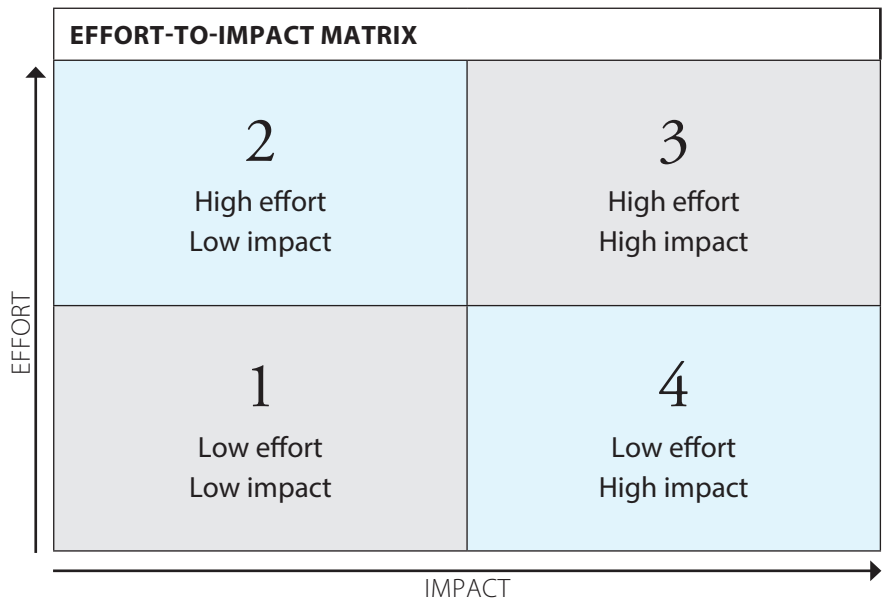
BY SHARRON HELMKE

For those who support teachers, it can feel like there are myriad urgent needs, especially when educators are stretched thin and students are struggling, as many are now. How do you prioritize your support, and where do you start?

The effort-to-impact matrix is a simple but valuable tool that can help instructional coaches, teacher teams, administrators, and other change agents prioritize their efforts and make strategic choices about which steps to take and when. It allows the user to map out potential strategies and identify how much effort each will take versus how much impact it is likely to make.

The matrix is divided into four quadrants. (See figure above right.)

Quadrant 1 refers to **low-effort, low-impact** strategies. Strategies in this quadrant don't require much educator effort, but they also are likely to produce few improvements in



student outcomes. These strategies often leave the learning leader wondering why he or she should bother. That doesn't mean that the strategies are useless, but they are unlikely to make meaningful changes in teacher practice and student outcomes. Examples might include redesigning bulletin boards or

changing lesson planning templates for administrative purposes.

Quadrant 2 is for **high-effort, low-impact** strategies. They require much effort on the part of teachers and perhaps other staff but have little impact on student outcomes. Strategies in this quadrant often lead participants



to wonder, “Whose idea was this anyway?” An often-cited example is filling out binders of professional learning community documentation that teachers perceive as being unrelated to the actual work of the team or their teaching efforts.

Quadrant 3 is for **high-effort, high-impact** strategies. Coaching cycles or change initiatives in this quadrant take cognitive heavy lifting. They take time to investigate, learn, practice, and implement with consistency and fidelity, but they make an obvious difference for most or all students.

Examples of Quadrant 3 activities include instructional changes such as ensuring that all members of teacher teams have a common planning period or moving a teacher whose comfort zone is whole-class direct teaching to a more interactive approach that incorporates student groups and independent practice.

While Quadrant 3 activities produce big wins for teachers and students, they require intensive efforts

to produce results that unfold slowly over time, and they can leave teachers and coaches feeling overwhelmed and burned out.

Quadrant 4 strategies are **low effort, high impact**. They can be considered quick but effective wins. Strategies in this quadrant may result in small changes that add up quickly and make a noticeable difference in student outcomes. Examples include improving classroom management and implementing more effective student grouping strategies, both of which can help maximize instructional time while also decreasing teacher stress and improving teacher efficacy.

Different combinations of effort and impact make sense in different situations. For example, during especially challenging times, such as during post-pandemic recovery, focusing on small, quick wins (low effort, high impact) can make professional learning feel manageable and increase teacher buy-in. During more stable times — for example, when

the district has stable leadership and an influx of grant funding — professional learning leaders might choose to focus more on high-effort, high-impact strategies.

An effort-to-impact matrix can also help professional learning leaders sequence their support over time. Consider, for example, the value of building momentum with several low-effort, high-impact cycles. This can build teachers’ interest in and commitment to coaching. That might open the door to a single high-effort, high-impact cycle. Following that push, the district might choose to ease off, using a few more low-effort, high-impact cycles to keep the pace and load manageable for teachers.

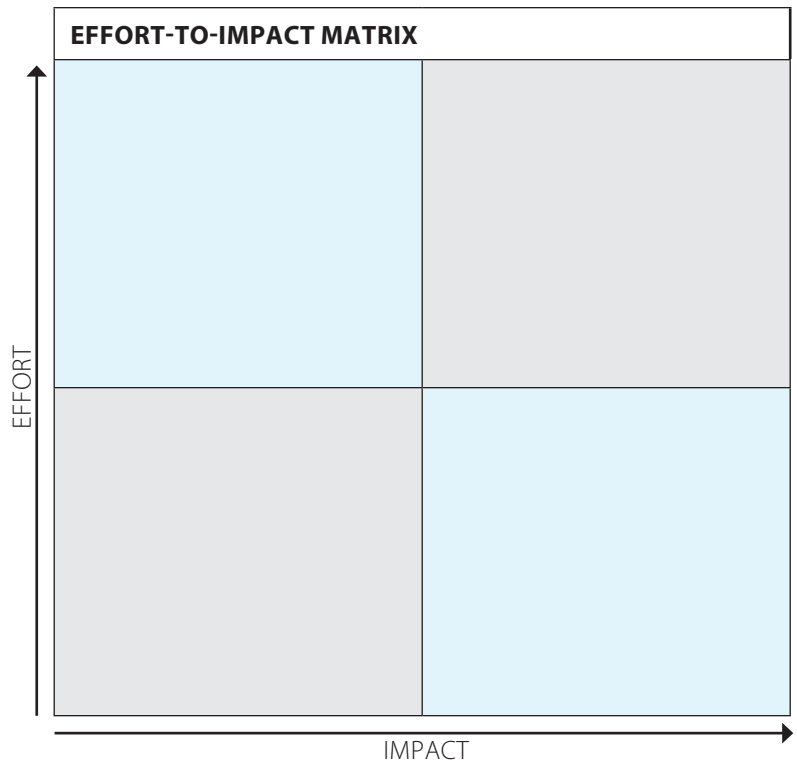
Use the tool on p. 74 to create your own effort-to-impact matrix.

•
Sharron Helmke (sharron.helmke@learningforward.org) is vice president, professional services at Learning Forward.

TOOLS

EFFORT-TO-IMPACT MATRIX	
<p>1. Thinking alone or in collaboration with a teacher, consider current student learning needs and brainstorm a list of possible change strategies.</p>	
Needs and strategies:	
<p>2. For each strategy, consider the amount of effort required for this change to be made.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How much effort will it be for the teacher? Is it a simple behavior to learn, practice, and establish consistency of use? Or is it a complex behavior that requires rethinking several aspects of practice or underlying beliefs and values? • How much effort will it be for the coach or other leader? Will it require several modeling or co-teaching experiences? 	
Notes:	
<p>3. Consider the anticipated impact of each strategy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If this strategy is successful in changing practice, who would benefit and how? The most important factor to consider is how the change would benefit student outcomes, but you might consider teacher-level factors as well, such as how the proposed change might impact teacher stress levels or self-efficacy. 	
Notes:	

<p>4. Place each strategy in the appropriate quadrant of the matrix. Note that there is no standard definition of high-impact or low-impact. It is a subjective judgment based on your reflections and discussions of the above questions.</p>
<p>5. Reviewing the options you've identified in the matrix, consider the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which quadrant are you most drawn to right now, and why? • Are there strategies you can immediately discard or disqualify? Which ones, and why? • Which strategies make the most sense to implement right away? Why? • Which strategies might you implement later? When and why? • Is there a sequence of strategies you might try? Why did you choose that order?
<p>6. Plan with your team how to begin implementing the strategies you plan to try first.</p>



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UPDATES

LEARNING FORWARD RELEASES REVISED STANDARDS

Mark your calendar for the release of the newly revised Standards for Professional Learning on April 25. Join us for a livestream event, followed by a week of additional learning opportunities. See p. 76 for more details.

UPDATES



Professional learning funding passed

The Department of Education will receive a nearly \$3 billion increase over the last fiscal year in the Omnibus Appropriations Bill passed by Congress and signed by the president last month. While this is far short of the president's request, it represents significant progress.

Most K-12 programs will see only incremental increases and not the massive change that the president had requested and that the House of Representatives had supported originally.

Title IIA, the primary source of federal funding for professional learning, received a \$27 million increase in the final measure — significantly less than the \$150 million increase proposed in the initial House of Representatives bill.

The majority of the new education money will go toward Title I, which saw a \$1 billion increase, and IDEA, which received a \$448 million bump. The bill also includes \$111 million within School Safety National Activities for Mental Health Services Professional Demonstration Grants and School-Based Mental Health Services Grants, an increase of \$95 million over last year's level, to help local education agencies directly increase the number of mental health and child development experts in schools — supports that should benefit all educators and students.

CEO Denise Glyn Borders to retire

Denise Glyn Borders will retire as Learning Forward's president/CEO on June 30. The board of trustees will select her replacement by July 1.

Borders has been an invaluable addition to the Learning Forward team. Her extensive experience and steady leadership have served Learning Forward well, especially during the challenges of the unprecedented global pandemic.

We will share details about succession and transition planning with the Learning Forward stakeholder community as we proceed. For questions on the transition, contact board administrator Joel Reynolds at joel.reynolds@learningforward.org.



Denise Glyn Borders

STANDARDS KICKOFF WEEK APRIL 25–29



Learning Forward will release the revised Standards for Professional Learning with a livestream event on April 25, followed by four consecutive days of opportunities to learn about the standards and hear from key stakeholders about the design process and recommendations for implementation.

The week will include webinars that outline the standards, give an overview of available tools, explain the implications for specific education roles, and highlight the research behind the standards, as well as a Congressional briefing.

The kickoff week will be just the beginning of our support for implementing the revised standards, with regular opportunities to be offered in the following months. Follow us on social media and sign up for our email list through our website to receive updates about these and other events and resources.

Conference keynotes announced

Here are the keynote speakers for the 2022 Learning Forward Annual Conference, to be held Dec. 4-7 in Nashville, Tennessee.

- **Baruti Kafele**, transformational school leader and author, will speak on “The equity-mindset educator.” (Learn more about Kafele’s work in his ongoing column for *The Learning Professional*, which appears on p. 9 of this issue.)
- **Tracey Tokuhama-Espinosa**, an expert on the neuroscience of learning, will speak about “How time and tools have changed forever in education, thanks to COVID.”
- **Jessyca Mathews**, award-winning high school teacher and social justice activist, will share insights from her work with students in a presentation called “Placing ourselves on the mountaintop.”

The Annual Conference, which will focus on the theme “Reimagine,” will also include in-depth preconference and concurrent sections on a wide range of timely topics, with opportunities for networking and reflection.

To get more information and register, visit conference.learningforward.org.



COACHES GROW THROUGH VIRTUAL COACHES ACADEMY

BY JESSICA CATOGGIO

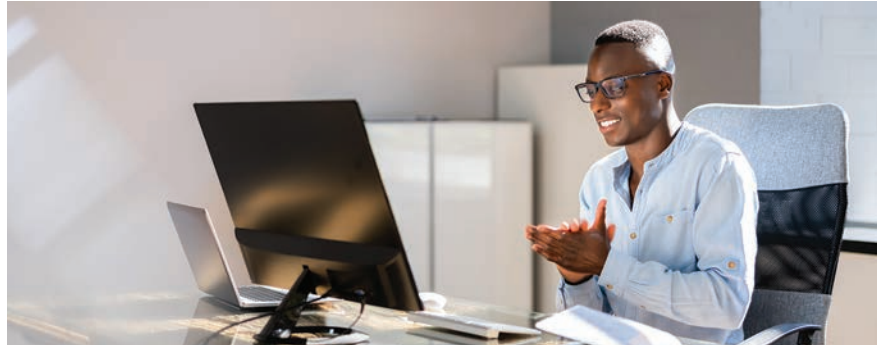
When facilitator Joellen Killion launched the most recent Virtual Coaches Academy with the assertion that “the most important reason we have coaching in schools is to improve and extend student success,” her intent was to inspire and set the stage for five powerful months of learning and connection among the Academy’s 46 participants.

It reminded me of one of my favorite lessons I used to teach to 2nd graders. It began with the assertion that a single drop of water from our school’s campus in Richmond, Virginia, would eventually reach the Chesapeake Bay and, even further, the Atlantic Ocean.

What my wide-eyed students came to understand through our study was that seemingly small impacts on the environment in our own school community would eventually trickle out to some of our region’s most valuable and vulnerable ecosystems. That’s exactly what coaching does, and what the Virtual Coaches Academy did for me and my cohort peers.

Each of the Academy’s three-hour sessions, co-facilitated by Killion and Andy Mendelsberg, provided space for coaches with a wide range of experience and serving in a variety of settings and roles to build awareness of and capacity around the building blocks of coaching. These building blocks are the foundation of coaching practice and include critical topics such as communication skills, coaching cycles, data and trust, and facilitation skills.

Through a diverse array of virtual engagement strategies including breakout rooms, Zoom polls, and Jamboards, participants took a deep dive into each of the critical skills and reflected on their own practice. As the group’s cohesion and trust grew, so did the opportunities to access role-playing and feedback-based activities centered



COACHES ACADEMY ENROLLING NOW

Enroll in Learning Forward’s Coaches Academy to get a head start on summer and fall learning for your coaches to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to support new and returning teachers in your system.

Coaches Academy provides school- and district-based coaches with instructional and content expertise and develops their critical skills in building relationships, leading professional learning, and providing effective coaching to individuals and teams.

Learn more at **services.learningforward.org/services/coaching-and-mentoring/**

on the building blocks.

Participants who, at the beginning of the four-month journey, may have lacked a thorough understanding of the hats a coach wears, the skills required to develop relationships with clients, or the potential impact of their work sharpened their views and developed a broader understanding of their mission-driven roles.

One of many activities that left a lasting impact on participants was a listening self-assessment. The assessment encouraged coaches to think critically and reflectively about how listening

impacts their daily practice. While most coaches already knew that listening is a crucial component to their work, the outcomes of this assessment made this intangible skill more concrete and approachable.

During the last virtual session, with the concept of extending student success at the forefront, each of the coaches participated in a learning symposium, where they showcased their own goals, learnings, and reflections in a public space. Coaches shared the ways in which their learning will impact their practice and extend student success. Meaningful peer feedback and the celebration of the collective learning was central to the symposium.

At the closing of the session, four coaches at a time stepped into a circle to share their personal reflections. Among the insights shared was the realization that supporting teachers is the key to building school cultures in which student success is the ultimate goal.

It was clear to me throughout the Academy, and especially during our closing circle, that coaching is just like that single drop of water on my school’s campus: Coaching, when done effectively, has the potential to impact environments and extend student success well beyond a single classroom and a single school.

•
Jessica Catoggio (jessica@worldleadershipschool.com) is director of professional learning at World Leadership School.

UPDATES

NEW STAFF MEMBER

Gail Paul has joined Learning Forward as content marketing specialist. In this role, she will contribute to making our content even more accessible for members and customers.



Gail Paul

Before joining Learning Forward, Paul served as a communications consultant, with extensive experience in journalism, marketing, and media relations. Before that, she was the vice president of communications

and marketing for the Port of Greater Cincinnati Development Authority in Ohio and has led several teams in communications strategy, storytelling, and producing high-quality content across various channels and platforms.

BOARD MEMBER JOINS PUBLIC SCHOOLS WEEK PANEL

Linda Chen, a member of the Learning Forward board of trustees, represented Learning Forward on a panel of exemplars during Public Schools Week, an annual celebration held in February that brings together school leaders, educators, parents, and community leaders to recognize the importance of our nation's public schools.



Linda Chen

Chen noted that the pandemic has shone a brighter light on the disparities that have always existed in schools and communities and the need for greater resources so that students can excel.

She identified two areas of knowledge and capacity for supporting students. First, educators need to know their students well — socially, emotionally, and academically — and leverage that knowledge to help students achieve and succeed. Second, there must be ubiquitous access for all teachers and the school leaders who support them to high-quality curriculum and professional learning to accelerate learning and meet the needs of all students.

Public Schools Weeks events are hosted by the Learning First Alliance.

#TheLearningPro FEATURED SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

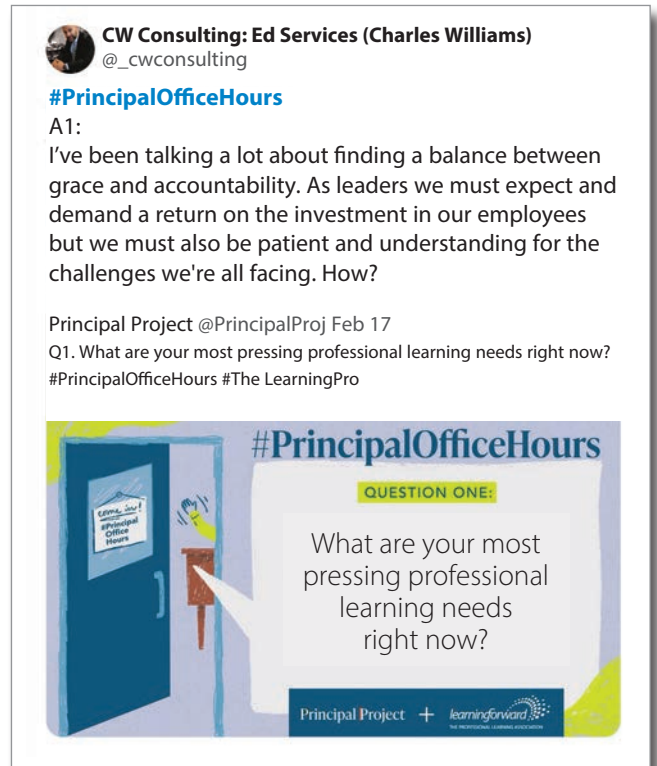
"School leadership in stressful times" was the topic of a Twitter chat co-hosted by Learning Forward and the Principal Project in February.



GradGal2 @gradgal2
Hmmm... 🤔 {Reads and Reflects} "We advocate that norms should be given to a newly formed community to elevate the different needs, goals, & perspectives of all team members, including those who feel marginalized."
[#TheLearningPro](#) @KnowlesTeachers

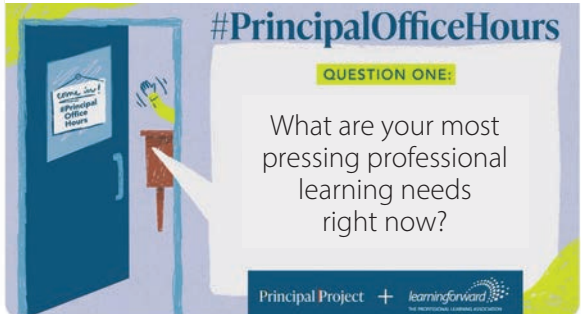


learningforward.org
Should Groups Set Their Own Norms? Maybe Not | Learning Forward
Collaborative norm-setting may not represent all voices.



CW Consulting: Ed Services (Charles Williams) @_cwconsulting
[#PrincipalOfficeHours](#)
A1:
I've been talking a lot about finding a balance between grace and accountability. As leaders we must expect and demand a return on the investment in our employees but we must also be patient and understanding for the challenges we're all facing. How?

Principal Project @PrincipalProj Feb 17
Q1. What are your most pressing professional learning needs right now?
[#PrincipalOfficeHours](#) [#The LearningPro](#)



[#PrincipalOfficeHours](#)
QUESTION ONE:
What are your most pressing professional learning needs right now?
Principal Project + learningforward

Follow us on social media. Share your insights and feedback about *The Learning Professional* by using [#TheLearningPro](#).

ABOUT LEARNING FORWARD

Learning Forward shows you how to plan, implement, and measure high-quality professional learning so you and your team can achieve success with your system, your school, and your students.

We are the only professional association devoted exclusively to those who work in educator professional learning. We help our members effect positive and lasting change to achieve equity and excellence in teaching and learning.



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THROUGH THE LENS

OF LEARNING FORWARD'S STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

LEARNING FORWARD'S STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students ...

Learning Communities

... occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment.

Leadership

... requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning.

Resources

... requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning.

Data

... uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning.

Learning Designs

... integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes.

Implementation

... applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long-term change.

Outcomes

... aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards.

Many of the articles in this issue of *The Learning Professional* demonstrate Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning in action. Use this tool to deepen your understanding of the standards and strategies for implementing them.

Ways you might use this tool include:

- Discuss the questions in a professional learning community;
- Share one or more articles from the issue with your staff and facilitate a conversation; and
- Do a self-assessment of what you have learned from this issue.

<p>STANDARD: LEADERSHIP IN ACTION</p> <p>Leaders set expectations for professional learning, model its importance, and allocate resources such as time and funding, so it's important for leaders to understand the value of coaching. Several of this issue's articles highlight innovative ways coaching programs and initiatives include principals to create shared commitment and aligned purpose. For example, in North Dakota (p. 26) and Kildeer Countryside School District 96 in Illinois (p. 22), principals are encouraged to attend training for coaches.</p>	<p>TO CONSIDER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does your system or organization encourage principals to understand and support coaching? <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What knowledge do principals or other leaders still need to develop about coaching? How could you begin to cultivate that knowledge? <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>STANDARD: LEARNING DESIGNS IN ACTION</p> <p>Throughout this issue, authors write about the importance of ongoing professional learning for coaches. The Learning Designs standard reminds us that all professional learning — including coaches' — should be based on how adults learn best. This issue's authors highlight multiple learning designs that meet that criterion and benefit coaches, including professional learning communities, coaching of coaches, using tools such as Innovation Configuration maps, and analyzing and applying knowledge from student data.</p>	<p>TO CONSIDER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Murrow and Leis (p. 30) write about how they tailor their support to coaches' varied levels of experience. How do you, or could you, differentiate professional learning designs according to your coaches' needs? <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaches can also grow through reflecting on informal professional learning opportunities, as Ashly Skiffington did after she returned to the classroom as a teacher (p. 40). How can you support your coaches to use informal learning opportunities intentionally and regularly? <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Learn more about Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning at www.learningforward.org/standards-for-professional-learning.

AT A GLANCE

CELEBRATING COACHES



Coaches are learning leaders in their schools, districts, and states, so it's no surprise that coaching is one of the most popular topics among Learning Forward's members and followers.

There's a growing need for data about the prevalence of instructional coaching. Here's a peek at some indicators from our organization. They show how coaching is having a big impact on us and on the field of professional learning.

Learning Forward members list **125+** different job titles related to coaching.

Additional words that appear most frequently in those job titles are:

- 15%** LITERACY/READING
- 3%** MATH/MATHEMATICS
- 2%** LEADERSHIP
- 2%** TECHNOLOGY
- 2%** SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT AND CLIMATE*

*This category combines multiple words and phrases.



Our coaching members hail from **39 U.S. states** and **3 Canadian provinces**.

"Coach" was the second most frequently searched term on our website in the past year.

OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS,

2 of our 3 most popular webinars focused on coaching.

At our Annual Conference, the **2 most popular** preconference sessions focused on coaching.



Our Twitter chats on coaching attract the most participants of all our chats.

Learning Forward's **Coaches Academy** has been our most requested service.

Instructional coaches are an integral part of Learning Forward's mission to build the capacity of leaders to establish and sustain highly effective professional learning. We are proud to be a leading resource for this work. Your membership helps support this work, so thank you for your support.

Your membership gives you access to hundreds of other resources for leading high-quality professional learning in your buildings and systems. Visit our new coaching resources page at learningforward.org/coaches for articles, tools, webinars, and more.



THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION

504 S. Locust Street
Oxford, OH 45056

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES



LEARNING FORWARD'S

Professional Learning Planning

WHAT WE DO. We customize support to meet your district's needs by facilitating the visioning and development of a systemwide approach to professional learning focused on 22 essential components.



A systemwide vision, mission, and beliefs for professional learning



Professional learning governance, roles, and responsibilities



A vision for using student, educator, and system data to guide decision making



Ensuring time and resources for collaborative professional learning



Mentoring and induction



Evaluation of professional learning

Set a systemwide vision for adult learning

Systems achieve their greatest potential when they create, scale, sustain, and advocate for coherent systems that connect adult learning and equitable student outcomes.

Contact us to learn how we support system leaders in conceptualizing, designing, and scaling professional learning plans that:

- Develop a systemwide vision for professional learning;
- Set clear roles and responsibilities;
- Build structures to ensure job-embedded collaboration;
- Define key components of a learning system; and
- Change teacher practice and student outcomes.

For more information, contact Sharron Helmke, vice president, professional services, at sharron.helmke@learningforward.org | services.learningforward.org