



Washington State Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

“The Practitioner’s Best Friend”
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WHAT SUPPORTS DO INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES NEED?

Support for instructional coaches must be delivered with a multi-layered and interdependent approach. The ultimate goal of all professional development is increasing student achievement. At the district level support begins with a vision of delivering job-embedded, relevant, ongoing professional development to teachers, everyday. This must be steadfastly defended and maintained by all stakeholders in order to support coaches and this model of professional learning.

Beginning with hiring practices it is important to search for master teachers who have the skill and personality to successfully work with a diverse staff and are skilled in leading difficult conversations. Now is not the time for seniority hiring. The job is too difficult to leave to a popularity vote and too expensive a model to leave to chance. Coaches must have or rapidly develop a thick skin. They need to know teaching and learning. An insatiable professional curiosity that drives their own learning is essential.

Multiple opportunities for coaches as a group to become a learning community is critical. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways. The coaches need time to learn together, problem solve and reflect. Meetings held several times a month are crucial to that development. Case studies around a complex situation or a particular curricular issue are one way of building skills in problem solving and communication. Coaches need time for reflection. Sharing of successes, challenges, ideas, and tools all help support group learning. Taking time to get feedback on presentations from colleagues, asking questions and challenging the status quo pushes their thinking about the work.

Celebrations are another community builder. Investing in the coaches’ learning at workshops, trainings and conferences pays huge dividends district wide. Not only will this kind of support benefit the staff in a district, the district benefits from the collective intellect of their coaches. Many times coaches act as key communicators in a district to send common

messages to staff. District support can provide helps the group develop resilience to the slings and arrows that accompany the job.

Resilience is garnered both through their community of learners and the support offered through the district and their building. Effective support at the building level begins with a strong working relationship between the coach and the administrator. Weekly meetings, daily check-in times, and the physical presence of the administrator at all professional development events provide a powerful message to staff about the value of the coaches' work. A united effort is part of the power of this model of professional development.

The combination of publicly maintaining the vision of the model as well as tangible support helps coaches build confidence, competence and credibility and makes them more resilient when the work gets difficult. Retaining effective and highly skilled coaches who can work as change agents in a building is a worthy strategy to improve student achievement.

A resource for coaches and those thinking about this model: ***Taking the Lead: New roles for teachers and school-based coaches***, Killian, Joellen and Harrson, Cindy. National Staff Development Council, 2006.

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