

BEST PRACTICES IN INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING

Prepared for Iowa Area Education Agencies

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In the following report, Hanover Research provides an overview of best practices for instructional coaching across various approaches and models. The report draws from the available secondary literature as well as from expert interviews conducted on behalf of Iowa Area Education Agencies.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

Instructional coaching seeks to provide ongoing, job-embedded professional development for teachers in order to improve teacher practices and student learning. While school districts across the country employ a variety of models and structures for teacher coaching programs, there are a number of strategies and recommended practices that apply across multiple coaching approaches. In order to assist the Iowa Area Education Agencies support high-quality teacher instructional coaching in constituent districts, the following report explores multiple coaching orientations and recommended practices across coaching models.

This report draws from the available literature on instructional coaching as well as from interviews conducted with experts in the field. The report comprises two major sections:

- **Section I: Effective Practices for Teacher Coaching** examines different models for instructional coaching programs and identifies overall best practices, including methods for promoting positive teacher-coach interactions, coaching content, and provision of professional development for coaches.
- **Section II: Structural Support for High-Quality Teacher Coaching** identifies the needed supportive factors for successful instructional coaching initiatives, including clearly established goals and participant roles, school leader participation and support, adequate time and resources, and a meaningful plan for program evaluation.

KEY FINDINGS

- **When creating an instructional coaching program, experts consistently emphasize that establishing clear coaching goals and delineating participant roles and responsibilities is a key factor in ensuring success.** Creating specific and actionable goals for coaching programs helps leaders choose the appropriate coaching model, strategically plan for the use of resources and time, and evaluate the impact of coaching programs. Furthermore, clear delineation of goals and responsibilities helps to focus instructional coaches on the most important activities. Clear explanations of teacher, coach, and principal roles helps to set participant expectations and supports the development of trusting, collaborative relationships between teachers and coaches.
- **In order to promote positive teacher-coach interactions, instructional coaching should be non-evaluative and respectful of teachers as professional practitioners, and should employ adult learning principles.** Often, teachers may be resistant to instructional coaching because they believe decisions about instruction are being imposed from the top-down without respect for teacher practices. When working with teachers as adult learners, coaches should recognize teachers' need for

autonomy and decision-making power over their learning. Furthermore, because trust and respect are critical for ensuring receptive and meaningful teacher participation, coaches must not be involved in the teacher evaluation process. When coaches act as partners in improving instruction rather than as supervisors or evaluators, teachers will feel more comfortable having open discussions about their practices and taking risks to improve.

- **Supportive principals are critical to establishing successful instructional coaching programs.** As such, building administrators should be involved in the design of an instructional coaching program in order to ensure their understanding of the program philosophy and approach as well as their support for program operation. Principals should visibly support instructional coaching efforts in order to promote teacher willingness to participate.
- **Coaching programs may establish a distributed leadership model for school instruction.** This is because multiple leaders and stakeholders should contribute to the program's operation and feel a sense of accountability for its success. Ann O'Doherty of the Center for Educational Leadership recommends establishing coaches as school leaders distinct from the administrative team. Accordingly, the principal should remain the school's foremost instructional leader, responsible for the evaluation of teachers and ultimately making final decisions regarding priorities for teaching and learning, while principals and coaches work together toward achieving shared goals for instruction.
- **Successful coaching programs require the adequate allocation of resources, most importantly coach responsibilities and time.** Accordingly, programs should seek to maximize coach time spent working directly with teachers, rather than relying too heavily on coaches to perform administrative tasks. While there is no clearly recommended teacher-coach or coach-school ratio in the available literature, experts interviewed for this report typically recommend that coaches work with no more than 10 teachers in a given coaching cycle.
- **Instructional coaches require ongoing, high-quality professional development throughout their tenure in order to support their development as effective coaches.** Because coaches are generally chosen based on their success as classroom teachers, professional development may focus on practices for teaching adult learners, developing communication skills, and deepening expertise in instructional strategies. In order to provide professional development to coaches, consultant Elena Aguilar suggests employing a designated instructional coaching program leader, who is responsible for running the program and leading coach professional learning. Furthermore, Ann O'Doherty recommends assigning new coaches to experienced "coach mentors" and creating professional learning communities for coaching.
- **School and district leaders should designate clear metrics with which to evaluate and assess the progress of instructional coaching programs.** Ongoing evaluation of instructional coaching helps to document benefits, identify areas for improvement, and communicate progress to stakeholders. According to Elena Aguilar, instructional

coaching has been linked not only to student outcomes, but also teacher outcomes such as improved retention and reduction in absences. The American Productivity and Quality Center recommends tracking factors related to student achievement, other student outcomes such as discipline and attendance, teacher outcomes such as attrition and retention, and operational factors such as the number of coaching participants and costs.

SECTION I: EFFECTIVE PRACTICES FOR TEACHER COACHING

The following section provides an overview of effective practices for teacher coaching programs, with a particular focus on identifying different coaching models, establishing coach responsibilities, and promoting positive teacher-coach interactions. The section draws on a review of the literature related to instructional coaching as well as from interviews with experts in the field, including Elena Aguilar of Elena Aguilar Consulting, Dr. Jim Knight of the Kansas Coaching Project, Ann O’Doherty of the Center for Educational Leadership, and Leanna Harris of Dianne Sweeney Consulting.

INTRODUCTION

Much of the current research literature maintains that the most effective professional development for teachers is *ongoing* and *job-embedded*, rather than provided through one-off trainings.¹ As such, instructional coaching has emerged as a major strategy for improving teaching practices and, in turn, student learning and achievement. However, instructional coaching can take a wide variety of formats and structures.

In practice, teacher coaching models exist along several spectra. As shown in the figure on the following page, the Education Alliance at Brown University recognizes that coaching may be either consultative or directive in nature, meaning that teachers may be permitted to initiate coaching on their own, or may be compelled to do so by the coach, administrator, or other leader. Similarly, coaching may also be collaborative, with coaches and teachers working together to improve instruction and student learning, or may place coaches in a more supervisory position. Inquiry-based coaching tends to focus on issues related to cognition and teacher reflection on their practice, while other coaching models may focus on supporting teachers in implementing specific actions and behaviors. Finally, some coaching models elect a peer-to-peer format, while others employ an expert-to-novice format, with specialists, instructional coaches, teacher leaders, or administrators acting as coaches.²

¹ [1] Croft, A. et al. “Job-Embedded Professional Development: What it is, Who is Responsible, and How to Get it Done Well.” National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, 2010. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED520830.pdf>

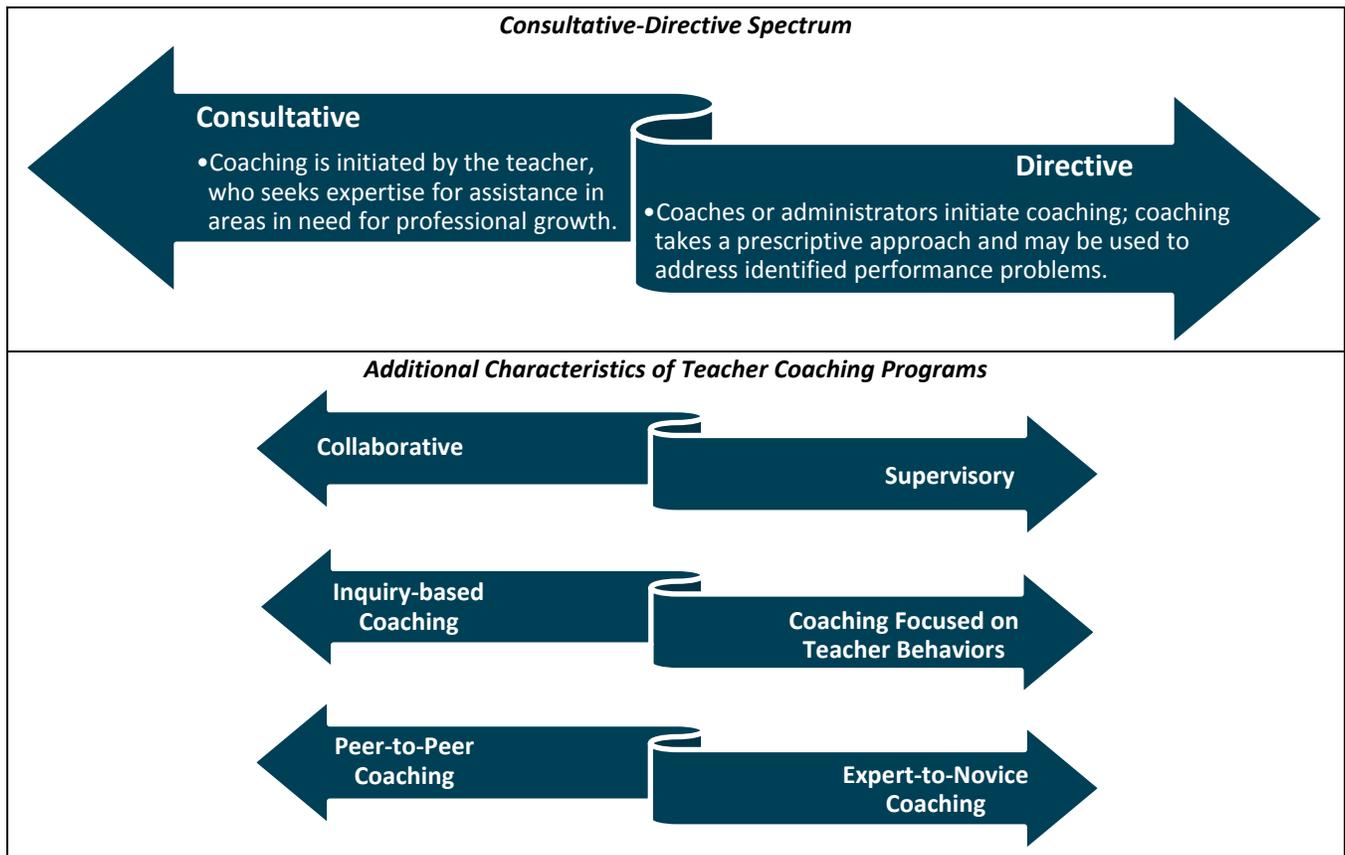
[2] Darling-Hammond, L. and Richardson, N. “Research Review/ Teacher Learning: What Matters?” *How Teachers Learn*, 66:5, February 2009, pp. 46-53.
http://www.mimathandscience.org/downloads/math_professional_development/how_teachers_learn_20110908_165813_22.pdf

[3] Joyce, B.R. and Showers, B. *Student Achievement Through Staff Development*, 3rd Edition, 2002.
<http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/102003.aspx>

[4] Miller, E. “The Old Model of Staff Development Survives in a World Where Everything Else Has Changed.” *The Harvard Education Letter*, 11:1, 1995 pp. 1–3.

² Borman, J. and Feger, S., with assistance from Kawakami, N. “Instructional Coaching: Key Themes from Literature.” The Education Alliance at Brown University, 2006, p. 3. http://www.brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/sites/brown.edu.academics.education-alliance/files/publications/TL_Coaching_Lit_Review.pdf

Figure 1.1: Possible Characteristics of Teacher Coaching Programs



Source: Education Alliance³

According to Ann O’Doherty, school leaders should seek fidelity of implementation in whichever coaching model best fits their school’s unique needs. “There is a big difference between something like cognitive coaching (which says the person is the center of the coaching and wherever they want to take coaching that day is where you go with them), and Karla Reiss’ model, which is about improving the school and school learning outcomes,” O’Doherty explained. “...With each coaching model, you need to make sure that coaches and [other stakeholders] understand the purpose.”⁴

EFFECTIVE COACHING PRACTICES

Coaching practices may vary widely by the type of coaching model employed. While certain coaching practices are unique to that model, a review of the literature and interviews with instructional coaching experts suggest that there are some recommended practices that apply to most coaching programs regardless of model. The following subsection examines

³ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴ Ann O’Doherty, Director, Danforth Educational Leadership Program, Center for Educational Leadership. Phone Interview, November 13, 2015.

recommended practices and coaching cycles specific to each coaching model, as well as coach responsibilities and principles of teacher-coach interactions that apply across models.

PRACTICES AND COACHING CYCLES FOR VARIOUS COACHING MODELS

The following subsections detail proposed coaching cycles and practices for three distinct coaching models identified by interviewees: the Kansas Coaching Project’s instructional coaching model, inquiry-based/cognitive coaching, and student-centered coaching. The characteristics of the coaching models described are not necessarily exclusive or incompatible with each other; rather, the subsections highlight key practices for certain coaching goals and/or approaches as described by the interviewees.

KANSAS COACHING PROJECT INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING MODEL

Jim Knight—Director of the Kansas Coaching Project at the Center for Research on Learning at the University of Kansas—has extensively studied instructional coaching methods in schools.⁵ Knight commented that the Kansas Coaching Project’s research indicates that efficient coaching models typically take on a three-part cycle: identify, learn, and improve. He explains the cycle as follows:

You identify a goal. You identify a teaching strategy to hit the goal. The teacher learns about that teaching strategy and then they implement and adjustments are made until the teacher hits the goal.... Over time the kind of goals you set, the questions you ask, the process, is very tight and clear. The process itself is adaptable. There’s a recognition that if this practice or this teaching strategy won’t help, we’ll use a different one. Or change the way we measure progress towards the goal. You work with the teacher and make adjustments as you need to, but the steps are pretty consistent.⁶

In his 2007 book on instructional coaching, Knight further describes the coaching cycle. This instructional coaching model employs seven principles that form the basis of its theoretical framework.⁷ First, the teacher and coach must establish a sense of **equality** within the relationship, placing equal value on the thoughts and beliefs of both parties. The coach must also ensure that the teacher maintains both **choice** and **voice**, allowing for the educator to maintain control over the techniques and methods employed. The professional learning mechanisms must also enable a natural and authentic **dialogue**, engaging the teacher in conversations regarding the application of pedagogy and encouraging **reflection** about what elements have been effective and which may be improved. The model should also include a **praxis** component, allowing teachers to apply new skills in real educational scenarios as they learn. Finally, the instructional coaching model is built upon **reciprocity**, or the idea that both teacher and coach are learners, allowing for mutual growth and

⁵ “Director of the Kansas Coaching Project.” Center for Research on Learning, The University of Kansas. <http://instructionalcoach.org/about>

⁶ Jim Knight, Director, Kansas Coaching Project. Phone Interview, November 10, 2015.

⁷ Knight, J. “Chapter 2: Instructional Coaching.” In Knight, J. *Instructional Coaching: A Partnership Approach to Improving Instruction*, 2007, pp. 31-32. <http://www.instructionalcoach.org/images/downloads/research-pubs/Chapter2.pdf>

development of both parties through coaching.⁸ The Kansas Coaching Project also establishes seven components for the implementation of a successful instructional coaching program (see Figure 1.2).⁹

Figure 1.2: Components of Effective Instructional Coaching Implementation

COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION
Teacher Enrollment	The coach initiates a one-on-one interview prior to engaging in professional learning activities. The interview helps build common ground, develop interests and concerns, and establish a rapport between teacher and coach.
Collaborative Planning	Teacher and coach collaboratively develop a practical plan for the implementation of a new teaching practice, and build a rubric to help guide observation of the lesson’s delivery.
Modeling the Lessons	The coach delivers the planned lesson in the teacher’s classroom, while the teacher observes and records notes on the observation guide.
Teacher-Directed Post-Conference	Immediately following the coach’s model lesson, the teacher facilitates a collaborative and constructive conversation.
Observing the Lesson	The pair then reverses roles, with the teacher delivering the planned lesson and incorporating elements learned during the previous three steps. During the lesson, the coach records observations on the rubric.
Collaborative Data Exploration	Immediately following the teacher’s lesson, teacher and coach discuss the lesson, incorporating data from the coach’s observation rubric.
Continued Support	The coach provides continuous support in the development of lessons and pedagogical techniques, until both parties feel recognize mastery of the practice.

Source: Knight and Cornett¹⁰

INQUIRY-BASED & COGNITIVE COACHING

Inquiry-based or cognitive coaching aims to improve a teacher’s instructional practices by focusing on their underlying thought processes and beliefs. Particularly important in this model is developing a teacher’s “cognitive skills of reflection through discourse and application of knowledge.”¹¹

Cognitive coaching is the model most clearly described by Elena Aguilar of Elena Aguilar Consulting. Coaching that is truly transformational, she argues, must address teachers’ emotional intelligence, non-verbal communication, and underlying beliefs. She further explains:

The most powerful coaching models are those that look at a teacher’s instructional practices but also at the beliefs that they hold about students and learning and perhaps about themselves. So coaching programs that only focus on instructional practices and stay at a superficial level, the changes that teachers make are often

⁸ Ibid. pp. 32-33.

⁹ Knight, J., and J. Cornett. “Studying the Impact of Instructional Coaching.” Center for Research on Learning, The University of Kansas. pp. 3-4. <http://instructionalcoach.org/research/tools/paper-studying-the-impact-of-instructional-coaching>

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 3-4.

¹¹ Borman, J. and Feger, S., Op cit., p. 3.

not sustained and don't transform the experiences for kids because the underlying beliefs aren't being explored.¹²

Ann O'Doherty commented that inquiry-based coaching is one of the most commonly used coaching structures in the field at this time. She describes that this model of coaching is essentially the "idea of leading people through cycles of inquiry and having a coach that helps guide them through that process." According to O'Doherty, the cycle of inquiry begins with an examination of student learning. "Then building out from student learning, [leaders should ask] 'what do we see that can be improved?'" she explained. "What would teachers have to do differently to make the student learning different? How would you prepare them for that? What type of professional development or support would teachers need to make that change in practice?"¹³

O'Doherty confirms that this variety of coaching is different from content specialist coaching that may focus on specific teacher practices or student learning goals. "Someone can help coach someone through that [cycle or inquiry] process at any layer," she stated. "However, this type of coaching is different from content specialist types of coaching that can target particular aspects of student learning; for example, math skills."¹⁴

STUDENT-CENTERED COACHING

The model of instructional coaching supported by Diane Sweeney Consulting (DSC) is known as "student-centered coaching." According to the organization's website, student-centered coaching is able to achieve a higher degree of impact on students because of its focus on student learning rather than teacher practice and use of data. Figure 1.3 below displays DSC's comparison between student-centered coaching and teacher-centered or relationship-driven coaching.

¹² Elena Aguilar, Elena Aguilar Consulting. Phone Interview, November 17, 2015.

¹³ Ann O'Doherty, Director, Danforth Educational Leadership Program, Center for Educational Leadership, Op. cit.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Figure 1.3: Student-Centered, Teacher-Centered, and Relationship-Driven Coaching

STUDENT-CENTERED COACHING	TEACHER-CENTERED COACHING	RELATIONSHIP-DRIVEN COACHING
ROLE OF THE COACH		
The coach partners with teachers to design learning that is based on a specific objective for student learning	The coach moves teachers towards implementing a program or set of instructional practices	The coach provides support and resources to teachers
FOCUS OF COACHING		
The focus is on using data and student work to analyze progress and collaborate to make informed decisions about instruction that re-differentiated and needs-based	The focus is on what the teacher is, or is not, doing and addressing it through coaching	The focus is on providing support to teachers in a way that doesn't challenge or threaten them
USE OF DATA		
Formative assessment data and student work is used to determine how to design the instruction. Summative assessment data is used to assess progress towards mastery	Summative assessment data is used to hold teachers accountable, rather than as a tool for instructional decision-making	Data is rarely used in relationship-driven coaching
MATERIALS		
Textbooks, technology, and curricular programs are viewed as tools for moving student learning to the next level	The use of textbooks, technology, and curricular programs is the primary objective of coaching	Sharing access and information to textbooks, technology, and curricular programs is the primary focus of the coaching
PERCEPTION OF THE COACH		
The coach is viewed as a partner who is there to support teachers to move students towards mastery of the standards	The coach is viewed as a person who is there to hold teachers accountable for a certain set of instructional practices	The coach is viewed as a friendly source of support that provides resources when needed
ROLE OF RELATIONSHIPS		
Trusting, respectful, and collegial relationships are a necessary component for all forms of coaching.		

Source: Diane Sweeney Consulting¹⁵

According to Leanna Harris, a consultant at DSC, a student-centered orientation is one of the key factors in successful instructional coaching. She explained:

It needs to be centered on student outcomes and not getting teachers to do things.... It's not about: "if the teacher implements this curriculum or implements this structure, or does this program." Coaching is most effective when it's "what do the kids need to do in order to be effective and what can we do together to help get them there?" Being student-centered is one big piece.¹⁶

Like cognitive and inquiry-based coaching, Harris suggests that student-centered coaching also involves building teacher capacity over time by supporting teachers "to be reflective and responsive practitioners."¹⁷

¹⁵ Table contents verbatim from: "Study Guide for Student-Centered Coaching." Diane Sweeney Consulting. <https://dianesweeney.com/study-guide-student-centered-coaching/>

¹⁶ Leanna Harris, Consultant, Dianne Sweeney Consulting. Phone Interview, November 11, 2015.

¹⁷ Ibid.

COACH RESPONSIBILITIES AND TEACHER-COACH INTERACTIONS

Across multiple models of instructional coaching, there are a number of recommended skills and practices for supporting effective coaching and positive teacher-coach interactions. The primary responsibility of instructional coaches is to improve classroom instruction and increase student achievement.¹⁸ In order to work toward improving classroom instruction, coaches engage in a variety of in-class activities—such as modeling instructional methods and observing teachers at work—and out-of-class activities, such as co-planning, analyzing student data, developing curricula, and conferencing with teachers.¹⁹

“People who become coaches may have been strong teachers and are invited or volunteer to become a coach. But working with adults is very different and requires a different skill set.”

- Elena Aguilar

While coaches may be responsible for a variety of tasks both within and outside of the classroom, school and district leaders should ensure that coaches are not weighed down by administrative tasks or activities that do not directly impact teaching and learning.²⁰ In fact, Jim Knight’s Kansas Coaching Project notes that the most basic way to increase the effectiveness of a coaching program is to increase the amount of time coaches spend interacting with and guiding teachers.²¹

In support of their work, coaches must possess a variety of skills and talents. For instance, Leanna Harris stated that an instructional coach has to be “a really good facilitator and needs to know how to manage small groups and effectively engage people,” as well as knowing how to “be an excellent facilitator of conversation to help people engage in self-reflection ... [and] meaningful dialogue.”²² Furthermore, Jim Knight identified a number of factors that instructional coaches should understand and know how to do, including:

- Know how to coach and understand the coaching cycle;
- Understand the teaching practices they want to share with teachers;
- Understand how to work with adults;
- Know how to gather data and monitor progress toward learning goals;

¹⁸ Shaha, S., Lewis, V., O’Donnel, T.J., Brown, D.H. “Evaluating Professional Development: An Approach to Verifying Program Impact on Teachers and Students.” National Staff Development Council. 2004, p. 1.
<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.196.2041&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

¹⁹ Swafford, J. “Teachers Supporting Teachers Through Peer Coaching.” *Support for Learning*, May 1, 1998, p. 54.

²⁰ [1] L’Allier, S., Elish-Piper, L. and Bean, R.M. “What Matters for Elementary Literacy Coaching? Guiding Principles for Instructional Improvement and Student Achievement.” *The Reading Teacher*, April 2010, pp. 544-554.

[2] Steiner, L. and Kowal, J. “Principal as Instructional Leader: Designing a Coaching Program that Fits.” The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, September 2007, p. 5.
<http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED499255.pdf>

²¹ Knight, J. “Chapter 2: Instructional Coaching,” Op cit., p. 50.

²² Leanna Harris, Consultant, Dianne Sweeney Consulting, Op. cit.

- Possess good communication skills; and
- Possess leadership skills.²³

In order to support positive interactions with teachers, coaches need to be skilled in supporting adult learners. Elena Aguilar commented that coaches often require training to transition from the classroom to a coaching role. “Again, this is a problem I see across the country; people who become coaches may have been strong teachers and are invited or volunteer to become a coach,” she said. “But working with adults is very different and requires a different skillset.”²⁴

According to Jim Knight, teaching adult learners—in this case teachers—requires instructional coaches to recognize the learner’s need for autonomy and to maintain decision-making power.²⁵ Ann O’Doherty further explained that adult learning involves ensuring that learning is relevant and meaningful, and making coaching activities worthwhile for participants. She stated:

... I see this being more [about planning] and [being] mindful; adults require some immediacy, something they can wrap their heads around and that they personally see a real need. Sometimes kids don’t have a choice—they have to come to class. So I think that there are [practices] for adult learning that will support people to want to do the work, because they aren’t compulsively held to do this.²⁶

In a 2010 essay on the principles of effective literacy coaching, L’Allier, Elish-Piper, and Bean suggest that teachers, as adult learners, are best served when “they are involved in planning instruction, when experience is the basis for learning, when learning has immediate job-related relevance, and when learning is problem-centered.”²⁷ The Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University recommends that teacher coaches operate within a professional learning environment that supports adult learning by allowing coaches to:²⁸

- Focus on data- and evidence-informed learning;
- Promote adult learning in a way that models classroom practice;
- Construct and apply knowledge and skills in the classrooms of participating teachers;
- Develop school and teacher learning plans that focus on content and leadership;
- Make connections and ensure alignment with the larger system; and
- Continuously measure, document, reflect upon, and adjust professional learning opportunities.

²³ Jim Knight, Director, Kansas Coaching Project, Op. cit.

²⁴ Elena Aguilar, Elena Aguilar Consulting, Op. cit.

²⁵ Jim Knight, Director, Kansas Coaching Project, Op. cit.

²⁶ Ann O’Doherty, Director, Danforth Educational Leadership Program, Center for Educational Leadership, Op. cit.

²⁷ L’Allier, S., Elish-Piper, L. and Bean, R.M., Op. cit., p. 545.

²⁸ Bullets verbatim from: “Instructional Coaching: Professional Development Strategies That Improve Instruction,” Op. cit., p. 3.

In addition to developing skills for teaching adult learners, coaches should strive to establish a collaborative relationship with teachers. L’Allier, Elish-Piper, and Bean recommend that coaches work to develop this collaborative relationship by ensuring a shared focus on student achievement, but also “by establishing trust, maintaining confidentiality, and communicating effectively with teachers.” Further, the researchers suggest, trust can be established by communicating a respect for teachers’ professional expertise and focusing

“I believe that if a teacher has a strong educational and pedagogical foundation, they know good instructional practice [is] the key feature that really goes across contexts.”

- Leanna Harris

discussion on “how to address the needs of students—rather than on the strengths or weaknesses of a teacher’s instruction.”²⁹

Leanna Harris of DSC recommended approaching this teacher-coach collaboration through a partnership model. “I believe that a partnership model, as opposed to the coach having the role of ‘expert’, again helps with

creating buy-in, motivation, and engagement,” she commented, “and there’s a much higher rate of adoption and receptiveness to instructional coaching when the coach is viewed as a partner rather than the ‘expert.’”³⁰

COACHING CONTENT

As previously indicated, the content of instructional coaching is largely dependent upon the model employed. The Annenberg Institute recommends that instructional coaching consist of “rigorous content-based experiences.”³¹ However, while content coaching “emphasizes lesson design and empowering teachers, largely through questioning, to attain a deep, rich understanding of the content they teach,”³² other coaching models may draw on pedagogical practices that span content areas.

For instance, Ann O’Doherty suggested that content area specialization may not be necessary for effective coaching, depending on the coaching program’s purpose and goal. She explained:

We know that there are some really quality teacher “moves” and [coaches should ask] how do we help teachers incorporate moves into their practice? An example may be student discourse; you don’t have to be an expert in a particular content area to coach [teachers] around improving student discourse in their classroom. A coach like this may be able to coach someone in history, chemistry, and calculus in order to improve student-to-student talk and [create] a highly cognitive and accountable nature of discussion in class.³³

²⁹ L’Allier, S., Elish-Piper, L. and Bean, R.M., Op. cit., p. 547.

³⁰ Leanna Harris, Consultant, Dianne Sweeney Consulting, Op. cit.

³¹ “Instructional Coaching: Professional Development Strategies That Improve Instruction,” Op. cit., p. 8.

³² Knight, J., and J. Cornett, Op. cit., p. 193.

³³ Ann O’Doherty, Director, Danforth Educational Leadership Program, Center for Educational Leadership, Op. cit.

Leanna Harris expressed a similar perspective on the importance of pedagogical expertise over content area expertise in some models of coaching. “I don’t think that coaches need to be content experts,” she said. “In other words: I believe that if a teacher has a strong educational and pedagogical foundation, they know good instructional practice [is] the key feature that really goes across contexts.”³⁴

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR COACHES

In order to run a successful coaching program, schools and districts must provide adequate professional development for coaches. Across the interviews conducted for this report, nearly all experts mentioned providing professional development that teaches coaches how to coach as a key factor in ensuring program success. For instance, Jim Knight commented that one major challenge to successful instructional coaching is lack of training, stating “a lot of coaches have had one day of training, or no training, and they don’t really even know what they are supposed to do.” In order to support successful coaching, Jim Knight recommends that coaches “need to practice, learn communication skills, have a deep understanding of effective instruction and have a process they follow, and have an understanding of the complexities of working with adults. All of that stuff is learnable, but you can’t just pick it up on the job. You need a system to support it.”³⁵

“I think that the skill set of coaching is massive and coaches need their own professional development every week. They need time to plan and reflect and be a learner as well.”

- Elena Aguilar

Experts propose a variety of actions to ensure appropriate professional development for coaches. Elena Aguilar recommends that all coaching programs should include an explicitly designated program leader, who is responsible for “articulating the coaching framework, providing professional development, and working with principals and site leaders to clarify what the program is about.” In addition to establishing a clear leader responsible for coach professional development, Aguilar also suggests scheduling coach professional development activities at regular, frequent intervals, stating, “I think that the skill set of coaching is massive and coaches need their own professional development every week. They need time to plan and reflect and be a learner as well.”³⁶

Ann O’Doherty advises that all coaches be paired with “coach mentors,” who are successful, experienced instructional coaches. Having a mentor “should help them learn the moves, through an opportunity similar to student teaching, to watch someone who has mastered this craft.”³⁷

³⁴ Leanna Harris, Consultant, Dianne Sweeney Consulting, Op. cit.

³⁵ Jim Knight, Director, Kansas Coaching Project, Op. cit.

³⁶ Elena Aguilar, Elena Aguilar Consulting, Op. cit.

³⁷ Ann O’Doherty, Director, Danforth Educational Leadership Program, Center for Educational Leadership, Op. cit.

Furthermore, O’Doherty suggests that coaches seek to continuously improve their craft even after receiving the title of “coach.” She explained that in her work, creating space for coaches to interact with each other in a coach professional learning community helped to improve coach learning and training. “What we found very helpful,” she said, “was to have ongoing meetings with just coaches to puzzle through what was not working well for them, to really see each other as support.” Additionally, O’Doherty believes that videotaping can be a valuable tool for coaches, as they are given the opportunity to watch themselves at work to identify areas for improvement and reflect on their practice.³⁸

Also in support of using video in teacher coaching programs, Jim Knight explained that video can be useful for both teachers and coaches to examine and reflect on their work:

The promising thing is that video is totally transforming the way professional learning works in schools. It’s going to be a very rare school that doesn’t use video to improve practice. When you’re looking at a video, you’re looking at reality. You aren’t just talking, you’re actually doing something. And the video is just going to get more powerful and the sound is going to get better and tools are going to be developed to support it. But I think because of video, we are moving away from a culture of talk to a culture of action in schools.³⁹

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Jim Knight, Director, Kansas Coaching Project, Op. cit.

SECTION II: STRUCTURAL SUPPORT FOR HIGH-QUALITY TEACHER COACHING PROGRAMS

Across multiple models of teacher coaching, experts recommend establishing strong guidelines, planning for the achievement of identified goals, providing coaches and teachers with the necessary time and resources for faithful implementation, and evaluating efforts to ensure positive impact. The following section explores the needed structural supports to ensure success in teacher coaching, including:

- Establishing goals and defining participant roles;
- The role of school leadership;
- Ensuring adequate time and resources; and
- Evaluating the impact of coaching.

ESTABLISHING GOALS AND DEFINING PARTICIPANT ROLES

According to the experts interviewed for this report, establishing goals and clearly defining roles and responsibilities for all coaching participants is a critical factor in ensuring the success of programs regardless of the model used. For instance, Elena Aguilar identifies several key components of successful coaching programs:

... the district or school implementing the model has a clearly defined and articulated framework that may include things such as: what are the goals for the instructional coaching program; how is the program going to be evaluated; how are coaches evaluated; how is instructional coaching one component of a professional development plan; what is the coaching program's mission, vision, and core values; what are the series of actions behind the program? All of those components set up an initiative or program to be strategic and effective.⁴⁰

Setting clear goals for coaching helps school and district leaders to plan strategically and to make decisions about program resources and logistics. Ann O'Doherty states that program logistics, such as frequency of meeting and coach workload, should be "backward mapped from the outcome that you want."⁴¹

Furthermore, the Annenberg Institute posits that teacher coaching programs include the establishment of clear goals and expected outcomes for coaching programs, structural guidelines for coaching, and identified metrics to determine the impact of coaching and monitor student and teacher outcomes.⁴² Coaching programs that lack clear purpose and guidance may flounder as coaches do not know where to focus their efforts and teachers do not understand the role of coaches.⁴³ Ann O'Doherty commented that one of the key

⁴⁰ Elena Aguilar, Elena Aguilar Consulting, Op. cit.

⁴¹ Ann O'Doherty, Director, Danforth Educational Leadership Program, Center for Educational Leadership, Op. cit.

⁴² "Instructional Coaching: Professional Development Strategies That Improve Instruction," Op. cit., p. 3.

⁴³ Goodwin, B. "Teacher Leadership: No Guarantee of Success." *Educational Leadership*, October 2013, p. 79.

components for a successful coaching program is “to have a really clear purpose so that everyone who is involved—teacher, coach, principal—are all aware of the purpose and targeted outcomes of coaching.”⁴⁴ Thus, clearly defining both goals and the role of participants is a critical factor in planning for coaching success.

“Everyone who is involved—
teacher, coach, principal—[should
all be] aware of the purpose and
targeted outcomes of coaching.”

- Ann O’Doherty

In addition to ensuring that coaches are engaging in productive activities that further establish learning goals, establishing clear participant roles also helps to promote positive relations between teachers, coaches, and principals. Often, teachers are resistant to coaching efforts because of a sense of top-down decision making and a perceived lack of respect for teacher professional

practice.⁴⁵ Whether teachers are required to participate in coaching or they participate on a voluntary basis, those teachers who are resistant to coaching may not benefit from participation.⁴⁶

Interviewees unanimously recommend that when defining participant roles, coaches should be clearly established as *non-evaluative*. This allows coaches to build more trusting relationships with teachers and supports a collaborative rather than supervisory mindset. “Coaching tied with evaluation is a recipe for disaster,” commented Elena Aguilar. “In order to be able to work with a coach and really learn, you have to be able to feel like you can really take risks. And if coaching is tied to evaluation, it’s not going to even be possible.”⁴⁷

Sometimes, the instinct to employ coaches in an evaluative capacity arises from the needs of the teacher evaluation system. Elena Aguilar confirmed that she often works with school districts that require a certain number of classroom observations per teacher per year, and coaches may be asked to complete such evaluative observations due to a general lack of human resource capacity. In such a situation where coaches *must* be used to assist in teacher evaluations, Aguilar recommends that coaches only observe those teachers whom they do not work with directly. She explains further:

... If I’m an eighth grade English teacher and I have a coach who coaches me on English, she would not be my coach evaluator. Instead it may be the math coach who evaluates so I don’t have to put my coaching relationship at risk by bringing that evaluation piece into it.⁴⁸

In one practical example of a district coaching program, Spokane Public Schools outlines specific roles and responsibilities for all parties involved, including coaches, principals, and

⁴⁴ Ann O’Doherty, Director, Danforth Educational Leadership Program, Center for Educational Leadership, Op. cit.

⁴⁵ Knight, J. “Teacher Perceptions of Professional Development.” Center for Research on Learning, The University of Kansas, pp. 4-6. http://www.instructionalcoach.org/images/downloads/research-pubs/Another_Freakin_Thing.pdf

⁴⁶ “Instructional Coaching: Professional Development Strategies That Improve Instruction,” Op. cit., pp. 5-6.

⁴⁷ Elena Aguilar, Elena Aguilar Consulting, Op. cit.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

teachers (see Figure 2.1). Notably, coaches bear the greatest variety of responsibilities, including facilitating professional learning, acting as school leader in instruction, and leading the initiative to implement data-driven instruction, among other roles. Principals are established, among other roles, as both the instructional leader and the evaluator who ultimately oversees the performance of coaches and teachers. Teachers, on the other hand, are responsible for reflecting on their practices, working with coaches as a learning partner, and acting as an “assessor” to use data and make collaborative instructional decisions.

Figure 2.1: SPS Roles and Responsibilities

Instructional Coach	Principal	Teacher
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom Supporter: to increase the quality and effectiveness of classroom instruction based on using the gradual release model • Instructional Supporter: to support the implementation of effective instructional strategies • Curriculum or Content Facilitator: to promote implementation of state standards through adopted curricula • Data Coach: to facilitate conversations using data to drive instructional decisions • Facilitator for Change: to engage teachers in reflective thinking while looking at their own instructional practices critically and analytically • Learner: to engage in continuous learning in order to keep current • Professional Learning Facilitator: to design and facilitate effective professional learning opportunities based on SPS Professional Learning Framework • Resource: to identify a variety of resources to enhance classroom instruction and student achievement • School Leader: to support and communicate school and district initiatives with the school community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicator: to build understanding of the interconnectedness of the coaching model, school improvement plans, and district initiatives • Facilitator: to collaboratively plan and coordinate professional learning • Instructional Leader: to support coaches and teachers in the coaching model • Learner: to promote and model professional learning • Evaluator: The Principal is responsible for evaluating the coach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructor: Reflect, refine and implement effective instructional practices to increase student achievement • Learner: to engage in continuous learning • Learning Partner: to engage in professional collaborative relationships • Assessor: to participate in data conversations that influence instructional decisions

Source: Spokane Public Schools⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Figure adapted nearly verbatim from: “Instructional Coaching Model: Spokane Public Schools.” Spokane Public Schools, April 2010, pp. 6-7.
<http://swcontent.spokaneschools.org/cms/lib/WA01000970/Centricity/Domain/629/Instructional%20Coaching%20Model%20FINAL%20-%206.10.pdf>

While interview contacts typically concede that coaching should not be evaluative, they disagreed somewhat in relation to the need for *confidentiality* in coaching. Some sources suggest that confidential coaching may improve teacher willingness to participate.⁵⁰ Leanna Harris, however, suggests that leaders can ensure teacher willingness to participate without the need for confidentiality by building a pro-coaching culture. “Confidentiality creates a sense of having something to hide,” she stated. “Instead [participation in coaching] should be very public and very celebrated. Have the cultural shift [result in an attitude where teachers would feel comfortable saying,] ‘yeah of course I’m meeting with a coach.’”⁵¹

Alternatively, Elena Aguilar suggests establishing a balance between confidentiality and accountability in coaching, “so that participants have privacy, but also administrators know who is and who isn’t being coached.”⁵² Essentially, administrators should have a basic idea of coaching activities, but coaches do not need to report on their specific interactions with each teacher.

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Principals and other school leaders are critically important in both selecting an appropriate coaching program to meet the needs of the school and supporting the success of coaching initiatives during implementation. According to an article by Steiner and Kowal for The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, school leaders should “play an active role in selecting trained coaches, developing a targeted coaching strategy, and evaluating whether coaches are having the desired impact on teaching and learning.”⁵³ For example, in one large-scale study of literacy coaches in Florida, most case studies revealed that coaches view administrators at the school- and district-level as key supporters of their work, while a small number of coaches reported that unsupportive administrators hindered their work, including by assigning additional tasks beyond their stated responsibilities.⁵⁴

Involving school leaders in the design and implementation of coaching programs is important because, according to Jim Knight, “there needs to be theoretical consistency, which is a fancy way of saying that the coach and the principal have to have the same beliefs about how to work with adults.” Essentially, the principal’s leadership style should be compatible with the coaching program in order to ensure its success.⁵⁵

Furthermore, principals are an important factor in ensuring the success of teacher coaching initiatives by expressing support for the program in a visible way. Steiner and Kowal’s article states that “administrators who are transparent about the purposes of the coaching program, who provide clear support for the initiative, and who indicate through their words

⁵⁰ L’Allier, S., Elish-Piper, L. and Bean, R.M., Op. cit., pp. 547-548.

⁵¹ Leanna Harris, Consultant, Dianne Sweeney Consulting, Op. cit.

⁵² Elena Aguilar, Elena Aguilar Consulting, Op. cit.

⁵³ Steiner and Kowal, Op. cit., p. 1.

⁵⁴ Marsh, J.A., et al. “Supporting Literacy Across the Sunshine State: A Study of Florida Middle School Reading Coaches.” RAND Corporation, 2008, p. xxi.
http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG762.pdf

⁵⁵ Jim Knight, Director, Kansas Coaching Project, Op. cit.

and actions that the initiative represents a long-term commitment of human and financial resources are more likely to reassure staff members who are committed to improvement.”⁵⁶ Thus, administrator support related to instructional coaching should include frequent meetings with instructional coaches to discuss goals and school progress as well as holding staff members accountable for working with the coach to improve instruction.⁵⁷ Consistent with these ideas, Jim Knight commented:

The principal has to believe the coach and support the coach and communicate to the staff their confidence in the coach because if the staff picks up that “it looks like the principal doesn’t really care about the coaching,” they are not going to do much. They are going to do what they can to please the principal, but if the principal isn’t that concerned, the teachers won’t be either.⁵⁸

Beyond involving school leaders in the design and implementation of the coaching model and establishing school leaders as important supporters of instructional coaching, the Annenberg Institute suggests that coaching requires a collaborative, interconnected leadership model. The institute’s guide to instructional coaching states that: “an essential feature of coaching is that it uses the relationships between coaches, principals, and teachers to create the conversation that leads to behavioral, pedagogical, and content knowledge exchange.” Accordingly, coaching distributes leadership across multiple levels of professionals working toward a shared goal of improving teaching and learning, through which stakeholders at multiple levels feel a sense of ownership and accountability for coaching outcomes.⁵⁹

“Make sure that the coach is seen as part of the leadership team— not the administrative team—but the leadership team.”

- Ann O’Doherty

Several interviewees contacted for this report further expressed the importance of establishing shared leadership between principals and instructional coaches. For instance, Leanna Harris explained that alignment between school principals and coaches is critical, as the principal is typically the school’s foremost instructional leader. “I think this is really key, because I see a lot of ineffectiveness and lost potential when there are bad alignments and the principal just doesn’t get what’s behind [the coaching program],” she said. “And then the coach comes to the trainings and gets a completely different story from their boss.”⁶⁰

However, while the principal is the foremost instructional leader, they should not treat the coach as their “enforcer” or “informer.” Harris suggested that this behavior “undermines everything, and I mean everything, about the program. I don’t know a quicker path to undermining the work than that.”⁶¹

⁵⁶ Steiner and Kowal, Op. cit., p. 5.

⁵⁷ Wren, S. and Reed, D. “Literacy Coaches Roles and Responsibilities.” SEDL. <http://www.sedl.org/pubs/sedl-letter/v17n01/literacy-coaches.html>

⁵⁸ Jim Knight, Director, Kansas Coaching Project, Op. cit.

⁵⁹ “Instructional Coaching: Professional Development Strategies That Improve Instruction,” Op. cit., p. 4.

⁶⁰ Leanna Harris, Consultant, Dianne Sweeney Consulting, Op. cit.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Achieving an appropriate relationship between the principal and instructional coach requires both parties to be established as leaders, but clearly delineates coaches as separate from administrators, and confirms that coaches do not contribute to teacher evaluation. Ann O’Doherty suggests that this balance can be achieved by “making sure that the coach is seen as part of the leadership team—not the administrative team—but the leadership team, helping to set a direction for the campus and strongly involved in the professional development delivery, planning, design, and selection.”⁶²

Meanwhile, in relation to instructional leadership, the principal should be established as a sort of “head coach.” O’Doherty explains: “It’s important that principals stay in the classroom, that they don’t abdicate responsibility for coaching teachers because they have an instructional coach.”⁶³ Instead of ceding all control of instruction to coaches, principals should remain engaged in setting high expectations for instruction, including regularly observing and giving feedback to teachers. Ideally, principals are “not just waiting for the coach to tell them things” but are “actually out there, actively looking for the best things that are happening in the classroom and helping teachers move their practice forward.”⁶⁴

ENSURING ADEQUATE TIME AND RESOURCES

The allocation of sufficient time and resources is critical to ensuring the success of instructional coaching programs. According to Jim Knight, one of the biggest challenges to the operation of a successful coaching program is “superficial implementation,” which involves setting up a coaching program without designating clear goals, participating in an organized planning process, or providing an adequate budget. “It could be that people only give lip service to the belief that professional learning can change or they don’t really believe that better teaching is better learning, [but] I don’t really think that,” he stated. “More so, I think that people just don’t understand what they need to do and don’t budget for it.”⁶⁵

The most important resource in a coaching program is the coach’s time. As previously mentioned, while coaches may participate in a variety of activities, time spent with teachers is often the most significant for improving instruction and meeting the learning goals established by a coaching program. Therefore, beyond planning for the number of days an instructional coach is assigned to a given school, the more detailed allocation of time spent on various activities is an important consideration.

For instance, Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) in Falls Church, Virginia operates a successful instructional coaching model, recognized as exemplary by the American

⁶² Ann O’Doherty, Director, Danforth Educational Leadership Program, Center for Educational Leadership, Op. cit.

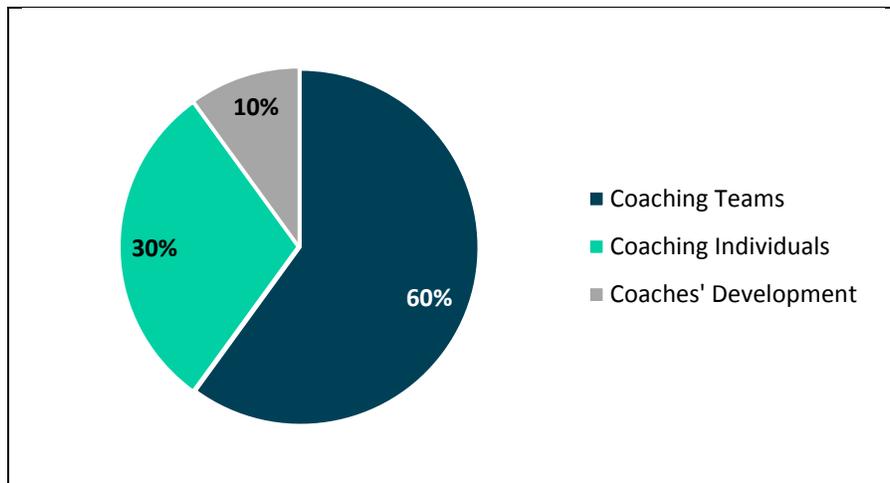
⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Jim Knight, Director, Kansas Coaching Project, Op. cit.

Productivity and Quality Center (APQC).⁶⁶ Under the FCPS program model, instructional coaches “act as professional teacher colleagues who work on instructional issues in a collegial and non-evaluative atmosphere with their peers.”⁶⁷ In this role, coaches are responsible for working with both individual teachers and teacher teams. With individual teachers, coaches are responsible for mentoring, connecting teachers to available resources, planning, and co-teaching. With groups of teachers and professional learning communities (PLCs), coaches are responsible for gathering and disseminating research on best practices, facilitating peer observations in each other’s classrooms, and organizing professional development activities such as book studies.⁶⁸ In order to support this work, coaches are expected to spend 90 percent of their work time working directly with teachers, including 60 percent of time coaching teacher teams and 30 percent coaching individual teachers (see Figure 2.2 below).

Figure 2.2: Time Allocation for Instructional Coaches



Source: Fairfax County Public Schools⁶⁹

As in-class activities such as co-teaching and observation are often easy to schedule, coaching programs should emphasize ensuring time for out-of-class activities, particularly including pre-conferencing and post-conferencing for classroom observations. Ann O’Doherty commented that it is important that “the coach has an opportunity to be in classrooms, observing practice and doing models, but they also have the opportunity to sit side-by-side to look at student learning products and data and discussing observations in other teachers’ classrooms.”⁷⁰ According to Steiner and Kowal, some administrators have

⁶⁶ Kline, D., et al. “Best Practices in Evaluating the Impact of Instructional Coaching on Teaching and Learning: Final Report.” APQC Education Advanced Working Group, 2011, p. 3. Accessible from: http://www.apqceducation.org/knowledge-base/download-documents/cat_view/72-benchmarking-research/71-evaluating-the-impact-of-instructional-coaching-on-teaching-and-learning

⁶⁷ “Instructional Coaching Program.” Fairfax County Public Schools. <http://commweb.fcps.edu/programprofile/overview.cfm?programID=207>

⁶⁸ “The Coaching Work.” Fairfax County Public Schools. <http://www.fcps.edu/is/ic/documents/CoachingWork.pdf>

⁶⁹ “Time Allocation.” Fairfax County Public Schools. <http://www.fcps.edu/is/ic/documents/TimeAllocation.pdf>

⁷⁰ Ann O’Doherty, Director, Danforth Educational Leadership Program, Center for Educational Leadership, Op. cit.

responded to the lack of time for instructional coaching activities by setting dates for early student release or arrival several times per year.⁷¹

In relation to coaching workload, interviewees provide a number of guiding recommendations. First, Ann O’Doherty explicitly recommends against full-time teachers acting as coaches in addition to their teaching responsibilities, stating that such a heavy workload can be “very challenging.”⁷² Elena Aguilar posits that assigning coaches to work with too many teachers is a major obstacle to effective instructional coaching programs in many schools and districts. “Ideally, coaches should not work with more than eight to ten teachers at a time,” she said. “It could be that they work with eight to ten teachers for three months and then they go on to work with a different group of teachers.”⁷³

Leanna Harris confirmed that the DSC model consists of coaching cycles that span four to six weeks. During each coaching cycle, the model requires coaches to work with four to ten

“Ideally, coaches should not work with more than eight to ten teachers at a time.”

- Elena Aguilar

teachers per cycle in teams or on an individual basis. “When I hear coaches say, ‘I’m working with between 15 to 20 teachers at a given time,’ I’m questioning what level of depth they are getting to,” she stated.⁷⁴

However, it is worth noting that Jim Knight does not believe that there is a standard “optimal” caseload for instructional coaches. “I think that anybody that will give you an answer to that isn’t being honest,” he stated in response to questions about the appropriate teacher-coach ratio. Instead, Knight states that the issue is not so much one of providing standardized coaching time, but rather of allowing coaches the necessary time to help teachers achieve their goals, which will vary greatly by teacher and goal. Based on his research, Knight believes that establishing a standardized amount of time for coaches to spend with one teacher or on a particular coaching cycle can be somewhat arbitrary, and ultimately shifts the coach’s and teachers’ focus toward achieving a certain number of contact hours rather than achieving a learning goal for students. “If you’re not setting and achieving goals, coaching isn’t a good investment,” he explained. “But if you are, it’s a really good investment. If you are not hitting goals, it’s probably a professional learning issue.”⁷⁵

In order to maximize coaching resources in a given school or district, administrators may also consider group-based instructional coaching models. A review of current research and district coaching guidelines suggests that using group-coaching techniques in tandem with individual coaching is a common practice throughout the K-12 context.⁷⁶ However, the optimal ratio of instructional coaches to teachers and coaches per school is unclear from the

⁷¹ Steiner, L. and Kowal, J., Op. cit., p. 5.

⁷² Ann O’Doherty, Director, Danforth Educational Leadership Program, Center for Educational Leadership, Op. cit.

⁷³ Elena Aguilar, Elena Aguilar Consulting, Op. cit.

⁷⁴ Leanna Harris, Consultant, Dianne Sweeney Consulting, Op. cit.

⁷⁵ Jim Knight, Director, Kansas Coaching Project, Op. cit.

⁷⁶ Neufeld, B., and D. Roper. “Coaching: A Strategy for Developing Instructional Capacity.” The Annenberg Institute for School Reform. 2003, p. 19. <http://annenberginstitute.org/sites/default/files/product/268/files/Coaching.pdf>

available literature. In an article co-authored with J. Cornett, Jim Knight reports an assumed ratio of one instructional coach per school, but the authors suggest that this ratio is largely dependent on location, budget, and other circumstances.⁷⁷ The Alliance for Excellent Education recommends a staffing ratio of one literacy coach per 20 teachers.⁷⁸ In practice, the Annenberg Institute suggested in its guide that most coaches “typically work with teams of teachers in one or two schools at a time.”⁷⁹

EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF COACHING

Evaluating coaching models allows programs to demonstrate progress toward identified goals and prove the value of the program as a worthwhile use of limited resources. As previously stated, establishing clear goals helps to inform the evaluation approach for a coaching program.

Experts interviewed for this report make a variety of recommendations to support evaluation. First, Ann O’Doherty suggests schools and districts measure three major types of data surrounding coaching:

- Product – did you get the outcomes you hoped to find?
- Process – how well did coaching serve each of the parties involved?
- Inputs – what was invested in the program? (e.g., frequency of meetings, content and quality of coaching, etc.)⁸⁰

Elena Aguilar recommends that evaluation efforts focus on data related to student learning, but also on teacher outcomes. “The impact of coaching can be measured on teacher satisfaction, teacher changes in practice,” she commented. “Coaching has been linked to teacher retention [and] reduction in teacher absences, particularly among new teachers and those in urban settings.”⁸¹

Leanna Harris posits that “with discrete goals for students over time, you can take baseline data and pre- and post-assess kids” in order to evaluate coaching programs. However, she also recommends avoiding metrics that explicitly examine teacher practices beyond self-report. “Promising teachers that this isn’t evaluation and then going in and measuring what teachers are and aren’t doing is basically evaluative and destructive,” she said. “You have to have a very soft view of data and if student achievement is improving and teachers are reporting making changes in their practice voluntarily, I’d say you’re well on your way.”⁸²

⁷⁷ Knight, J. and Cornett, J. Op. cit. p. 11.

⁷⁸ Sturtevant, E.G. “The Literacy Coach: A Key to Improving Teaching and Learning in Secondary Schools.” Alliance for Excellent Education, p. 2. https://www.carnegie.org/media/filer_public/80/50/80508f5f-bec4-4214-ab80-8142123d188f/ccny_grantee_2003_coach.pdf

⁷⁹ “Instructional Coaching: Professional Development Strategies That Improve Instruction,” Op. cit., p. 7.

⁸⁰ Ann O’Doherty, Director, Danforth Educational Leadership Program, Center for Educational Leadership, Op. cit.

⁸¹ Elena Aguilar, Elena Aguilar Consulting, Op. cit.

⁸² Leanna Harris, Consultant, Dianne Sweeney Consulting, Op. cit.

In 2011, the American Productivity and Quality Center (APQC) conducted a study of “Best Practices in Evaluating the Impact of Instructional Coaching on Teaching and Learning” with support from a GE Foundation grant. The study examined practices for coaching program evaluation at five exemplary districts: Allen Independent School District (Texas), Dysart Unified School District (Arizona), Fairfax County Public Schools (Virginia), Iredell-Statesville Schools (North Carolina), and Springfield Public Schools (Missouri). The study aimed to identify the impact of instructional coaching—particularly in terms of return on investment (ROI)—as well as to examine how school districts were able to identify and communicate the value and impact of instructional coaching programs.⁸³

APQC found that across districts, identifying and measuring the impact of instructional coaching programs presented a major challenge. According to one district administrator at Dysart USD, “It’s hard to isolate coaching as a variable on student performance [even though] we’ve gathered data on effective teachers based on student achievement.”⁸⁴ However, despite these difficulties, the exemplary districts reported tying a variety of positive impacts to their instructional coaching program. These impacts include improved teacher retention and cost savings, improved district and campus academic performance, improved graduation rates, and improved campus collaboration (see Figure 2.3).

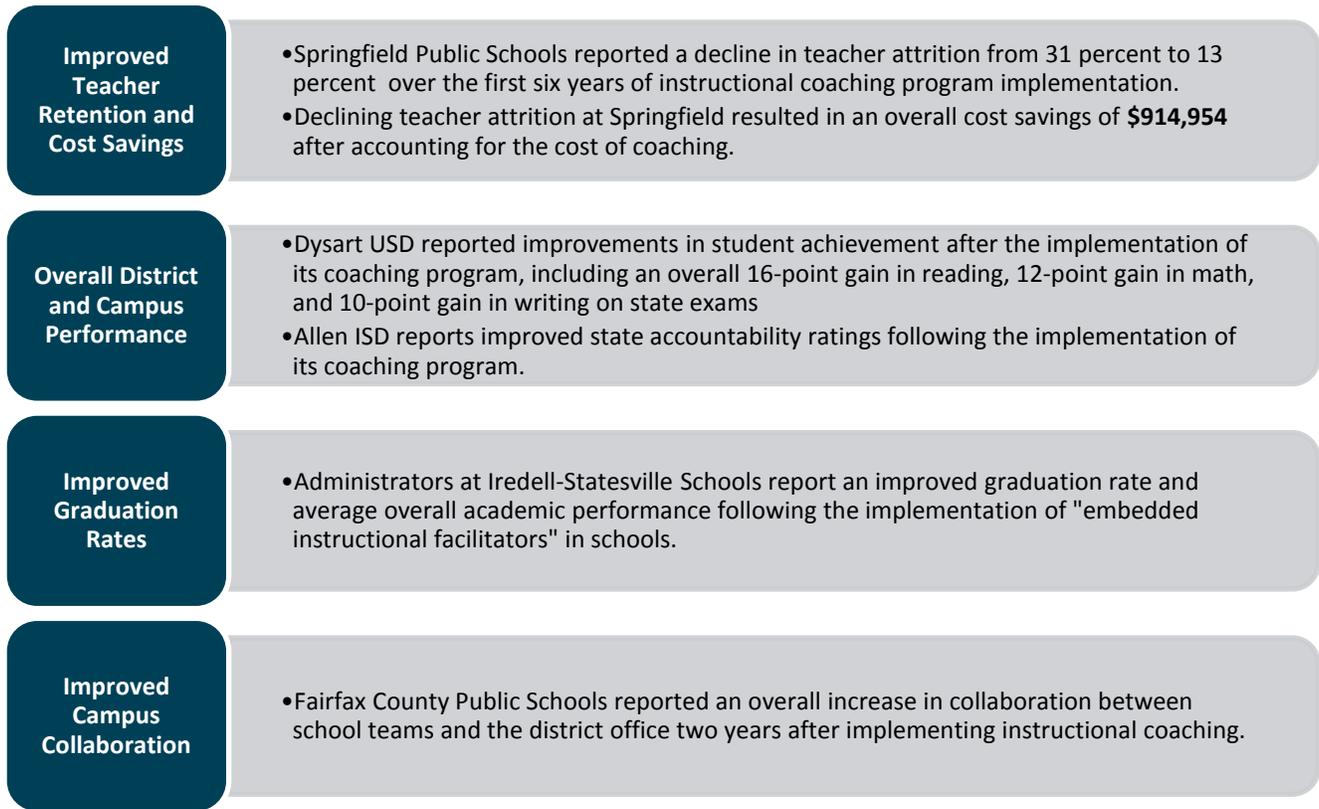
“Coaching has been linked to teacher retention [and] reduction in teacher absences, particularly among new teachers and those in urban settings.”

- Elena Aguilar

⁸³ Kline, D., et al., Op. cit., p. 3.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Figure 2.3: Sample Outcomes of Coaching Programs Reported by Exemplary Districts

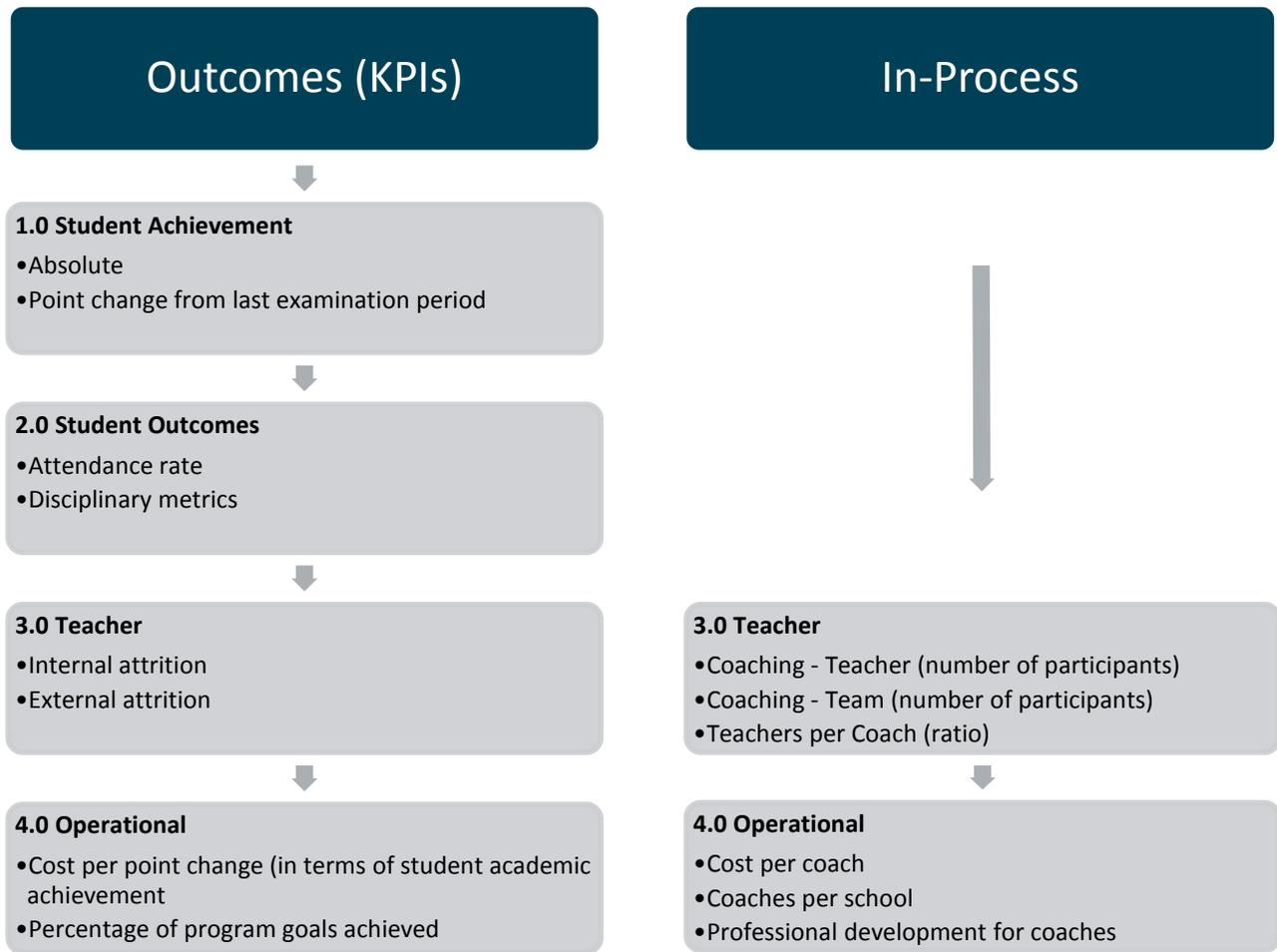


Source: APQC⁸⁵

Ultimately, in order to support districts implementing instructional coaching programs, APQC recommends tracking a number of metrics related to coaching processes and outcomes. These metrics are described in Figure 2.4 on the following page, and relate to student achievement, other student outcomes (behavior, attendance, etc.), teacher factors, and operational details. Tracking these metrics allows school districts to examine the impact of their programs and communicate the value of coaching to stakeholders.

⁸⁵ Figure created with language adapted partially verbatim from: Ibid., pp. 6-7.

Figure 2.4: Measuring the Performance of Coaching Models: KPIs and Process Metrics



Source: APQC⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Figure adapted nearly verbatim from: "If it Matters, Measure it!" APQC Education, 2011. Accessible from: http://www.apqceducation.org/knowledge-base/download-documents/cat_view/72-benchmarking-research/71-evaluating-the-impact-of-instructional-coaching-on-teaching-and-learning

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Arlington, VA 22203

P 202.559.0500 F 866.808.6585

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