Funded by The Annenberg Foundation, the Pennsylvania High School Coaching Initiative (PAHSCI), a $31 million, three-year high school instructional coaching initiative, aims to improve student achievement and build teacher capacity through a distinctive instructional coaching model. Instructional coaching, where trained teacher-leaders, or coaches, sustain ongoing, site-based, job-embedded professional development, has emerged as a promising strategy for helping educators advance their skills and thereby, help improve student achievement.

As research suggests, quality teaching is the most significant factor affecting student achievement. Assisting teachers in enhancing their practices can help schools to meet the expectations set by national standards under No Child Left Behind. “Decades of research clearly demonstrate that a quality teacher, more than any other factor, enables students to overcome obstacles to learning like poverty and can even erase the achievement gap” (Alliance for Education, 2006).

Instructional coaching can provide the support and professional development necessary to advance teaching skills. One research study conducted by the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning evaluated a group of 87 teachers from different schools. The results of the study indicate that 85% of those teachers who receive ongoing support from instructional coaches implement newly learned instructional methods, a factor that enhances teacher quality. In another study conducted by the same group, research indicates that teachers who do not receive such support implement newly learned strategies at only a rate of 10% (Joyce and Showers, 2002).

PAHSCI’s instructional coaching model provides support to enhance teacher quality with: meaningful professional development tied to standards, curriculum, research, and best practices; follow-up support to effectively implement new learning; and scaffolding that encourages reflective practices and instruction.