

The Annenberg Institute for School Reform (AISR) at Brown University works with a variety of school districts that are engaged in the school transformation process. Many of these districts implement instructional coaching as an effective job-embedded professional development model. AISR has found that focusing on these four critical areas for school wide improvement is a promising practice: human capital; sustainability; equity and internal accountability; and connecting school and district (*Professional Development Strategies That Improve Instruction*). Instructional coaches are integral to providing continual professional learning that focuses on both content and process.

Instructional coaches build communities of practice through “side-by-side” support. This kind of support takes the form of one-on-one and small group support to teachers, administrators, and other school leaders. Real time support of colleagues working with each other and engaging in professional conversations around student learning is how theory translates into practice. Teachers working together, collaborating on lesson design, instructional delivery, and available resources in a non-judgmental environment makes a difference in student learning. At its best, this is where relationship building is most effective in improving instruction... helping teachers help students in a risk-free atmosphere. Instructional coaches provide an opportunity for teachers to talk about student work and effective ways to deliver instruction. Coaches help teachers become reflective practitioners through modeling reflection “*in, on, and about*” instruction and by making their own thoughts and actions visible. The expectation is that teachers model the reflective practice demonstrated by the coaches in ways that reinforce data-driven decision-making.

Creating schedules that honor ongoing professional learning and helping practitioners take ownership of the learning helps to sustain and embed the opportunities for collaborative learning. Every staff member is a member in a community of learning and practice. Instructional coaches strengthen that notion. When everyone shares a vision for building teacher capacity and improving student learning, instructional practices become routines, not just isolated strategies to implement on specific days of the week.

Instructional coaching offers sustainable ways to address different adult learning strategies that are necessary to support teacher growth. There is no *cookie cutter* model that is “one size fits all.” We know that each student has a unique learning style and teachers are asked to provide a personalized approach to each student’s learning. The same holds true with adults. Coaches are able to provide that one-on-one support to teachers so that the individual learning needs are addressed and the collective vision of what is needed to help students succeed is what drives the instructional design.

Instructional coaches are at the forefront of local, regional and statewide initiatives. They are the link between the theory and practice. Coaches are the professional colleagues who understand each of these initiatives. They build awareness of the expectations for these initiatives; identify ways to collect, analyze and use the data about these initiatives; and help teachers integrate these initiatives so that the “flavor of the day” is replaced with more sustainable learning opportunities that are relevant to teacher practices and designed in collaborative ways.

Instructional coaches are much more than just resource providers; coaches are the vehicle for helping teachers understand effective instructional practices and how delivery of these practices are vital for improved student learning.