

In the December 2013 issue of JSD, authors Victoria Duff and M. René Islas' article "*Partners in Learning*"

talk about how the new teacher evaluation process demands a growing emphasis on effective teaching and teacher professional growth. It makes sense... the greater the emphasis on promoting professional learning, the greater the impact on teaching and learning. So, the more teachers are engaged in high quality, relevant professional development, the better the chance that the professional development leads to professional learning that transforms their teaching. And, of course, that professional development must effectively address the needs of the students so that the teaching transformation effectively reaches all teachers and the students they teach.

Instructional coaches and other teacher leaders help schools put the focus on building teacher capacity. Coaches work with their colleagues to stimulate the change process by thinking outside of the box, supporting the ideas those "outside" thinkers share. They are on the side of helping teachers implement effective instructional practices without evaluating those practices. They help teachers think about what content they are teaching, why they are teaching that content, how they should teach it, and what to do if the instructional delivery does not yield the intended outcomes. They help their teaching colleagues to see the connections between teaching and learning, practice and research, and assessment and outcomes.

In the words of these authors, successful schools leverage professional learning in order to improve educator effectiveness. Sounds like common sense... select highly effective school leaders who can maximize learning for all stakeholders by first recognizing that everyone needs ongoing opportunities to share the learning, to learn from mistakes, and to make adjustments along the way. Everyone needs the chance to collaborate, collectively problem-solve, and communicate openly and freely. Instructional coaches are those teacher leaders who make that happen: they help their colleagues set short term and long term goals, discuss ways to accomplish those goals, talk about the actual practice of meeting those goals, and support their colleagues in non-evaluative ways to make changes to ensure effective teaching and student growth.

The 2012 MetLife Survey of the American Teacher indicates that 50% of the teachers surveyed want to pursue a role that includes classroom teaching as well as other responsibilities but not as the school principal. Instructional coaching certainly provides the potential to satisfy this pursuit! As a coach, one experiences the best of all worlds: coaches help share the vision of school wide improvement with colleagues, support the environment that is conducive to teaching and learning, help others recognize their potential for leading, encourage teachers to make instructional decisions that ensure student growth, and focus on collecting, using and

analyzing data to assess student needs. And, they do all of this in a no-risk setting where practice makes perfect and feedback is welcomed, expected, and critical for change.

So, as coaches move practice to new heights, don't worry about the implementation dip or fear the new teacher evaluation. Don't get panicked over the creation of SLOs or grant funding that maintain positions. Think, instead, about the myriad ways coaches change teacher behaviors and actions. Think about the trusting environments that you help create and sustain; think about the shared vision for school wide improvement that you reinforce; think about the collaborative coaching in which you engage with your colleagues and the contributions you make to help others grow. Think about how you maximize leadership and build teacher capacity... it doesn't get much better than that!