

Welcome back! As we greet the 2017 school year, the stressful fiscal conditions continue to exist statewide which certainly influences our local decisions. Schools are facing cuts in budgets which have a damaging impact on personnel, programs, and resources. Despite this, the determination and dedication of instructional coaches to change the landscape of teaching and learning continue to be the priority across all content areas even in the face of these financial struggles.

So, what does that mean? These challenging times may result in either part-time coaching or only time after school to work with teachers. This is less than ideal and will surely create anxiety for the entire school community. If this is the situation in your school/district, you must think “out of the box” and work with what you have and know.

Coaches need to identify the teachers with whom they are working. If they are the same teachers as last year, that’s a great beginning. Build on those successes. If the coaching contacts have expanded to include additional content areas and the scheduled time to work with those teachers has decreased, the coach’s creativity will surely be tested! Being deliberate and intentional in your coaching interactions is what will make a difference in the work you do. Make the time you have with teachers meaningful and data driven.

For starters, coaches need to identify the roles they are expected to pursue as part-time coaches. Remember, you cannot do all the same things you did when you were full time. Part time coaches need to be purposeful in their support to teachers, i.e., what part of the BDA cycle of consultation works for which teachers. Here’s my caution... planning is really important to help teachers understand lesson design; modeling and co-teaching feel great to keep the coach connected to the students; debriefing, however, is where the strengths and areas of weakness are recognized, discussed and future action planned. Knowing this, which stage of the cycle can be abbreviated or restructured? Please do not omit the debriefing session. That is the one time/place where actions and results are discussed; it’s the time for reflection and thought-provoking conversations designed to make changes in instruction. However, knowing that a part-time schedule determines the part-time work creates the need for redesigning the coaching work.

Part-time coaches need to implement new strategies for supporting teachers. They may need to coordinate their support in a cohort model, working with a small group of teachers implementing the full BDA process for a specific cycle of time and then moving onto another cohort of teachers. Cohort one teachers become “buddies” to cohort two teachers, etc. Even within the

cohort system, remember to differentiate who needs what which may help you decide which teachers are organized into which cohort. Or, coaches may need to implement a blended approach where F2F and virtual support are offered. For instance, a preliminary “screening” can take place virtually, e.g., what are your goals for our conversation; what are your long-range goals for this unit of study; how would you like to work with me, etc. This way, the coach can collect some data electronically and begin preparations for the F2F “before” planning session with teachers.

Part-time coaching is also influenced by the grade level or content level of the support. For instance, if the coach is working with elementary teachers, perhaps providing grade level support as a group designed around grade level content helps configure the most effective way to offer the support. Or, upper grade support focused on disciplinary content is quite effective in bringing teachers together with literacy as the anchor.

Another way to provide ongoing support to all teachers is to arrange weekly or monthly study groups with peers. That way, teachers can continue to engage in professional conversations in small groups, look at student work and the data collected, share resources and evidence-based literacy practices that work well, and reflect about the kinds of improvements they’d like to make in their instructional delivery, all in a non-evaluative environment with the collective goals in mind. From these small group conversations emerges the one-on-one support that will be personalized and individual. By engaging in both kinds of interactions, the coach can identify what kind of differentiated support s/he can provide.

The keys are to recognize the limited roles of part-time coaches, determine the amount of time needed to provide effective support to accomplish the tasks, problem solve with your mentor to discuss the barriers to effective implementation, and collaborate on ways to help teachers and administrators continue to make the changes that influence student learning.

Have a great year!