Bringing Instructional Coaches on Board:
Enhance Your Title I Program and Boost Academic Achievement

Presented By:
Laurie Matzke

During this 90-minute audio presentation, we will:

• Discuss what an instructional coach is
• Examine why we are seeing a surge in the use of instructional coaches
• Review some frequently asked questions
• Discuss the specific job responsibilities of an instructional coach
• Look at the qualifications for an instructional coach
• Explore some possible funding sources to support instructional coaching
• Discuss how to evaluate the use of instructional coaches, and
• Share some do’s and don’ts of instructional coaching.

What Is An Instructional Coach?

Definition

The dictionary definition of a coach is an instructor or trainer of others.

An instructional coach in education is no different from an athletic coach for sports or a vocal coach for a singer. A coach is simply one who supports and provides training.

The basic role of an instructional coach in education is to increase the instructional capacity of teachers so they can better incorporate literacy or math into their instruction (Hall, 2004). An instructional coach is one who supports others in building their teaching skills, assists others in applying new knowledge, and provides ongoing professional development.
Individuals who provide training and support may be called instructional coaches, mentors, intervention specialists, or any other title that implies support.

The use of instructional coaches is becoming increasingly prevalent in schools all across the nation.

Why are we seeing this surge in the use of instructional coaches?

The use of instructional coaches and mentors is not a new concept and has been used in schools for many years.

The establishment of the Reading First program in 2002 popularized the use of reading coaches as it was required by federal legislation.

In North Dakota, we’ve seen a surge in the number of schools employing instructional coaches, in part because of the increased number of schools identified for improvement.

Schools are using instructional coaches to meet the requirement to spend 10% of their Title I funds on professional development.
There may be numerous reasons why a school would be interested in employing an instructional coach; the following are just a few:

To Raise Achievement
- Many schools employ instructional coaches as a method of increasing student academic achievement.

To Facilitate Professional Development
- We all know the importance of high quality professional development and its potential to create positive change in schools. Instructional coaches are an excellent tool for facilitating professional development.

To Promote the Use of Research-Based Practices
- Instructional coaches can equip staff with the knowledge and skills they need to implement effective instructional practices.

To Increase Teacher Effectiveness
- Instructional coaches can improve the quality of teaching and learning by providing intentional, ongoing support to staff at the school and classroom levels.
  - Students are more likely to perform at higher levels when teachers perform at higher levels.
  - Extensive research suggests that teacher quality is the most significant factor affecting student achievement.

To Encourage the Concept of Professional Learning Communities
- Instructional coaches can support the development of quality learning communities where continuous improvement is the norm.
To Share Resources

- Instructional coaches can also:
  - Offer resources requested by teachers.
  - Recommend resources.
  - Share research, effective instructional practices, emerging trends.

What Are the Specific Job Responsibilities of an Instructional Coach?

The duties of an instructional coach obviously vary significantly from school to school; however, there are elements or tasks that are common to most schools.

Through my monitoring and visits to schools, there are some job responsibilities that appear to be consistently used in many schools.

Conduct Research and Make Resources Available

- Many job descriptions include researching and providing resources on a range of effective and innovative practices.
- Instructional coaches find and share research, supplemental materials, games, and activities that will enhance the curriculum and increase student achievement.
Model Lessons

- Instructional coaches go into classrooms to model lessons. Modeling lessons provides an opportunity for teachers to watch and learn new strategies or instructional practices.

Review Data

- Instructional coaches can:
  - Facilitate data dialogue with teams of teachers;
  - Help identify student needs based on data and then;
  - Assist to plan and take action to alter instruction.

Observe and Provide Feedback to Teachers

- Instructional coaches can observe teachers and focus on the things that teachers do well and provide feedback.
- A coach should seek to help teachers improve and refine their practices.

Sample job descriptions for instructional coaches (including one specifically for a targeted assistance school) can be accessed at www.dpi.state.nd.us/title1/coaches.shtml.

What are the Qualifications for Instructional Coaches?

As the Florida Literacy and Reading Excellence (FLaRE) Center states, “the job description of a literacy coach is as multidimensional as reading itself. One must possess the social skills of a seasoned politician, the knowledge of an ivy-league professor, the experience of a veteran teacher, and the flexibility of a gymnast. A good coach is like the proverbial “walking encyclopedia” with a ready index of relevant articles, websites, professional books, and other resources to deepen learning and solve problems” (FLaRE Center n.d.)
As a district considers hiring someone to fit the role and responsibilities of an instructional coach, remember that they must possess the right mix of knowledge, interpersonal skills, adaptability, flexibility, and potential for growth.

Finding the right person to hire as an instructional coach can make or break whatever initiative is implemented.

Across the country, there is significant variation in the qualifications that states and districts require of instructional coaches.

One of the few consistencies that I have found is that instructional coaches are always educators. All job descriptions that I’ve come across require a valid teaching license.

Other Commonly Recommended Qualifications Include:

- Pedagogical knowledge:
  Instructional coaches should be experienced teachers who have demonstrated success in the classroom and thorough understanding of how children learn.
• Strong interpersonal skills:

Instructional coaches must possess strong interpersonal skills. The key to a successful coaching program is a trusting relationship between teachers and coaches.

• Knowledge in content area:

Effective instructional coaches have a thorough understanding of the subject they are coaching.

• Knowledge in evidence based practices:

A key responsibility of a coach is to share research, effective instructional practices, and emerging trends. Therefore, instructional coaches need to have a wide array of instructional strategies to draw upon.

• The “Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse” has a document which highlights four levels of qualifications for literacy coaches, ranging from not Good Enough to The Gold Standard. Log on to their website at www.literacycoachingonline.org to access this document.

What Are Some Possible Funding Sources to Support Instructional Coaching?

There are a variety of possible funding sources to help school districts support the use of instructional coaches. Some of these funding streams may include:
Use Your Federal Title Funds

- Title I Part A – Title I funds, under certain circumstances, can be used to help support the cost of instructional coaches.

- Title II Part A – Title II A funds designated for professional development are an opportune source to support professional development for instructional coaches.

IDEA

- One of the four priorities in Special Education is to provide intensive district-wide development for special education and regular education teachers that focuses on scaling-up, through replication, proven and innovative evidence-based school-wide strategies in reading, math, writing and science, and positive behavioral supports to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

- The use of instructional coaches can help meet this priority.

School Improvement Funds

- Schools and districts identified for improvement may receive additional funds to help them make Adequate Yearly Progress. Using these additional program improvement dollars to support instructional coaches would be an allowable use of these funds.

General Funds

- Another avenue for funding instructional coaches is your district’s general funds. If your school staff truly believes that an instructional coach will make a difference, you should consider collecting the data and showing how it will improve student achievement, approach your school board, and request funds to sustain it.

Pool Your Resources

If schools or districts have limited funds...

- Pool various funding sources, such as Title I and Title II funding or Title I and Special Education funding to hire an instructional coach.

- Districts can pool resources with other districts within a close proximity to share an instructional coach.

Evaluating the use of Instructional Coaches
Evaluation is a key component in any intervention or new initiative.

It is imperative for schools or districts that employ instructional coaches to have a method of evaluating the success of the use of instructional coaches.

I’ve found that many districts are still in the beginning phase of establishing a system of evaluation for instructional coaches and their effects on student achievement.

It is imperative to evaluate periodically so that adjustments can be made in a timely manner.

Methods of Evaluation

1. Surveys – Collect feedback as to what worked well, what areas need improvement, and other suggestions for making improvements. A survey, gathering input from teachers, coaches, and the principal, can be a powerful tool to evaluate the use of instructional coaching.

2. Rubrics – Outline a set of standards and then measure each one periodically as a method of evaluating instructional coaches.

Sample rubrics could include:

- Data evidences an increase in student achievement linked to the use of instructional coaches.
- There is evidence of an increase in the use of research-based practices linked to the use of instructional coaches.
- Evidence supports a change in instructional practices linked to the use of instructional coaches.
3. Self-Assessments – Help instructional coaches reflect upon their strengths and weaknesses to help make improvements and determine future professional development needs.

4. Review of Data – Collect data that can link coaching to student achievement gains or teachers' professional growth and measure the impact.

An evaluation using a combination of these methods is ideal, as no one evaluation measure can do justice or capture an entire initiative.

An ideal evaluation of a coaching program would assign teachers in certain buildings to receive coaching services but not in other schools. By constructing a viable comparison group of non-coached teachers verses coached teachers, you could compare and evaluate.

- Your evaluation process needs to review the impact of the program at many levels.
- The evaluation needs to reflect teacher perception, instructional practice, and improved student learning.

Resources for evaluating an instructional coaching program:
• A sample survey to gather information from staff regarding instructional coaches can be accessed at www.alabamapepe.com/specialist/InstructionSpecialistSurveyFaculty.doc.

• A tool called the “Cluster Coaching Program Model” which is designed to measure the short-term and long-term outcomes of instructional coaches can be accessed at www.fcps.edu/plt/ic/howic.htm.

• The University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning has a wide array of resources on instructional coaches, including a toolkit with observation forms, reflection sheets, and effectiveness checklists to help measure the success of using an instructional coach. These resources can be accessed at www.instructionalcoach.org/tools.html.

• The Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse has a tool entitled “Self-Assessment for Middle and High School Literacy Coaches” available on their website at www.literacycoachingonline.org/library/resources/selfassessmentformshsliteracyinstructionalcoaches.html.

We have found that our teachers appreciate hearing from their peers on what they are doing and what has been successful in other schools.

Do’s and Don’ts of Instructional Coaching
I’d like to share some Do’s and Don’ts offered by our North Dakota coaches:

DO
• Establish a relationship with teachers
  ▫ Build trust and confidence
  ▫ Be open
  ▫ Listen to needs

DO
• Have regular contact with the principal; the same vision is important.
• Maintain a collaborative relationship with the principal to ensure clear roles and expectations.

DO
• Read up on coaching – principals and teachers are looking to coaches for guidance and resources. New research, resources, and strategies are continuously being released. It is important for instructional coaches to stay on top of the latest and most current information on instructional coaching.

DO
Market yourself and what you have to offer.
• Instructional coaches need to be proactive and let teachers know how they can assist them.

Don’t
• Use a judgmental or evaluative approach. Instructional coaches are not there to evaluate; that is the principal’s responsibility.
Don’t

• Take the place of the principal.
• The principal is the instructional leader.
• The coach is there to offer support to principals and teachers.

Don’t

• Go in and act like the expert – nothing will turn off veteran teachers more than an instructional coach acting like they have all the answers.

The “literacy coaching clearinghouse” also has a document which provides a list of Do’s and Don’ts for staff new to the role of an instructional coach. Log on to www.literacycoachingonline.org/briefs.DosandDontsfinal.pdf to access this document.

Frequently Asked Questions

In my position, I am asked numerous questions regarding the use of instructional coaches. Most of the questions pertain to the allowable uses of Title I funds.

Using instructional coaches in a schoolwide Title I program is a natural fit

By far, the most frequently asked question that I hear is:

How can Title I funds support instructional coaches in a targeted assistance school?
• For a targeted assistance program, Section 1115(C)(1)(F) of NCLB states that schools may use Title I funds to provide professional development for teachers, principals, and paraprofessionals who work with children participating in the Title I targeted assistance program. This professional development must, however, meet the following requirements:

  • The professional development must be focused on helping at-risk students.
  • The cost of the training must be reasonable.
  • The teachers, principals, and paraprofessionals participating must be reflective of the grades being served by the Title I program.

Kay Rigling, an ED attorney, clarified during a recent USDE conference call that a district may use reading and mathematics coaches to provide professional development to teachers of participating Title I students in Title I targeted assistance programs.

The next two slides offer key reminders to schools regarding this issue.

• The district must document that each teacher receiving professional development services from the Title I-paid coach was a teacher of a participating Title I student.

• If the eligible and participating building is a K-5 building, but the school chooses to provide Title I targeted instructional services to K-3 only, the instructional coach could only provide professional development to teachers of a participating Title I student in grades K-3.

Are instructional coaches limited to reading?

• No. Reading coaches are more prevalent due to the Reading First program, which required that schools that receive a grant employ a reading coach. The use of instructional math coaches is also on the rise. Instructional coaches could be employed in any subject area that is in need at the school;
• However, Title I funds would only pay for reading and math.
Are instructional coaches only utilized in elementary schools?

- No. It is certainly more common to see instructional coaches being utilized at the elementary level; however, there is a growing trend to use instructional coaches at the middle and high school levels.

How can a district pay for instructional coaches?

- A handout which overviews the various sources available to fund instructional coaches is available at www.dpi.state.nd.us/title1/fund.pdf

Conclusion

The use of instructional coaches will no doubt continue to grow in the future.

Section 9101 of the NCLB Act defines professional development as including activities that:
- Improve and increase teachers' knowledge of the academic subjects they teach,
- Are high quality, sustained, intensive and classroom focused and
- Positively impact classroom instruction and teacher performance.

Furthermore, the USDE is now placing an even greater priority on teacher effectiveness in upcoming grant opportunities, such as the Race to the Top and School Improvement Grant Competitions. Therefore, high quality professional development that focuses on improving teacher effectiveness is critical.
Instructional coaching is a powerful form of job-embedded professional development that helps teachers on-site and in their classrooms and most definitely meets the definition of highly qualified professional development.

The use of instructional coaches can be a powerful intervention with great potential to improve teacher performance and raise academic achievement. Implementing instructional coaches can play a major role in facilitating school’s/district’s professional development initiatives.

Additional resources available at [www.dpi.state.nd.us/title1/resources.pdf](http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/title1/resources.pdf)

- This PowerPoint presentation on instructional coaches.
- Additional PowerPoint presentations on instructional coaches that may be used in your school or district.
- Resource handout with recommended websites pertaining to instructional coaches.
- Summary interview with actual instructional coaches.