

North Dakota Department of Public Instruction

TITLE I FAST FACT SERIES

Issue: Instructional Coaches

What are Instructional Coaches?

In North Dakota, we are seeing an increased trend in schools utilizing coaches to assist with literacy and math instruction. Instructional coaches may be given a different title, such as intervention specialists or mentors. Whatever the title of this position, the basic role of an instructional coach is to increase the instructional capacity of teachers so they can better incorporate literacy or math into their instruction (Hall, 2004). A coach is one who supports others in building their teaching skills, assists others in applying new knowledge, and provides ongoing professional development.

The Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse covers six important factors to effective literacy coaching. The coach should be 1) collaborating dialogue for all teachers, no matter what their level of knowledge or experience, 2) facilitating development of a school vision based on the district's goals, 3) using data to assist in planning activities to enhance student and teacher learning, 4) providing and/or organizing ongoing professional development, 5) implementing classroom observation that builds knowledge over time, and 6) supportive, not evaluative.

The main duty of a coach is to support teachers. Coaches provide leadership within the school, work cooperatively and collaboratively with other professionals, serve as a resource, consult with teachers on a one-to-one basis, facilitate small group discussions, model lessons, observe in classrooms, assist in devising strategies for hard-to-reach students, serve as a liaison between administration and teachers, provide professional development opportunities, assist with the administration and analyzes of assessments, and become involved in evaluating the school plans.

Research on Coaching

The increase in the number of instructional coaches has come from the pressure on student accountability. The basic assumption is that by increasing classroom teacher's expertise in content areas, student achievement will also increase. Currently, there is limited research on instructional coaching. In a document titled *Reading First Coaching: A Guide for Coaches and Reading First Leaders*, Learning Point Associates have included information on four studies that point to the positive results reported by schools using coaches.

A Good Fit is Essential

As your district considers hiring someone to fit the role and responsibilities of an instructional coach, remember that they must possess the right knowledge, interpersonal skills, adaptability, flexibility, and potential for growth. 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 schoolteacher, 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.).

Qualifications

There is a wide variance in the list of qualifications for a coach. The International Reading Association discovered, through a 2005 survey, that the only clear requirements for a reading/literacy coach was that the coaches must have a BA degree and a teaching certificate. To be an effective coach, it is imperative that the coach have the following qualifications in the area of content in which they will be coaching.

- A North Dakota teaching license,
- A Masters degree within the field of the coaching position is preferable.
- An appropriate Title I credential (i.e., reading or math).
- Previous teaching experience in the grade level.
- Be knowledgeable in scientifically based research.
- Be well versed in research, theory, and practices.
- Have strong leadership, communication, and interpersonal skills.
- Have knowledge and expertise in assessments.

How Can Schools Use Title I Funds to Support Instructional Coaches?

- **Schoolwide Programs** – In a schoolwide Title I program, Title I funds may be used to pay for a reading and/or math coach as long as the coach's role is related to the schoolwide goals outlined in the schoolwide plan.
- **Targeted Assistance Programs** – In a targeted assistance Title I program, Title I funds may be used to employ a reading and/or math coach that works exclusively with Title I teachers to assist with strategies and intervention plans for identified Title I students. Title I funds could possibly be used to hire a coach that works with classroom teachers as long as the focus is to assist teachers with strategies that can be used specifically with Title I students.

Schools/Districts That Employ Instructional Coaches

All Reading First schools employ reading coaches. A list of Reading First schools can be found on the Reading First website at www.dpi.state.nd.us/title1/reading/index.shtm. Other districts that employ **reading coaches** include the Mandan Public School District, the Grand Forks Public School District, and the Fargo Public School District. Schools and districts that employ **math coaches** include Wachter Middle School in Bismarck, the Fargo Public School District, and the Jamestown Public School District.

Resources

The state Title I office has created an extensive list of wonderful resources that pertain to coaching. This list, as well as additional information regarding instructional coaches is available at www.dpi.state.nd.us/title1/coaches.shtm.

If you have questions regarding this issue, please contact:

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