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COMMON CORE UPDATE

Instructional coaches ease Common Core transition

Many districts that cut coaches during recession now bringing them back

By: *Alison DeNisco*

Districts in the midst of Common Core implementation are increasingly turning to instructional coaches to help teachers master the new skills needed.

Administrators say these coaches, whose positions were cut in many districts during the recession, are now a valuable investment for time-strapped principals working to ensure schools are transitioning smoothly to the new standards.



The Kansas Coaching Project studies how instructional coaches improve academic outcomes.

“People underestimate how complex implementation is,” says Jim Knight, director of the Kansas Coaching Project, a University of Kansas-based office that studies the role of instructional coaches in professional learning and improving academic outcomes. “It’s naive to think a teacher can learn a whole new set of teaching practices without seeing them done first, and with no support.”

There are no national statistics on the number of [instructional coaches](#) now in schools. But a number of large districts have reportedly hired more in recent years. For example, the District of Columbia Public Schools now has 113 coaches—one for nearly every school. And Oakland USD has doubled the number of coaches, from about 25 to 50, in the past three years, according to published reports.

The “linchpin” of implementation

Sacramento City USD, a district of 43,000 students, has 12 math and 11 ELA coaches



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—up from just four coaches in 2010-11. Each has a caseload of five to six schools. They help teachers plan lessons, and also do demonstration lessons, conduct observations and provide feedback.

“The coaches are the linchpin of our [Common Core](#) implementation,” says Iris Taylor, assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction at Sacramento City USD. “They’re able to touch more teachers than we would

ever be able to and can see them more frequently to continue the work.”

Leadership teams, which include the coaches from each Sacramento City school, convene three times per year for ELA PD and four times per year for math PD. The coaches take the concepts covered at these meetings and put them into practice with classroom teachers.

For example, last school year, a main coaching focus was on teachers creating multiple ways for students to show understanding of academic concepts. The coach demonstrated strategies to get students to show their work in different ways. The teacher then used that work to help other students form an understanding of the concept being taught.

Sacramento City has so far added three additional coaches with an anonymous, four-year grant it received two years ago to expand math coaching. The district intends to keep the coaches after the grant has ended if the funds are available, Taylor says. The other coaches are paid with categorical funding.

Getting teachers to buy into new curriculum ideas is key to Common Core implementation, Knight says.

“Teachers have education and experience, and want to be part of the thinking,” Knight says. “The coach doesn’t replace the principal, but helps the principal be an instructional leader by doing things the principal doesn’t have time to do.”

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**Brady** • 3 days ago

Our instructional coaches use a great tool to help them with their work with teachers. www.icoachlog.com

It allows coached to electronically collect and store teacher observation and instantly e-mail feedback to teacher. Observation data can be instantly accessed and used during post conferences. It has electronic note pads to keep track of pre and post conferences with teachers.

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I am in my 8th year as an Instructional Math Coach in the Aurora Public Schools (Aurora Colorado). The structure of the position has changed a few times, but the over-all work has remained the same. The coach's role is to be a support to the instructional leadership in the building- the principal. Many times this means coaching administrators in best instructional practices first because the effect of the coach in a building is directly related to being on the same page as the building administration.

My work took on new meaning with the implementation of the CCSS. Specifically, the creation of a classroom around the Math Practice Standards is critical in meeting the intent of Common Core Math. Implementation of the practice standards requires teachers to teach in a significantly different way than what they probably were taught as school children. This is a cultural change in the way a math classroom functions- and these kinds of changes for many teachers need the support of an instructional coach.

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