



Maximizing the Effectiveness of Instructional Coaches

At Title I Elementary Schools

District Leadership Forum

Sarjana Jaiswal

Research Associate

Caleb Hausman

Research Manager

Olivia Rios

Senior Research Manager

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1) Executive Summary

Key Observations

Use instructional coaches to provide skill development to all teachers and facilitate collaborative solution-sourcing. Instructional coaches at **School C**, **School B**, and **School A** use staff meetings to provide professional development trainings. Coaches at School C and School A also discuss academic support methods with teachers during their common planning times.

Leverage data to identify teachers with significant support needs and organize individualized mentoring opportunities with instructional coaches.

Instructional coaches at all five profiled schools regularly analyze student assessment scores to best align their support resources with teacher needs. Coaches at these schools meet with individual teachers to provide personalized support. For instance, coaches and administrators at **School A** identify teachers in need of significant assistance by tracking student performance and classroom observation data. Administrators then place identified teachers on professional learning plans to provide intensified instructional support and attention.

Regularly communicate with teachers about the rationale behind assigning additional coaching support to minimize teacher resistance. Contacts at **School A**, **School E**, and **School C** overcome teacher pushback to instructional support through carefully framed and data-oriented communication. Administrators at School A take classroom observation notes starting on the first day of the school year and document specific evidence to reference in future communications with teachers. Additionally, administrators at all five profiled schools recommend communicating with teachers proactively and clarifying that coaches' assistance is a support resource, instead of a punitive measure. These measures cultivate teacher comfort with coaches and openness to altering their existing practices.

Employ instructional coaches through flexible funding sources to increase coaches' adaptability in providing services. While contacts at all five profiled schools consider coaches to be a worthwhile resource to teachers and students, contacts at **School E** and **School C** highlight the value of employing coaches through avenues outside of Title I funds. Contacts at School C note that using general funds to employ coaches allows for greater flexibility in coaches' functionality. Coaches funded through Title I funds can only handle tasks that directly relate to Title I objectives.

Adopt robust hiring, evaluation, and professional development practices to enhance the quality of instructional coaches. Contacts at all profiled schools report that characteristics of an ideal instructional coach candidate include strong communication skills, interpersonal skills, and technology skills, as well as classroom experience. While district-level administrators usually provide professional development sessions to instructional coaches, school-level administrators at **School D**, **School A**, **School E**, and **School C** also encourage their coaches to seek out external trainings of interest. Administrators at School D and School C fund these external sessions through general school funds.

2) Instructional Support Practices

Overview

Administrators at Profiled Schools Employ Several Tactics to Maximize Instructional Coaches' Academic Impact

Instructional coaching is a personalized mentoring service for teachers that aims to increase instructional quality and student outcomes. Research shows that instructional coaching is more effective than traditional professional development sessions provided to teachers.¹ As contacts at **School D** report, teachers benefit more from the personal attention and small group collaboration provided by instructional coaches, as compared to large classroom-style training sessions. However, factors such as imbalanced coach-to-teacher ratios, financial constraints to employing coaches, and underdeveloped recruitment processes can constrain the impact of instructional coaches.²

Administrators at all profiled schools consider instructional coaches to be a prudent use of their funds. To maximize the effectiveness of these coaches, administrators use both whole-school and one-on-one coaching support, track student data to best align coaching support with teacher needs, and employ in-depth selection processes for candidates for coaching positions.

Overview of Instructional Coaches at Profiled Schools

School	Instructional Coaches	Coach-to-Teacher Ratio
School A	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Five coaches• District-level writing and technology coaches (one of each) serve all grade levels across schools• School-level math and English Language Arts (ELA) coaches (one of each) serve grades K-5• Intervention specialist coach specializes in Response to Intervention (RTI) processes	1:70
School B	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One academic coach provides overall academic support	1:40
School C	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One district-level reading and math coach serves all grade levels across schools• One intervention specialist who is a part of the school's student support team and works with RTI methodologies	1:16
School D	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One academic coach provided overall academic support	1:65
School E	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One academic coach provides general academic support	1:35

School D lost Title 1 status in 2018 and will not employ instructional coaches going forward.

School-Wide Support

Instructional Coaches Provide Support to All Teachers During Regular Collaborative Meetings

Instructional coaches at **School D**, **School A**, **School E**, and **School C** participate in teacher meetings and planning times to provide content-related training to all

¹ Matthew A. Kraft and David Blazar, "Taking Teacher Coaching To Scale: Can Personalized Training Become Standard Practice?," Education Next, July 31, 2018, <https://www.educationnext.org/taking-teacher-coaching-to-scale-can-personalized-training-become-standard-practice/>.

² Matthew A. Kraft and David Blazar.

teachers. Coaches deliver training on topics such as technology navigation and new curricular programs. Coaches and teachers also use these times to craft instructional strategies aimed at alleviating student achievement gaps.

The Instructional Coach at *School B* Helps Teachers Navigate Technology and Build Assessments

The instructional coach at **School B** helps teachers build assessments on the common assessment development program used across the district. The coach also helps teachers find test questions that promote higher order thinking and depth of knowledge, instead of simply using recall-based questions.

The coach helps teachers navigate educational technology in general, through trainings and individual guidance, especially assisting ones who may be technology-averse.

Coaches at School D and School C train teachers on instructional skills during regularly scheduled faculty meetings. At School D, coaches led small-group professional development sessions (e.g., book studies) aligned to school-wide instructional goals. For instance, if school administrators and teachers aimed to increase student math scores, the instructional coach worked with the math teachers for a month to train them on practices designed to achieve that goal. In addition to professional development training, instructional coaches at School C facilitate collaboration and crowdsourcing of instructional strategies among teachers.

Aside from all-staff meetings, instructional coaches at School C, School A, and School E use common planning times to develop teacher skills. Administrators and coaches at School C discuss academic support methods with teachers periodically during weekly common planning times. Coaches and teachers often use this time to reevaluate alignment of support services to individual students' needs, according to the RTI framework.³

For more information on how to implement and evaluate RTI frameworks, please see our report [**Response to Intervention**](#).

Similarly, instructional coaches at School A collaborate with teachers in two common planning sessions every week. Administrators expect teachers to share successful practices with their peers and ask for insights on the areas where teachers need additional assistance. In the first session, content specialist instructional coaches meet with teachers to enhance instruction in math, ELA, and science classes. For example, math coaches work with K-5 math teachers to frame subject-specific instructional interventions. In the second session, teachers review student data to identify teachers and topic areas that require extra attention and supplementary strategies.

In addition, instructional coaches and administrators at School A observe teacher interactions during professional learning community (PLC) meetings. Coaches and administrators compare notes from their observation and provide individualized feedback to teachers on instructional performance.

At School E, administrators leverage instructional coaches to promote teacher accountability on their contributions during common planning times. Administrators expect teachers to bring useful instructional resources to weekly collaborative planning sessions, take meeting notes, and send those notes to instructional coaches. Coaches and administrators use teacher notes to identify opportunities to provide assistance.

³ Edward S Shapiro, "Tiered Instruction in a Response-to-Intervention Model | RTI Action Network," RTI Action Network, n.d., <http://www.rtinetwork.org/essential/tieredinstruction/tiered-instruction-and-intervention-rti-model>.

Contacts at **School C** Use a Specialist Coach to Advance the School's RTI Program

The RTI coach at **School C** works with the school's head counselor to familiarize teachers, students, and parents with the RTI program. The coach assists with monitoring K-2 students' classroom behavior, developing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), and moving the students between the tiers of RTI programs. The RTI coach at School C also ensures that teachers collect the correct data on students struggling behaviorally and academically.

Instructional Coaches Also Employ Several In-Classroom Practices to Enhance Instruction for All Teachers

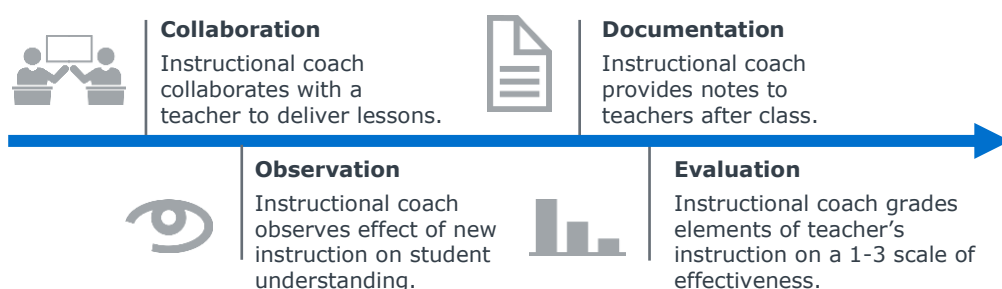
Instructional coaches and administrators at all profiled schools use a combination of classroom observation, collaborative teaching, and lesson modeling to teach effective instructional strategies to teachers. Coaches use these tactics for year-round diagnosis and correction of instructional shortcomings of all teachers.

Instructional coaches at **School A**, **School E**, and **School C** regularly observe all teachers' classroom instruction to identify poor teaching methods and align support services with teacher needs. Instructional coaches at School A and School E observe teacher instruction and provide feedback to teachers in either brief conversations after class or via email.

The coach at School E checks teacher instruction for alignment with the state-level academic benchmarks and the school's performance-based objectives. The coach meets with teachers to discuss their observations and recommend appropriate next steps. Contacts at School E highlight that the coach discusses support strategies in a collaborative manner, instead of directing the teachers to follow a set plan. This approach allows them to increase teacher involvement in their own growth.

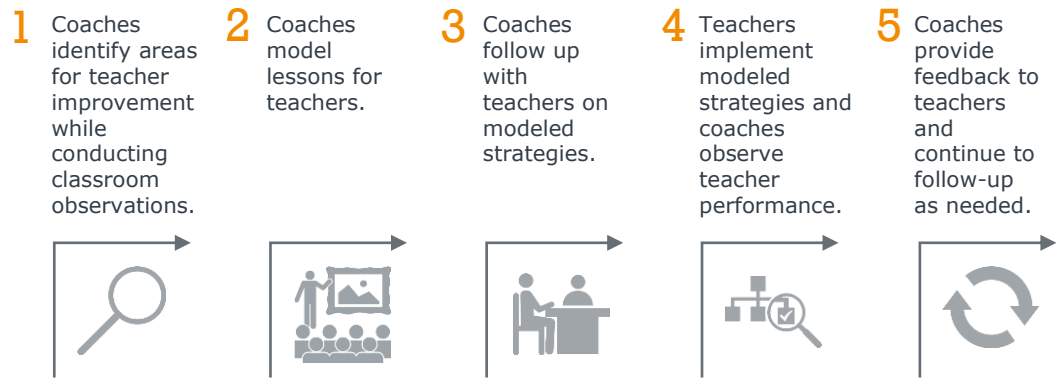
Instructional coaches at **School B** and School C collaborate and coteach lessons with teachers to build trust and rapport with teachers.

Instructional Coach's Observation and Co-Teaching Process at **School B**



Instructional coaches at all five profiled schools model lessons for teachers to develop teacher comfort with new instructional strategies. Instructional coaches at **School D** and School A leverage a system of classroom observation, modeling, and feedback delivery to help teachers effectively change teaching techniques.

Lesson Modeling by Instructional Coaches at *School D* and *School A*



The instructional coach at School E also facilitates peer observations for teachers to learn tactics employed by other teachers. The coach selects teachers who demonstrate strong instructional tactics to serve as a model. The coach accompanies teachers during peer observations and helps them make content more accessible to students.

Instructional Coaches Work Directly with Students to Model Strategies for Teachers and Further Enhance Student Achievement

Instructional coaches at **School D** and **School B** work with small groups of students to model practices for teachers. This allows coaches to not only demonstrate the effectiveness of instructional tactics but also allows students to access personalized support.

Contacts at both schools emphasize the importance of keeping these instructional groups small to minimize classroom distractions.

Individualized Support

Coaches Leverage Assessment and Observational Data to Identify Teachers with More Significant Support Needs

Instructional coaches at profiled schools leverage various points of student performance data, observation notes, and teacher requests to identify which teachers require additional support. They communicate data insights to administrators as well as teachers to increase transparency and awareness of students' academic growth. Coaches at all five profiled schools then meet with individual teachers to provide support on a one-on-one basis.

Student Assessment Systems Used Across Profiled Districts

- **Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) Tests:** Personalized digital tests that measure student growth in instructional areas.
- **STAR Assessments** and **IXL Assessments:** Personalized assessments aligned to state standards for student learning.

On average, coaches at **School D**, **School E**, and **School B** conduct weekly data meetings with grade-level teachers to identify gaps in student understanding and brainstorm ideas for improvement with teachers.

Data Points Tracked by the Instructional Coach at *School E*

Teacher Assessments

Weekly assessments through an online program that does regular benchmarking

State Test Scores

Trends in student performance on state assessments

Attendance

Teacher and student attendance



Diagnostics

Diagnostic taken at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year

Expectations

State objectives and district standards for classroom instruction

Students in Need of Support

Growth and performance of students who require additional assistance

The academic coach at **School C** analyzes student and teacher data and discusses student support solutions with school administrators twice a week. Teachers at School B initiate their own requests for instructional support, with administrators and coaches driving support assignment less frequently.

Teacher Identification and Delivery of Additional Support Services at *School B*



Teacher-Driven

- Teachers ask for support in specific areas.
- Instructional coach works with district-level content specialists to bridge gaps between teacher instruction and performance expectations.



Instructional Coach-Driven

- If the coach identifies that students lack mastery in an entire unit, the coach sources alternative teaching strategies.
- Coach conducts walkthroughs to demonstrate delivery.



Administrator-Driven

- If administrators identify overall gaps in student progress, they send coaches to help in relevant classes.
- They communicate with teachers one-on-one to explain assigning additional support.

The instructional coaches at School B and **School A** analyze student data for the monthly school leadership team meetings as well. The team (which includes instructional coaches) identifies yearly performance trends and devises schoolwide strategies to maximize impact on students. Some of the strategies may include adjusting the daily schedule, hiring additional personnel, and developing staff skills. At School A, coaches present conclusions from these meetings to all teachers to maintain transparency.

Data Analysis Responsibilities of Instructional Coaches for School Leadership Meetings at *School B*



Frequency

Monthly



Attendance

Attended by administrators, instructional coaches, content experts, and teachers from each grade-level as well as from special courses.



Coach Responsibilities

The coach analyzes student IXL scores and math and reading scores on STAR assessments.

At School A, academic staff members engage in data-related conversations twice a week to strategize on teacher support. In the first meeting, instructional coaches discuss insights from their classroom observations with administrators, counselors, and teachers. Coaches incorporate administrator input from observation in classrooms and during PLC meetings and propose support strategies. In the second meeting, the principal and assistant principal meet to further discuss details on teacher concerns and determine which teachers need formal professional learning plans (PLPs).

Example Student Performance Data Points Tracked by Instructional Coaches at Profiled Schools

School Name	Student Data
School A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formative and summative classroom assessment scores State assessment scores Student writing assessments
School B	<p>Lower grades:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> STAR assessment scores Classroom assessment scores <p>Upper grades:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> STAR assessment scores Classroom assessment scores IXL scores
School C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scores on MAP assessments that students take thrice times a year
School D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> STAR assessments scores

For more information on writing workshops, please see our report [Reading and Writing Workshops at Secondary Schools](#).

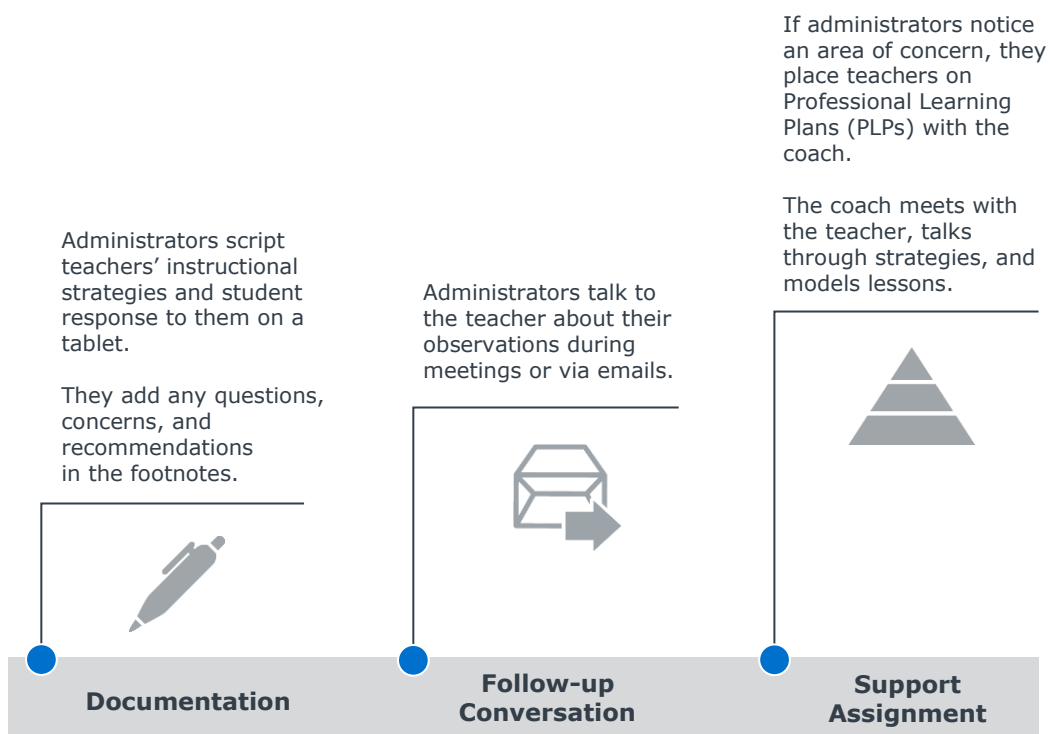
Intensify Instructional Assistance to Teachers by Diligently Structuring Support Tactics

Administrators at **School A** and **School C** place teachers on PLPs to ensure a proper structure for their skill development. Coaches at both schools work more closely with these assigned teachers and ensure that teachers use all the available resources, such as the Lucy Calkins Writing Program's resources. At School C, administrators assign three to five teachers on average to their reading and math coach at the beginning of every school year. The coach works with them to determine instructional

best practices and leads professional development sessions with them for half a day every semester to discuss new and existing strategies.

The intervention specialist coach at School A works one-on-one with teachers who implement intervention strategies in their classes. The coach then discusses the implementation period, impact, and potential iterations of these interventions with the teacher.

Steps Taken by Administrators at *School A* During Classroom Observations to Identify Teachers in Need of Support



Characterize Instructional Coach Assistance as a Support Resource Rather Than a Punitive Measure to Minimize Teacher Pushback

Administrators at all five profiled schools highlight the value of communicating proactively and clearly with teachers regarding the services offered by coaches. Administrators present instructional coaches as a non-evaluative support resource to increase teacher comfort and collaboration with coaches.

Though administrators at **School D** and **School B** mandate that instructional coaches intervene in classes where teachers need support, administrators clarify to teachers that the intention is to help them instead of penalize them. As a result, they do not receive significant pushback from teachers related to instructional coach support. Administrators at School B do not often mandate that teachers use the instructional coach's services to cultivate teacher willingness to drive their own support. Administrators do not project the coach as another administrator to avoid unnecessary distrust among teachers.

Contacts at **School A**, **School E**, and **School C** receive some resistance from teachers on accepting instructional coaches' support, but contacts overcome pushback through carefully framed and data-oriented communication. Administrators at School A reference specific evidence from their classroom observation notes when

communicating with teachers. This strategy makes teachers aware of the weaker aspects of their teaching and reinforces the need to improve instruction. Administrators and teachers at School A also take video recordings of lessons to troubleshoot specific concerns together. Similarly, administrators at School E and School C use student performance data to explain the need for instructional coach support.

3) Hiring, Evaluating, and Training Coaches

Hiring and Funding

Employ Instructional Coaches Through Flexible Funding Sources to Increase Coaches' Adaptability

Instructional coaches at all five profiled schools are either currently employed through Title I funds or have been in the past. Contacts at these schools confirm the value of employing instructional coaches in general.

Overview of Instructional Coach Funding Models at Profiled Schools

School	Funds to Employ Instructional Coaches
School A	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use Title I funds for all coaches• They receive additional support from district-funded coaches that provide support in writing, technology and data analysis
School B	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Used Title I funds until 2019• Will neither receive Title I funding nor employ instructional coaches starting next year
School C	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Used to employ the math and reading coach through Title I funds until 2019• Now use general budget to hire them
School D	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Used Title I funds until 2018• Lost Title I status in 2018 and will not employ instructional coaches going forward
School E	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Used Title I funds until 2018• Now use a consolidated fund that includes Title I funds

None of the contacts at profiled districts highlighted any challenges in gaining support from district-level administrators to employ instructional coaches.

However, while Title I funds enable schools to employ instructional coaches they otherwise may not be able to, the funding also restricts the responsibilities that administrators can assign to a coach. Contacts at both **School E** and **School C** highlight the value of employing instructional coaches through methods aside from Title I funds.

Previously at School C, the instructional coach was only allowed to handle tasks that were relevant to Title I objectives, such as teacher skill-development, data-tracking, and educational technology training. Funding coaches through the school's general funds allows them to be more flexible with their services. For instance, the coaches at School C can now assist administrators with testing responsibilities.

Adopt Robust Hiring Practices to Select the Best Coach Candidates and Maximize Their Academic Impact

Contacts at all profiled schools shared several core competencies of an ideal candidate for open instructional coach positions, emphasizing the value of communication, multi-tasking, and technology skills.

Core Competencies of an Ideal Instructional Coach as Noted by Contacts at Profiled Schools

1

Leadership & Interpersonal Skills

Contacts at **School D** emphasize that coaches require these skills to earn teachers' respect and trust in the coaches' expertise.

2

Communication Skills

Contacts at **School C** note the importance of strong communication with various school-level stakeholders, especially teachers.

3

Flexibility & Creativity

Contacts at **School A** recommend hiring candidates who are flexible in their working style, given the nature of their job responsibilities. Contacts at **School A** and **School E** value creative thinkers who can be innovative in their resource and strategy recommendations.

4

Technology & Data Analysis Skills

Contacts at **School D** list technological expertise as an essential requirement.

Contacts at **School C** and **School E** recommend looking for candidates with data analysis skills.

5

Classroom Experience

Contacts at **School A** and **School E** value previous teacher leader or academic coaching experience.

6

Concern for Student

Contacts at **School C** imagine an ideal candidate always prioritizes and cares about the needs of students.

Administrators at **School C** incorporate instructional and administrative responsibilities for the coach they employ through the school's general fund.

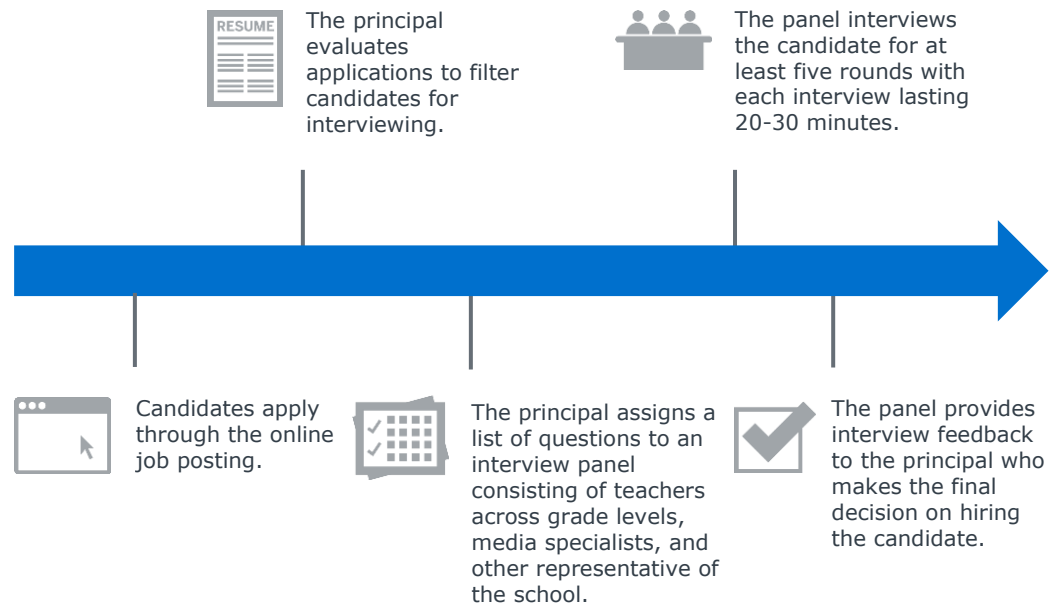
Excerpt of the Job Description for the non-Title I Coach at *School C*

Title: Instructional Support Coach

- Designs and delivers professional learning related to formative assessments to school staff.
- Serves as a co-lead for the schools to ensure all practices comport with state requirements related to formative assessments (e.g., student learning objectives).
- Assists teachers in reflecting on and analyzing their practices by reviewing student work to inform instruction for student achievement.
- Administers and/or supports the state and local standardized testing processes and policies.

Administrators at **School E** employ a thorough interview process to filter the best external candidates and onboard the newly-hired instructional coaches by going over the school improvement plan with them.

Interview Process for Hiring Instructional Coaches at *School E*



Evaluation and Professional Development

Compare Student Scores and Solicit Teacher Feedback to Effectively Evaluate Coaches

While studies have confirmed that instructional coaches are able to enrich teacher instruction, their impact on student achievement is harder to trace.⁴ To overcome common challenges associated with evaluating instructional coaches, administrators at profiled schools employ several methods to judge their coaches' performance. For instance, administrators at all five profiled schools reference student improvement data and teacher feedback to evaluate the impact of instructional coaches.

At **School D**, **School E**, and **School C**, the principal evaluates individual instructional coaches' performance. Administrators at these schools solicit feedback from teachers during meetings and through informal one-on-one conversations, which they incorporate into instructional coaches' evaluations.

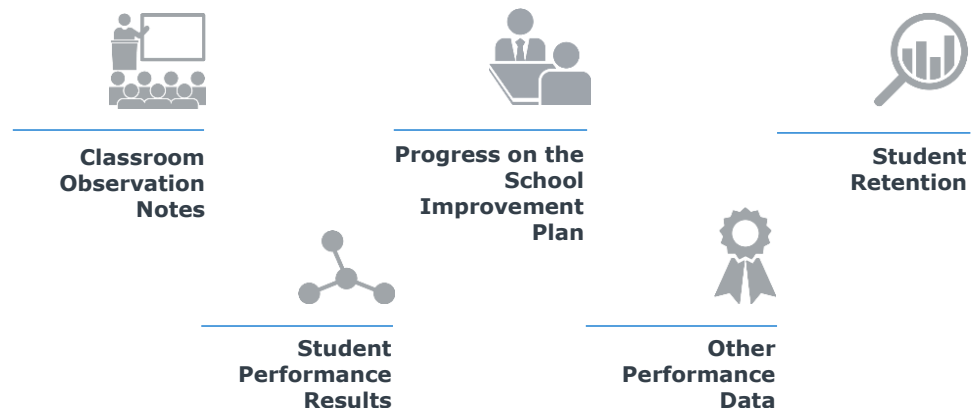
Administrators at School D, School E, and School C also track student scores to assess coach's academic impact. At School D, administrators saw significant improvements in student performance scores in classes with instructional coach support as compared to stagnant scores in classes where the instructional coach did not provide any support. While conducting classroom observations, administrators noted improvements in teacher instruction that they attributed to the coach's support. Administrators met with individual teachers, grade-level teachers, and the teacher leadership council as needed to solicit feedback on coaches. Administrators also asked the instructional coach during their evaluations about the ways they intervened in classrooms and strategies they suggested that were successful.

At School E, administrators evaluate the coach's effectiveness based upon progress toward goals outlined in the school improvement plan. In addition to tracking student

⁴ Diana Quintero, "Instructional Coaching Holds Promise as a Method to Improve Teachers' Impact," The Brookings Institution, January 25, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2019/01/25/instructional-coaching-holds-promise-as-a-method-to-improve-teachers-impact/>.

data, administrators also encourage the instructional coach to document intervention strategies that the coach suggests to teachers as well as the impact of each strategy. Administrators at School C look at student performance scores in MAP and state assessments, focusing especially on math and reading scores, to measure the instructional coach's impact.

Data Points Leveraged by Administrators at *School E* to Evaluate Coaches



Administrators at **School A** evaluate coach effectiveness by tracking student data and surveying teachers on the effectiveness of instructional coaches. Administrators also encourage instructional coaches to keep a log of their classroom observations and suggested interventions for accountability. Contacts report remarkable improvements in teacher collaboration during PLCs as well as improved results of RTI programs, which they credit to the work of their instructional coaches. Contacts at School A would ideally want to map these results back to the specific services of instructional coaches but note the complexity of doing so in practice.

Contacts at **School B** and School E highlight the value of setting clear expectations for the instructional coaches to provide direction in their work and evaluate them against those expectations. At School B, administrators conduct mid-year and end-of-year conferences to assess school needs and adjust the instructional coach's responsibilities. They also consider student performance data provided by teachers and state evaluation tools to assess their instructional coach.

Encourage Instructional Coaches to Participate in Professional Development Sessions to Enhance their Skills

Instructional coaches at all five profiled schools participate in district-provided professional development sessions. On average, coaches attend one to four sessions every two months. Topics of professional development include data analysis, technology, and areas relevant to licensing or accreditation.

Content and curriculum specialists at **School D's** district send out monthly subject-specific newsletters to provide information on upcoming professional development opportunities. After attending any district-driven or external session, the coach trained teachers at the school on the topics covered. This way, the coach disseminated valuable information on skill development when it was not feasible to send multiple teachers to a session. Instructional coaches, administrators, and

teachers at **School A** attend annual trainings on data analysis and critical decision-making organized by an institute for teacher development.

Administrators at School D, School A, **School E**, and **School C** also encourage their instructional coaches to seek out external trainings of interest. Administrators at School D and School C fund coaches to attend these sessions. Administrators at School D used general funds, while administrators at School C uses a combination of general, Title I, state, and parent-teacher association (PTA) funds to send teachers to professional development trainings.

4) Research Methodology

Project Challenge

Leadership at a member district approached the Forum with the following questions:

- What is the current instructional coaching model at contact districts?
- What practices do contact districts employ to maximize instructional coach support for teachers?
- How do teachers at contact districts access coaching support?
- How do contact districts differentiate coaching support between the general population of teachers and teachers with more significant support needs?
- How do administrators at contact districts communicate about instructional coaches' services to teachers?
- How do contact districts allocate funds to employ instructional coaches?
- If contact districts use Title I funds to support instructional coaches, how do administrators navigate restrictions in applying Title I funds to coaching efforts?
- How did administrators at contact districts gain support from district-level administrators to adopt the use of instructional coaches?
- What metrics and evaluation tools do contact districts use to measure the academic impact of instructional coaches?
- What is the coach to teacher ratio at contact districts?
- How do contact districts evaluate candidates for open instructional coach positions?
- What onboarding practices do contact districts employ to familiarize new instructional coaches with the school's needs, goals, and techniques?
- What ongoing professional development opportunities do contact districts offer to increase instructional coaches' impact on teacher instruction?
- How do contact districts solicit feedback from coaches and teachers about practices designed to improve teaching outcomes?

Project Sources

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

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- "Classworks," n.d. <https://www.curriculumadvantage.com/classworks>.
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Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed administrators at elementary schools that employ instructional coaches and either currently receive or recently received Title I funding.

A Guide to Schools Profiled in this Brief

Institution	Location	Approximate Enrollment
School A	South	1000
School B	South	500
School C	South	500
School D	South	1000
School E	South	500