

Keys to Creating a Thriving Coaching Culture in Your School



A growing body of literature highlights the principals' role in creating a thriving coaching culture (Bean et al., 2018).

Jordan School District Coaches view the principal as critical to supporting coaching success and fostering a wider culture of coaching. As coaches have told us, they want principals who not only understand the value of coaching but who support it as a priority for improving student learning in their school.

The research and our experience have taught us that behind every successful coach is a supportive principal.

However, what does that mean to be a supportive principal?

To Support Coaching work...

1. Do Create and Continually Communicate a Shared Vision for Coaching Work:

Articulate clear roles and responsibilities for coaches. Once a coaching model is crafted and shared, principals need to talk about that model continually—not just at the beginning of the year or when coaching is first established. They must reinforce the notion that coaching is one of the major mechanisms for everyone to improve their practice. "Have you chatted with the coach about this?" can be one of the common questions that principals ask teachers. Principals who stress communication about coaching consistently realign coaching work as student and teacher needs shift.

2. Do Establish a Coaching Schedule That Meets Individual and System Needs

Principals can more effectively build a coaching culture by working with coaches to create schedules that allow them to engage in one-on-one, small-group, and large-group coaching activities and address individual and system needs. Coaches need time and space to plan, react, and problem solve with teachers and to vary the ways in which they work. Some teachers do best if the coach models a strategy for them, while others might prefer to co-plan or even co-teach a lesson. At times, coaching cycles (pre-conference, observation, post-conference) may be useful, especially for intense one-on-one work.

3. Do Meet with Coaches Regularly and Observe Teachers Frequently

To stay abreast of coaching work, principals should meet regularly with coaches and frequently observe teachers understand how professional learning is changing classroom instruction. Coach-principal meetings should not be sessions in which every grizzly detail of coach-teacher relationships is litigated. Instead, they should be broader conversations about whether and how overarching goals are being met. Which grade levels or content areas might need more or less coaching time or different supports? What resources might the coach or teachers need to meet students' needs better? Principals should avoid asking coaches to report on individual teachers in these conversations. Instead, they should strategically observe teachers and teams to understand how coaching impacts classrooms.

4. Do Keep the Focus on Student Learning

When we ask coaches to talk about their focus, we often hear answers such as, "I follow the teacher's lead," or "It depends on what the teacher needs to know." These are good starts, but decisions about focus are to be made after teachers, coaches, and administrators have reviewed the expectations for specific grades or content areas and data about what instruction is necessary for students to meet those expectations. By focusing on student needs (as opposed to exclusively focusing on teacher needs and preferences), coaching is more likely to address systemic issues better and improve student learning (Sweeney, 2010).

And Now, What Not to Do to Support Coaching...

1. Do not Assign Coaches Non-Coaching Roles and Responsibilities (At least not often)
2. Do not use Coaches as "Fixers"
3. Do not devalue Professional Learning for Coaches