Research Brief

Title: Instructional Coaches

Question: What is the role of instructional coaches at the high school level?

Summary of Findings:

With the passage of No Child Left Behind, doing well on high stakes testing has become paramount and the pressure is intense for schools to demonstrate and meet adequate yearly progress. According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, 3000 high school students drop out daily and the reason most often cited is their lack of literacy. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, only 36% of seniors are proficient in reading and 17% are proficient in math, while more African Americans and Latinos by the end of high school, have the reading skill levels as those of whites in the eighth grade. By the age of 17, on average, 1 in 17 students are able to read and get appropriate information from specific texts (*Youth at a crossroads*). One approach that is gaining momentum to help student achievement is the use of instructional coaches.

The structure of the instructional coaches' program varies in school districts. In order for it to be effective it must be long-term, substantive, supported by the district, principal and teachers, and evaluated with the results used to inform the instructional program. According to one article, an important role of the coach is to "…help teachers understand that their students 'can develop content knowledge at the same time that they are improving literacy' " (*A comprehensive approach to adolescent literacy*). The primary role of the coach is to work with teachers to support them as they develop strategies to work with students so that they develop literacy strategies in different content areas. Coaches are master teachers who have been trained in research-based reading and studying strategies in various content areas, should be able to go into any classroom and teach, be familiar with the characteristics of both adolescent and adult learners, are able to work well with people, and have a positive attitude. The literature cautions that it is not a "quick fix" and if too many ideas are expected to be implemented in a year, the program can be counter-productive. According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, nine million 4th-12th grade students have below grade level literacy skills. This translates into needing about 10,000 coaches nationwide (*Reading Next*). Considerations to be taken into account if a district/school decides to explore/use instructional coaches are cited below.

Issues

Listed below are some issues in secondary schools that can influence the use of instructional coaches.
- They will most likely work with a large number of teachers in several content areas
- Teachers tend to be more focused on teaching content and have tight time constraints
- Teachers have not been trained in literacy development skills
- Teachers do not view themselves as teachers of literacy
- The beliefs of administration and teachers about instruction
- Students have a large range of literacy skills
- Students may be unable to handle different comprehension expectations from a variety of subjects and sources
- No one person is monitoring student progress so the chances of them "falling through the cracks" are greater
- Coaches may feel a sense of isolation

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Considerations
When determining if instructional coaches are appropriate in the school, the items listed below should be considered.
• What are the goals of the program?
• What does research say about different coaching models?
• Which models would best help the school's goals be met?
• What are characteristics of effective coaches?
• What will the responsibilities and expectations of the instructional coach be?
• How will the teachers accept the coaches?
• Who will work with the coaches?
• How will the program be evaluated?
• What is a realistic timeline?
• What resources are available to support the program over the long term?

Responsibilities of the coach
The instructional coach should be able to help teachers support students "…to read at higher levels and comprehend the complex texts and other information sources they need to graduate from high school prepared for college or a challenging job" (*A comprehensive approach to adolescent literacy)*. Other responsibilities include:
• Offer on-going staff development to participating teachers, small groups and departments
• Establish and work with literacy leadership teams
• Work one-on-one with teachers
• Model applicable literacy strategies
• Set up opportunities for teachers to observe each other when using literacy techniques
• Make available resources and research
• Help teachers prepare for their lessons when teaching literacy and support them in their endeavors
• Provide productive feedback
• Promote positive and productive conversations about literacy in the school/district
• Learn from each other because all participants are equal partners
• Educate parents and other stakeholders about instructional coaches and their importance to helping improve student learning
• Conduct and review program evaluations and use that information for further growth and development
• Train the principal in the literacy strategies
• Obtain and participate in on-going training for the coach

Online Resources:

- A comprehensive guide to adolescent literacy
  A thorough description of the role of literacy coaches in the Pittsburgh Public Schools is given in this article.
  http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa4002/is_200502/ai_n9520533/print

- A primer on instructional coaches
  The role of instructional coaches in Kansas and Maryland is comprehensively explained.
  http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa4002/is_200505/ai_n13637074/print

- Calls for revamping high schools intensify
  Some reasons why high schools need to be systemically restructured are described in this piece.
  http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/01/26/20high.h24.html?print=1

- Coaches build strong teams
  An overview of Boston's instructional coaching program is described in this article.
  http://www.nsdc.org/library/publications/results/res9-04rich.cfm

- Coaching: A strategy for developing instructional capacity
  This is an extensive explanation of various types of instructional coaching.
  http://www.annenberginstitute.org/images/Coaching.pdf

- Dropouts
  An overview of dropout statistics is provided in this article.
  http://www.edweek.org/rc/issues/dropouts/

- Getting started with literacy coaching
  This is a list of different references on literacy coaching that have live links to them.
  http://www.ncte.org/collections/literacycoach/resources/118029.htm

- Literacy coaches: An evolving role
  This brief article provides varying definitions of literacy coaches.
  http://www.carnegie.org/reporter/09/literacy/index.html

- Prosocial learning communities: One step at a time these three school districts are successfully working at the process of reform, using coaching to bring about change
  The importance of honest conservations and realistic goal setting in order for systemic change to occur is described in this article.
  http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0HUL/is_5_34/ai_n13820035/print

- Reading next. A vision for action and research in middle and high school literacy
  This report from the Carnegie Corporation thoroughly describes the reasons for a strong literacy program in secondary schools.
  http://www.all4ed.org/publications/ReadingNext/ReadingNext.pdf

- Reading researchers outline elements needed to achieve adolescent literacy
  A brief explanation of the need for adolescents to develop literacy skills is provided.
  http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2004/10/20/08literacy.h24.html?print=1

- Researchers tally costs of educational failings
  From a financial aspect, the cost of high school dropouts is summarized in this piece.
  http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/11/02/10adequacy.h25.html?print=1

- School based coaching: Revolution or fad?
  Descriptions of different types of coaching programs in various parts of the country are in this article.
  http://www.edletter.org/past/issues/2004-ja/coaching.shtml

- Standards for middle school and high school literacy coaches
  This provides standards for secondary literacy coaches with standards in math, science and social studies, and describes some high schools that have literacy coaches.
  http://www.ira.org/downloads/resources/597coaching_standards.pdf

- Standards for middle and high school literacy coaches
  A brief list of the standards for literacy coaches is provided in this brief article.
  http://www.ncte.org/announce/122956.htm

- States and districts send literacy coaches to the rescue
  A short overview of the role of literacy coaches is provided in this article.
  http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/07/27/43coach.h24.html?querystring=Instructional%20Coaches&print=1

- The literacy coach
  A thorough description of the reasons why literacy coaches are needed, their role, examples of programs from several states and different ways to develop the training are given.
  http://www.all4ed.org/publications/LiteracyCoach.pdf

- What is a literacy coach?
  A graphic organizer of the role literacy coach is provided.
  http://www.ncte.org/library/files/Free/Journals/vm/VM0121From.pdf

- Youth at a crossroads. Facing high school and beyond.
  This is a sobering look at the academic conditions on the outcome of high school along with easy to interpret graphs.
  http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/85897615-327E-4269-939A-4E14B96861BB/0/k16_winter01.pdf

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http://www.principalspartnership.com