



Principal-coach relationships

The heart of a successful coaching program is the relationship between the principal and the coach. The principal serves as the school's primary instructional leader, and the coach shares and supports the principal's vision. Their partnership is crucial to successfully implementing the coaching program (Wren & Vallejo, 2009).

The principal and coach work hand in hand to make quality instruction a top priority and create a culture of collaboration and inquiry. Together, principals and coaches communicate their common belief that well-prepared teachers who consistently implement research-based instructional practices and continually strive to improve their practices make the greatest difference in student learning. This shared belief is a common indicator of an effective principal-coach relationship.

Effective principal-coach relationships are built on the key elements of: communication, feedback, expectations, time and resources, confidentiality, and professional development.

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Communication

The coach and principal's communication is essential to implementing coaching effectively. When their working relationship begins, the effective coach and principal create a partnership agreement for how they will work together to carry out their shared vision for the school. The partnership agreement addresses the principal's and coach's expectations for:

- The coach's roles and responsibilities, as well as clients' roles and responsibilities;
- Desired outcomes of the coaching and coaching's alignment with school goals;
- Coaching's boundaries and limitations;
- How many and which teachers the coach will work with (preferably all teachers in the school);
- What procedures teachers will use to access the coach's services;
- Resources and support the coach needs to carry out the work;
- Ways to assess the coach's effectiveness;
- Confidentiality about teacher and coach interactions;
- Communication and reporting procedures; and
- Allocation of the coach's time and timelines for engaging in coaching.

During these partnership agreement conversations, the coach and the principal discuss how they will monitor the work and how often and when they will meet to share updates and to collaborate.

They make it a priority to meet for 30 minutes to an hour each week (Knight, 2007). Meeting weekly to plan and collaborate demonstrates the principal's and coach's belief that they can draw on each other's strengths and expertise to enhance their effectiveness in their respective roles. Their regular meetings help ensure their messages are aligned and reinforce each other's, and that they do not have different or unfair expectations of any teachers or teacher teams.

Coaches often worry that teachers view these meetings with the principal as reporting on teachers. They worry that they may inadvertently breach their confidentiality agreements in the natural course of their conversations with the principal. The principal and teachers must remain vigilant about the partnership agreements and speak up when confidentiality slips.

The coach and principal might use their regular meetings to discuss:

- Teachers: Which teachers the coach worked with in the past week, and with whom the coach plans to work in the upcoming week.
- Topics: Topics the coach is focusing on with teachers.
- Time: How much time the coach is spending with individuals and teams of teachers.
- Tasks: Tasks the coach is doing (for example, modeling, co-planning, conducting a data meeting, and so on).

The coach may have entered factual information in a log, so the principal and coach might review the week's entries. Coaches also use their weekly time with principals to share their own learning from their practice or from professional development with other coaches, to communicate information from district meetings that principals need to know, ask for the support they need to make their work more effective,

and discuss any difficulties. If the coach feels that asking for support or solving a problem will breach confidentiality, the coach should seek support from the district coach champion rather than the principal.

Eventually, as coaches and principals work together over time and a culture of collaboration grows within a school, teachers will more routinely share information about their practices. When teachers, coaches, and principals are comfortable speaking openly about teaching and learning, the coach and principal can relax the strict agreements about confidentiality.

When either the coach or principal feels that the teachers are ready to move past strict controls

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about confidentiality, they should not make the change on their own. They should gather the staff, propose changes to the confidentiality agreements, and engage teachers in the decision.

The principal's style is key to a coach's success

How the principal supports the coach influences how successful coaching and the coaching program will be. Jacy Ippolito (2009) identifies three styles of principal interaction with their coaches: neglectful, interfering, and partnering.

Neglectful principals may have high expectations, but for a variety of reasons, they do not follow through with the support coaches need. They may not adapt the school schedule, may not meet regularly with the coach, don't set priorities with staff about coaching, don't establish and keep a partnership agreement, fail to offer the coach continuous feedback, or don't align the coach's work with the school improvement plan.

Interfering principals, according to Ippolito, have a difficult time letting go of or sharing responsibility for professional development. They may usurp meeting agendas, may be directive about which teachers the coach works with, and may specify the topic of the coach's work. Interfering principals often unintentionally confuse teachers and even the coach, and they potentially undermine teachers' work.

Partnering principals provide leadership for coaching by setting high expectations, providing ongoing support to the coach, and providing feedback to the coach and staff about coaching. Ippolito notes that one way partnering principals support coaches is by modeling partnership and collaboration in all aspects of their work within the school and community. "[M]uch of this culture of collaboration and professional learning [can be attributed to] the partnering stance of the administration," says one coach in Ippolito's research (p. 3).

Feedback is essential

As part of the ongoing conversations between the principal and coach to monitor the process, the principal should maintain time to offer the coach explicit feedback about the coach's effectiveness. The coach may ask the principal for specific feedback about an activity, or the feedback may be about routine components of the coach's work.

Whether the principal or a district-level administrator is the coach's formal supervisor, the coach still needs regular feedback. The principal often is well informed about the coach's work because the principal participates in professional development sessions with the coach and faculty and also visits classrooms. The principal can see how the coach's work is affecting

coach significantly affects the coach's work. Principals often assume either that coaches will work with teachers who need the most help or that coaches will work with all the teachers in the school. When the principal doesn't make the expectation public to both the staff and the coach, the expectation frequently goes unmet. Establishing expectations that define how much and how teachers will work with the coach enables the coach to partner with teachers and avoid potential tension and conflict.

The principal is responsible for monitoring and holding teachers accountable for meeting the expectation. If the principal identifies a teacher who might benefit from working with the coach, often because the teacher's performance is substandard

in some area, the principal is responsible for making known to the teacher that the teacher needs the coach's support. The principal holds the teacher accountable for improving his or her practice and allows the coach to maintain a supportive rather than evaluative role. If the teacher is aware of the principal's expectations, the teacher's work with the coach can be more focused.

Often, however, principals allow teachers to choose to work with the coach. Teachers who can choose how they will work with a coach usually are

more invested in the work than those who have no choice (Knight, 2007).

Overall, principals' behaviors affect coaching, teachers' engagement in coaching, and the coach. Researchers correlated teachers' participation in coaching and principals' support behaviors and found that teachers are more likely to participate in coaching when the principal:

- Treats coaches as valued professionals;
- Publicly endorses the coach as a content expert;

When the principal and the coach have established professional respect and trust, the coach will look forward to receiving the principal's feedback and having an opportunity to make adjustments to the work to be able to affect teachers' practice even more.

teachers' practices as well as the school's culture and climate. When the principal and the coach have established professional respect and trust, the coach will look forward to receiving the principal's feedback and having an opportunity to make adjustments to the work to be able to affect teachers' practices even more.

Set clear expectations

The principal's ability to set clear expectations for teachers about how they will work with the

- Actively participates in the content-focused coaching program; and
 - Provides overall support to the coach in all categories of principal support.
- (Matsumura et al., 2009)

The principal shows support for coaching by being involved and engaged. Visible support paves the way for the coach to work more effectively with teachers. For example, when a principal attends some of the grade-level or department meetings that the coach facilitates or engages in professional development alongside teachers, the principal conveys the message that these activities are worthwhile.

Teachers participate in coaching less when coaches and principals have a less consistent understanding of the work that coaches do and

of what support principals provide coaches (Matsumura et al., 2009).

As the principal sets expectations for the coach's role, the principal must be careful not to rely on the coach for managerial tasks that can take away from the coach's ability to add to the school's instructional leadership. In a Florida study of middle school literacy coaches, district supervisors reported that coaches were occasionally expected to serve as substitute teachers or administrators (Marsh et al., 2008).

The coach's impact is greatly diminished if the coach spends time on noncoaching duties. In the Florida study, nearly 18% of coaches reported spending between six hours and 16 hours over a two-week period on noncoaching, administrative

Principal sends clear message

A principal might set a schoolwide expectation that all teachers work with the school's coach by sending a message such as:

One of the expectations we share at this school is that all students will succeed. We also believe that each of us has a responsibility to contribute to that success. We are fortunate to have Charles as our coach. Charles' primary role is to ensure that all students succeed, and he will work with each of you so that you engage in continuous professional learning to refine teaching practices so that we reach every student. As a part of your professional growth and collaboration, each teacher will work with Charles individually and also during your grade-level collaboration time. As a school, we will focus our professional growth on differentiating instruction to meet the learning needs of all students.

As teams and individuals, you will determine how Charles can help you meet the goals we have established for our school. Charles will work primarily as an instructional specialist, classroom supporter, and data coach, yet he has considerable latitude within those roles for the type of support he provides, and you will work together with him to determine what will best serve your learning needs.

As a professional and member of our school community, engaging in professional growth with Charles is not negotiable because we need all of us learning and working together in order to meet the needs of the students we serve.

duties, and 26% reported managing reading resources, budgeting, ordering, and overseeing computer software and reading laboratories (Marsh et al., 2008). While these tasks may contribute to a successful literacy program, they leave less time for a coach to focus on individual and team-based work with teachers to improve teaching and student learning. Judicious allocation of a coach's time in ways that are most likely to impact overall student achievement is a hallmark of an effective principal.

Modeling the value of professional learning for all staff members helps establish a culture of inquiry, learning, and continuous growth needed for schools to improve.

Align time and resources

Clear expectations for teachers' and coaches' collaboration alone are not enough, however. Principals who want to see results from coaching set up structures that align with the expectations. If the principal expects the coach to work with teacher teams, for example, the principal needs to give teachers a common planning period during the workday or workweek. If teachers use materials and technology in their work, they may need broadband access or other resources such as research or information related to their areas of inquiry. Principals sometimes can allocate funds to hire substitute teachers and release a team for a day of intensive planning. These kinds of support tell teachers that the principal is willing to invest in improvement, believes in their professionalism, and supports their work with the coach.

Over time, as the coaching program matures and teachers' comfort with coaching grows, the focus of the coach's work may change. The needs of staff and students then define how the coach allocates time. The coach can maintain a log to record and analyze how she spends her time and review the log periodically with the principal to ensure that her use of time aligns with the coaching program's goals and the school's improvement plan. When coaches and principals compare the coach's allocation of time to what is desired or needed, they can talk about any adjustments that may be needed to achieve their identified goals.

The coach's role is complex and multifaceted, and coaches, too, need ongoing professional development. Principals need to schedule time for the coach to attend district or other professional development sessions, even when the sessions occur during the school day and the coach needs to leave the building. The principal should communicate to teachers that the coach's professional learning is linked to the staff's professional learning, and that the principal expects the coach to share what he is learning with the entire staff. Modeling the value of professional learning for all staff members helps establish a culture of inquiry, learning, and continuous growth needed for schools to improve.

Ensure confidentiality

Having an explicit understanding that the coach's work does not influence teachers' evaluations increases the coach's chances of establishing relationships based on trust and confidence. If teachers perceive that the coach talks to the principal about teachers' practices, they are less likely to want to work with the coach or to see the coach as a support (Killion & Harrison, 2006).

An astute coach deliberately and systematically discusses confidentiality with all administrators and with teachers when establishing partnership agreements. The agreements specifically state that the coach will not share any information with administrators that could influence the administrators' evaluations of teachers. The only time a coach would share information with an administrator about a specific classroom action is if students' safety — physical, academic, or emotional — were in jeopardy.

As the school's primary instructional leader, the principal is responsible for being visible in teachers' classrooms and being aware of each teacher's strengths and areas for growth. A principal who spends time formally observing in classrooms as well as informally dropping in on teachers on a regular basis will not expect the coach to assess teachers' strengths and needs.

Learn side by side

In many school districts, the central office designs and coordinates the coaching program, and coaches are expected to support district-level initiatives. Coaches help teachers implement the district's new programs or curricula, or they carry out the district's vision for school improvement. Ultimately, principals are responsible for teachers' implementing new programs and initiatives and for supporting coaches' work with teachers.

Both coaches and principals need professional development to carry out these tasks. The school and the district benefit when coaches and principals learn together about these initiatives so each clearly understands the other's scope of responsibility and they can agree on how to support one another's efforts. When the coach and principal sit side by side as they learn about a new initiative, they are able to determine how best to integrate

the new program in their school's context. They can discern how the initiative relates to their shared vision for the school and how to engage other staff members in carrying out the vision. By attending professional development together, the coach and principal model the collaboration they want to encourage among the staff in order to create a culture of collaboration and inquiry that results in improved student learning.

In some schools and districts, the coach may plan and implement school-based professional

The coach and principal model the collaboration they want to encourage among the staff.

development for teachers, either in small groups or individually. When districts create professional development for coaches that is data driven and based on a needs analysis, coaches are able to use effective designs to plan teachers' professional learning and determine how and when to use various designs. Taking part in quality professional development equips coaches to make good decisions about how to engage their colleagues.

Coaches seldom are the sole drivers of learning in their schools, however. The principal remains the school's primary instructional leader (Wren & Vallejo, 2009), and the coach shares expertise in pedagogy, curriculum content, and adult learning theory to support teachers in becoming more resourceful in their own classrooms. The principal may help the coach plan a session, may facilitate or co-facilitate, or may participate. When the principal models a professional, collaborative relationship with the coach for the staff, the principal is setting the tone for the culture of inquiry desired among staff members.

Scenario

Ranell Williams is a second-year coach in a large elementary school. During her first year, she focused mainly on mentoring three novice teachers on the staff, providing all teachers with resources, and helping teachers become more data savvy. At the beginning of the current year, Williams and the principal, Demond Davies, revisited the partnership agreement they had developed the previous year and adjusted how Williams would allocate her time, as well as how they would work together. They decided that Williams might have a greater effect on improving instruction if she met regularly with all grade-level teams. They talked about what teachers might focus on in their team meetings and Williams' role in facilitating those meetings. They discussed how Williams' work aligned with the school's improvement goals. They then settled on a schedule of two meetings each month with each team that Williams would facilitate and discussed a process for determining how the agenda would be set for each meeting to include input from the team members, as well as Williams' ideas.

Williams and Davies also talked about the dynamics of each team and what Williams might expect regarding teachers' engagement in regular team meetings and collaborative dialogue focused on teaching and learning. In the past, most teams had spent their meeting time talking about management issues rather than instructional issues. Williams found it helpful to hear Davies' perspective about these teams and appreciated that his comments were constructive and not focused on specific teachers or teams. She also appreciated his advice about how to help teams become stronger learning communities.

The pair agreed it was important that teachers knew what was expected of them in their learning community meetings. Davies promised that at the next faculty meeting he would clarify with the staff what he wanted to have happen. He also committed to attending some of each team's meetings throughout the year. He thought it would be helpful for Williams to begin working with the teams and put some norms and procedures into place with each group before he attended. They created a simple template that could be used at each meeting to describe the meeting's focus, outcomes planned, resources requested, results achieved, and next steps. Both of them thought that the template would be useful in monitoring Williams' work with the teams over time. Williams agreed to bring copies of the completed form to their weekly meetings to talk about her work and to plan together. Williams left this meeting feeling energized and hopeful that her work would make a greater difference in the coming year.

Reflection questions

- What are the possible outcomes of a school-based coach and the school's principal not having a clear partnership agreement or a good relationship?
- What are the top requirements in a principal and coach partnership agreement? Why did you identify these areas as priorities?
- How does Davies demonstrate his support of the coach and coaching?
- What strategies can coaches use to increase principal support of coaching and the coach?
- If the principal and coach have a strong relationship, as is evident between Williams and Davies, what benefits and disadvantages would they face in minimizing the number of meetings they have with each other?

Recommendations for

Central office administrators

- Design professional learning for coaches that includes how to work collaboratively with the principal.
- Plan and deliver joint professional learning for school-based coaches and principals about new programs or initiatives when coaches will be expected to support teachers in implementing the program or initiative.
- Convene coaches and principals before school begins to help them understand partnership agreements and write an agreement.
- Meet with coaches and their principals periodically during the school year to review their collaboration, assess whether they are communicating frequently and keeping their agreements, and determine whether they are collecting evidence of the coach's impact.

Building administrators

- Develop a partnership agreement with the coach to clarify expectations for the coach's work and for how administrators and the coach will work together. Revisit the agreement periodically.
- Include the topic of confidentiality in the partnership agreement.
- Define the respective roles of the principal and the coach in providing instructional leadership for the school.
- Communicate clear expectations to the staff regarding the coach's work.
- Communicate the principal and coach partnership agreement to the staff.
- Allocate time in the teachers' workday for them to work with the coach.
- Budget for material resources to support the coach's work.
- Set a regular time in the principal's schedule to meet with the coach to plan and review the coach's work.
- Offer the coach regular feedback.
- Attend district professional development with the coach when the coach is asked to support a new program or initiative with teachers.
- Become knowledgeable or maintain knowledge of what constitutes effective professional development.

Coaches

- Develop a partnership agreement with the principal to clarify expectations for coaching and how you will work together.
- Include the topic of confidentiality in the partnership agreement.
- Plan time for a regular meeting with the principal to monitor coaching's effect.
- Be receptive to feedback about coaching's impact and adjust behaviors as needed based on the feedback.
- Attend district professional development with the principal when you are asked to support a new program or initiative with teachers.

TOOL INDEX

Chapter 9

	TOOL	PURPOSE
9.1	Instructional coach contact log template	Maintain records of how the coach's time is allocated using this template.
9.2	Sample partnership agreement between instructional coach and principal	Define the working relationship between the coach and principal and the expectations for the coach's work with this sample partnership agreement.
9.3	Partnership agreement map for instructional coach and principal	Use this template as a basis for establishing agreements between the instructional coach and the principal regarding the coach's work.
9.4	Partnership agreement example	Study this example of an actual partnership agreement between an instructional coach and principal.
9.5	Agreement of confidentiality	Read this tool that defines and describes the importance of agreements about confidentiality.
9.6	Testimonials from school-based instructional coaching program clients	Use these excerpted comments from focus group participants in the evaluation of a coaching program to provide persuasive evidence for a coaching program.
9.7	Coach's time chart	Fill in this chart to track how you use your time during the week.

To download tools, see www.learningforward.org/publications/coachingmatters