At-a-Glance

The Instructional Coaching initiative started in 2005 as a concept of the Institute for Learning, Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh. Its purpose was to meet the academic needs of underperforming campuses. The Instructional Coaching program provided support on a regular basis to teachers on those campuses. The Dallas Independent School District extended the initiative in the following year to all schools as its benefits became apparent.

The model applied by the Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD) is Knight's model (2007) from the University of Kansas Center for Research and Learning, with the addition of West & Staub's (2003) model for mathematics instruction.

As a districtwide call for improvement of individual academic success that emphasized the need for instructional assistance, in 2006, the Dallas ISD formed a task force to reevaluate student performance in light of the results of the initiative and to set the organizational mechanisms to ensure success for all students. Aiming toward that goal, the district implemented Dallas Achieves.

The National Center for Educational Accountability conducted a district audit in 2006, and the recommendations of this audit included providing instructional coaches to campuses of greatest need. To that effect, the district entered into a collaborative relationship with the National Staff Development Council (NSCD). Based on recommendations from the audit, Dallas ISD also made efforts to strengthen the rigor, consistency, and coherence of its curriculum. The district adopted the Institute for Learning instructional methodology, which includes, among other components, coaching for teachers at the campuses of greatest need, and professional development for principals. The district decided to use teacher leaders as school-based staff developers and called them instructional coaches. The purpose of the instructional coaches is to help educators improve their teaching with the expectation that as their performance improves so will students' performance.

A Wachovia Foundation’s Community Needs grant funded the initiative from January 2008 to January 2009. This grant made possible the creation of the Coaches’ Academy in association with the National Staff Development Council (NSDC). The Coaches’ Academy efforts were geared to develop specific competencies and increase effectiveness, provide evidence of increased self-efficacy, and application of effective instructional practices to improve teaching and student learning.

According to documentation provided by Core Curriculum and Instructional Services (Teaching and Learning), the number of schools served during the 2009-2010 school year was as follows: 6 high schools and 14 middle schools were served of the 20 secondary schools in the East Learning Community. All 8 high schools in the Superintendent Learning Community were served, and 8 high schools and 14 middle schools were served of the 22 schools in the West Learning Community. Similarly, 13 elementary schools were served in the Northeast Learning Community, 20 elementary schools in the Southwest Learning Community, 12 elementary schools in the Northwest Learning Community and 16 elementary schools in the Southeast Learning Community. Instructional coaching was available to all schools, but emphasis was made to serve those identified schools where the need was more pressing.

Budget

The Instructional Coaching budget consisted of Title I funds ($9,058,737) to support the four-content-area coaching throughout the district.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Budget Source and Code</th>
<th>Budget 2009-10</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English/Language Arts (814)</td>
<td>3,529,608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics (904)</td>
<td>2,826,020</td>
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<td>Social Studies (907)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Science (912)</td>
<td>2,064,019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$ 9,058,737</strong></td>
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</tbody>
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Note: Data provided by the Instruction and Teaching Department.

Major Results

Over the period of February 8 to 15, 2010 twenty evaluators conducted school visits to verify the implementation of major components of the Instructional Coaching model. The results of the analysis of these visits' records indicate that, in general, coaches conduct pre-conferences with teachers in an informal manner; coaches also observe teachers and take notes to provide them with constructive feedback for reflection. The information that coaches collect during the observations serve as the basis for post-
conferences. Teachers and coaches press students to commit to the learning process and provide answers that show higher order learning. Most teachers and coaches use meta-cognitive activities to encourage students to analyze and solve problems, moving them beyond simple identification or reference to the explanation provided on the board. Activities and discussions help students be engaged and participate in higher order thinking. Coaches’ interactions with teachers reflected on teaching best practices and gave teachers an opportunity to reflect on improvements in instruction. Coaches use data, research on best practices, and the Curriculum Planning Guide to support teachers’ instructional strategies. Principals, associate and assistant principals seem supportive of the Instructional Coaching program and see its benefits.

Most coaches, teachers and administrators agree on the potential benefits of the Instructional Coaching program. The analysis of survey data indicated that there are some areas of disagreement among the three groups. The disagreement seems to be the result of diverging expectations of the program.

Survey analysis also indicated that, while most of the coaches, teachers and administrators agree in major areas, there is a strong need to increase the level of information to all three groups about the program through professional development. The purpose of this training is to equate the expectations, increase the understanding of the purpose of the program, and avoid confusion and frustration for all participants involved.

Teachers strongly believe they should receive training through a better delivery method. Teachers indicated that they need more training in pedagogy. Similarly, teachers suggested that coaches should model lessons more often. In a few cases, teachers pointed out that coaches used a judgmental demeanor to address the teaching aspect needing improvement. It seems important that teachers understand the use of the collaborative planning period. Some teachers expressed expectations that do not correspond to the Instructional Coaching Model. They include, among others, coaches teaching their classes or pulling students out of class for tutoring. Teachers also mentioned that coaches should focus their efforts on instruction rather than on teaching TAKS.

Teachers reported coaches are doing a good job; in some cases, coaches could not devote as much time as needed to support teachers because of multiple school assignments. Some teachers mentioned that once students’ scores improved, coaches were removed from their school.

Administrators coincided with teachers in some of their recommendations for program improvement. Administrators especially emphasized the importance of providing training and consistency and stability of coach assignments to campuses. Additionally, administrators stated that it is important to provide support on developing common assessments and using data for instruction planning.

Coaches’ concerns were also on training, support from administrators, and stability of school assignment, and on focusing their efforts on instruction rather than on teaching TAKS.

Recommendations

Based on observation and survey results the following recommendations are suggested:

- Priority should be given to unifying the understanding of the Instructional Coaching model among coaches, teachers and administrators. Results from this report indicate differing perspectives of the IC program. Informative sessions or training should continue to be provided, and possibly be expanded, to all three groups.

- Coaches should be assigned to no more than two schools in order to ensure that coaches can concentrate their efforts and increase their impact on teachers’ performance and students’ achievement, it is necessary to limit the number of assigned schools. Results from this evaluation indicate that teachers and administrators report higher satisfaction with having coaches assigned to their schools over longer periods.

- According to all three groups, coaches, teachers and administrators, it is central to the coaches’ role to focus on instruction instead of teaching TAKS. For this purpose, demands on principals should also be modified, so they do not have to request from teachers to stop instruction and teach strategies to pass the test.

- More coaches should be hired to cover more schools. This would make possible to give the proper support to teachers and to continue to improve student achievement. Administrators expressed the need to keep coaches in their schools after students’ assessment has improved to maintain this improvement over time. Some administrators indicated that once scores improved, coaches are taken away, interrupting the improvement process.

- Similarly, administrative support from their respective departments should be provided to coaches to propitiate a positive climate at the schools and principal support for the program. This is especially important to maintain administrators’ expectations in line with program goals.
For more information, see EA10-163-2, available at www.dallasisd.org/inside_disd/depts/evalacct/, or contact Dr. Leonardo R. Ledezma at 972-925-6442.