At-a-Glance

The Dallas Independent School District Instructional Coaching Initiative was conceived in 2005 by the Institute for Learning (IFL-Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh). During 2014-15, the Academic Facilitators and Coordinators (AFC) program remained decentralized with variations in implementation across the five divisions. The purpose of this evaluation was to determine the level of implementation of the Academic Facilitators and Coordinators program in district Title I schools.

In 2014-15, the academic coordinators reported to the assistant superintendents. Academic facilitators were assigned to feeder patterns within their assigned division, and managed and coordinated by either the academic coordinator (AC) or the executive director (ED) in their assigned feeder pattern(s). Academic facilitators’ campus assignments were made through School Leadership according to: the AF’s assigned feeder pattern(s), school level, and according to campus data and needs. There were differences across the divisions and feeder patterns as to how the AFs were utilized.

AFs specialized in the content areas of English/Language Arts (ELA), mathematics, and science. There were not enough AFs to address all content areas in each division; therefore, they were also responsible for providing support to campuses in content areas outside their specialization.

Role of the AFs and CICs

The role of the AFs was to provide instructional and ongoing professional development support to campus instructional coaches (CIC) and campus administrators. Similarly, the role of the CICs was to support teachers to help strengthen their knowledge of the subject matter and delivery of instruction, all with the purpose of improving student academic achievement.

Data were collected through interviews, full day observations of four AFs, an online survey, and a focus group session with seven of nine temporarily re-assigned AFs to Billy Earl Dade Middle School.

Shadowing of Academic Facilitators

The AFs were observed performing a variety of tasks with the CICs, specific to the particular needs of their campus. It was evident that the AFs were very knowledgeable and resourceful and each was fully supportive of the CICs. The AFs were faced with time constraints as they adhered to scheduled campus visits. They reported their daily activities in summative reports on a daily or weekly basis. It was noticeable from the observations that there were differences between the feeder patterns as to how the AFs served their assigned campuses.

Outcomes

Outcomes from the 2014-15 evaluation showed that there were shortcomings with the implementation of the Academic Facilitators and Coordinators program. The AFs and CICs faced many challenges that affected their abilities to properly support campus needs.

A total of 57 AFs provided support to 390 CICs during the 2014 fall semester. The CICs were managed by the campus principals, who had the discretion to decide their role on the campus. Data indicated there was a need for clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the AFs and CICs districtwide.

A summary of survey results from 54 AFs showed that the majority of facilitators had one or two years of experience (70.4%), just under half served in elementary schools (48.1%), just under half specialized in the content areas of ELA and mathematics (48.1% and 44.4%, respectively), over a third of AFs assisted campuses with tasks outside of their specialty area (39.0%), and over a quarter of all AFs attended state and national conferences in their content areas during the 2014-15 school year (28.3%).

A summary of survey results from 342 CICs showed that the majority were assigned to elementary schools (68.6%), not assigned to IR campuses (74.4%), and were served by an AF in 2014-15 (96.5%). A majority of CICs reported that an AF assisted them on a regular basis (73.1%). Just under half of CICs indicated that AFs provided assistance to campuses outside their specialty areas (43.8%). About 43.4 percent specialized in ELA and 40.0 percent in mathematics. Just over half of CICs were in their position between one and three years (53.5%) and 39.1 percent had been in their position for less than one year.

Other survey results indicated that CICs were highly satisfied with the AFs knowledge in the content area(s) addressed on their campus, responded to their campus needs in a timely manner, and were resourceful and provided adequate materials. They responded to a lesser degree of satisfaction that AFs provided services that met all their campus needs.
Implementation of the AFC Program Components

Comparisons were made for AFs and CICs and their level of agreement regarding the implementation of the four instructional coaching program components. In general, the majority of AF responses were in strong agreement with most aspects of capacity building as compared to lower agreement levels among CICs. Both AFs and CICs had high levels of agreement for most aspects of communication and follow-up and coaching roles. CICs had much higher levels of agreement regarding the knowledge and use of instructional coaching tools than did AFs.

Satisfaction Levels

Comparison data on the satisfaction levels of AFs and CICs concerning the implementation of the Academic Facilitators and Coordinators program showed that AFs responded at moderate levels of satisfaction regarding the elements of the AFC program, while CICs responded at significantly higher levels than AFs. The lowest level of satisfaction expressed by AFs and CICs was in reference to instructional professional development support from their divisions.

Major Challenges, Changes, and Comments

AFs and CICs were asked to list the three major challenges encountered during the 2014-15 school year, make recommendations for change, and make comments or express concerns regarding the AFC program.

In general, across most divisions, training, collaboration, support, roles/responsibilities, and communication were found to be the top common challenges for AFs. Overall, the data showed that across all divisions, the major challenges CICs encountered included role/responsibilities and support. Other challenges included resistance from teachers and lack of time. A number of responses indicated a need for clearly defined roles and responsibilities for AFs and CICs and that there was a lack of support from AFs and administration.

Recommended changes from AFs indicated a need for quality and effective professional development training in the areas of content and coaching at various personnel levels (from teachers to administrators). Similarly, responses from all division CICs indicated that changes needed to be made regarding training.

Comments expressed by the AFs from most divisions were in reference to training and program effectiveness. Across most divisions, the top category of CIC comments were in reference to support. Many were expressions of appreciation for their AF(s) and the services provided; however, some responses showed discontentment with the lack of support from the AF, principal, and/or administration.

Professional Development

Some expressions of concern and dissatisfaction from AFs and CICs suggested that professional growth was not occurring in the content areas and that there was a lack of training on the coaching model and training for new AFs and CICs. Some feedback indicated that training provided through the Teaching and Learning department was irrelevant due to the time of the year of the presentation, and the quality of the PD sessions was not satisfactory. Other feedback indicated there was a lack of PD training provided by some divisions, which was confirmed through the low survey satisfaction response levels of AFs and CICs.

Dade Focus Group

In October 2014, Superintendent Miles made a campus visit to Dade Middle School that subsequently led to a major reorganization of the campus. The principal, two assistant principals, and 10 teachers were removed. As a result, the superintendent requested assistance from School Leadership to provide AFs from each division to temporarily help out while the school was in transition. A total of seven AFs were notified of temporary assignments to Dade and were later joined by two other AFs. AFs served as mathematics, ELA, and science CICs, a floating sub teacher, or regular classroom teacher. What was expected to be a short term assignment, lasted through the end of the school year. The AFs responded to campus needs as directed, even though there were situations that they felt were outside their scope of work as AFs. Some AFs felt isolated from their own division because of lack of communication from their school leadership team while at Dade.

Recommendations

Recommendations based on the findings from the 2014-15 evaluation related to: standardizing the AFC program and clearly communicating program guidelines; clarifying the roles and responsibilities of academic coordinators, academic facilitators, and campus instructional coaches; stabilizing staff assignments and hiring additional staff to fill gaps where possible; providing professional development to AFC staff, accounting for campus needs; and creating a culture of collaboration within the program.

For more information, see EA15-126-2, which can be found at http://www.dallasisd.org/Page/888.