Leadership and Instructional Coaching:

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE EVALUATION OF THE EARLY COLLEGE EXPANSION PROJECT

SERVE Center

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SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro · June 2018

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Coaching is a key strategy used to build educators' capacity to implement educational improvement initiatives.[1] Coaches are individuals with expertise who work intensively with participants to assist them with implementation of specific practices. Designed to support professional growth, coaching is generally individualized or done with small groups, targeted to a specific situation, and ongoing.[2]

This brief presents a summary of lessons learned about leadership and instructional coaching from the evaluation of the Early College Expansion Project (ECEP). Implemented by JFF and Educate Texas in three districts across Texas and Colorado, ECEP was a five-year, $15 million project that sought to transform comprehensive high schools into early colleges. Early colleges are schools that are designed to smooth the transition from high school to college by working to ensure that all students are ready for postsecondary education and by providing students with substantial access to college courses. The expectation is that schools will also change other parts of the schooling experience by, among other things, implementing more rigorous, student-centered instructional practices;

providing wraparound student supports; and improving the organizational structures of the school, including teacher collaboration, ongoing professional development and use of data. The evaluation examined both the impact and implementation of this work.

ECEP used leadership coaching to build the capacity of school administrators to guide early college implementation. Supported by an external provider (initially Jobs for the Future, later supplemented by coaches from Educate Texas), leadership coaches visited monthly and worked with principals or school administration teams around various aspects of program implementation. ECEP also used on-site instructional coaching to improve teachers' instructional practices. In this brief, we use data from the evaluation to provide insight into the use of coaching as part of a comprehensive reform model.

This brief begins with an overview of the literature on coaching. It then discusses implementation of ECEP leadership coaching and implementation of ECEP instructional coaching. Each section includes an overview of the different coaching roles and responsibilities and how they changed over time. The sections then go on to discuss any evidence related to the impact of coaching and conclude with lessons learned from the evaluation.

What does research say about coaching?

Coaching is a type of professional development that embeds characteristics the research says are important, including being grounded in inquiry and reflection, being collaborative, engaging individuals in concrete tasks associated with their work, and connecting to other aspects of school change.[3] Coaching can be implemented in a variety of ways, although it is often structured to incorporate five key aspects: 1) initiation or joint planning, 2) observation, 3) action/practice, 4) reflection, and 5) evaluation or feedback.[4]

Although coaching is generally studied as part of a broader intervention, there have been a number of studies that have linked coaching to different kinds of outcomes. In general, studies have found positive impacts for coaching, including higher levels of implementation of the targeted instructional practices and higher levels of curriculum implementation.[5] One study found that leadership coaching combined with feedback from teachers improved principals' leadership practices.[6] The connection to improved student outcomes is more tenuous, with most studies finding positive outcomes but others finding mixed or null outcomes.[7]

Researchers have also explored the different characteristics associated with effective coaching. Creating high-quality relationships has been shown to be critical to the success of coaching. For example, a national study of mental health coaches found the greatest predictor of success to be the quality of the relationships between the coaches and the providers.[8] Coaching success may also be dependent on factors associated with the individuals being coached, including openness to learning and frequency of participation.[9] The next sections describe how coaching was implemented in ECEP.

Three Types of ECEP Leadership Coaching

Leadership Coach: Helped the school principal and school planning team plan, implement, and manage effective instruction, postsecondary partnerships and the school's college-going culture.

Implementation and Accountability Coach: Provided support focused on the goals of the grant; more specifically, the school-level implementation of the design elements and student outcomes.

CIF Implementation Facilitator: Assisted Texas principals with implementing the Common Instructional Framework.

ECEP Leadership Coaching

Each ECEP school received services from a JFF leadership coach, who was expected to work with school principals and to assist in a variety of areas related to the implementation of the early college model. Over the course of the grant, the definition and concept of leadership coaching evolved (see Three Types of ECEP Leadership Coaching on the previous page). At the start of the project, JFF created a document that defined and described the specific services that would be provided. According to this document, the role of leadership coaches was "to help the school principal and school leadership team plan, implement, and manage effective instruction, postsecondary partnerships and the school's college-going culture." The expectation was that the JFF leadership coaches would observe instruction and review data with school leadership.

The role was modified in Colorado because the district already provided leadership coaches to the schools and there was concern about unnecessary duplication of activities and role confusion. As a result, the leadership coach was renamed the implementation and accountability coach and the role was restructured to examine the fidelity of implementation of the grant.

The grant had planned and budgeted for the JFF leadership coaches to spend two to four days a month in a district. During the on-site visits, the coach was expected to touch base face to face with each principal for approximately a two-hour period. The coaches were then expected to interact regularly through email or phone conversations during the rest of the month. The total number of interactions was targeted to be at least 17 coaching consultations annually for each principal, an amount that was reduced in the final year of project implementation by approximately half, to a target level of eight coaching consultations annually.

After the first year of the project, the program staff recognized that school leaders needed more support than

originally planned. As one of the project leaders noted, "of any missing link in this theory of change that we underestimated, [it] was probably the building leadership level." As a result, the program staffers began exploring alternative ways of supporting their principals. In both states, the districts provided professional development specific for school leadership. In Colorado, the district brought the principals together for regular meetings to discuss project implementation. In Texas, Educate Texas created an additional position to focus specifically on implementation of the Common Instructional Framework (CIF), a core set of student-centered instructional practices intended to lead to deeper student learning.[10] This role, the CIF implementation facilitator, was expected to spend an additional five hours a month of face-to-face time with principals. In addition, the Educate Texas project director provided regular leadership coaching to early college directors (school-level individuals responsible for implementation of the early college efforts).

What did ECEP leadership coaching look like?

The JFF leadership coaches visited the schools regularly (usually monthly) for two-hour blocks of time. They generally met with the principal, but may also have worked with assistant principals or other members of the school leadership as appropriate or as desired by the school.

The coaches said their job was to build capacity, and one coach explained that "capacity" encompassed the capacity to plan, teach, assess, learn, and work in teams. During the sessions, the coaches usually focused on different types of data and asked questions that would help the principals develop solutions aligned with the needs identified in the data. The sessions frequently included walk-throughs during which the coach and school leaders visited classrooms or observed other activities designed to support students.

The content of the sessions changed as the project matured. In the beginning, there was more of an emphasis on establishing relationships and identifying how the school was doing. For example, in the first year, the Texas leadership coaches began with a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis with the individual principals. This was intended to have the principal examine the entire school, capitalize

Structure of a Typical Leadership Coaching Visit

- The leadership coach meets with a principal and discusses the district's postsecondary readiness goals.

- The coach and principal then conduct a series of classroom walk-throughs centered on looking for evidence of college readiness.

- After their visits, the leadership coaches summarize their observations in reports that they provide to the principal.

on its strengths and identify possibly problematic areas. In Colorado, the JFF coach shared a rubric developed to guide the project's work and conducted walk-throughs of the school.

During the middle years of the project, the coaches continued to lead strategic discussions with school leaders focused on the grant's student outcomes, each principal's leadership capacity, or implementation of the early college design elements. While the leadership coach set the agendas, some principals "drove" the meeting agendas and led portions of the meetings. The principal's recommendations also impacted the agendas of the meetings that followed. As the sessions concluded, the coaches usually left the principals (and their leadership teams) with homework assignments. When possible, they debriefed with district leaders and shared with them the topics covered during the visit, while still honoring the confidentiality of the discussions.

In the third year, a JFF coach in Texas described her work as focused on leadership skills and practices (the coach and principals were reading a series of books with leadership messages), with an emphasis on data-based decision-making:

> The one-on-one work with the principals is all around data-driven decision-making. The district here has a lot of things in place, a lot of initiatives, and many of these initiatives have the potential for really nurturing data-driven decision-making beyond formative and summative

assessments. So the work we've done this year is around what is the ultimate goal in terms of student achievement, and they're looking at EOCs [end-of-course exams] and TSI [a college readiness exam] pass rates.

Similarly, the JFF coach assigned to Colorado emphasized the review of data related to specific grant goals:

> I have them set targets, and I make sure that those targets are put in writing.... My targets are attendance, graduation rate, dropout rate, number of concurrent enrollment courses they offer, number of students who enroll, the number who have a C or better, whether they have AP [classes], AP with a passing [score] of a three or four, number of students that you know will have 12 or more college credits by the year 2016.... Where are you in terms of meeting these targets?

In the third project year, Texas also introduced the CIF implementation facilitator to assist in implementation of instructional practices. This individual conducted walk-throughs of classrooms with administrators and modeled the evaluation process of the CIF instructional strategies—addressing, for example, what questions to ask, what student behaviors to look for, and how to offer feedback to teachers.

As the project continued, the focus of the coaches' work shifted more toward sustaining the early college work in the absence of grant funding. Starting in the third year of implementation, the Colorado leadership coach developed a template that she used with the principals

to help them develop a plan for sustaining the early college work in the district. In the final year of the project, the Colorado principals developed that plan. In Texas, the coaches held conversations around sustainability, but no formal plan was expected.

What were the impacts of leadership coaching?

Although the evaluation did not collect evidence on the relationship between leadership coaching and student performance, throughout the project, we did collect participants' feedback on the leadership coaching through surveys and interviews. Over 85% of the participants said that they agreed or strongly agreed that the leadership coaches provided effective professional development around all the targeted areas: planning and implementing instruction, assessing instruction, using data to improve instruction, planning postsecondary partnerships, and implementing a college-going culture.

Participants commented on two general benefits that were seen from leadership coaching. First, school leaders indicated that it was helpful to have someone who helped them focus on the aspects of the project.

Second, the coaching was seen as providing a safe environment for leaders to reflect on their practice. For example, one participant said this about the experience with the leadership coach:

> It's time out to self-reflect and regroup, rethink, and look at data. It's time to plan with a colleague, discuss concerns, plan new tactics and talk afterward to celebrate successes. It's sharing the drama and the consequences of change, good change. It's learning about other campuses across the

> "The influence that [coaching] has had is that it keeps the prize forefront. It keeps us focusing on that because sometimes in our busy days things go to the bottom of the pile. So it keeps us focused on the early college strategies because another initiative can rise to the top... So it's just a good reminder that that's what we need to be doing."
> – A Principal

nation and what works, what will work here, and celebrating what's working here that might work there without consequences, in a safe environment.

What lessons did the project participants learn about leadership coaching?

After four full years of implementing and participating in leadership coaching, ECEP program participants reported several lessons learned.

1. Given the importance of school leadership to quality implementation, school leaders need targeted support.

One of the key (and early) lessons learned from the ECEP project was the importance of school leadership. After the first year, a project staff member stated that the number one lesson learned was the "importance of leadership, the need to set the right tone. You [need to] have the proper leaders with the skill set that is needed, somebody that can speak and present and sell, can convince, can motivate, can encourage ... that knows instruction. Leadership matters ... [at] all levels." In addition to setting the vision for the school, principals were gatekeepers, and when they didn't understand the vision and goals of the grant, it was difficult for other project staffers to gain entry and provide services. Project staffers acknowledged that they had initially underestimated the importance of leadership and, almost immediately, there was a sense that the partners and districts needed to invest more in principal leadership development.

Despite the importance of ensuring an emphasis on leadership, there was not necessarily agreement on the ideal amount of time to spend on coaching. Leadership coaches indicated that it was challenging for the principals to carve out time to work with them, and they said that they did not necessarily believe that it would have been necessary or appropriate to meet with the principals for more than two hours a month. On the other hand, all three districts increased the amount of support that they provided to districts through professional development and, in the Texas districts, through additional coaching. Other research has suggested that leadership coaching once a month might be enough to

bring about change but that more research is needed to determine the ideal frequency and intensity.[11]

2. It is important to be clear about the goal of the project and the role of each individual within the project.

Individuals commented that it was important to understand all of the pieces of the project and how they all fit together. This was particularly important to the coaches, who were working on the ground with the staff. As one leadership coach commented, "We could've been more productive in that early start if people really knew that we were coming and why." This lesson was also important to the instructional coaches (see next section).

3. It is better to work with teams.

Just as staffers noted the importance of working with school leadership, they also noted that it was important to work with broader school leadership teams, partly to expand buy-in for the project and partly to address issues of turnover. For example, to expand support for the work, a project staff member in Texas began providing support to academic department heads (e.g., the math or English department head) because they had influence and authority and were critical partners in implementing and sustaining the initiative.

Over the life of the project, there was regular turnover among principals (and among other district and school employees). Project staff believed that providing support to leadership teams could help minimize the impact of the departure of a principal or other key administrator.

Additionally, leadership could take a variety of forms beyond the high school principal. For example, in Texas, to meet the requirement that state-designated early college high schools have a leadership team, the project schools have early college directors in addition to principals. These individuals were not part of the original grant design, but nonetheless played important roles in program implementation. As a result, Educate Texas staff took on the responsibility of providing coaching to the early college directors.

Leadership Coaching Summary

The purpose of leadership coaching was to guide the principals to develop their own personal leadership skills, and to help support the implementation of CIF strategies and college course-taking in their schools. As the project matured, the professional development focus evolved toward greater utilization of state accountability data, data trends, and the use of data to inform administrative actions. The leadership coaches used results from state testing to develop the coaching session agenda around the use of data to inform the work of the leadership teams, which was also aligned with the work of district planning meetings.

Essentially, the leadership coaches worked on building the principals' capacity for sustaining the grant activities. There was also growing attention paid to the leadership teams and their role in sustainability. When the leadership teams met with the coaches, they were not only learning more about CIF, but also being trained to become instructional leaders—just like the principals were. The coaches had the same conversations around data and course-taking with the school leadership teams as they had with the principals. In some instances, these other school leaders were also coached by the instructional coaches to better understand the coaching cycle and what to look for during walk-throughs.

A key lesson learned was the importance of leadership at all levels. Leadership at the school level reinforced the importance of ECEP with school staff members. However, it took more than one staff person per district to provide meaningful support for principals and their leadership teams.

ECEP Instructional Coaching

As schools sought to implement the early college model, they were expected to integrate the six CIF instructional strategies. Instructional coaching was the primary vehicle through which the program expected to influence instruction. JFF and Educate Texas provided instructional coaching services to teachers at participating schools within the three partner districts. According to the project design, the instructional coaches were responsible for providing support around the following topics: the CIF, student support strategies, incorporating college readiness skills into instruction, and aligning course content to college expectations.

Instructional coaching was structured differently in the two states. In Colorado, the district's office of college and career readiness hired three local instructional coaches to focus on ECEP implementation. These coaches were supported by a JFF instructional coach who also worked directly with some schools. In addition to the district coaches, each school had internal coaches who were already in place and funded by different sources. One of the primary goals of the JFF and district coaches was to work with the internal coaches to align their work with the CIF and other goals of the grant. The three district coaches worked with all 14 participating schools in the district. The district also has a strong teacher's union,

whose contract defined the length of observations that could be done in a classroom, influencing the way in which the coaches could interact with the teachers.

In Texas, Educate Texas provided external instructional coaches who worked directly with schools and with internal coaches hired by the district. Across the two districts, there were a total of 10 external coaches who started in Year 1, with the number purposefully reduced in Years 3 and 4 as part of a planned transfer of coaching responsibility to the districts. Each district also had a number of internal coaches who were supported by the district and also worked with the schools. Starting in Year 3, Educate Texas supplemented the instructional coaching with a specialist who focused on providing professional development, as well as a CIF implementation facilitator who worked with principals around instruction (described under the leadership coaching section). The purpose of the professional development specialist position was to reduce the burden of the instructional coaches in trying to provide schoolwide professional development.

To meet the goal of bringing about instructional changes in partner schools, each ECEP school was targeted to

receive 17 to 22 days of instructional coaching annually for the first three years, with that number dropping to an average of 8 to 11 days in the final year. The actual number of coaching days provided varied widely and generally far exceeded the planned number of days. For example, in the third year, the average number of days of coaching was 52 and the total provided ranged from a low of 21 days in one school to a high of 149 days in another. This wide range resulted in the project having a much more substantive touch in some schools than it did in others.

What did ECEP instructional coaching look like?

Instructional coaches focused on implementation of the CIF, although the focus and scope of their work was determined by the principal based on the needs of the school. In most schools, instructional coaches had a set group of teachers with whom they worked, although that group varied depending on the needs of the school. These groups might be organized by subject (all English teachers in a school, for example), by grade (all of the ninth-grade teachers), or by function (all adjunct faculty members who taught college courses). Similarly, the content of the coaching varied. For example, some schools focused on implementation of one or two of the CIF strategies at a time whereas others focused on overviews of all six strategies together.

An Example of the Coaching Cycle

The coach met with the teacher in advance of the observation and identified areas that the coach was expected to observe—how students were interacting with each other as they were working in collaborative groups.

The coach observed the teacher, collecting data about how students talked to one another during the lesson. The coach and teacher then met during the teacher's planning period to discuss the data the coach had collected. The coach also shared feedback and resources with the teacher.

Coaches worked with teachers in a variety of ways including working one on one, providing professional development to the school or to groups of teachers, or facilitating instructional rounds or peer observations. Instructional coaches typically employed coaching cycles in which teachers would take part in CIF-focused professional development, followed by a preconference meeting, observation, and a debriefing with instructional coaches to provide feedback around how CIF strategies were being implemented in the classroom. These sessions were intended to be non-evaluative; the goal was to provide useful feedback to the teachers.

One teacher described the work of a coach in this way: "She models early college instructional practices and encourages us to try them. She prints out the steps to implement these strategies in our classrooms, then she follows up with us to see how the strategy went in our classes." Another teacher noted, "The coach that I had worked with me, observed my classes, and helped me come up with strategies to use. One time, she even stayed the whole period and, along with me, collaborated with a group project with my class."

Early in the project, instructional coaches worked to promote the ECEP goals, build relationships with teachers and administrators, and understand the needs of the individual schools and districts. Relationship-building between coaches and teachers in the first year of the project was seen as vital to meeting the goals of the project. As the project matured, the role of the coaches and the frequency of their visits to the schools changed. Toward the end of the project, to build capacity to carry on the work of implementing CIF strategies in the classroom, instructional coaches began working more closely with school leaders, particularly teacher departmental leaders, to lead instructional monitoring efforts that were consistent with the CIF. Helping school leaders build the capacity to provide internal instructional monitoring that was consistent with the CIF was considered important to sustaining the work if districts were unable or unwilling to continue coaching without grant funding.

As the project matured, the ECEP instructional coaches also began working more with school leaders and other instructional coaches in the district to promote sustainability. While these efforts focused on sustaining the project, such efforts took away from time that

coaches had to work with teachers individually or in small groups. Our annual surveys and interviews with teachers suggested that one of the greatest areas of weakness around the instructional coaching was that coaches were not always available to work with teachers.

Although instructional coaches continued to provide or contribute to group professional development, shifting priorities and planned coaching reductions in the final year of the project resulted in coaches having less time to provide more individualized feedback to teachers. Some teachers reported that more structured group activities were less effective if coaches were not available to observe and provide feedback on implementation of the newly learned CIF strategies.

Although we were not able to determine the most effective level of coaching, participants did express a need to have an appropriate ratio of coaches to schools (with many recommending one coach per school) to establish and maintain relationships necessary to reinforce effective implementation of CIF strategies.

An Example of Group Professional Development

An instructional coach conducted professional development on questioning for a group of high school English teachers. The focus of the professional development was addressing a common problem for teachers: getting students to write more detailed responses to essay prompts.

The trainer used data collected from her observations in teachers' classrooms to tailor the training to the teachers' specific needs.

What were the impacts of instructional coaching?

As was the case with the leadership coaching, the evaluation was unable to make connections between instructional coaching and student outcomes. However, we did collect data on the relationship between coaching and implementation of instructional strategies and on participants' perceptions of the impact of the coaching.

A recurring theme coming out of our visits to schools and our discussions with project partners was that teachers who worked with instructional coaches, particularly one on one, were more likely to implement CIF strategies in the classroom and to buy into the project in general. This was confirmed by surveys we administered to all staff members in participating ECEP middle and high schools. The survey asked teachers to indicate the frequency of their implementations of specific instructional practices that served as indicators of the six CIF instructional strategies. In addition, we looked at teachers' use of

quality assessment practices, their frequency of collaboration, and their use of data. The survey also asked the staff members to identify whether they had received ECEP instructional coaching. Figure 1 below reports the frequency of implementation of different instructional practices by a participant's level of exposure to an ECEP instructional coach. Participants either indicated whether they had not worked with an ECEP instruction coach (nonparticipants), whether they were unsure if they had worked with an ECEP coach (unsure participants—these individuals probably worked with a different type of coach in the school), or whether they had worked with an ECEP instructional coach (instructional coach participants). As the figure shows, teachers who had worked with ECEP instructional coaches reported higher levels of implementation of the targeted practices. In addition, teachers were more likely to collaborate with other staff members and use data.

Figure 1: High School Teachers' Use of CIF Strategies by Participation in ECEP Instructional Coaching
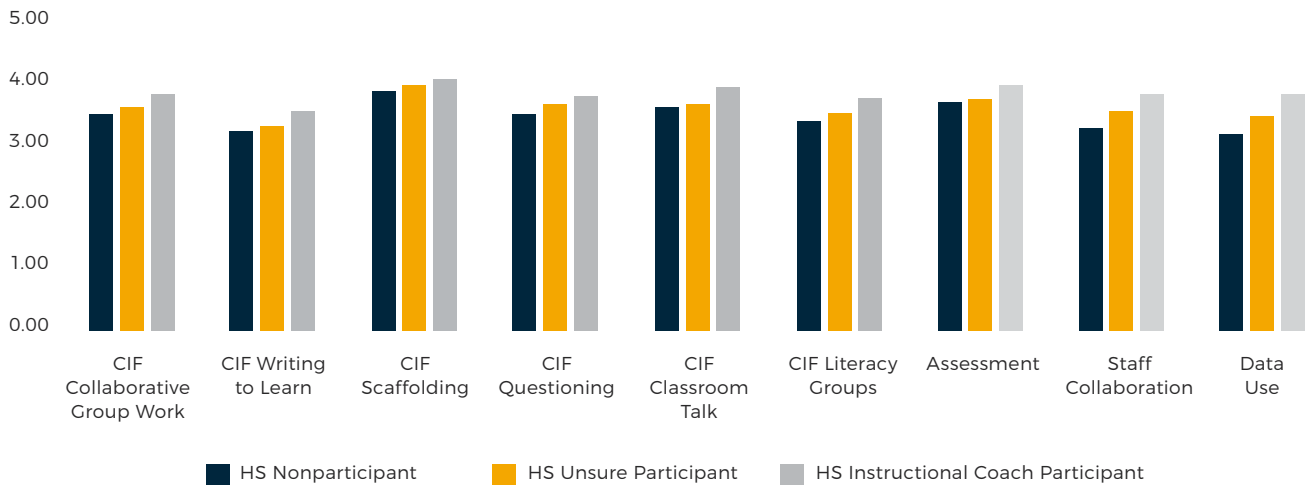
Figure 2: Middle School Teachers' Use of CIF Strategies by Participation in ECEP Instructional Coaching
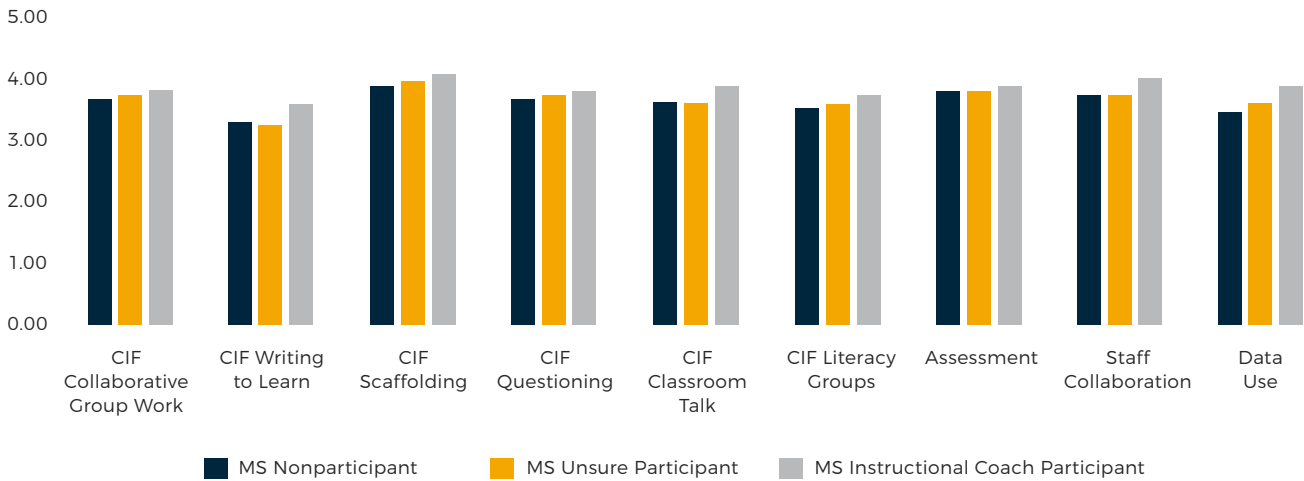

Figure 2 shows similar patterns for the middle school teachers. It is important to note, however, that these survey data do not confirm that the coaching caused the increase in teachers' use of CIF strategies. It is possible, for example, that teachers who were using these instructional strategies already were also more likely to work with the coaches.

Qualitative data from our interviews and surveys, however, do support the theory that the coaching activities were changing instructional practices, at least partly by making teachers more intentional and purposeful in their teaching. For example, leaders in one school commented that teachers like having lower-pressure feedback from outside the administration, saying, "Not only do the teachers trust them, but the teachers have shown growth as a result of the coaches' modeling and the relationships that the coaches have with the teachers."

One teacher agreed, offering the following observation:

> Working with an external coach these past two years, I think it has made my teaching better. I mean it has actually helped me focus on what exactly I am trying to get the kids to do, especially in middle school

where we don't have the time that I wish we had. So, we need to make sure that we are planning our lessons intentionally for the time that we have in middle school because we don't have enough time. I am better able to implement my lessons to make sure that I am going to get out of the lesson what I need to get out of it.

Another teacher offered this description of how the coaching had resulted in a change in student understanding:

> The bite-size feedback is essential for me to make improvements. I'll generally just take those notes while we have those conversations and then try to implement them right into my next lesson or the next class period as much as possible. I mean,

"…the teachers have shown growth as a result of the coaches' modeling and the relationships that the coaches have with the teachers."
- A Principal

it's been a huge impact on improving student understanding, or students actually justifying their work and explaining it. Not just me talking and them listening forever, which can tend to happen.

What lessons were learned about instructional coaching?

After four full years of implementing and participating in instructional coaching, ECEP program participants reported several lessons learned.

1. Aligning coaching work with other work of the district is key.

The primary role of the instructional coaches was to work with teachers to implement CIF strategies in the classroom. However, because all three partner districts were implementing a variety of state, district, and school-level initiatives, one of the concerns was that instructional coaching would be perceived as an additional requirement for teachers that would add more burden to their workloads. In addition, all three districts already had school- and district-based instructional coaches who were implementing other state, local, and grant-based initiatives making it necessary to coordinate efforts among all providers of instructional support. This was particularly true for one of the districts, which was a large, urban district with a number of initiatives across multiple schools.

Across districts, instructional coaches worked with school leaders to align and embed coaching practices, CIF strategies, practices, and protocols within existing local and state initiatives. For example, one of the districts was implementing a new teacher evaluation system at the same time it was implementing ECEP. Some teachers and school leaders were concerned that CIF practices would conflict with the new evaluation system, and that teachers might receive lower evaluations for implementing CIF strategies. Instructional coaches developed crosswalks to demonstrate how the CIF strategies complemented the new evaluation system. In this same district, during our annual site visits, two of the principals that we met with shared crosswalks that had been developed with ECEP partners to show how ECEP's instructional practices

aligned with goals of other initiatives currently underway within the district. This district also made the conscious decision to avoid the CIF-specific terminology, using instead language that was aligned to their other work. Similarly, in the other two partner districts instructional coaches worked with school leaders and district coaches to demonstrate how CIF instructional practices complemented state literacy and assessment initiatives focused on college and career readiness.

This alignment work was seen as an important tool for promoting buy-in and program sustainability through institutionalization of the CIF strategies within school and district practices, particularly in districts with significant leadership and teacher turnover. However, one lesson learned from the evaluation is that some initiatives do create challenges in aligning efforts. For example, in one district, some coaches who were working across initiatives were assigned both coaching and evaluation responsibilities as part of separate initiatives. This created some problems for coaches who found it difficult to separate their roles as non-evaluative coaches from their roles as teacher evaluators across the two projects.

2. It is important to be clear about the goal of the project and the role of each individual within the project.

This is the same as lesson two in the leadership coaching section. In our interviews, particularly with teachers and instructional coaches, we found that the way in which the role of the instructional coach was communicated to staff initially impacted buy-in toward coaching and the ECEP program in general. For example, in the first year of the project some teachers in one district believed that they were selected for coaching as punishment for being poor teachers. This initial lack of clarity about the grant and the expectations for the teachers seemed to hamper relationship-building between coaches and teachers in the first year of the project. In this particular situation, the staff members changed their approach for the second year and were more transparent about the role coaching was expected to play in the school, portraying the selection to receive coaching as an honor.

3. Coaching is likely more effective when it is reinforced by school leadership.

No initiative can be successful without the continued support of school leaders. As one instructional coach put it in reference to ECEP:

When you have a principal who's bought in and is looking for the Common Instructional Framework, for example, then it trickles down into the whole school. When you have a leader that's not bought in, then it's not important to anybody at the school. When we asked the instructional coaches what distinguished higher implementing schools from lower implementing schools, the answer was most often related to support from school leaders. The work of the instructional coaches was enhanced when coaches coordinated with, and received the support of, school leadership teams. Coordination allowed external coaches to work more efficiently and effectively with internal coaches, school administrators, and teachers. Also, as suggested in the above quote, school leaders who focused on evidence of CIF implementation as a priority indicated to school personnel the importance of the project and the priority of making instructional changes in the classroom.

4. It is important to be strategic about rolling out coaching.

ECEP was an initiative intended to impact the entire school. One of the lessons learned early was that implementation of the instructional coaching would be improved by being thoughtful and strategic about who receives the coaching and how the strategies are shared with teachers, particularly during the beginning of the project. In the first year, there was some confusion about the role of the coaches and why teachers were selected; this was remedied in the remaining project years where the project became more purposeful and clear about which teachers should receive coaching and why.

One suggestion that emerged from the evaluation was to identify and work initially with a cohort of teachers who are more receptive to the project and are willing to participate—a "coalition of the willing." If these early adopters experienced success, the belief was that the coaching would be better received by other faculty members.

Instructional Coaching Summary

Overall, the feedback that we received from teachers who worked with instructional coaches was positive. Many teachers that we interviewed said that they valued the work of the instructional coaches and believed that support from the coaches was important for bringing about instructional changes in the classroom. However, findings from our evaluation also indicated that the adoption of CIF strategies in the classroom and willingness among teachers to work with instructional coaches was uneven within and across schools. We found that a number of factors influenced the success of the instructional coaching in partner schools, including the level of leadership support, clarity and communication around the roles of the coaching, alignment with other initiatives, and the rollout of the coaching.

CONCLUSION

In our study, we were not able to determine the effectiveness of coaching activities or to definitively identify practices associated with more effective coaching. The evaluation was designed to determine the impact of the overall initiative and not specific components within that initiative. Nevertheless, we believe that findings from our descriptive survey and interview data do provide suggestions that groups using instructional and/or leadership coaching may want to consider. Specifically, our study suggests the following ways for practitioners to potentially maximize the impact of coaching:

- **Be strategic about identifying the individuals involved in coaching—** consider both their readiness for coaching and the ultimate goal of the program.

- **Ensure that coaching efforts are aligned** with other school or district improvement activities.

- **Communicate clearly about the roles and responsibilities of coaches** and their relationship to building leadership and instructional capacity.

- **Work with administrators** to support the coaches' efforts.

Coaching can play a critical role in building leadership and instructional capacity to implement school improvement efforts. It is likely even more important when the efforts are as complex as the early college work. The lessons learned from this study can help practitioners as they consider the role of coaching and how to implement it to get the results they need.

ENDNOTES

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