

EVALUATION BRIEF

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APS' INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING PROGRAM IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS: YEAR ONE PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVENESS

BACKGROUND

Instructional coaching (IC) is a nationally recognized job-embedded teacher professional development model and a key component of the Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) professional development program. Instructional coaches help teachers examine and improve their instruction through one-on-one “cognitive coaching,” classroom demonstration, facilitation of teacher collaboration, coordination of professional development and the securing of educational materials and resources.

Title IX – Part E of the 2001 No Child Left Behind reauthorization requires APS to provide professional development services to private school teachers that are equitable to those provided to public school teachers.¹ In 2005-06, APS made available about \$316,000 in Title I and Title II-A funds for the professional development of private school teachers.² APS' Title I office hired 3 instructional coaches to serve 21 schools with a total IC program budget of \$187,000.

Each instructional coach served about 7 schools. The amount of time allocated to each school was based on student enrollment. ICs contacted school principals to establish schedules and to collaboratively determine the focuses of their time. Each IC also participated in APS' professional development program which consisted of 2 full-day sessions per month.

EVALUATION PURPOSE & METHODS

In April 2006 APS held a consultation meeting with private school administrators to discuss the use of 2006-07 professional development funds. Administrators requested a survey of their peers to find out whether the instructional coaching program had yielded anticipated benefits. RDA conducted two surveys, one of administrators and one of teachers.³ Using an open-ended format, the administrators' survey asked for comments about what did and did not work well about the IC program, and what would improve IC program effectiveness and efficiency. For teachers, RDA adapted a questionnaire that had been used to survey public school teachers about the IC program in 2004-05. All 21 items were close-ended with Likert-scale response options; teachers also had an opportunity to write comments.

RDA distributed both surveys via email to private school principals in May 2006. RDA asked principals to print paper copies of the teacher survey and distribute them to staff members. To preserve confidentiality, RDA instructed teachers to return their completed surveys in sealed envelopes and deliver them either to their school's administrative office or directly to RDA.

¹ ESEA No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Title IX – Part E, Subpart 1, Section 9501 states that if an LEA uses federal funds for professional development activities in public schools, the LEA must provide equitable educational services and benefits to private school students and teachers.

² APS released additional professional development funds from 2004-05, totaling about \$140,000, in 2005-06.

³ Copies of each survey are available from Debra Heath at RDA (heath_d@aps.edu or 848-8710).

RESULTS

Respondents

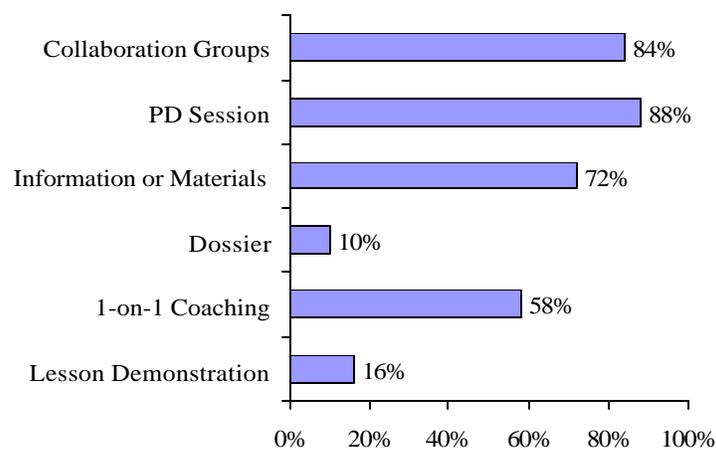
Administrators from just over half (13) of all private schools with an instructional coach, plus one archdiocesan representative, completed the administrators' survey. A total of 79 K – 8th grade teachers from 7 schools completed the teachers' survey.⁴ Teacher returns represent about one-third of participating private schools.

Instructional Coaching Coverage

Almost all teacher respondents (96%) reported at least one contact with their school's instructional coach during the school year. For example, 84% reported participating in a collaboration group facilitated by the IC, 88% reported participating in at least one professional development session coordinated by the IC, and 72% said the IC helped them obtain instructional information or materials. Ten percent reported that the IC helped them prepare their dossier for Three -Tiered Licensure.

Almost two-thirds (60%) of teacher respondents said they experienced direct instructional coaching (one-on-one coaching or lesson demonstration) at least one time during the school year. However, only a minority of teachers (37%) experienced 1-on-1 coaching more than one time during the year and only 10% experienced a lesson demonstration more than once. Many administrators explained that ICs were not present often enough to cultivate or meet demand for their services. As one teacher wrote, "Our instructional coach was helpful to me. She gave me ideas for lessons and she demonstrated some good lessons. However I feel I could have used more support and advice."

Figure 1: Percentages of Teachers Reporting IC Contact, by Type of Contact.



⁴ Eight teacher surveys were excluded from analyses because either an administrative role was reported and/or grade level was blank.

Awareness & Understanding of Instructional Coaching

Most but not all teacher respondents said they were knowledgeable about instructional coaching. Three-quarters (74%) said the principal clearly communicated the IC's role and the same percentage said they know how to get IC services when they need them. Over two-thirds of teacher respondents (68%) said they fully understand the IC's role.

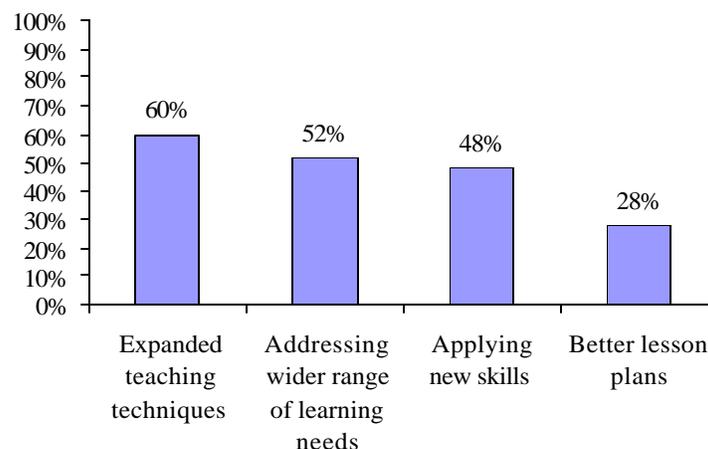
Both private school administrators and teachers reported that ICs were underutilized at their schools. Some administrators worried that ICs were not present in the schools consistently enough to establish relationships with teachers and for teachers to understand the opportunities that ICs offer. If true, this may explain the relatively low proportion of teachers reporting they want an IC available to them (52%)⁵ and the 34% not knowing whether they want an IC or not.

Further, some private school administrators did not feel well prepared to use the instructional coach effectively. Many commented that principals and ICs need to create plans before the start of the school year, and that they need to do a better job of aligning the IC's work with school improvement plans. One administrator commented that it would have been helpful to meet with her IC regularly throughout the year. She also said her school did not take advantage of the opportunity to draw on the skills of all three ICs, not just the one assigned to her school.

Perceived Effectiveness of Instructional Coaching

Almost two-thirds (64%) of teacher respondents said their school had a highly effective IC. Almost as many reported that instructional coaching improved their instructional practice in at least one way. These results are particularly impressive given that few teachers had more than one direct coaching experience. The most commonly cited improvement was an expansion in the number of instructional techniques teachers use, reported by 60% of teacher respondents. About half said they are doing a better job addressing a wide range of learning needs and applying new skills in the classroom. Over one-quarter said instructional coaching improved their lesson plans. For example, one teacher wrote: "Most often she knows what ideas to give us to strengthen our lesson plans. When and *if* she does not, she knows where to direct us for more information."

Figure 2. Percentages of Teachers Reporting Improvements in their Instructional Practice Due to Instructional Coaching, by Type of Improvement.



⁵ Results from a spring 2005 survey showed 68% of APS public school teachers wanted an IC available to them. Among new teachers the proportion was even higher (82%).

Administrator Perspectives

Administrators described a wide array of IC activities and benefits to their schools. They said coaches helped teachers with strategies for special needs students, differentiating instruction, using data, and preparing their dossiers. Many administrators expressed appreciation for the coaches' initiative, flexibility and skills. They said coaches used a variety of methods in order to meet school needs. These included meeting with staff during duty and in-service days, meeting with teachers after school, observing classroom instruction and providing feedback on instructional strategies, providing materials and resources and conducting small group professional development.

For 2006-07, administrators would like more advance planning and a more consistent coaching schedule that better accommodates schools' needs. Many also want more information about what each IC has to offer and regular communications how she uses her time. Almost all administrators expressed a desire for the IC to work at their schools for larger blocks of time.

A few administrators and teachers said they would prefer to use IC funds in another manner. However the uses they recommend suggest that they do not understand the legislative expectations that APS is required to meet.

CONCLUSIONS

Where understood and used, instructional coaches helped private school teachers improve their instructional practice. APS' private school IC program has an opportunity to learn from its first year of operations and make improvements for the future. A number of strategies to improve utilization are recommended below.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations emerged from APS' April 2006 consultation meeting and from administrator and teacher surveys:

- Add a fourth coach to allow more time and relationship development at each site.
- Schedule IC's for multi-day blocks of time at each school.
- Establish and distribute quarterly IC work schedules with significant advance notice.
- Use schools' improvement plans to drive IC activities. Hold meetings between the IC and principal at each school in order to develop work plans before the school year starts.
- Hold regular meetings between the IC and principal.
- Disseminate IC time use information to school principals.
- Establish an IC coordinator at each school to prepare specific tasks and facilitate logistics.
- Provide descriptions of each IC's areas of expertise as well as a list of workshops or trainings that each IC can present.
- Allow schools to keep the same IC each year so relationships can deepen and expand.