EVALUATION BRIEF

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INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING IN APS: 2001- 2005
OUTCOMES & SUCCESS FACTORS

BACKGROUND

Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) launched its instructional coaching program in the 2001-2002 school year, as part of the nation-wide movement toward on-site, job-embedded teacher professional development. By 2004-05 APS had 111 instructional coaches (IC) in 101 schools. APS' professional development department, Teaching and Learning Systems (TLS) trained instructional coaches in Cognitive Coaching, one of several coaching models designed to help teachers adopt, integrate and apply new knowledge and skills in the classroom. TLS and district leaders asked RDA to evaluate the IC program both to assess its effects on teaching as well as to identify factors essential to success.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

APS' instructional coaching program was deemed highly effective by principals, coaches and teachers alike. IC fidelity to the essential coaching functions resulted in the best outcomes. Where fidelity was high, 81% of teachers reported substantial improvements in teaching practices. The most positive teaching outcomes resulted when teachers received both one-on-one and group coaching. The IC program also demonstrated cost-effectiveness by reaching an average of 81% of teachers with predominantly one IC per school.

Teachers and principals preferred instructional coaching to previous professional development approaches. Instructional coaches mentored new teachers, coached experienced teachers, facilitated teacher collaboration, and provided school-wide professional development. A majority of coached teachers reported that instructional coaching improved their instructional practice in at least one way. Coached teachers across the entire career span reported that they gained new instructional skills and applied those skills in their classrooms. Principals, teachers and ICs reported an increased alignment to instructional standards as a result of coaching.

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>
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Keys to success include: collaborative school climate; effective school leadership; IC fidelity to the essential coaching functions; and teacher participation in both one-on-one and group-level coaching.

A barrier to IC program success and sustainability was differing expectations among district and school leaders. Conflicting messages may have contributed to widespread IC performance of non-coaching functions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluation findings suggest the following actions to obtain optimal value and impact from instructional coaching:

- Maximize IC time on essential functions, e.g., mentoring, coaching, group facilitation.
- Optimize opportunities for teachers to receive both one-on-one and group coaching.
- Assign coaches based on schools' readiness to implement with fidelity.
- Include principal coaching in the IC program model.
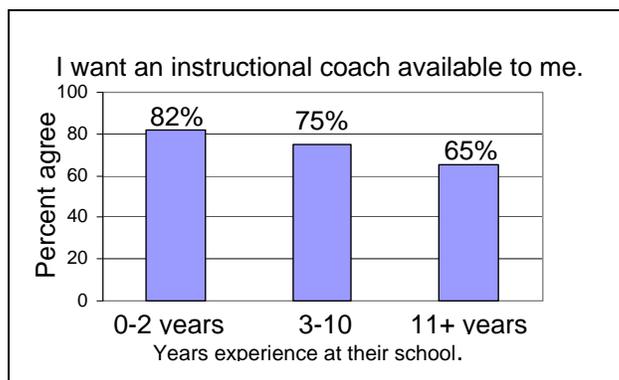- Continue coaching for teachers at all tenure levels.

SURVEY RESULTS

1) A majority of teachers (81%) received instructional coaching, according to teacher reports of their own experiences with one-on-one and/or group coaching.[1] This is remarkable coverage considering that most schools had only one instructional coach. Further, coaching reached a majority of teachers at every level of experience: new teachers (86%), mid-career teachers (80%) and veteran teachers (80%).

2) Majorities of principals, coaches and teachers perceived the instructional coaching program as very effective.[2] Further, majorities of teachers from all experience levels said they want an instructional coach available to them. One teacher's written comment illustrates the enthusiasm behind these survey results:

In the 2 schools I have been at, I saw improvements not only in professional knowledge and teacher use of methods, but also in school climate. It's the best professional development I've seen in my 26 years with this district!

I want an instructional coach available to me.

0-2 years: 82%
3-10: 75%
11+ years: 65%

Years experience at their school.

3) The majority of coached teachers reported that instructional coaching improved their instructional practice in at least one way.

As a result of instructional coaching I am doing a better job applying new skills in the classroom.

0-2: 71%
3-10: 67%
11+: 58%

Years experience at their school

Confirmed by principals and ICs, teachers reported the following improvements:

- 68% expanded the number of teaching techniques they used
- 82% did a better job of applying new skills in the classroom
- 72% created better lesson plans
- 76% did a better job of addressing a wide range of learning needs.

[1] Group coaching refers to IC facilitation of collaboration groups.
[2] 73% of teacher respondents who had received coaching judged the program effective; 89% of ICs and 100% of principals.

Evaluation results suggest that instructional coaching improved not only classroom practice, but also teacher retention, school climate, school leadership, standards implementation and the alignment of instructional materials with school plans. Written comments from two teachers illustrate the range and depth of these perceived impacts:

> *"Having an IC, especially in my first year, was the only way I survived.*
> *Had it not been for our IC, I may not have returned to teaching."*

> *"Even though I'm an experienced teacher, the IC has helped me see the vision of our*
> *school, how our school functions and how to use new effective ideas in my classroom."*

4) Instructional coaching showed the strongest effects when teachers received both one-on-one and group coaching. The more teachers interacted with their IC the more their teaching practice reportedly improved. About one-quarter (24%) of teachers who received group coaching alone agreed that their teaching practice improved substantially, compared to about half (55%) of teachers who received only one-on-one coaching, and nearly three-fourths (73%) of teachers who received one-on-one and group coaching combined.

Percent teachers reporting improved practice by type of coaching received
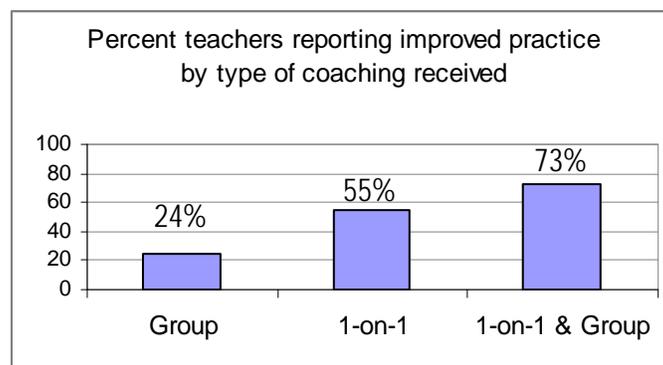
5) The best instructional outcomes occurred when ICs performed the essential coaching functions and minimized non-coaching activity. Essential functions include: mentoring teachers, coaching new and experienced teachers, facilitating collaboration groups, planning and implementing staff development, supporting standards implementation and assessment, helping teachers and principals access resources, and building a collaborative culture of learning. [3]

Survey results indicate widespread non-coaching activity among ICs, in addition to fulfilling essential coaching functions. About two-thirds of ICs reported performing non-coaching activities frequently or sometimes, e.g., cafeteria duty, teacher evaluations, teaching a regularly scheduled class, test coordination, and other administrative functions. In schools where teachers reported low levels of fidelity to the essential coaching functions, only 19% of

As a result of instructional coaching my teaching practice has substantially improved

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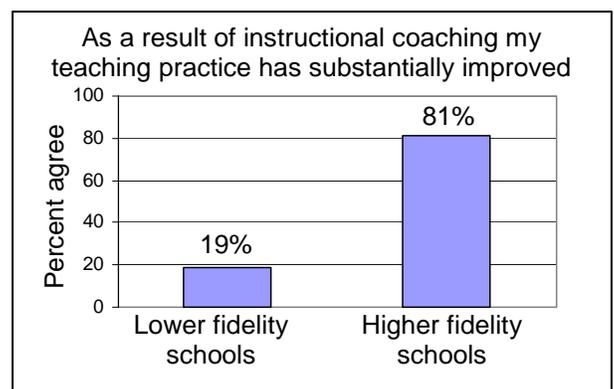
[3] Defined in communications from Teaching and Learning Systems (TLS) and the APS Superintendent.

teachers saw substantial improvements in their teaching practice as a result of instructional coaching.[4] Compare that to schools with higher coaching fidelity, where 81% of teachers reported substantial improvements.

6) School leadership[5] drives the fidelity of IC program implementation, according to both Phase 1 and Phase 2 evaluation findings**.** Almost all teachers who reported effective school leadership (91%) also reported high levels of coaching fidelity. In contrast, only 8% of teachers who reported less effective leadership reported high levels of coaching fidelity.

7) About one-quarter of teachers reported they were not satisfied with instructional coaching. Twenty-one percent agreed coaching is not working well at their school; 26% agreed coaching resources would be better used in another manner; and 24% strongly preferred a different professional development model.

Teachers' written comments suggest that dissatisfaction with the IC program often stemmed from poor implementation of the IC program model (low coaching fidelity), a mismatch between the school and the IC, or poor IC skills. For example:

One teacher wrote: *I am supportive of the IC model. Any negative responses arose from a desire to see our coach more intimately involved in helping teachers and students, and less in administrative chores.*

Another teacher explained: *The quality of the program is directly related to the quality of the person in the role. The IC may well be effective in other schools. Our IC is not beneficial to our school.*

METHODS

The IC Program Evaluation was conducted in two phases. In the spring of 2004, RDA evaluators used the "Success Case Method" (Brinkerhoff, 2002) to describe program activities, assess fidelity to plans, identify perceived outcomes, and highlight factors that enabled and constrained success. Methods included a brief survey for each instructional coach (IC), reviews of IC time logs, and staff interviews at six elementary schools.

RDA began Phase 2 of the IC Program Evaluation in February 2005. The purpose was to verify, quantify and explain Phase 1 findings. RDA distributed about 1,965 surveys to teachers in all 96 elementary and middle schools that had ICs, with permission for surveys to be copied and completed by additional teachers. RDA distributed surveys to every principal and all 111 ICs at the 101 schools with ICs, including high schools. Five-point Likert scale survey items addressed IC program satisfaction, program coverage, program activity and perceived program impacts. Surveys also invited written comments from participants.

Respondents are comprised of 908 teachers from 76 schools (46% of sampled teachers and 9% of all teachers), 59 principals (58%), and 75 ICs (68%). Responding teachers represented the full range of instructional experience, from new teachers to veteran. Forty-five percent reported Albuquerque Teachers Federation membership (ATF). There were no significant differences between ATF members and non-union teacher responses.

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[4] A school's "coaching fidelity" refers to the extent to which an IC performs the essential coaching functions.

[5] The construct of 'school leadership' comprises perceptions of principals' support of teachers, implementation of policies that maximize learning, effectiveness as a manager, and leadership effectiveness.