

An instructional coach is someone whose chief professional responsibility is to bring evidence-based practices into classrooms by working with teachers and other school leaders. In PIIC, we focus our one-on-one and small group support for teachers, coaches, and school leaders around evidence-based literacy strategies and the instructional coaching process with the goals of increasing student engagement, improving student achievement, and building teacher capacity in schools.

Coaching is an established professional practice.

Many professions ensure that their practitioners benefit from the wise counsel and hands-on assistance of experienced colleagues — in other words, coaches. Some professions require coaching as an essential part of mastering the requisite skills. In medicine, for example, internships and residencies provide required coaching for doctors new to the profession or specialty. In the legal profession, senior partners mentor junior associates. The education profession is now adopting coaching as a promising strategy for building teacher expertise, raising student achievement, and advancing school reform.

Coaching is one-on-one and small group professional development.

At its core, instructional coaching involves two people: the classroom teacher and the coach. Coaches work one-on-one and in small groups with teachers, providing guidance, training, and other resources as needed. Together, they focus on practical strategies for engaging students and improving their learning. Coaches also are often responsible for providing or arranging professional development activities for all teachers in a school or district.

Coaching is high-quality professional development.

Instructional coaching reflects the growing consensus about what constitutes high-quality professional development for teachers. It is job-embedded, addressing issues teachers face daily in their classrooms. It is ongoing, not a one-shot workshop. It is aligned to state standards, curriculum, and assessment. And its goal is twofold: improved instructional practice and improved student learning.

Who are the coaches?

Coaches are experienced, highly accomplished, and well-respected educators. Coaches must have credibility with teachers and administrators, the ability to juggle several roles, and the skills needed to work one-on-one with teachers as well as to oversee a wider professional development effort in the school.

How does instructional coaching work?

The key to a successful coaching program is a trusting relationship between teachers and coaches, but training and support from administrators are vital as well. Coaching is confidential, non-evaluative, and supportive. Coaches work one-on-one and in small groups with teachers on specific teaching strategies or problems, focusing on practical changes they can make in their classrooms. This ongoing one-on-one work is supplemented by other professional development activities, and skillful mentors often help support and extend the work of coaches.

Is instructional coaching effective?

There is little research available documenting the effectiveness of instructional coaching. However, recent research on the Pennsylvania High School Coaching Initiative ([PAHSCI](#)) shows evidence of success. In 2005, PAHSCI began working with 26 high schools in 16 high-needs districts. According to research conducted over three years in PAHSCI schools:

- In 18 of 21 PAHSCI schools, the percentage of 11th-graders reaching proficient or advanced levels in math on the Pennsylvania System of Student Assessment (PSSA) exceeded the statewide percentage of students reaching proficiency from 2004-2007.

- In 15 of 21 PAHSCI schools, the percentage of 11th-graders reaching proficient or advanced levels in reading on the PSSA exceeded the statewide percentage of students reaching proficiency from 2004-2007.

- Ninety-one percent of teachers coached regularly stated that coaches helped them understand and use new teaching strategies.

- Seventy-nine percent of teachers coached regularly said that their coach played a significant role in improving their classroom instruction and practice.

- Teachers who were regularly coached one-on-one reported that:
 - 0 They made significant changes in their instructional practice.

- 0 Their students were more engaged in the classroom and enthusiastic about learning.

- 0 Attendance increased dramatically in their classes.

It is important to note that not all teachers in PAHSCI schools participated in coaching. Schools are complex organizations, and other factors also may have contributed to improved student attendance, engagement, and achievement. More research is necessary to document the unique contributions of instructional coaching.

In 2013, two more studies based on schools participating in PIIC were completed: [Instructional Coaching and Student Outcomes: Findings from a Three Year Pilot Study](#)

and

[Teacher Perceptions of Instructional Coaching](#)

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[Research Highlights](#)

page.

How can I learn more about instructional coaching?

The following are some resources on instructional coaching:

- The Pennsylvania Institute for Instructional Coaching (PIIC) is a statewide resource that promotes and supports instructional coaching in Pennsylvania high schools. [Learn More.](#)

- The Instructional Coaching Resource Guide - www.instituteforinstructionalcoaching.org

- Knight, Jim. 2007. *Instructional Coaching: A Partnership Approach to Improving Instruction.* New York: Corwin.

- International Reading Association. 2006. *Standards for Middle and High School Literacy Coaches.* Newark, DE: Author.

- Sturtevant, Elizabeth. 2003. *The Literacy Coach: A Key to Improving Teaching and Learning in Secondary Schools.* Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.