

How can instructional coaching be used to support teachers?

The teaching profession nationwide is experiencing a major workforce shortage. Fewer college students are choosing education as their major, and more teachers are leaving the profession or retiring early. A study by the [Learning Policy Institute](#) shows that high teacher attrition is one of the leading factors driving the teacher shortage. When researchers study factors impacting attrition, two areas stand out:

1. Teachers value high-quality professional learning and administrative support.
2. Teacher leaders desire opportunities to grow without leaving the classroom for administrative roles.

This document highlights how using teacher leaders as instructional coaches can address these factors, lead to impactful shifts in instructional practice and build a culture of ongoing learning.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

[Instructional coaching](#) is a unique model of professional development that has been shown to [improve teacher practice](#) and positively [impact student achievement outcomes](#). On average, instructional coaching raises the quality of teachers' practice and their impact on student achievement [as much or more](#) than the differences observed between a novice teacher and an experienced veteran. [Instructional coaches can be change agents](#) for a school, resulting in improved teacher effectiveness and student success.

A popular coaching format is to pair teacher leaders with other teachers to guide them in developing their instructional skills. Another approach is to establish learning teams in which individual teachers take turns coaching each other. Regardless of the model, it is

important to ensure instructional coaches are provided professional learning in the art and skills of coaching.

True instructional coaching is [collaborative and emphasizes a partnership](#) between the teacher and coach. Coaching is not evaluative. Because trust is the hallmark of any good relationship, a teacher leader, rather than an administrator, is the ideal person to provide coaching.

Schools are encouraged to explore [technology tools](#) to help establish efficient coaching protocols. A range of digital platforms and shared spaces for coach and teacher collaborations exist. Flexible scheduling allows for class coverage and enables both teacher and coach to have opportunities for collaboration during the school day.

KEY INSIGHTS

- Professional development workshops provide foundational knowledge for teachers, but follow-up support for implementation is essential and can be provided through instructional coaching.
- Instructional coaches need professional learning to successfully guide teachers. Without training and support, instructional coaching initiatives may fail.
- Technology tools and flexible scheduling allow for innovative instructional coaching models.
- Instructional coaching provides leadership opportunities for talented teachers and a support structure for all teachers.

SEE ALSO

- [How can accelerated learning models support students with unfinished learning?](#)
- What innovative virtual learning practices can be adapted for in-person instruction? (coming soon)

ATTENDING TO EQUITY

Instructional coaching is a model of support that is proven effective for *all* teachers, not just those who are new or struggling. One of the single best predictors of student success is the effectiveness of the classroom teacher. To ensure all students have access to a highly effective teacher, consider building a coaching culture where *everyone deserves* to have a great coach.

Often, instructional coaching programs are present only in large districts with more staff to implement the initiative. However, small and rural educators merit this kind of support as well. Consider the ways in which technology tools can span geographic regions and bridge gaps.

Instructional coaches are not limited to working within their districts. Small, rural schools can pool resources and technology to leverage coaching consortiums with other districts.

RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS

- Begin by conducting a [staff survey](#) to assess your school's readiness to adopt an instructional coaching model. Conducting this self-evaluation will help leaders understand current staff attitudes and beliefs related to professional learning and identify critical needs.
- Identify teacher leaders in your school who may be ready for an instructional coaching role. Connect them with resources from instructional coaching experts such as [Jim Knight/Insight Education Group](#), [Instruction Partners](#) and the Instructional Coaching Group's free [webinars](#) and [videos](#).
- Consider the steps school leadership can take to value coaching and increase coaching visibility. When administrators work with instructional coaches, it sets the tone for other teachers to engage with coaching.
- [Review the Regional Education Laboratory West's summary of information](#) from the research literature organized around four themes of instructional coaching: goals of coaching, defining a coaching cycle, effective coaching practices and structural support for implementation of effective coaching.
- Ensure instructional coaches are guided by the evidence base for specific disciplines and grade bands such as [early reading](#), [English language arts](#) and [mathematics](#).
- Use funding from Title IIA, Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds (ESSR I and ESSR II) and the American Rescue Plan Act to design an instructional coaching program that leverages teacher leaders. Funding may be used to provide professional development for coaches and pay stipends for coaching work that occurs outside contracted time. It may also support using technology platforms that allow collaboration to occur in flexible formats at convenient times.