

As the New Year begins, all of us think about the many ways in which we can make changes and amend our practices both personally and professionally. The same 10 pounds are still here even though I've promised myself that with each new year, I'd shed those pounds instead of keeping them around like an old, comfortable pair of shoes. Although I have lost some and gained some over the course of several years, one thing remains constant – my attempts to keep those unwanted pounds forever at bay are hindered because my “implementation” of a healthy life style is sporadic, choppy, ineffective and relatively unsupported. As I get older, I clearly understand why weight loss “buddies” are more successful than me just talking to myself. After all, no matter how many times I get on the scale, the weight does not come off any faster or with any less stress, especially if I do not have a champion who understands the process and has some experience with the challenges that thwart sustainability.

One of the ways coaches can support teachers, administrators, and other school leaders is to focus on deliberate and intentional interventions. Coaching is the perfect vehicle to design a professional development plan that is consistent, relevant, non-judgmental, and sustainable. Instructional coaches can help school staff members think about and plan which instructional practices and other kinds of interventions are appropriate to meet the needs of students and their teachers. Coaches can help identify the current professional development practices that require additional support, need re-structuring, or necessitate re-focusing. It may mean that the school's action plan needs revision and the school team collaborates to set supplementary goals, action steps, timelines, and assessment of progress.

Hopefully, each school has active professional learning communities (PLCs) that provide the venue for collaboration and collegial sharing that are essential for action planning. Effective learning communities are committed to improving learning for all stakeholders – teachers, students, administrators, and other school leaders. It is a built-in support system that honors the professional growth of all members and promotes the continuous learning that is critical for school improvement.

When coaches are part of the school team, they help establish the appropriate interventions and can help address any obstacles that may arise. For instance, once the challenges are recognized, coaches can help teachers review a variety of resources and evidence-based literacy strategies that may be helpful to maintain implementation. Coaches work one-on-one and in small groups, providing support to colleagues. They help staff determine which data sets are necessary to assess needs as indicated in the action planning. Coaches can also foster collaboration and cross-district visitations so that learning takes place across environments, not just within a particular school, all in a non-threatening community of practice.