

As you reflect on your work as instructional coaches this past year, we hope you recognize that every positive change, even a small one, is a reason to celebrate. Remember, everyone wants change; you go first! Although student achievement is not the only measure to consider, it certainly is the one that our key stakeholders look for first. So, what do we do about changing that philosophy? Not much... but what we can do is work towards establishing a culture of change that reflects several ways in which student achievement is influenced.

Every person or organization with a direct interest or investment in student achievement claims to know how to help students achieve higher test scores, attain better grades, become college ready, or be prepared for the military or work force. As a result, there is a plethora of textbook companies, private organizations, websites, corporations, and various publications attesting to the fact that improved student achievement will occur if we have state standards, core curricula, teacher and principal evaluations, common assessments, standardized bell schedules, digital and print materials, technology in all classrooms, and a host of other equally as important elements to help students achieve at greater levels. No one disagrees. What we don't have is a common understanding that one element — helping teachers address the myriad ways of meeting the diverse needs of all students — occurs one conversation at a time while honoring the teacher's skill set, practice, knowledge base, and understanding of learning. It is the dedicated practice of working together and collaborating so that both student needs and teachers' professional needs are respected.

There is evidence that teacher performance plateaus at four years. According to Urban Institute researcher Jane Hannaway: "Teachers work in isolation. They learn what they learn and then they plateau. They get no valid input (Stephanie Hirsh, Executive Director, Learning Forward)." Additionally, "there is a 2.6 times greater variation in student achievement across classrooms in the same schools as from school to school (OECD, 2008 - PISA Science).

Do you think these conditions exist in places where ongoing professional conversations, sustaining teacher collaboration, looking at student work collectively, and creating time/space for deliberate and intentional discourse are the norm? I think that while components of the above list occur, the channel of communication is not routine nor natural in places without instructional coaching.

Celebrate now and proactively design your action plan for September 2012-2013. The PIIC framework and BDA cycle of coaching are not the only panacea for a challenged educational system but when multiple partners come together to share their learning, there's certainly a

better chance that the students are the beneficiaries. After all, isn't that what it's all about... improving a system where students are at the center and offering ongoing professional learning so that their teachers are well-prepared, well-supported, and well- appreciated. Thank you, coaches, for all you do to create an environment where the culture of your school continues to change and you persist in helping teachers implement effective instructional practices.