

Strengthening, supporting, and maintaining a collaborative environment in schools is critical for school improvement. As the school year ends, some of our coaches are moving forward in their practice and transitioning to the classroom. Their role as a teacher leader will certainly change. What will not change, however, is the commitment and dedication to pursue their work in school transformation, promote teacher professional development, and continue to provide opportunities to improve practice and redefine the title of “coach.”

This is tricky business. Does coaching from the classroom provide another opportunity to support colleagues in financially stressed times or give policy makers the excuse that we can do more with less? I don't know the answer but I do know that we must continue to create an evidentiary trail that makes the association between improved student achievement and coached teachers. In fact, one of our recent studies, March 2017 Teacher Follow-Up Survey Report documented that 89% of teachers surveyed indicated that their classroom practice changed as a result of working with a PIIC instructional coach. (Click [here](#) for report.)

Highly effective teachers are still the single most important factor in student success and school improvement. And, providing support for teachers is critical in helping teachers implement highly effective instructional practices. That we support our teachers and help them expand their students' literacy learning skills across all content areas is definitely the goal of school wide improvement. That support does not end because of a reduced budget. How we support them, however, will make the difference between maintaining the status quo and experiencing great achievement for both teachers and students.

In Michael McNeff's recent blog post (*Learning Forward*, May 17), he admits that developing an individualized, meaningful professional learning plan for all teachers is challenging. He mentions a 2009 NSDC article that states the need for professional learning to occur *“several times per week among established teams of teachers, principals, and other instructional staff members where the teams of educators engage in continuous cycle of improvement.”*

I believe that he really means professional development opportunities must be proffered multiple times to ensure the sustainability of professional learning. Remember, the professional development is the “stuff” teachers are offered in a professional setting; how well and how deeply the “stuff” can be applied in different contexts, and is supported by a trusted colleague, aka the coach, defines the extent to which professional learning actually occurs.

So, the coach is now a full-time teacher again. How can we coach from the classroom? How

can we provide a level of support when we have our own classroom responsibilities? How can coaches help teachers build on the previous year's successes and move both teacher and student practice forward?

Coaches need to be proactive and design a plan of action. They need to maintain the integrity of student engagement and student achievement. They need to regularly implement various evidence-based literacy strategies and help students navigate a variety of texts. They need to ensure that students have multiple opportunities to write every day. They need to foster collaborative work and open their classrooms for peer visitations. They need to engage in conversations about student work and share their thinking about why students are successful. They need to continue to promote book studies, study groups, and professional learning communities designed to address the diverse needs of both teachers and students. Above all, they need to participate in the school's plans for improvement perpetuating the concept that teacher professional development is not a luxury; it's a necessity.

Instructional coaches are teacher leaders; they need to continue receiving ongoing support to move their practice forward so they can help teachers move their practice forward. This is the very message coaches have shared in their professional learning communities, their schools, and their districts over the last few years. They continue to be members in a community of practice and learning with the shared vision of increasing student engagement and student achievement.

So, as you prepare for your summer vacation, take time to read for pleasure, think about your happy place, and relax. Start the new year building on the previous year's successes, plan for moving forward, continue to stay the course and sustain the notion that professional learning is life-long learning, and practice what you preach... everyone is a member in a community of learning and practice. Encourage your learning community to focus on three areas: continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and alignment and accountability (*Learning Forward*, July 2014). As a coach, these will come naturally to you as you foster collaboration that focuses on student learning.

Best wishes for a wonderful summer vacation.