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, broken-in, comfortable pair of jeans. 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 understand that coaching is not an intervention; it is a way of life. The school must focus on deliberate and intentional, sustainable, positive "interruptions" that can be maintained. Coaching is the perfect vehicle to design a professional development plan that is consistent, relevant, non-judgmental, and sustainable. Instructional coaching must influence the systemic changes that are needed, not episodic interventions that come and go.

Instructional coaches can help school staff members think about and plan which instructional practices and other kinds of support 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. It encourages engagement and not just cooperation; change is not a result of cooperation; it is a result of collaboration.

When coaches are part of the school team, they help establish the norms that address school change and promote ways to accomplish the agreed upon goals for school wide improvement.

Coaching is a deliberate and intentional way to offer capacity-building professional development that is supported with follow-up attention from coaches. It is a viable way to “build human capital strategies by taking advantage of local capacity” (www.ascd.org/oscb).

As you embrace the New Year, think about the power of community and how sustainable practices yield consistent results. Be mindful of how you establish, support, and maintain relationships with your teaching colleagues; be aware of self and how you approach adult learning. Be receptive to change yourself by accepting and offering tools for success. Integrate time for thinking and collaboration into your daily routines as you help others grow their practice and expand your reach.