Instructional Coaching in Pennsylvania

In 2005, the Pennsylvania High School Coaching Initiative (PAHSCI) began working with 26 high schools in 16 high-needs districts. To monitor the progress and effects of the initiative, PAHSCI invested in research and evaluation from the start. Several studies of PAHSCI were conducted in recent years, by research partners Research for Action, MPR Associates, Inc., Success for All, and the Academy for Educational Development.

PAHSCI: From Promise to Practice offers a summary of the research on PAHSCI. Below are some highlights from these studies; the full studies are available on PAHSCI's Research Findings page.

Although PAHSCI is a school reform model focused directly on improving teaching and learning in classrooms, this work was supported by a complex infrastructure that included several partners, a specific literacy framework, content mentors and leadership mentors, professional development, and other components. Some of these components are addressed in the research highlights below.

The Early Studies: Implementation Issues

The first PAHSCI studies looked mainly at the organization and implementation of the instructional coaching program. Studies examined what coaches were learning and doing; how they were viewed and supported in their schools; what kinds of obstacles they encountered; how teachers and administrators were responding to PAHSCI, and other issues.

Teachers. Greater percentages of teachers who were frequently coached one-on-one

(compared with teachers coached less frequently or not at all) reported:

- Improvement in the quality of their instruction.
- Engagement and enthusiasm among their students.
- Evidence of their students' ability to think critically.
- Participation in joint lesson planning.

They also noted that coaches addressed their needs as teachers and served as a catalyst for learning among school staff.

Instructional Coaches. Coaches were experienced educators, and about 80 percent were women. They had an average of 17.5 years of teaching experience, and their positions prior to coaching were:

- Classroom teacher: 67 percent.
- Teacher leader: 12 percent.
- Department head: 10 percent.

The activities coaches most frequently engaged in were:

- Planning lessons with teachers.
- Locating and creating classroom resources.
- Responding to teachers' concerns.

The Role of PAHSCI. PAHSCI served as a catalyst for organizational and cultural change within schools and supported change in classroom practices.

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Recent Studies

Educator-Centered Instructional Coaching: What the Research Says

Educator-Centered Instructional Coaching Practices that Work: Lessons from PIIC Research

The Pennsylvania Institute for Instructional Coaching (PIIC) Teacher Survey Follow-Up Report

Coaching for Impact: Six Pillars to Create Coaching Roles That Achieve Their Potential to Improve Teaching and Learning

Pennsylvania's Barrow School District Seeks Improved Instruction: A Case of Instructional Coaching

Key Findings from the Pennsylvania Institute for Instructional Coaching (PIIC) Teacher and Coach Survey Report

- Coach Survey Questionnaire 2015
- Coach Survey Questionnaire 2014
- Teacher Survey Questionnaire 2015
- Teacher Survey Questionnaire 2014
- Teacher Survey Questionnaire 2013

Instructional Coaching and Student Outcomes: Findings from a Three Year Pilot Study

Teacher Perceptions of Instructional Coaching

The Philadelphia Story

PAHSCI Mentor Study

The Role and Contribution of Mentors to the Pennsylvania High School Coaching Initiative

Instructional Mentors. Mentors play an essential role in instructional coaching in Pennsylvania. They are the "coach's coach," and they also have broad responsibility for analyzing instructional needs in districts, promoting collaboration among school staff, and addressing the professional development needs of coaches and teachers.

A survey of PAHSCI mentors found that:

- Administrators, mentors, and coaches noted "substantially increased student engagement" in their schools.
- There was more discussion among teachers about professional issues and instruction, as well as more interest in collaborative planning.
- Mentors played significant roles in strengthening the capacity of coaches and the ability of school leaders to support instructional coaching.
- Mentors were instrumental in helping coaches resolve challenges that interfered with their work.
- Mentors promoted a better use of data in the districts and consistency in improved instructional strategies and curriculum.

Student Achievement. The ultimate goal of PAHSCI is improved student achievement. Findings from research conducted over three years in PAHSCI schools found that:

- In 18 of 21 PAHSCI schools, the percentage of 11th-graders reaching proficient or advanced levels in math on the Pennsylvania System of Student Assessment (PSSA) exceeded the statewide percentage of students reaching proficiency from 2004-2007.
- In 15 of 21 PAHSCI schools, the percentage of 11th-graders reaching proficient or advanced levels in reading on the PSSA exceeded the statewide percentage of students reaching proficiency from 2004-2007.

The PAHSCI Teacher' Survey indicated the following:

- Ninety-one percent of teachers coached regularly stated that coaches helped them understand and use new teaching strategies.
- Seventy-nine percent of teachers coached regularly said that their coach played a significant role in improving their classroom instruction and practice.
- Teachers who were regularly coached one-on-one reported that:
- They made significant changes in their instructional practice.
- Their students were more engaged in the classroom and enthusiastic about learning.
- Attendance increased dramatically in their classes.

These findings, while encouraging, must be judged cautiously. Not all teachers in PAHSCI schools participated in coaching. Schools are complex organizations, and other factors also may have contributed to improved student attendance, engagement, and achievement. More research is necessary to document the unique contributions of instructional coaching.

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A Continuing Commitment to Evaluation

PIIC continues PAHSCI's strong commitment to evaluation. Data-based decision making is built into the day-to-day operations of the Institute. External evaluators —Elliott Medrich and FHI360 — will help develop and implement a framework for continuous improvement, as well as appropriate strategies for data collection and management. Click here for more information on the Institute's plans for research and evaluation.