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Key Issues Pertaining to In-School Coaches' Activities, Roles, and Supports

Data Brief

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* Authors are listed alphabetically and produced this report collaboratively. They share responsibility for its contents equally. While there are many potential viewpoints, these reflect a systematic analysis of data by external evaluators. The hope is that these findings can facilitate improvement of these and related programs through open discussion and consideration of data-driven understandings.



I. Overview, Sample, and Methods

The PRAIRIE Group, in collaboration with the CPS Department of Program Evaluation (DOPE), serves as an external evaluator for the CPS In-School Instructional Coaching (ISIC) Program for the 2007-08 school year. This data brief is the second in a series of external evaluation briefs prepared by the PRAIRIE Group that aims to provide the CPS Office of Instructional Design and Assessment and other key stakeholders with timely feedback regarding to in-school coaches' activities; roles and responsibilities; received or needed supports; and impact on teachers, students, administrators, and schools.

This data brief draws on 20 full-day observations and debriefs, occurring March through May 2008, with in-school coaches: 14 Office of Literacy (OL)/Supported Core Reading Materials Adoption (SCRMA) coaches and six Office of Math and Science (OMS) citywide specialists (CWS), representing 17 neighborhood CPS schools.¹ The data brief contains analysis, findings, and questions for reflection on three facets of in-school coaching that program leadership may want to consider in planning for next year's program implementation: (1) coaches' uses and perceptions of New Teacher Center (NTC) coaching tools; (2) coaches' uses of data; and (3) coaches' views of the supports they receive or would like to receive. In a supplemental section we list additional programmatic issues that emerged from our data collection that we will explore in depth in the final evaluation report for this year.

II. Findings and Analysis

(1) Uses and perceptions of New Teacher Center coaching tools

We observed few instances of New Teacher Center tools in use during the 20 coach observations.² The only tools observed included the Collaboration Log (twice) and the Lesson Planning tool (once). However, our observations reflect only one day of work for these coaches who indicate that their work varies greatly from day to day. Thus, in debrief interviews, we also asked coaches to report which NTC tools they regularly use. All NTC tools were reported as used at least once, with the following frequencies: Collaboration Log (eleven), Lesson Planning tool (five), Analyzing Student Work (five), and Selective Scripting (four).

An in-depth discussion of the coaches' perceptions of all the NTC tools will appear in the final report. Here we report on the Collaboration Log, which was the most frequently observed and commonly cited tool used. Coaches who reported using the Collaboration Log identified positive aspects such as providing a conference structure and a written record for teachers. Coaches who reported not using it provided a variety of reasons for this decision, including teachers' aversion to being observed with a formal tool and the notion that the log is only useful when a strict pre-conference/lesson/post-conference sequence is possible. Another explanation coaches offered for its limited application was that the tool seemed useful for new teachers only, as experienced teachers were often reluctant to discuss issues that need work.

¹ See the April 2008 Data Brief for a full discussion of the sampling rationale for these studies.

² All counts in this section indicate the number of *coaches* observed using and/or reporting the use of coaching tools.

Overall, these findings suggest that coaches are not consistently using the NTC coaching tools and that their perceptions of these tools vary widely.

- **Data from the PRAIRIE Group’s qualitative evaluation and survey data from DOPE indicate inconsistent use of and issues with the NTC tools. Should modifications to the NTC tools be considered? How can IDA address concerns and support use of the tools?**
- **How can NTC consult with coaches to help make the tools more useful within the context and realities of coaching in Chicago public schools? What role will IDA play in this process?**

(2) Uses of data by coaches

Coaches’ reported use of data was consistent with our observations of their work. Both literacy coaches and citywide specialists cited student work as their primary data sources, including extended response, journals, test scores and posted classroom work. Almost all coaches said they spent some of their time working with standardized testing. Working with test data included looking for patterns in the scores, monitoring changes in scores over time, and interpreting results with and for teachers. Another aspect of their work included logistical responsibilities for organizing and facilitating the in-school data collection processes. In the case of literacy coaches, five of the 14 also reported (and we observed four) directly conducting the DIBELS progress monitoring of individual students. Additional, though less frequent, reported examples of coaches’ data usage included conducting data conversations with teachers, preparing calendars to help teachers keep track of individual student progress associated with testing and, in one case, using of student test scores to stimulate a healthy competition across grades for the greatest increases in scores.

While our findings document a variety of data among coaches, more than half reported that it was an ongoing challenge to educate their teachers as to how and why they should use student data. For instance one coach reported how hard it was simply to get her teachers to believe that their students’ DIBELS scores meant something useful at all. She said that despite her efforts, her teachers felt it was just something that they had to do as part of their jobs and saw it as little more than an obligation.

- **Given the range of activities around data use, to what degree should coaches play a role in the uses of data in their school? What sorts of resources will help them in this role?**
- **What should be the extent of coaches’ involvement with administering standardized tests in their schools? How is that responsibility determined and by whom? How will multiple school site responsibilities factor into this determination?**

(3) Sources of support for coaches

The most common and consistently favorable support coaches spoke of came from their fellow coaches within their content areas. They described this support as welcome opportunities to meet outside of their schools and to collaborate, to share experiences and to help one another understand their roles. Coaches appreciated the experience, knowledge, and collaboration offered by their colleagues. Nine out of 20 coaches named their principals as a source of support. Coaches also valued but mentioned less often the support they received from Area coaches, department managers, and facilitators. Three coaches named other coaches in their schools as supports. Of the 20 coaches we interviewed only two said they felt isolated and wished for more types of support of any kind in or out of their school. While we observed coaches routinely supplying support to others in their schools, only six out 20 coaches received any noticeable support (e.g. principals, other in-school coaches) during the times we were present.

- **How can ISIC capitalize on the supportive relations among coaches to further improve the program?**
- **How is ISIC leveraging support across CPS to improve the work of coaches?**

III Preview of Final Report:

In addition to expansion on the themes included in the current report, we anticipate that the final report will include such topics as:

- *How coaches find the legitimacy to lead*—factors that contribute to their sense of legitimacy in and ownership of their roles
- “*We’re building the wings while the plane is in flight*”—coaches’ reflection on adjustments they have made during the course of the year
- *A job well done*—how coaches assess when they have done good work
- *A peek inside some schools*—what principals and teachers say about coaching in their schools
- *Same role/different experience*—ways that coaching work varies as a result of a number of factors (e.g., content area, working in one vs. multiple schools, first year in a school vs. returning to a familiar school).