

Data Brief

Issues Raised by Instructional Area Math Science Elementary Coaches at a CPS Office of Mathematics and Science Meeting on April 23, 2004

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This is a summary of the observation and notes taken by the UIC CMSI Evaluation researchers at the Elementary Math and Science Coach Meeting at Medill on April 23, 2004, as a part of our continuing documentation of the work of Coaches. The presentation of these notes is by theme rather than in chronological order; Coaches met with each other and Chandra James for about two hours prior to Marty Gartzman's joining them for an additional 2 hours. During the two hour exchange between Coaches and Gartzman, it seemed to the two of us observing this conversation that the dialog was happening at times on two different planes. Therefore, the purpose of this document is to make explicit concerns shared by Elementary Coaches to inform Office of Mathematics and Science (OMS) planning of the Chicago Math Science Initiative (CMSI) for 2004-2005. In addition, this document outlines OMS requests for data from Coaches needed for data driven decision making for ongoing planning. We present this data at this time because we believe that this observation represents a critical juncture in the relationship both between OMS Leadership and Elementary Coaches and Coaches with one another. It is our hope that this data brief will be used as a building block for strengthening these relationships.

Coach concerns focused on three issues: (a) budget cuts for 2004-2005; (b) problems with the scope and definition of their role in 2003-2004; and (c) the scope and definition of their role in 2004-2005.

Concerns related to budget changes

Coaches shared the outrage that Readiness school participants had expressed to them about changes in the budget. After having participated fully in the Readiness stage (for example a school having a 97% attendance rate at TAMS workshops) school participants were extremely disappointed and frustrated that they would not receive what was initially promised to them (most specifically a Specialist for next year). This concerned Coaches for a number of reasons:

- 1) It gave CMSI the old CPS "this too shall pass" feeling.
- 2) It compromised the implementation of the Initiative.
- 3) It compromised the credibility of everyone who has worked for CMSI success.

Coaches also expressed their own sense of frustration about how budget cuts affected them directly. Three aspects of the situation with the budget changes were salient in their comments. In the first place, a decrease in the number of hours per day or the number of weeks per year that they work would affect them personally, resulting in a decrease in their gross pay by approximately \$4,000-\$10,000. Secondly, the timing of the finalization of budget details which may not occur until May or June would give them very short notice of a pay cut that would begin on July first. In addition, it is likely that if Coaches experience a decrease in the number of weeks they are to work, this decrease will go into effect a week after summer school begins thus preventing Coaches from participating in this work--work that could level out the loss of pay. Thirdly, the Coaches were concerned about how a decrease in their hours would influence their effectiveness. In a job where they already feel like there are not enough hours in the day to serve their schools and do their work well, a decrease in time would contribute to an already difficult problem

Concerns related to this year's work

Noting strained relationships and a decline in professional learning community (which they described as having been very high in summer 2003), Coaches expressed disappointment in the quality of their work together and

with other OMS staff during 2003-2004. Coaches talked about how preserving a shared vision and strengthening professional community required protected time to work and reflect together with Facilitators and Specialists but that this had not occurred throughout 2003-04.

Coaches were most concerned about their own Coach community. Without a framework of unified vision and goals, Coaches felt they were not all on the “same page” in the CMSI work they do within their Areas. Likewise, they felt this lack of a framework contributed to their feeling that their work was “hit or miss” in terms of bolstering the capacity of Broad Support and Readiness schools for CMSI implementation. In addition, Coaches noted differences in opinion about whether or not to (a) continue to work with Lesson Lab; (b) create a coherent plan for working with Broad Support and Readiness schools; (c) provide consistent PD to schools; or (d) seek professional development from vendors.

Discussion at the meeting revealed that Coaches felt that the divergence in their work and focus was due both to a lack of direction and supportive structures from OMS as well as to their own inability to maintain a supportive professional community. Coaches recognized and owned their own missed opportunities to create a consistent framework for their shared work and to follow through on this noting several failed attempts at creating a framework, whether due to lack of OMS support or lack of impetus on their part. For example, the professional development plans Coaches designed together fizzled out before the plans were completed or implemented.

Coaches expressed a desire to move beyond the lack of clarity around their work and role. With the experience of the first year of the Initiative behind them, Coaches better understand their work and role and were excited and eager to create a coherent structure that each Coach present at this meeting was willing to commit to—a shared vision of the role of the Coach within the CMSI. Together they came to the realization that from the beginning of the CMSI, Marty Gartzman had given them the voice to define their work and role. They appreciated this opportunity yet questioned the extent to which their ideas would be embraced by OMS leadership. The Coaches spoke confidently about their ability to define their work and roles more effectively at this point in time. They expressed hope that if they took what they had learned from this year and together defined their future work, that the Office of Math and Science leaders would support them in this endeavor to shape their role and the Initiative more generally.

Coaches perceived a lack of support for their work by CPS leadership, namely Arne Duncan and Barbara Eason-Watkins. Coaches saw evidence of this lack of support reflected in recent budget cuts and in the actions of CPS leaders who used public forums to talk about reading or literacy but not science or math. The Coaches felt that math and science were not central to the agenda of these leaders. Coaches explained that their concern for the lack of centrality of math and science in school system priorities was present in their work predating the CMSI. However, this concern had a different meaning to them as math and science leaders of a district initiative, as they were thinking about the future of CMSI and whether they want to continue to be associated with it. Coaches also worried that principals may look at CMSI differently if they perceive that support for it was not coming from CPS district-level leaders.

Concerns about next year's implementation

Coaches expressed numerous questions about plans for the 2004-2005 implementation of CMSI. These included the following:

- What is the role of Coach/Facilitator in Intensive Support schools without a Specialist? What is required of Coaches now that these schools have written them into their SIPAAA?
- What is the vision/mission of CMSI (not what is on paper, but what is the plan/framework for unified and coherent implementation?)? How will Coaches be involved in these decisions? How will this framework be set up to endure budget cuts? What will support and commitment to it look like?
- Why have budget priorities taken support away from Specialists within schools while continuing to fund outside consultants and vendors? Is it possible to create internal capacity to provide professional development to schools from people within the system instead of paying outside vendors exorbitant rates while eliminating school Specialist positions?

- What is going to be done for Broad Support schools next year? Is it just or fair to not provide Coach services to Broad Support schools not implementing OMS materials? Will AIOs support this and will it put Coaches in a difficult position with AIOs if this is what OMS expects of their work? How will CMSI be communicated to these schools (by whom and with what support)? What supports will be needed to continue a positive attitude about CMSI?
- What frameworks are going to be in place to ensure that professional community develops between Coach-Coach, Coach-Facilitator, Coach-Specialist, and Coach-OMS Staff?
- How will CPS show that math and science are priorities? How will CPS support the CMSI vision? How will this support be communicated?

OMS Responses to Coach Concerns

At the point in the April 23 meeting where Coaches were about to begin formulating their framework, Marty Gartzman, Executive Officer for the Office of Math and Science, came to talk with the Elementary Math and Science Coaches about their concerns. Gartzman expressed that the budget situation was a difficult one that affected all departments of Chicago Public Schools. The system was under pressure to cut \$200 million dollars across all departments, and everyone had to take budget cuts as a result. He talked about how Arne Duncan and Barbara Eason-Watkins were showing support of the CMSI by protecting a substantial amount of OMS funding despite major losses of district funding. Gartzman stressed that the overall OMS budget was still four times as large as it was prior to the introduction of the CMSI, showing an ongoing commitment to math and science.

Gartzman also cautioned Coaches to not get too far into planning for 2004-05 until the final decisions had been made about budget allocations and the details of their role. He hoped that Coaches would spend at least half of their time in 2004-05 on CMSI work and talked about how he hoped OMS staff and Area Coaches could work together to design and define their roles for the coming year.

In the interest of preparing for that design work, Marty Gartzman made the following request for data to be collected by the Coaches.

- What is each of your schools planning to do for next year?
- What curricula are they considering adopting?
- What materials and what supports do they need?
- What personal insights do you have about these schools and their ability to implement the curricula?
- Will they be financing a Specialist position?
- Do they need help locating a Specialist?
- What Broad Support schools are moving to implement curricula next year?
- What specialists will be out of positions at their current school due to the budget cuts?—
 - Can we compile a list for schools looking for a Specialist?

Conclusions

The April 23rd Elementary Math and Science Coach meeting revealed joint frustration about the budget cuts that have occurred and continue to occur throughout the system. This process has been a painful one for all involved, and this was clear in the comments of both the Coaches and Executive Officer Gartzman.

These issues with the budget encouraged Coaches to speak openly about five other concerns about their work: (a) the need for deeper and more ongoing development of their shared vision of the CMSI with their fellow Coaches; (b) their desire to develop closer relationships with one another; (c) the need for clarification of the nature of and the nurturance of their relationships with AIOs, the Office of Math and Science, Facilitators, and Specialists ; (d) the need for a clearer definition of their role in the CMSI, especially given changes in programming and budgeting and; (e) a desire to play a part in defining their role in the CMSI.

The meeting revealed a strong sense of ownership of the Elementary Coaches of their work and a deep desire to work together to improve the Elementary Initiative and their role within it. At the same time, the meeting showed the openness of both Area Coaches and OMS leaders to honest dialogue about difficult issues.