



**Pennsylvania High School  
Coaching Initiative**

# Promising InRoads:

Year One Report of the Pennsylvania High  
School Coaching Initiative

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# Introduction

*“Forty percent of all high school students can’t read well enough to comprehend their textbooks. The reading skill deficits of these students must be addressed in high school. Without intervention, millions of adolescents will have their futures largely foreclosed because they will lack the skills needed for the workplace, for further education or to take their place as citizens and heads of household.”<sup>1</sup>*

School districts around the nation are searching for ways to improve student achievement as they strive to meet the ambitious goals of No Child Left Behind and help all students reach high standards. Nowhere is this task more daunting than in high schools where significant numbers of students live in poverty, come to school with special learning needs, have become disaffected and disengaged. Many of these adolescents lack the basic literacy<sup>2</sup> skills that are necessary for them to learn history, science and mathematics.

*“More and more, I couldn’t count on my 9th and 10th grade students to finish a short story for homework. Even those who insisted that they had ‘done the reading’ often could not explain what they had read. Was it my job to teach this, too?”<sup>3</sup>*

This sentiment is shared by many high school teachers who feel ill-equipped to help these students. And high schools are not organized to help teachers across the subject areas develop the knowledge and skills they need to engage their students in literacy-rich instructional activities that will both strengthen their understanding of rigorous content and help them communicate effectively.

The Annenberg Foundation, well-known for its interest in and support of urban school reform, partnered with the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) to address the literacy needs of adolescents in high-need high schools in Pennsylvania. Together, they established the Pennsylvania High School Coaching Initiative (PAHSCI). PAHSCI uses instructional coaching to improve high school teachers’ knowledge and use of literacy-rich classroom instruction and, consequently, the achievement of the students they teach. The Initiative builds on and extends PDE’s groundwork on setting clear academic standards and developing a statewide assessment (The Pennsylvania System of School Assessment – PSSA) to measure students’ progress toward those standards by adding a systematic focus on professional development as the next essential component for improving teaching and learning across the state.

A relatively young reform, instructional coaching has been identified by researchers as a promising professional development strategy because it embeds professional learning in the daily work that teachers do in their classrooms and with their colleagues. Coaches help teachers select appropriate instructional strategies, and then custom tailor those strategies to the specific needs of that classroom. Although there is not yet conclusive research linking coaching to increased student achievement, a number of studies indicate that coaching helps teachers better understand instructional practices and more widely adopt and use new skills and strategies.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hock, Michael F. and Deshler, Donald D. (2003, November). Adolescent Literacy: Ensuring that No Child is Left Behind. (p.2) *Principal Leadership*, 1-13.

<sup>2</sup> Here and elsewhere in this report, we define literacy as “an individual’s ability to use printed information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals and to develop one’s knowledge and potential.” *National Adult Literacy Survey*, (1992). National Center for Educational Statistics. Department of Education.

<sup>3</sup> Cziko, Christine (1998). Reading Happens in Your Mind, Not in Your Mouth: Teaching & Learning 'Academic Literacy' in an Urban High School. *California English*, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Edwards, J. L. & Newton, R. R. (1994). *The Effect of Cognitive Coaching on Teacher Efficacy and Empowerment* (Rep. No. 1994-1). Evergreen, CO.; Showers, B. & Joyce, B. (1996). The Evolution of Peer Coaching. *Educational Leadership*, 53, 12-16.

During its first year of implementation, PAHSCI placed 90 literacy and math coaches in 26 high-need high schools in nine school districts and one I.U. (See Appendix A.)<sup>5</sup> for a total of 16 districts across the state. Coaches are allotted at the ratio of one literacy coach and one math coach for every six hundred students.

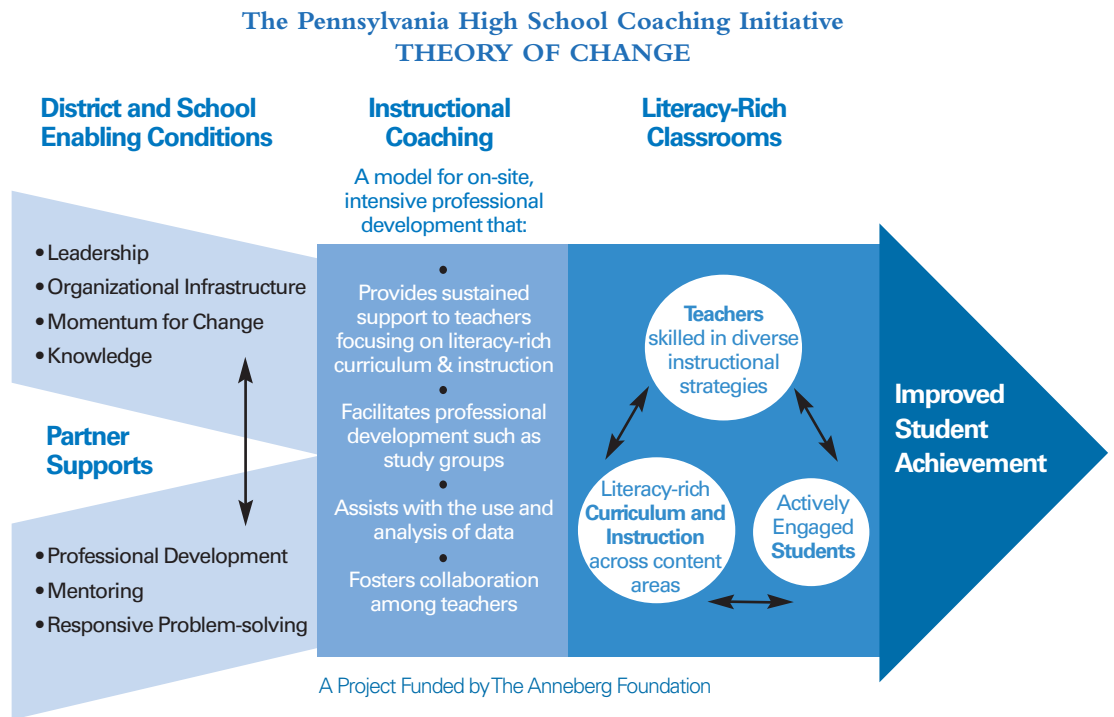


Figure 1

### Instructional Coaching

Effective, high quality teachers are the most important ingredient to student success. Supporting teachers to improve their practice is key to strengthening learning outcomes for students. The Pennsylvania High School Coaching Initiative seeks to improve students’ learning by improving teaching. At the heart of the Initiative are instructional coaches working with teachers from across the major subject areas to create literacy-rich classrooms in which students actively engage in learning tasks that deepen their content knowledge and strengthen their abilities to think critically and communicate well.

A distinctive feature of PAHSCI is that coaches focus on particular content; the Pennsylvania Literacy Network (PLN) framework. The PLN framework is rooted in the Pennsylvania Literacy Framework and the Pennsylvania Comprehensive Reading Program and it provides knowledge and strategies for strengthening subject area literacy. (See box on next page.) The PLN framework, a core component of the Initiative, supplies participants with a shared language for talking about instruction and student learning, which in turn helps build professional, collaborative learning communities among school-based educators.

Instructional coaches help to implement the PLN framework by providing many forms of professional development for teachers. They work one-on-one with teachers in their classrooms – problem solving with teachers, modeling lessons, and conducting structured classroom visitations that include pre-visit planning, classroom observation and debriefing after the visit. Coaches also work with groups of teachers. They plan and facilitate whole faculty training sessions, department-wide sessions focused on the PLN framework and the analysis of student performance data. In addition, coaches work with administrators to integrate coaching into the school culture.

<sup>5</sup> This I.U. encompasses seven rural districts. Many of these are significantly smaller than other districts participating in PAHSCI. The I.U. was treated as a 10th district in that it as a whole received approximately the same level of services as the other nine districts.

### **Penn Literacy Framework (PLF)**

PLF is based on four interrelated “lenses” from which instructional strategies are derived that promote student engagement, problem solving and critical thinking. These lenses are central to learning and good teaching and the framework encourages teachers to use the lenses as they work with their students. The lenses are 1) meaning-centered (relating new information to existing prior knowledge); 2) social (learning in a collaborative, social context); 3) language-based (reading, writing and talking for authentic purposes); and 4) human (self-reflecting to increase awareness of one’s own unique learning styles.) Also integral to the framework are five critical experiences: transacting with text, composing texts, extending reading and writing, investigating language and learning to learn. The training also includes strategies, aligned with state and national content standards that connect disciplinary content to the real world.

### **Creating the Conditions that Support Effective Coaching**

In their analysis of the “promises and practicalities” of coaching as a way to increase instructional capacity, Neufeld and Roper wrote that “Coaching holds a great deal of promise for districts willing to meet the practical challenges of this difficult work.”<sup>6</sup> Recognizing that creating an effective coaching model is complicated and demands multiple areas of expertise, Initiative designers recruited a group of partners to support schools and districts as they build the necessary infrastructure, leadership, knowledge and momentum for change. Partners include:

- **The Pennsylvania Department of Education** brings its expertise in education across the state and relationships with schools and districts. A project director from the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) plays a coordinating role. The Assistant Director of the Bureau of Teaching and Learning at the Pennsylvania Department of Education was instrumental in negotiating districts’ participation and buy-in.
- **The Penn Literacy Network (PLN)** offers a research-based framework and practical strategies for establishing literacy-rich classrooms across all subject areas. PLN provides training in its framework for coaches, administrators and teachers through intensive summer institutes and in regional courses throughout the school year.
- **Foundations, Inc.** brings deep knowledge of school improvement processes and the role of school leadership in promoting professional learning. It provides leadership and content mentors who visit districts four times each month to provide: training to coaches and school leaders in instructional coaching; ongoing technical support; and other opportunities for coaches and administrators to problem solve, reflect upon their work and refine their coaching skills.
- **Research for Action (RFA)** brings extensive experience in connecting evaluation research to the refinement of reform initiatives. RFA is evaluating the initiative and providing ongoing feedback to the partners so that mid-course corrections can be made to enhance the effectiveness of the reform as it unfolds. RFA is also creating knowledge that can be used by other education reformers around the nation as they adopt coaching as a model for professional development.
- **The Philadelphia Foundation** brings capacity in managing large grant amounts, and in statewide monitoring and reporting of the grant money. As fiscal agent, it oversees the distribution of funds, the accounting for those funds, and any/all financial reports. The Philadelphia Foundation serves as the one point of contact for the management of funds both centrally and at the district level.

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<sup>6</sup> Neufeld, Barbara and Dana Roper. *Coaching: A Strategy for Developing Instructional Capacity*. (p.28) Washington, D.C. and Providence, R.I.: The Aspen Institute Program on Education and The Annenberg Institute for School Reform: 2003.

## Distinctive Features of PAHSCI

### *PAHSCI is distinctive in its:*

- scale as a **statewide Initiative**. Most coaching initiatives are district-based.
- direct **focus on classroom instruction** in high-need high schools. Most high school reform initiatives focus on changing organizational structures.
- **focus on content** – the infusion of literacy-based practices across the curriculum by PAHSCI literacy and math coaches. Many coaching models use “change coaches” who provide technical assistance to principals and teacher leaders but do not focus on specific professional development content.
- design which includes **interventions** aimed at **creating the necessary conditions** in districts and schools that will result in effective coaching and improved student achievement.
- direct site-based monthly **mentoring of coaches and administrators** by Foundations mentors.
- **research and development model** designed as a cycle of documentation, assessment and refinement, and as an effort that will create knowledge about coaching.

## A Research and Development Project

Wisely positioned as a research and development project, the PAHSCI model is designed so that program assessment and reflection can inform ongoing refinements of the Initiative. In Phases 1 and 2 the designers of the Initiative began with a core strategy – coaching – that was gaining attention in a few forward-thinking schools and districts across the country. They used the earliest lessons about the work of coaches and drew from the research on organizational change in schools and school districts to design an initiative that would not only prepare a cadre of effective coaches but would also help to build the knowledge, leadership, organizational structures and momentum necessary for the coaching model to succeed. Now in Phase 3, project participants are deeply engaged in learning from their actions. The emerging knowledge base informs refinements in the Initiative. In Phase 4, these lessons will be distilled into tools for sustaining and scaling up coaching across the state.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RFA’s research plan for the evaluation of the Pennsylvania High School Coaching Initiative addresses four broad areas:

- **Partner Collaboration and Initiative Implementation** How are the coordinating groups working together to implement the program and develop shared program goals?
- **Participant Knowledge and Practice** How does the Initiative improve the knowledge and practice of administrators, coaches and teachers?
- **Student Engagement and Achievement** What are the outcomes related to student engagement, learning, and achievement?
- **School and District Level Changes in Instructional Culture and Capacity** What kinds of capacity and conditions are needed for the model to take root in and positively affect participant knowledge and practice and student achievement?

This multi-year evaluation is a mixed-methods study incorporating both quantitative and qualitative research methods and data.

In Year One of the Initiative, the research focused on program implementation, successes and challenges and on early indicators of the Initiative’s impact on participant knowledge and practice, student engagement, and school and district culture and capacity. Major research activities for Year One included:

- a survey of Initiative teachers;<sup>7</sup>
- a survey of Initiative coaches;<sup>8</sup>
- an end-of-year questionnaire for coaches, evaluations for all participants at centralized training and networking events;
- observations of partnership meetings, centralized trainings and networking sessions, and regional trainings;
- phone interviews with district point-of-contact people; phone interviews of administrators from all schools; and,
- site visits to four districts involving interviews with mentors, coaches, teachers, administrators and students and observations of classes, coach-teacher interactions, and professional development sessions.

This research design enables RFA to integrate and triangulate qualitative and quantitative data from multiple sources. Data from surveys, evaluation forms and the questionnaire provide a broad picture of the perspectives and experiences of large groups of Initiative participants and enable us to identify broad trends and common successes and challenges across sites. The qualitative data provides insight into and context for some of the survey responses. It also enables us to learn about areas that the survey doesn’t or can’t address, such as how differing school and district contexts and cultures affect implementation. For a more detailed discussion of the methodology, please see Appendix B.

#### **FOCUS OF THIS REPORT**

In this report, we focus on early implementation of the Initiative and initial impact on classroom practice and on the instructional capacity of schools and districts. More specifically, we describe PAHSCI’s encouraging progress in creating a seamless partnership to support the work of coaches and identify how the Initiative’s design elements are working. We report findings about the PAHSCI coaches and their successes and challenges in Year One, and findings that show PAHSCI’s impact on classroom teaching. In addition, we make recommendations for Year Two. In future reports, we will continue to focus on implementation but also examine the Initiative’s impact on student engagement, learning and achievement.

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<sup>7</sup> A web-based survey was sent to all teachers at PAHSCI high schools and resulted in a 36% response rate. See Appendix B for a complete description.

<sup>8</sup> A web-based survey was sent to all PAHSCI coaches and resulted in a 94% response rate. See Appendix B for a complete description.

# Enabling Conditions and PAHSCI Supports

Enabling conditions are a pre-existing context that affects project success. The PAHSCI Theory of Change Graphic (See Figure 2) illustrates: (a) district and school enabling conditions; (b) supports offered by partners; and (c) how these work together to support instructional coaching. The necessary district and school enabling conditions are leadership, momentum for change, organizational infrastructure and knowledge. Enabling conditions are also factors which PAHSCI can positively impact. One measure of the Initiative’s impact is its ability to improve these conditions, for example by supporting leadership development or building knowledge and organizational infrastructure.

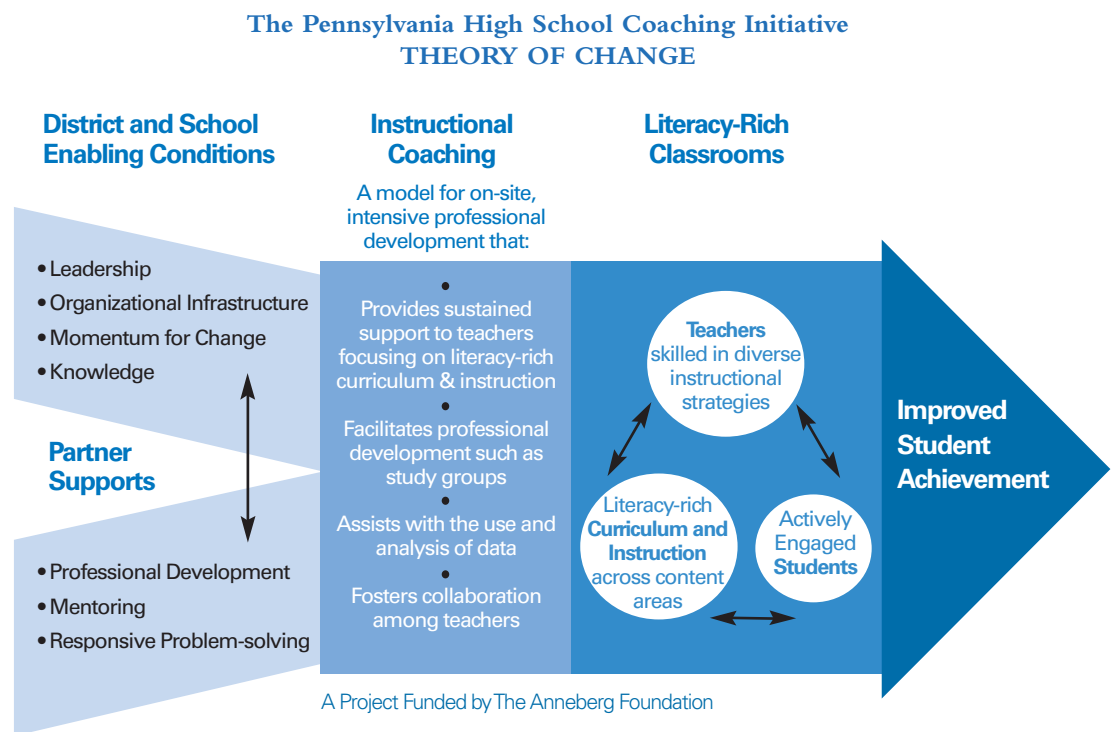


Figure 2

PAHSCI was explicitly designed to include interventions and supports that would create the necessary enabling conditions to increase coaching’s potential to improve teaching and student achievement. The supports offered by PAHSCI partners include:

- **the work of the leadership and content (literacy and math) mentors.** As noted above, leadership and content mentors provide on-site, embedded professional development and support for coaches and administrators implementing the Initiative.
- **professional development.** Partners offer a centralized summer and early fall course for coaches and administrators from all PAHSCI districts and school-year regional courses at multiple sites to serve coaches and teachers from local districts. The centralized course content includes both the PLN framework and strategies and focuses on the practice of coaching. Regional courses focus on the PLN framework and strategies. In Year One, 3 networking sessions for coaches and administrators from all districts were planned and facilitated by Foundations.



- responsive problem solving by partners. In a complex, multi-site initiative like PAHSCI issues and questions that need attention constantly arise. These include fiscal and budget issues, hiring and staffing, internal district or school factors that impede implementation. The PAHSCI Director helped the partners bring their resources and expertise to problem solving with districts to keep implementation moving forward.

All of these supports aim to increase district and school capacity to foster instructional change and increase student achievement.

This chapter shows that key Initiative supports provided by the partners, including professional development and mentoring, functioned well and were refined to address issues as they arose. Partners collaborated to make mid-course corrections and other ongoing refinements to strengthen the Initiative, based on evaluator feedback and partner experience. In terms of the enabling condition of leadership, many district and school administrators were highly involved in and provided strong support for the Initiative but there were significant gaps in administrator support in some districts.

### **THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF IMPLEMENTATION**

One major accomplishment was simply getting the Initiative running in a compressed time frame in nine districts and one I.U. across the state during the 2005–2006 school year. According to coach survey data, about half of all coaches did not attend the June and August 2005 central training sessions, which aimed to prepare coaches to begin their work; some coaches were not hired until after the school year began and others began their work without significant previous professional development about the Initiative. Thus, many aspects of this complex Initiative needed to be developed while it was being implemented. In the face of these challenges, what may seem like expected outcomes – the hiring of coaches, the building of productive coach-teacher and mentor-coach or mentor-administrator relationships, teacher excitement about the PLN framework and working with coaches – represent large achievements and are something to celebrate.

### **IMPLEMENTING AND REFINING THE SUPPORT SYSTEM**

As is described more fully above, PAHSCI was designed to provide an integrated support system to help build a school or district’s infrastructure, leadership, knowledge and momentum for change. This section will focus on how this support system worked to create the necessary enabling conditions for the Initiative and how the partners integrated formative feedback to make mid-course corrections.

#### **Professional Development**

There was a high level of satisfaction with the PLN professional development. In both surveys and interviews, coaches and teachers reported high engagement in and high satisfaction rates with the regional and centralized PLN courses. Across all three sessions of the centralized course, an average of 88 percent of attending coaches rated the trainings as useful or very useful. Of the teachers surveyed who had taken the PLN regional course, 95 percent reported that it was useful or very useful in helping them understand and implement PAHSCI.

Administrators emphasize the importance of the regional courses as a way to involve staff in the initiative. One administrator said, *“The PLN courses...have been phenomenal for our teachers.” “I think the ones who are actually involved in PLN and go to the trainings...are finding the most benefit....They’re learning about the strategies, differentiated instruction.”* Some districts report many more teachers seeking to register for Year Two regional trainings than they could accommodate.

Within the largely positive reaction, a few areas stand out where participants have raised questions or asked for more in-depth training. These include:

- Math professional development and the role of math within the PLN framework. For example, participants have requested a more concentrated focus on applicable secondary math content at professional development sessions. Some math coaches have struggled to understand their role and how best to integrate math and literacy in their work with teachers.

- Greater attention to using the PLN framework with ESL and special education students. PLN has been providing new sessions on these topics in the Year Two centralized trainings.
- More support in using the PLN framework in challenging, high-need settings, e.g. “To have some direct demonstration of how to assist teachers with problem students.”

PAHSCI was designed as a statewide initiative and intentionally provides opportunities for participants to work together across districts. Data indicate that this strategy enabled district and school level participants to deepen their knowledge of the what and how of instructional coaching by exchanging emerging structures and practices with like-positioned “authentic practitioners” at networking and training sessions. Participant evaluations from these sessions have indicated that the coaches and administrators (and small numbers of teachers) attending find these opportunities for networking, sharing and problem solving with other educators to be highly valuable. For example, an average of 59 percent of participants at the March and May networking sessions said that the most useful aspect of the meetings involved networking and sharing within and across districts. In evaluations at the most recent centralized training (August 2006), 71 percent of participants listed “networking” and “sharing” with colleagues across districts as “the most useful aspect of that centralized training.” Coaches and administrators are finding it beneficial to share experiences across districts so that they can draw from that knowledge base as they consider the best approach for moving forward and implementing the PAHSCI in their own context.

### **Developing the Mentor Support Role**

Mentors for both leadership and content (literacy and math) visit districts four days per month to provide ongoing support and professional development to coaches and administrators. Most mentors are retired teachers and/or administrators with extensive experience in education. Most mentors were hired by spring 2005 and were able to attend centralized trainings with teams from their schools and districts.

PAHSCI content and leadership mentors faced challenges similar to those of coaches, i.e., their role had to be created during the process of implementation. Like some coaches, most mentors also faced the challenge of working in districts and schools that were new to them. Roles varied across sites, affected both by district and school context and by the skills and experiences mentors brought. During the course of the year, mentors developed and refined their roles. They also focused intently on creating a more seamless partnership with PLN and improving their ability to support coaches in implementing the PLN framework. Because many of the mentors served more than one district, they were also able to promote cross-fertilization of ideas and practices across sites.

Coaches reported very positively about their relationships with content mentors, with 79 percent of coaches surveyed reporting that support from mentors was useful or very useful. Across districts there was a range in response to this question from a high, in two districts, of 100 percent of coaches finding the mentor support useful or very useful to a low of 29 percent of coaches in one district finding mentor support to be useful or very useful. Content mentors actually played many of the same roles with coaches that coaches played with teachers. Mentors provided a listening ear for coaches’ concerns and helped them problem solve, e.g., about how to gain entry into classrooms, mediating with principals, working with resistant teachers. They provided resources, such as articles, forms and websites and provided professional development, e.g., about adult learning styles or implementing the PLN framework. In addition, they supported coaches in a range of other ways, including developing their skills as coaches and their knowledge of the PLN framework, and assisting them to design and implement professional development.

School-based coaches, pushed by their daily interactions with and requests from teachers, often had to ramp up their knowledge base quickly. In some cases, the knowledge of coaches grew so rapidly that mentors were pushed to increase their capacity and knowledge base to keep up with the growth rate of coaches. One Initiative partner, Foundations Inc. provided additional training for all mentors and sought to clarify mentor roles. Mentors worked to develop tools to use across contexts.

One unique aspect of PAHSCI is that the mentors offer support to administrators as well as to teachers. The role of the leadership mentors is very important in building the necessary knowledge and leadership to sustain the Initiative; it also proved particularly challenging to enact, in part because the components of this role were less clear and less charted elsewhere than those of the content mentors. While many building administrators appreciated the chance to talk about their role and the Initiative with mentors, others did not see the payoff of working with mentors and viewed the meetings with them as using too much of their scarce time.

Foundations and the mentors themselves continued to refine the role of the mentors throughout the year. In spring 2006, Foundations held a retreat for the leadership mentors in order to provide professional development for enacting their role for Year Two and, in particular, to build knowledge about how to support PAHSCI schools with integrating their action plans for coaching into their school strategic plan. Ongoing assessment of the status of school action plans, along with related problem solving and planning, will be a focus of leadership mentors' work in Year Two.

### **Making Mid-course Corrections**

Responsive problem-solving by partners is an important aspect of the Initiative support system. One noteworthy accomplishment of Year One has been the effective collaboration among the PAHSCI partners who have shown a strong commitment to the Initiative and a strong capacity for creative problem solving. From the start, the partners knew they wanted a "seamless" partnership, in which partners would work together cohesively, articulate clear and consistent messages about project goals and processes, and provide the necessary coordinated supports. The partnership structure brings a wealth of resources to the Initiative, but the goal of seamlessness is formidable, given that the multiple partners (e.g., Foundations, PDE, PLN) bring different areas of expertise, a range of organizational structures and styles, different histories and have different roles within the Initiative.

Partners have worked throughout Year One to more fully integrate their planning, efforts and programming. One example of this is the partners' work on the training itself. In reaction to feedback from the 2005 centralized training, partners sought to better coordinate content and coaching portions of the trainings. A spring 2006 partner retreat focused on creating a "more coordinated partnership" was an important turning point in the evolution of the partnership. Subsequently, after the 2006 centralized training, participants applauded the more integrated design of the training.

Partners have routinely reflected on their practices and made mid-course adjustments as necessary. Partners responded to ongoing feedback from RFA to:

- add more math-specific professional development sessions;
- identify new areas of training for future networking and course sessions;
- use on-the-spot feedback to adjust and amend next-day course sessions;
- develop a model to standardize the role of the mentors; and
- revise both the mentor and coach logs.

### Learning from Experience: Creating a Stronger Model

Greenfield<sup>9</sup>, the final district to join the PAHSCI, did not do so until Spring 2006. The process for bringing in this district and beginning the Initiative there was highly successful. Partners used what they had learned in the initial phases of the Initiative to shape the process for this district and to avoid some of the earlier start-up challenges experienced with the first large group of districts. These included generating buy-in from key stakeholders, clear communication about the Initiative to various stakeholders and hiring and training coaches in a timely way.

- Partners knew the importance of buy-in and getting the right people at the table so that firm support for the Initiative would be present throughout the Greenfield district. Partners requested that key people attend the initial meeting. They all came and included the superintendent, director of curriculum, director of special education, high school principal, several school board members, several teachers, the teachers' union president and the business manager.
- Partners were very firm about their expectations. In addition to being clear about who needed to participate at the meeting, they indicated that anyone opposed to the Initiative needed to speak up. They knew they could only go ahead with everyone's support.
- Partners knew what the coach's job entailed and what coaches would need to be able to do. They developed a process whereby the Foundations and PDE program directors and several mentors held individual meetings with 20 teachers to explain the Initiative and what it means to be a coach. This built knowledge about the Initiative, generated strong candidates for coach positions and increased over-all readiness for the Initiative within the district.

### THE KEY ROLE OF SCHOOL AND DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

Research underlines that coaching will not succeed without strong administrative support. According to the International Reading Association, "It is clear...that districts where coaching has taken hold as a primary channel for the delivery of professional development have been characterized by district leaders' public commitment to the coaching model and by the provision of resources so that schools could hire well-prepared coaches."<sup>10</sup> A RAND study found that "investing in the professional development of central office staff can enhance capacity to lead instructional reform."<sup>11</sup> Increasing the knowledge and skills of central office and school administrators also enhanced their capacity to lead instructional change.<sup>12</sup>

PAHSCI addressed the need to increase the knowledge and skills of building administrators by including building administrators in centralized trainings and by employing leadership mentors. While many administrators participated actively in professional development, others missed portions or all of various training and networking sessions. Fully engaging administrators in the midst of busy schedules and crisis management is an ongoing challenge.

In addition, some central office administrators were highly involved in PAHSCI. Several served as Point of Contact (POC) or district liaisons to PAHSCI, attending trainings, overseeing communications and problem solving as issues arose. There was variation in mentors' role with this level of leadership. Data from site visits showed some Foundations leadership mentors addressing the need to explain and advocate for PAHSCI with district top-level leadership. In one example, the district superintendent met with the leadership mentor and listed the three biggest issues the district faced: 1) improving test scores, 2) addressing infrastructure and 3) attracting and retaining quality teachers and administrators. The mentor was able to outline PAHSCI's goals and potential to help with all three issues.

<sup>9</sup> All teacher, school and district names used in the body of the report are pseudonyms.

<sup>10</sup> International Reading Association (2006). *Standards for Middle and High School Literacy Coaches* (p.44) Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

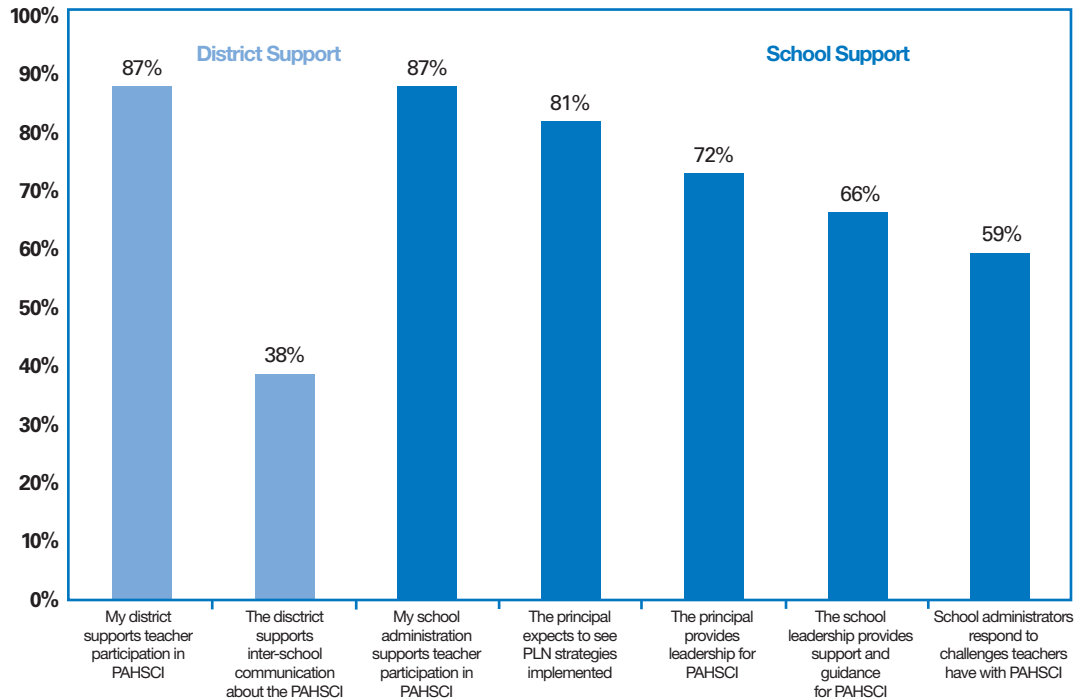
<sup>11</sup> Marsh, J., Kerr, K. A., Ikemoto, G. S., Darilek, H., Suttorp, M., Zimmer, R. et al. (2005). *The Role of Districts in Fostering Instructional Improvements: Lessons from Three Urban Districts Partnered with the Institute for Learning*. (p.xxiv) Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, xxiii.

Teacher survey data from spring 2006 indicates that teachers perceive there is strong support from school and district administrators for the Initiative. (Figure 3) More than three-quarters of teachers surveyed perceived strong school and district support for their participation in PAHSCI and said that their principal provides leadership for the initiative and expects teachers to use PLN strategies. Teachers perceived less support for inter-school communication about PAHSCI; only 38 percent agreed that the district “fosters communication between my school and other schools in the district participating in the initiative.”

**Percentages of Teachers Who Agree With Statements About Supports for PAHSCI**

*Teacher Survey Data, Spring 2006* N=590



*Figure 3*

While many administrators did provide strong support for the Initiative, other data indicate that there are significant gaps in administrator support. For example, coach survey data indicates that about a third of coaches either did not receive support from their principal (27%) and district administrators (30%) or did not find the support they received useful. Examining the data by individual district reveals that perceptions of principal support ranged from a high of 100 percent (useful or very useful) to a low of 44 percent. Interview and observational data indicate that some administrators are not yet fully behind the Initiative, don't prioritize supporting the Initiative, or don't understand the importance of their role.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter highlights a number of accomplishments in the areas of providing supports and strengthening enabling conditions during PAHSCI's first year of implementation. One major accomplishment is constructing and implementing the complex supports of this multi-site initiative and continuing to refine them throughout the year. Participants have reacted very positively to Initiative professional development; later chapters will discuss how coaches and teachers are using that professional development in their work. Mentors had to create and refine their role during the year; they are poised to build on and extend this work in Year 2. Many district and school administrators provided creative and effective leadership for the Initiative, but there were leadership gaps in some contexts.

Data highlight several key areas that need more intensive focus and attention in Year Two. Within professional development, these areas include the needs of ESL students and special education students, helping teachers work more effectively with low-performing students who may be disengaged and/or resistant; and math-literacy connections. There is a need to continue to reflect on and refine the role of the mentors, as well as appropriate tools for their work. PAHSCI also needs to continue to prioritize involving administrators in professional development and the Initiative as a whole so that all participating districts experience strong leadership.

# Instructional Coaching

## The Heart of PAHSCI

*“It’s been very helpful to have someone to talk to who really has an understanding of the class and can really make some real tangible suggestions because [she] knows the class well enough.” – Teacher*

*“They are part of the school fabric and may be the best coaching team in the state.” – Principal*

Coaches – working with teachers in their classrooms – are able to assess students’ needs and classroom dynamics and then, based on that assessment, identify what teachers need to know and be able to do to help all of their students master challenging academic content. At the heart of the Pennsylvania High School Coaching Initiative are coaches and teachers – from across the major subject areas – working together to create literacy-rich classrooms so that students will develop the reading, writing and oral communications skills they need to lead productive lives. One teacher offered the following example of PAHSCI at work:

*“I never would have thought of [having students practice] active reading by taking notes. I was even kind of skeptical, [thinking] ‘The kids aren’t going to connect with this.’ But they did. Now I have it to use in the future.” – Teacher*

In this chapter, we focus on PAHSCI coaches and their work. Our research shows that coaches have worked creatively and diligently to overcome teacher resistance and other obstacles that so often derail reform work in high schools. It indicates that coaches have been surprisingly well-received by teachers and administrators. This reception is encouraging, given the newness of the Initiative and the normative culture of high schools in which teachers work in isolation with only the very rare visitor to their classrooms. While challenges remain, our findings indicate that over the course of the year, coaches increasingly focused their time and attention on the kinds of activities that have the best chance of improving classroom instruction so that students become active and engaged learners and make the achievement gains that are the ultimate goal of this Initiative.

### WHO ARE PAHSCI COACHES?

PAHSCI coaches were selected through a site-based hiring process. Some districts took a local approach, posting the position in their own high schools and attracting teachers who were from the district, while others cast a wider net and posted the position outside of the district, sometimes through teacher network groups. Most often, a leadership team that consisted of district and building administrators made hiring decisions. Though the process varied from site to site, district and school leaders reported that they were determined to get the “right people” for the job. They were intentional about hiring high-caliber coaches who had the professional knowledge, experience and human qualities necessary to succeed in the role of coach. District and school leaders also reported that they found the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s job description and list of qualifications very helpful as they screened applicants (see Coaching Job description on next page). The site-based hiring ensured a good fit between coaches and schools as the comments from administrators attest:

*“I have a lot of good contact with them and they’re pretty well respected. I know, because I selected them.” – Principal*

However, the process of hiring coaches was not without its challenges. By the end of August, only 51 percent of coaches were hired.<sup>13</sup> Many more coaches (31 percent) began their work in September, and nearly all coaches were on board by the end of December 2005. However, the delayed hiring of these coaches meant that they began their work without the benefit of attending the June and August centralized trainings (about 50 percent of coaches attended these sessions). Thus, it was up to the resourcefulness of coaches to fill in the skill gaps that the trainings were meant to address.

<sup>13</sup> Coach Survey Data, January 2006. The number of coaches varied throughout the first year as a result of districts taken out and added into the Initiative. When the Coach Survey was administered in January, there were 86 coaches (83 responded to the survey). When the Coach Questionnaire was administered in June, there were 91 coaches (82 responded to the questionnaire).

## PAHSCI Coaching Job Description

The PAHSCI coaching job description, written by The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) with input from the PAHSCI partner organizations, served as the basis for judging candidates.

*The job goal of the coaches is to ensure that school staffs acquire the understanding and skills to: 1) Ensure that all students improve in their learning and gain the knowledge and skills to access future scholastic and workplace opportunities; and 2) Close the achievement gap by building the capacity of the school and teachers to meet the learning needs of all students.*

*Coaches will serve as part of their school's leadership team, providing support to principals in data analysis and professional development decision-making and providing professional development and guidance for teachers in improving their content knowledge and instructional strategies.*

*Recommended qualifications for coaches included:*

- Minimum, secondary teaching certification with advanced degrees in education, reading, English and/or mathematics;
- Three or more years teaching experience;
- Track record or evidence of improving student achievement in their classroom;
- Demonstrated deep knowledge of one or more instructional content areas;
- Knowledge and use of a rich array of instructional approaches and resources in literacy or math;
- Skills in collecting, analyzing and using data;
- Interpersonal, problem-solving and organizational skills required to effectively facilitate peer coaching and staff development;
- Ability to design and/or broker (individually or in collaboration with others) high-quality training for teachers/school staff;
- Knowledge of equity issues in current education reform;
- Knowledge of standards-based education system and familiarity with or training in the Pennsylvania Assessment Anchors.

They were, by and large, veteran teachers with an average of 17.5 years of teaching experience. Their deep knowledge of high school culture and their understanding of the joys and trials of teaching adolescents served them well as they sought the regard of their teacher colleagues.<sup>14</sup> Seventy-seven percent of PAHSCI coaches indicated that they were White; 14 percent Black; 3 percent Hispanic; 2 percent American Indian or Native Alaskan; and 4 percent "Other," which included one person identifying as Indian. Eighty percent of the coaches were female.

*The table below indicates the position that coaches held directly before being selected as a coach.*

Previous Position of PAHSCI Coaches	Percent
Classroom teachers	67%
Teacher leaders (Dept. chair, reading specialist)	25%
Central administration	4%
Retired teacher	4%

<sup>14</sup> Sturtevant, Elizabeth G. (2006). *The Literacy Coach: A Key to Improving Teaching and Learning in Secondary Schools*. Washington, D.C.: The Alliance for Excellent Education.



Notably, two-thirds of the coaches came to their new role directly from classroom teaching. This transition out of the classroom is an extremely significant one in the career of an educator, and comes with both advantages and areas for growth. Recent classroom experience and veteran status earned many coaches credibility with their teacher colleagues. However, these coaches often did not have experience effecting change on a school-wide level and they struggled intensely with defining a new professional identity and developing the skills needed for the job.<sup>15</sup> Over 50 percent of the coaches began their work in school settings that were new to them. For these coaches, becoming familiar with the culture of their new school and getting to know the people were major tasks for the first year.

### OBSTACLES TO COACHES

Coaches confronted significant obstacles in their first year on the job, but the obstacles differed across schools. Lack of administrative support was a problem for some. Twenty percent of coaches disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that *“My principal is a useful resource.”* While 55 percent of all coaches reported that staff was receptive to PAHSCI, only 31 percent of coaches who did not view the principal as a useful resource responded that staff had been receptive to the Initiative. In addition, of coaches who did not view the principal as a useful resource:

- 38 percent agreed with the statement that “Staff is encouraged to listen to new ideas”;
- 19 percent agreed with the statement that “Teachers are supported to excel in their teaching”; and
- only 6 percent perceived that their school had a clear focus on how to improve student achievement.

In response to an open-ended survey question asking what significant challenges coaches had encountered, 13 percent named inadequate administrative support. In an interview, one coach said,

*“I think the big fault of the Grant Initiative is the failure of the administration to pressure teachers to become involved in the Initiative and to attempt to implement some of the strategies.”*

Teacher resistance to the Initiative was listed as a major challenge by 33 percent of coaches in survey open-ended responses. An additional 15 percent responded that gaining the trust of teachers has been a significant challenge. One coach exclaimed that the biggest challenge was,

*“The resistance! This Coaching Initiative was NEVER presented to the whole faculty as an educational piece. They didn’t know who we were or if they did, they gave us a lot of push-back because they didn’t trust us or understand what we were there for.”*

Coaches also named confusion about their role as an obstacle for both themselves and staff in their schools. In all, 18 percent of survey respondents indicated that lack of clarity about their role was a significant challenge for them. Another coach said in an interview,

*“We had great difficulty connecting with the staff. We probably did not effectively articulate at the beginning of the year what we could do and how we could do it, because I don’t think we knew.”*

Eighteen percent of coaches also listed overcoming time constraints as a major challenge in the coach survey. A coach said that the biggest challenge was,

*“Time...it takes time to build a relationship and the teacher schedule does not always mesh with the schedule for the coach. There are too many people to provide coaching services to and not a full complement of coaches.”*

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<sup>15</sup> Neufeld, B. & Roper, D. (2003). *Coaching: A Strategy for Developing Instructional Capacity* Washington, D.C. and Providence, R.I.: The Aspen Institute Program on Education and The Annenberg Institute for School Reform.

*“The coaches in this school...their role is invaluable. The credibility that they have established with the teachers has been really good. I mean, their colleagues are fellow teachers, but they’re still pulling people out of their comfort zone and, at times, challenging individuals’ belief systems.” – Principal*

Another obstacle was teachers’ concern about whether their interactions with coaches would be confidential. In most districts, curriculum supervisors and other administrators enter teachers’ classrooms with the dual goals of support and evaluation of performance and under these circumstances teachers have been skeptical about whether the offer of support was genuine or only a step in the process of documenting poor performance. As teachers and coaches explained to us, this suspicion is reinforced when principals direct coaches to focus on marginal teachers. For this reason, it is important that working with a coach be voluntary even though this challenges coaches to be proactive and persistent in securing that important invitation to visit classrooms.

In the following section we show how coaches worked to overcome these obstacles to win the respect and trust necessary to help teachers make changes in their classroom practice.

## RECEPTIVITY TO COACHES

*“I don’t think you could find more dedicated people.” – Principal*

Ask principals, teachers or PAHSCI leaders and partners about the quality of coaches and overwhelmingly one hears a collective, *“They’re the best.”* Or, as an Initiative leader noted, *“We have the right people on the bus.”* Our interview data indicated that people most often pointed to coaches’ dedication, initiative, creativity and their ability to make themselves invaluable members of the school community. We observed coaches working creatively and through considerable trial and error, to earn their colleagues’ trust and receptivity to classroom visits. This is not to say that coaches made no missteps, but in general, coaches won the respect and high regard of most of their colleagues.

**Percentages of Teachers Who Strongly Agree or Agree**  
*Teacher Survey Data, Spring 2006*

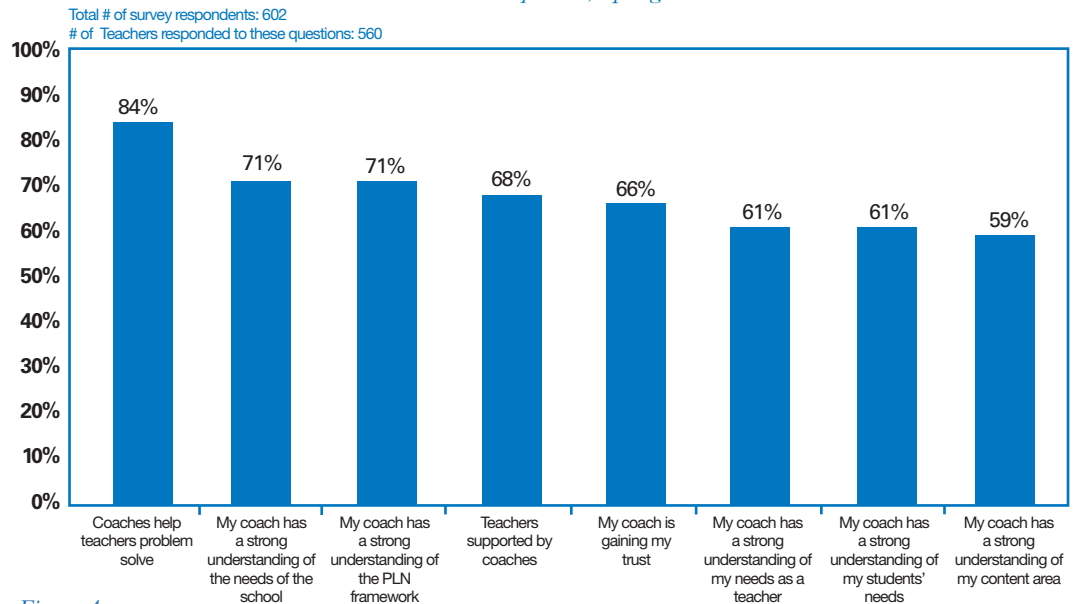


Figure 4

Data from the spring 2006 Teacher Survey demonstrate teachers’ positive perceptions of coaches (See Figure 4). A remarkable 84 percent of teachers who responded to the survey agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that “Coaches help teachers problem solve.” Sixty-eight percent agreed that “Teachers are supported by coaches.”

Teachers also expressed admiration for coaches’ knowledge. Seventy-one percent agreed or strongly agreed that “My coach has a strong understanding of the needs of the school,” and 71 percent agreed that “My coach has a strong understanding of the PLN framework.” Such positive perceptions reflect the benefits of PAHSCI’s site-based hiring process, a well-articulated job description that helped attract the right candidates, and the training and support provided by the Penn Literacy Network and Foundations Inc.’s mentors. Further, two-thirds of teachers responded that their coaches were gaining their trust, indicating that coaches possess the human qualities needed to succeed in their role.

Not only do teachers want coaches to understand their school and be knowledgeable about the Penn Literacy Framework, they also want coaches to understand their needs as teachers and their students' needs, and to be knowledgeable about the teacher's content area. Approximately 60 percent of the teachers perceived their coaches as meeting these requirements.

Coaches worked hard to win the high regard of their colleagues. Below, we describe three important tasks that the coaches confronted during this first, start-up year: building rapport and trust; establishing their role; and focusing on instruction.

### Building Rapport and Trust

*"Establishing trust and rapport is my primary goal and the only way I can get in the door as a coach."  
– Coach*

*"I'm willing to take risks and she knows that. But sometimes I don't always know what to do. I don't know what risks to take. You get stuck in the things that you've always done. She gives me lots of new ideas. She's like a friend. She's awesome. I love her. [laughs] I do, I love her and she knows it." – Teacher*

The goal of instructional coaching is to facilitate the transfer of newly acquired knowledge and skills into actual classroom practices. Coaches understood that their work was very much about building relationships and that establishing rapport is a precursor to facilitating instructional change.

*"I was hesitant to [incorporate new strategies into my teaching]. I would do it, but I wouldn't do it very willingly, because I wasn't comfortable. But now, I think I'm getting used to it. [I] know my coach is there if I fall short of something, if I'm not able to explain [something] more fully. If I don't know something, if there are some problems, I can always run to her. [In] trying to think what went wrong and what's going to happen, what can I do best, I just go to her and talk to her." – Teacher*

While teachers valued coaches for their knowledge about instruction and their dedication to education improvement, they also valued coaches who explicitly recognized and respected the emotional and intellectual investment of teachers in improving their practice. The high premium that teachers place on how they are approached, whether they feel listened to and valued, underscores the importance of the coach's interpersonal skills and in spending the time to build a firm foundation of trust. Our findings corroborate other studies that have shown that the interpersonal skills of coaches are just as important as their content knowledge as they help teachers to take risks and apply new ideas in their classrooms.<sup>16</sup> In fact, our research indicates that building trust is a task that coaches must return to again and again as they broaden and deepen their reach.

*"We have teachers who have come to study groups consistently; we have teachers who welcome us into their classrooms; we have teachers who seem to enjoy co-planning with us, co-teaching with us; and so I feel like we've really built that trust and rapport that we initially set out to do." – Coach*

Central to building rapport and trust is listening; 93 percent of coaches reported that they provided "a listening ear for teachers" at least once a week – the most frequently cited activity early in the program's implementation. A coach's work also involves supporting teachers in "behind the scenes" activities, for example redesigning the layout of the classroom, reorganizing libraries, or making photocopies when a teacher is short on time.<sup>17</sup> Many coaches (79 percent) reported that they routinely secured resources for teachers – the teaching materials and supplies that are so often scarce in high-need schools. Coaches also conducted Internet searches for curriculum materials and other information that would support the development of units of study. In addition to ensuring that teachers had access to well-designed materials, strategies like this one endeared coaches to teachers who spend considerable time scavenging for classroom materials. These activities, though not directly linked to changing instruction, contribute to the trust-building between a teacher and a coach, and convey to teachers that coaches are there for them in a holistic way.

<sup>16</sup> Poglinco, S., Bach, A., Hovde, K., Rosenblum, S., Saunders, M., & Supovitz, J.A. (2003). *The Heart of the Matter: The Coaching Model in America's Choice Schools*.

<sup>17</sup> Allen, J. (2005). *Becoming a Literacy Leader: Supporting Learning and Change*. Stenhouse Publishers.

*“There needs to be more consistency with the specifics of the program and what is expected from coaches.”*

*– District Leader*

## **Establishing Their Role**

*“Coaches were expected to create the coaching model.” – Coach*

*“Who’s in charge? We are getting conflicting directives from the school district main office, our school administration, and Foundations leadership.” – Coach*

Not surprisingly, in the first year of implementation, PAHSCI coaches struggled to define and internalize their role and articulate that role to others. In the survey of coaches, 40 percent of coaches disagreed with the statement *“I was provided a clear description of the Coach’s role in PAHSCI.”* And numerous coaches reported that their administrators and, consequently, the entire staff did not understand their role.

Coaches reported on questionnaires and in interviews that they struggled mightily with the ambiguity of their new assignment and with conflicting messages about what they were supposed to do. Given the newness of coaching to education reform, there remains a paucity of research to guide on-the-ground educators as they put the model into practice.

In addition, the list of possible tasks that coaches might perform is seemingly endless. There is so much to do and so few people in schools who have any time in the school day to do anything beyond their classroom teaching responsibilities. It is not surprising that when coaches became available in PAHSCI schools, ideas and demands for how they should spend their time proliferated. Establishing priorities was complicated by a number of factors. First, coaches received conflicting messages about where they should direct their attention. For example, early in the year coaches reported that Foundations mentors were pressing them to spend 90 percent of their time in classrooms, while school and district leaders were directing them to support other important district and school initiatives, such as curriculum development and alignment, the creation of benchmark assessments, and planning for and administering state testing.

Presumably, another source of guidance for coaches as they set priorities would be their school’s plan for improving student achievement. But a telling finding from the coach survey is that only 30 percent of coaches agreed with the statement *“My school has a clear focus on how to improve student achievement.”* While some district teams had created an action plan to guide PAHSCI activities during summer training, almost a quarter of the coaches were not hired until after that training and many of them seemed to be unaware of or uninvested in those action plans. It is expected that the PAHSCI school and district action planning process – a process setting the activities and strategies for Year Two – will eliminate some of the tensions that PAHSCI coaches experienced this year.

The PAHSCI design called for one literacy and one mathematics coach for every 600 students. This allotment meant that coaches did not work in isolation; they had at least one other coach (and, in most cases, at least three additional coaches) in their building. Coaches greatly appreciated their partner coaches and 95 percent of coaches agreed or strongly agreed that their partner coaches were their most important support.

Having partners helped coaches as they struggled to establish their roles. Coaches became adept at capitalizing on each other’s strengths and compensating for areas of weakness. Several coaches also commented that having more than one coach in a building also allowed for matching coaches’ styles and personalities with those of teachers.

## **Focusing on Instruction: Breadth and Depth of Coaches’ Contact with Teachers**

*“The coaches go above and beyond. I think it has helped that they are so busy and tend to so many things here, and people see that. I think they have gained authority from the example that they set.”*  
*– Principal*

*“I think we [coaches] understood what “teaching” was. [So] I began teaching rather than coaching. I would go into classes and when I was asked to model, sometimes I taught the lesson instead of coaching [the teacher on how to teach the lesson]. Understanding the technique of coaching, one of the most valuable pieces is learning how to allow the teacher to rise.” – Coach*

“Sometimes the coaches go in and actually demonstrate in the class, to model certain techniques. Sometimes they meet with the teacher before and after the class, to tell them what to expect or find out how it went. The staff needs to see these people as real support.”

– Administrator

During the first year of the Initiative, several trends emerged with regard to the kinds of contact coaches had with teachers. First, coaches achieved considerable breadth and depth of contact with teachers, but this contact varied dramatically from coach to coach. Second, coach/teacher interactions increased in frequency over the course of the year, as did coaches’ facilitation of study groups and professional development sessions. Third, the kinds of activities in which coaches engaged were more directly connected to instructional change later in the year. These are encouraging trends.

An important goal of instructional coaching is to achieve both breadth and depth of reach in terms of coaches’ contact with teachers. At the end of the year, coaches completed a questionnaire in which they reviewed their work to determine breadth and depth of contact. Our observations and interviews suggest that coaches’ contacts with teachers increased considerably over the course of the year. The chart below reports data collected from the questionnaire. On average, both breadth (the number of teachers worked with) and depth (the number and frequency of contacts) were impressive. However, the range of teacher contact from coach to coach was considerable. An end-of-year questionnaire indicated that, on average, each coach worked with 21 teachers over the course of the year. (The number of teachers ranged from 10 to 53 teachers across the 90 coaches.) It is likely that coaches’ involvement with district- and school-mandated activities, such as developing curriculum and administering standardized tests, accounted for this dramatic variation.

Avg. Number of Teachers Worked With	21	Range 3-100
Avg. Number of Teachers Worked With on a Weekly Basis	7	Range 0-25
Avg. Number of Teachers Worked With on Monthly Basis	13	Range 2-30
Avg. Number of Times Worked With Each Teacher	20	Range 1-90

These data and administrators’ reports indicate that, by and large, coaches made remarkable headway at building rapport and trust with teachers and working with them to improve instruction.

The bar graph in Figure 5 shows the percentages of coaches reporting that they engaged in the indicated activities at least once a week. These data were collected in January –fairly early in the Initiative. Overall, this graph suggests that while coaches were certainly engaged with teachers, the coaching activities that are most directly connected to changing classroom instruction (planning lessons, communicating PLN pedagogy and in-class modeling) occurred somewhat less frequently than the coaching activities aimed more at building rapport.

### Percentages of Coaches Engaging in Activities at Least Once a Week

Coach Survey Data, January 2006

N=84 coaches

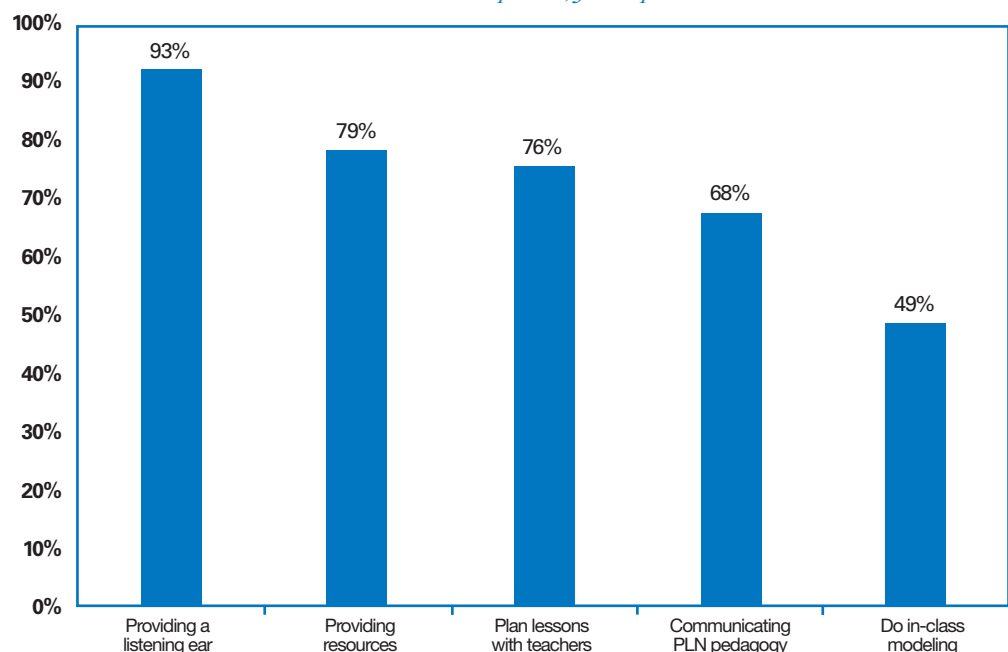
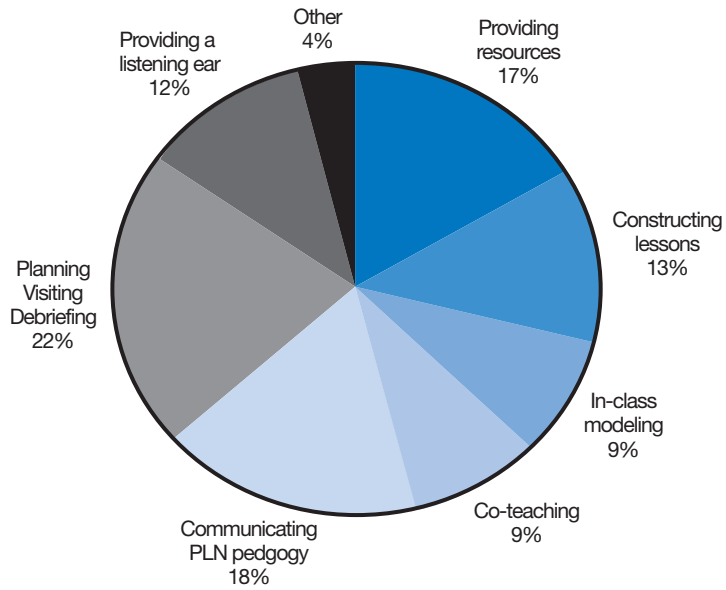


Figure 5

**How Coaches Spent Their Time**  
*Coach Questionnaire, June 2006* N=90

*“She’s been a rock star to me in this class. I think the kids have been so much more engaged. I never would have thought of having active reading by taking notes. She gave me this strategy and I looked it over and used it. It was profoundly valuable.”*  
**– Teacher**



*\*Note: The question asked respondents to appropriate a percentage of time to various coaching activities. Some individual's responses added to more than 100%, thus overall percentages add up to 104%.*

*Figure 6*

In comparison, by the end of the year coaches reported that they spent a large proportion of their time engaged in activities that offered the most promise for directly impacting classroom instruction. The pie chart in Figure 6 is based on coaches’ end-of-the-year questionnaire administered in June 2006. Coaches were asked to indicate roughly what percentage of their time was spent on various activities. Taken together, working with the Before, During, and After Planning Model, communicating PLN pedagogy, co-teaching, in-classroom lesson modeling and constructing lessons accounted for 70 percent of coaches’ time.

*“Teaching biology, there’s a lot of lecturing. I just needed other ways to engage my students. So it was really great when [coach] gave me suggestions. She’d take my material, and give me different ways to try things. It was great. It was really great!” – Teacher*

**CONCLUSION**

With support from their Foundation mentors and training by the Penn Literacy Network, PAHSCI coaches forged a role in their schools that, in many cases, is already having a positive influence on teachers’ instructional practices. Drawing on their deep knowledge of teachers and teaching, coaches were creative and persistent in their efforts to overcome obstacles presented by their particular schools.

They have built rapport and trust with teachers – a task that is ongoing. In most instances, coaches were able to work through ambiguity about their roles and competing demands for their time and attention to create a position that is highly valued by their teacher colleagues. Teachers and administrators perceived their coaches to have the knowledge, skills and personal attributes that would make them effective change agents. Teachers’ respect for and receptivity to coaches demonstrates an openness to new ideas that is a prerequisite for change. For their part, coaches have increasingly engaged in the kinds of activities that have the best chance of resulting in lasting instructional improvement, including: in-class modeling, planning with teachers, observing in their classrooms and debriefing their observations.

Several of PAHSCI's design elements were particularly important to making Year One of the Initiative a good one and high school reformers elsewhere should pay attention to them as they contemplate the use of instructional coaches. Site-based hiring helped to ensure a good match between coaches and their schools. Coaching teams provided a safe space for coaches to talk through problems and share practices. PAHSCI professional development and mentoring extended throughout the year. Implementation problems included a hiring process that dragged out past the beginning of the school year in some districts and lack of clear and shared understanding of the coaches' role in some schools.

In summary, coaches listened and learned and used the resources available to them from PAHSCI and their own intelligence, energy and capabilities to combine and recombine their thinking in new and different ways and establish a role that worked for them and for their schools. As would be expected, some made the journey more successfully than others. In the following chapter, we move from teachers' receptivity to coaches and instructional change to a discussion of what alterations teachers actually undertook as a result of their interactions with coaches.



# Teachers and Classrooms

## PAHSCI's Influence on Professional Learning and Practice

*“The coaching initiative – I think it is a very effective tool. I really enjoyed the training, and felt that I have learned a lot and put what I learned to good use.” – Teacher*

Comments such as the one to the left are encouraging and reflect the feelings of many of the teachers who are part of PAHSCI. As we noted in the previous chapter, teachers perceived their coaches to have the knowledge, skills and personal attributes to make them effective in their role. The question is whether this perception and the professional development work of coaches is impacting teachers' work in the classroom. In this chapter we examine how professional learning and practice has been influenced by PAHSCI.

PAHSCI aims to increase teachers' use of rigorous literacy-building practices and to build teachers' skill in actively engaging students in their own learning. Our research indicates the central components of PAHSCI were effective in helping teachers adopt instructional strategies that actively engaged students in rigorous literacy activities. These central components are: a) professional development that engages teachers with the PLN Framework and related instructional activities to use with their students; and b) follow-up conversations with and demonstrations by an instructional coach. The vignette below illustrates the synergy of combining these two kinds of professional development.

### VIGNETTE:

#### **Veteran Teacher: Mr. Matthews' Story**

*When Mr. Matthews began teaching in a large urban district he was full of idealism and had high hopes of making a difference in his students' lives. After almost ten years of teaching Mr. Matthews said that he had become “set in his ways” and that some of his idealism had been “ripped out of [him].”*

*Reluctant at first, Mr. Matthews decided to work with a coach after seeing coaches model strategies at a professional development session. He thought, “If these strategies are fun and engaging for me, maybe they will be fun and engaging for my students.” His comment illustrates the importance of PAHSCI's professional development strategy – demonstrate with teachers what they should do with students in the classroom.*

*Today Mr. Matthews credits his coach with, “getting me out of the rut that I was afraid I was falling into.” Walk into one of Mr. Matthews' productively loud classes now and you can see that he and his students are comfortable working collaboratively in small groups. Together, Mr. Matthews and his coach have spent a lot of time and given a lot of thought to lesson planning, delivery and assessment. Working with a coach has also helped Mr. Matthews become a more reflective teacher, constantly striving to keep his students engaged in their work. Mr. Matthews emphatically states that he “has regained some of that idealism he had when he first started teaching.”*

At a PLN professional development session, Mr. Matthews worked in a small group with his colleagues on a task that he found enjoyable and stimulating. This experience piqued his interest: Would his own students respond to this kind of activity? Luckily for Mr. Matthews he had someone in his school – an instructional coach – who was knowledgeable about the strategies being used and able to help him plan how he might transfer this experience to his classroom. The work with his coach made it much more likely that Mr. Matthews' use of group work would be successful and that his students' receptivity would encourage Mr. Matthews to continue to use the activity and to try other new ideas.



As would be expected, our research indicated that teachers’ openness to change was an important ingredient in whether they were able to forge collaborative relationships with coaches. When building administrators sent the message that they expected to see PLN strategies used in classrooms, teachers, including those still reluctant to open their classroom doors to coaches, attended PAHSCI professional development sessions and were more likely to use PLN strategies in their classrooms. Further, coaches made promising inroads with groups of teachers, including career-tech, special-needs and veteran teachers. Reform efforts often do not reach these teachers.

Below, we will show that PAHSCI coaches’ provided support, feedback and help in three critical areas of teaching: planning and organization, instruction and classroom management.

### PLANNING AND ORGANIZATION

Although literature on teaching effectiveness offers no single list of attributes of effective teachers, invariably: the ability to plan and organize subject matter content is included. Not surprisingly, planning and organization are a major emphasis of the PLN Framework. The Framework offers Before, During and After (BDA) as a model for planning and our research indicates that coaches use it frequently to structure lesson planning with teachers. In the Before portion of a BDA, the teachers set a purpose for the instructional activity and draws on students’ prior knowledge to encourage their engagement and readiness for learning. In the During portion, the teacher actively engages students in an instructional activity. In the After portion of the activity students reflect on the concepts and skills learned in the activity, consolidating their ideas and drawing further conclusions. And so, for example, in using the BDA model, coaches routinely asked teachers, “Can you explain your thinking in planning this lesson or unit?” They found that probing the rationale for the organization of the content was important.<sup>18</sup>

Coaches reported that the BDA model is a particularly useful tool for lesson planning with teachers. Seventy-seven percent of the coaches reported that they planned lessons with teachers daily or weekly. An encouraging number of teachers (42 percent of the total teachers surveyed and 65 percent of teachers who attended PLN training) reported that they use the BDA model at least weekly.

Teacher interviews and classroom observations show a deepening knowledge by teachers about how to organize and plan ways for students to practice and reinforce their literacy skills. Coaches showed teachers how to systematically incorporate literacy-building activities into their lesson planning. For example, a planning tool coaches used frequently was called the Reading Event Lesson. Coaches helped teachers to check for comprehension and to incorporate strategies such as scaffolding into their lessons to promote reading comprehension. (See below.)

Reading Event Lesson			
Do Now	Reading Event Clarify/Check for Comprehension	Lesson	Follow-up/ Summary Check for Comprehension

Following the planning, the teachers would teach and frequently coaches would observe the instruction.

Successful planning for literacy-rich classrooms includes attention to student engagement, and student voices, an important component of the PLN Framework. Some traditional “stand and deliver” high school teachers found it challenging to create ways for students to process their learning together. However, others are incorporating group work. Coaches helped teachers to think through how to draw on adolescents’ natural tendency to communicate with one another to reinforce conceptual learning. This kind of planning for how to elicit students’ thinking is critical, as one teacher reflected:

<sup>18</sup> There is strong evidence that content knowledge alone is not sufficient. Good teachers are also able to reconfigure knowledge in ways that students understand and to draw on a wide repertoire of teaching strategies that best fit diverse topics, classes and students.

Neild, R. C., Useem, E., Travers, E., & Lesnick, J. (2003). *Once & For All: Placing a Highly-Qualified Teacher in Every Philadelphia Classroom*. Philadelphia: Research for Action.

*“I have learned something very important about group work, you obviously just can’t tell a class one day I want to break down into groups, here is what we are going to do; you actually have to teach your class for a day or two about how to work in a group before you even break down into groups, you have to teach them the dynamics of group activity and you have to make them accountable.” - Teacher*

Students noticed and responded positively when teachers planned and considered how to elicit their voices and engage them more in the classroom. One introspective 11th grader shared the comment to the left.

*“My teacher has us write down what we think about what we read...and explain it and express what we wrote to the people next to us so we can learn how to speak out loud—to express our mind about what we read.”*

**– Student Focus Group**

In summary, our research indicated that after Year One, teachers were incorporating PLN planning tools and strategies into their work. Early evidence also suggests that students respond positively to these strategies.

## **INSTRUCTION**

Many students in the high-need schools can not read and write well enough to understand the subject matter taught in their classes. These students “need intensive, focused, sustained instruction to help them catch up with their peers.” PAHSCI planners understood the grim fact that “high schools are generally not structured nor have teachers been prepared to provide such intensive, focused and sustained instruction to help basic literacy.”<sup>19</sup>

The PLN Framework and the instructional activities and strategies that comprise it, while not a curriculum in itself, are designed to incorporate research-based best practices in teaching adolescent literacy. As mentioned earlier, PLN courses help participants to understand instruction using four perspectives or lenses: meaning-centered, social, language-based and human. These lenses are the background for delivering content-based instruction that provides students with experiences that immerse them in reading, writing, talking, and listening across the curriculum.<sup>20</sup>

### **Implementing Classroom Instructional Practices**

According to the teacher survey, teachers who participated in PAHSCI professional development and worked with coaches tended to implement more PLN instructional strategies and activities. For example: respondents who worked with coaches were much more likely to report they knew how to apply their learning in the classroom (79 percent) than were those who had never worked individually or in a small group with a coach (29 percent). Participants in the PLN regional course were more likely to implement Do Nows and the BDA model at least once a week than teacher survey respondents as a whole. Likewise, participants in the school-based professional development were more likely to implement Do Nows and the BDA model than teachers who had not participated. (See Figure 7)

<sup>19</sup> Hock, Michael F. and Deshler, Donald D. (2003, November). Adolescent Literacy: Ensuring that No Child is Left Behind. (p.6) *Principal Leadership*, 1-13.

<sup>20</sup> The five critical experiences are: transacting with text, composing text, extending reading and writing, investigating language and learning to learn.

### Teacher Participation in PD and the Use of PLN Strategies at Least Once a Week

Teacher Survey Data, Spring 2006

\*\*Statistically significant

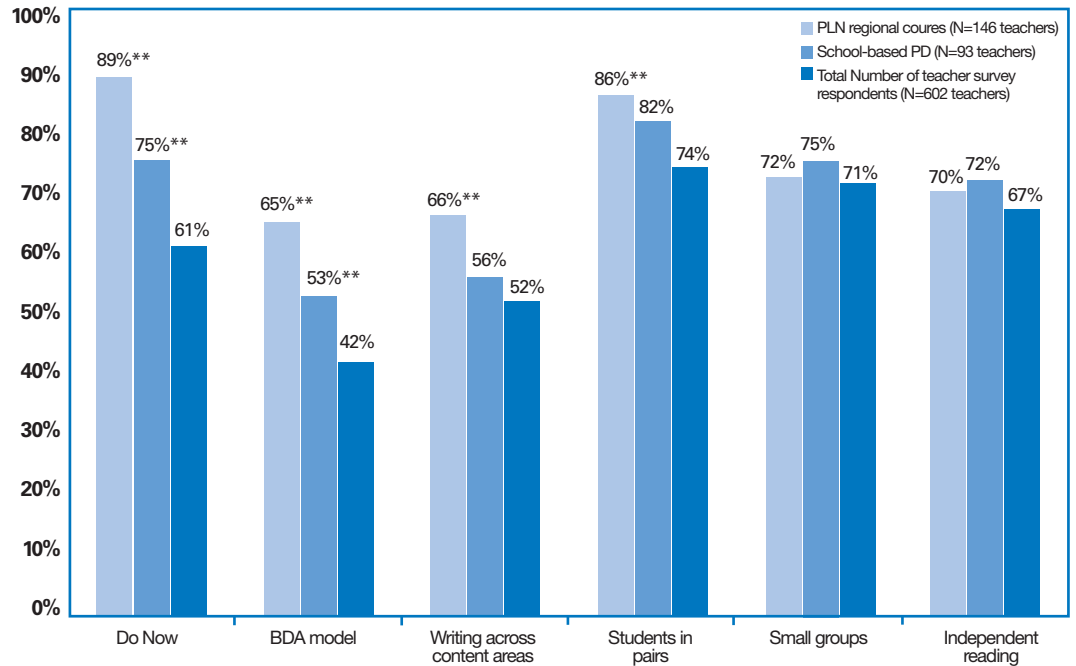


Figure 7

Eighty-nine percent of teachers who participated in the regional course used Do Nows at least weekly compared with 52% of teachers who did not take the regional course. An even stronger correlation is present between use of the BDA model and participation in the regional course. Sixty-five percent of teachers taking the regional course used the BDA model at least weekly compared with 23% of teachers who did not participate in the course. Thus, teachers participating in the regional course were almost three times more likely to use the BDA model at least weekly than their peers who did not participate in the regional course. (See Figure 8)

### Effects of Regional Courses on Use of PLN Strategies at Least Once a Week

Teacher Survey Data, Spring 2006

\*\*Statistically significant

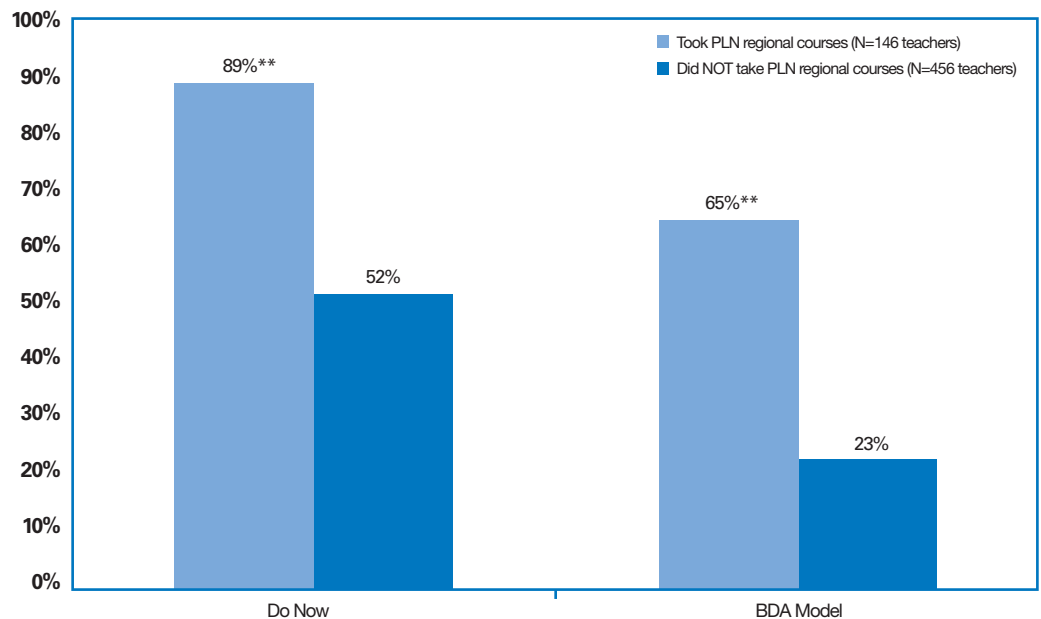
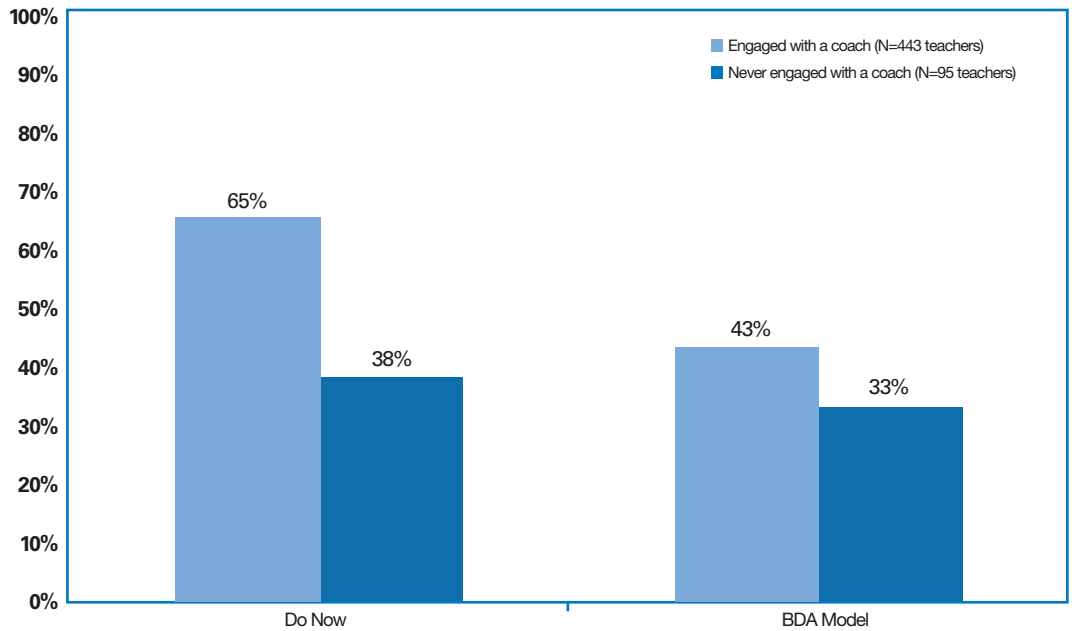


Figure 8

A similar pattern is evident in terms of teacher engagement with coaches and their use of PLN strategies. Teachers who engaged with a coach were more likely to use the Do Now strategy than those who never engaged with a coach. (Sixty-five percent of those who engaged with coaches used the strategy at least weekly vs. 38% of those who never engaged with coaches.) Teachers who engaged with a coach were also more likely to use the BDA model than their peers who never engaged with a coach. (Forty-three percent of those who engaged with a coach used the BDA model versus 33% of teachers who never engaged with a coach.) (See Figure 9)

**Work with Coaches and Use of PLN Strategies at Least Once a Week**  
*Teacher Survey Data, Spring*



*Figure 9*

In addition, 92 percent of PLN regional course participants said they knew how to apply what they are learning in their classroom. 86 percent of school-based PAHSCI professional development participants agreed they knew how to apply what they were learning. This means that survey respondents who engaged with a coach were almost three times more likely to say they knew how to apply what they were learning in the Initiative than teachers who never engaged with a coach. (See Figure 10)

### Teacher Participation in PD and Application of Learnings

Teacher Survey Data, Spring 2006 \*\*Statistically significant

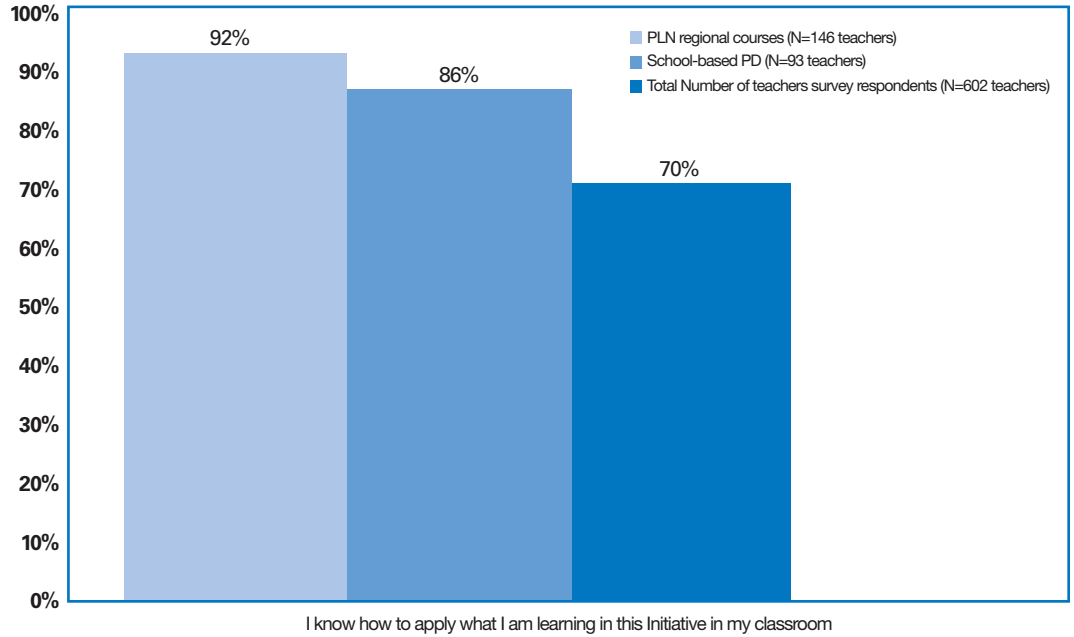


Figure 10

Respondents who worked with coaches were much more likely to say they knew how to apply their learning in their classroom than were those who had not. Seventy-nine percent of engagers said they could do this while only 29 percent of those who had never worked with a coach felt they could apply what they were learning about the Initiative. (See Figure 11)

### Work With Coaches and Application of Learnings to the Classroom

Teacher Survey Data, Spring 2006

\*\*Statistically significant  
N=538 teachers

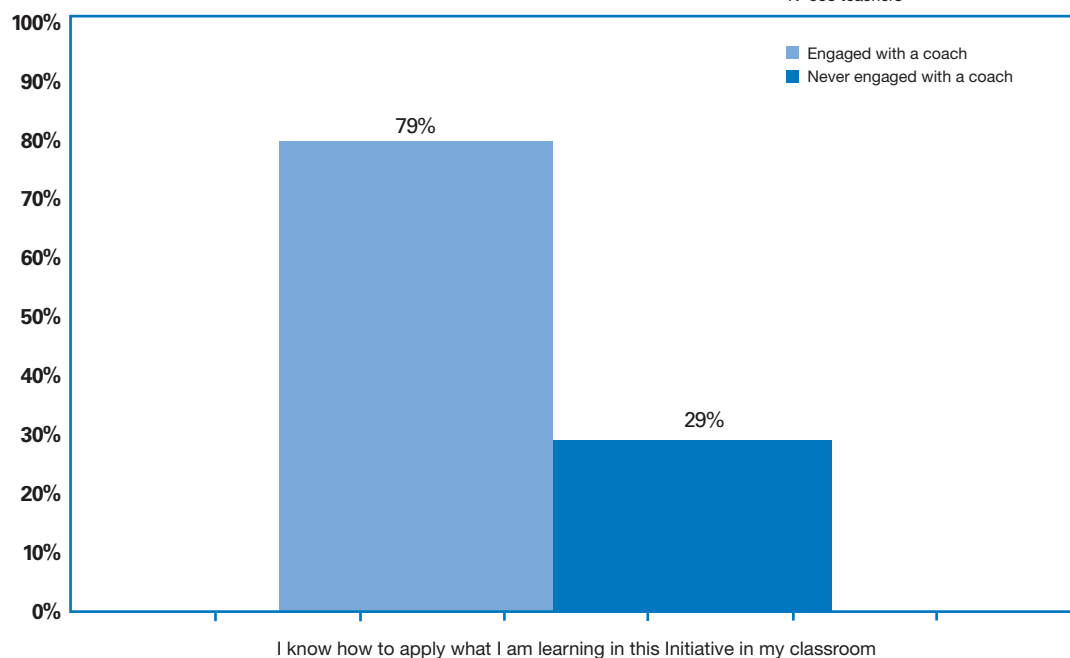


Figure 11

There was a moderate positive correlation between teachers' depth of involvement with coaches and their implementation of PLN strategies.

### Principal Expectations and Teacher Use of PLN Strategies

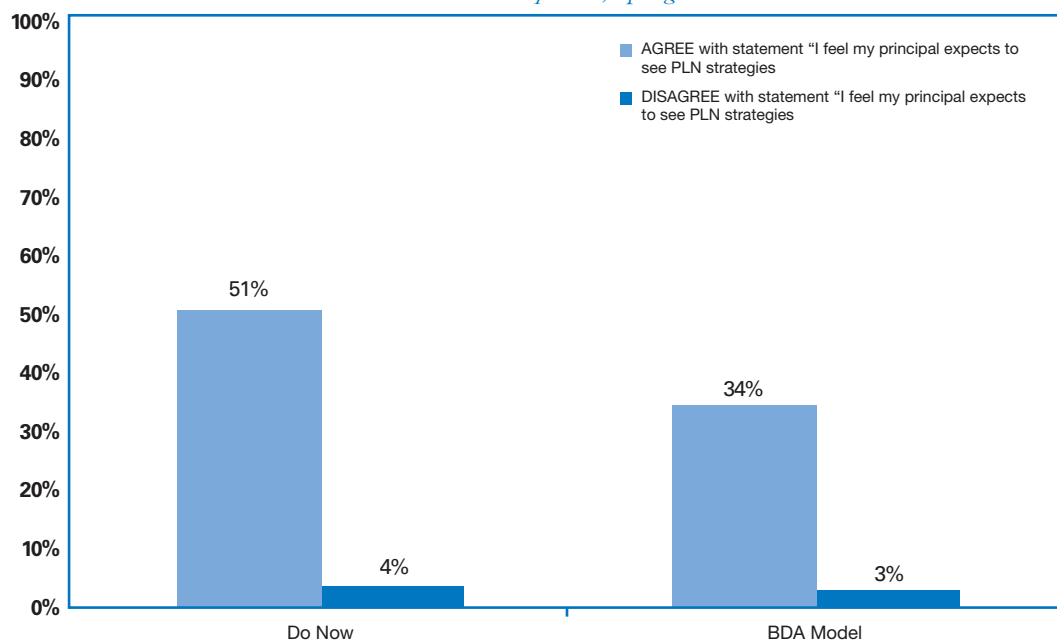
High expectations by principals proved important to the successful adoption of PAHSCI strategies. Our research shows that when principals communicated their expectations that teachers would use the PLN strategies it was more likely to occur. Eighty-one percent of teachers agreed with the statement, "I feel that my principal expects to see Penn Literacy Network (PLN) strategies implemented in the classroom." The data (see Figure 12 ) show that 51 percent of the teachers who reported their principals expected them to use PLN strategies used the Do Now strategy at least once a week. In comparison, 4 percent of teachers used Do Now weekly who reported that they did not feel their principal expected them to use PLN strategies.

Similarly, 34 percent of teachers who agreed that their principal expected them to use PLN strategies used the BDA model at least once a week. Only three percent of teachers who did not feel that their principal expected them to use PLN strategies utilized the BDA model.

## Principal Expectations and Percent of Teachers Using PLN Strategies at Least Once a Week

*Teacher Survey Data, Spring 2006*

N=538



*Figure 12*

The vast majority (three-quarters) of teachers said they had infused reading and writing into their classes even though the PLN activities were new to them. In particular, reading and writing were being incorporated into subject-area classes, such as math and career-tech classes, that did not traditionally require as much reading and writing. Teacher survey data showed that students were most resistant to independent reading and to writing across content areas. Interviews with teachers confirmed this point. One math teacher theorized:

*“They are of a mindset that writing is not to be done in mathematics classes. That’s their mindset. Given that, they still did it pretty well. They were like ‘why do we have to do this, this is not what we usually do?’ It was a whole big thing. [Eventually] they said, ‘we’ll just do it a little.’ So that was a fuss but they still did it and they did some nice reflections.”*

Some teachers, who were integrating more reading and writing into their lessons, remarked that an impetus for doing so was to prepare students for the PSSA. They were aware of the PSSA’s emphasis on reading and writing and felt that students needed the additional practice.

### **Engaging Students in their Own Learning**

The PLN Framework recognizes that a key component of improving adolescent literacy is engaging students in their own learning. This is a primary component of the PLN focus. Research shows that there is a connection between student engagement and student accountability and student achievement stating that students engaged in their work at school: have better grades, have better attendance and fewer discipline problems, and are much less likely to drop out of school.<sup>21</sup> Our teacher survey responses show that 65 percent of teachers consider student engagement and student accountability to be critical elements to improving student achievement.

<sup>21</sup> Newmann, F. M., Wehlage, G. G., & Lamborn, S. D. (1992). *The significance and sources of student engagement*. In F. M. Newmann (Ed.), *Student engagement and achievement in American secondary schools*, (pp.11-39). New York: Teachers College Press.

Wehlage, G. G., Rutter, R. A., Smith, G. A., Lesko, N., & Fernandez, R. R. (1989). *Reducing the Risk: Schools as Communities of Support*. New York: Falmer Press.

Finn, J.D. (1989). Withdrawing from school. *Review of Educational Research*, 59,117-142.

Overall, students reported that the new PLN strategies implemented in class were more “fun” and “active.” In most of the focus groups, students stated that these strategies promoted their learning. In one focus group students said:

**Student 1:** They are much more effective because...they are just more fun so you look forward to the class and it’s not just sitting there.

**Student 2:** You especially pay attention to it.

**Student 3:** It’s more hands-on because you are recalling information...instead of people just telling you, ‘there is a test tomorrow on this information, so here it is.

Teachers concurred with students’ assessment of the PLN activities. In interviews, a majority of teachers said that their work with coaches in implementing PLN strategies had resulted in greater student engagement and learning. Teacher survey respondents reported that the majority of students “had an engaged/enthusiastic response” to Do Nows (63 percent) and the BDA Model (52 percent). (See Figure 13)

### Teachers Use of Strategies and Report of Student Response

*Teacher Survey Data, Spring 2006*

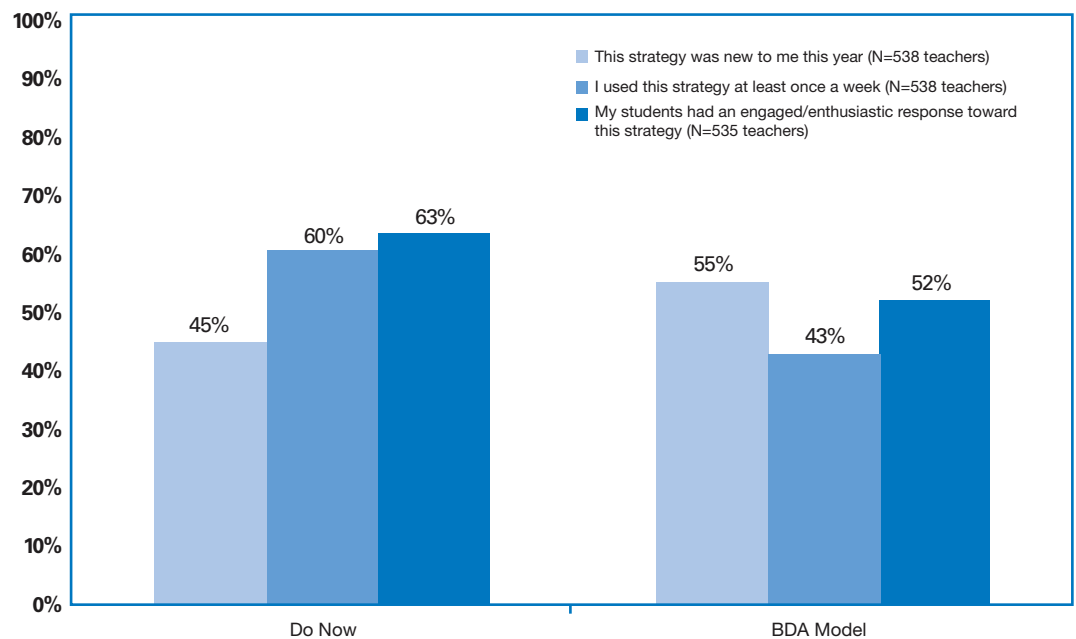


Figure 13

*“Some actually respond well, some are getting it, and I’m seeing with some students, even their comprehension, they’re thinking more. For some of them it’s still an issue, because it’s work. And when they have it at 6th period, they’ve pretty much gone through the day, and they’re shutting down.” – Teacher*

Some teachers noted that students were initially resistant to the new activities. They elaborated that it took time and careful planning for students to get accustomed to the new strategies and classroom practices. A small number of teachers felt that while the PLN framework was working for some students, it was still ineffective in reaching the most challenging of students.

Ten percent of the teachers we interviewed said they had increased classroom activities that connected to students’ own lives. Most cited use of the KWL (Know, Want to Know, Learned) charts as a tool to make the content relevant to students. Slightly over one-third of teachers mentioned their belief that increasing students’ awareness of their own thinking helped students “learn to learn.”

Teachers said that coaches helped them introduce technology such as [graphic] calculators, use of the inter/intranet and software programs into their classrooms and that this added to students’ interest. In their responses on the teacher survey, teachers also noted that all content teachers needed a broader repertoire of aids and strategies to reach all learners. Many who had worked with a coach and/or attended PLN regional training mentioned that broadening their pool of literacy strategies helped in managing classroom instruction.



*“I was never much for group work because I always was afraid that it was going to be more of a social session; work wasn’t going to get done or one person was going to do all the work and other people were just on the coat tails. That has not happened. I was very pleasantly surprised and (found) that students were able to work together and they were much more actively involved in their learning, which is the goal, and I do like the fact that with some of the different things we’ve tried I’ve gotten very positive results. I’ve gotten a lot of different things, very creative things from students and we were able sometimes to get off on a tangent and investigate some topics they found interesting a little bit further.” –Teacher*

## CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Livelier and noisier classrooms can be harder to manage. It is challenging to integrate reading, writing, talking, listening and thinking across the curriculum, still maintain control of the class and follow the progress of students working at different levels. Many teachers found it challenging to introduce some of the PLN strategies with students functioning at the basic or below basic proficiency levels, and difficult to engage these often apathetic and troubled students.

Roughly half of the teachers who were interviewed used group work to organize their classroom instruction to provide opportunities for students to interact with each other. However, many teachers mentioned managing pair and small group work as a challenge. Some teachers feared that allowing students to talk with one another would result in students discussing personal topics unrelated to the subject or task. However, some teachers who planned group work with a coach’s help, were pleasantly surprised by the results and their fears were alleviated.

Some teachers who initially had problems attempting group work reported it to be unsuccessful. The experience, however, did cause them to reflect on ways to improve subsequent attempts and this made them more eager to put into practice the lessons they had learned. There were also teachers who had worked through the initial challenges of managing small group work and learned that successful group work had to be “very structured” and there had to be “something to keep them busy the entire time [the students] were in group.”

## EARLY IMPACT ON SUB-GROUPS OF TEACHERS

Coaches made promising inroads with some groups of teachers in addition to helping new teachers who traditionally value support in their new roles. Some of the district action plans specifically indicated which teachers coaches should work with. Some administrators assigned coaches to work with new teachers and others assigned coaches to work with teachers experiencing classroom management challenges. As we indicated earlier, gaining entry into resistant teachers’ classrooms was a significant challenge for many of the coaches. However, we found that PAHSCI coaches made progress in reaching: career-tech teachers to make their lessons more rigorous and literacy-based and special-needs teachers to provide new ways to structure lessons to increase student engagement and infuse more writing into their lessons. In addition, there were numerous examples of coaches helping new teachers in areas where they struggled, particularly student engagement, lesson planning and classroom management. Career-tech teachers, often overlooked as coaches targeted core academic content teachers, were receptive to using the PLN Framework. In addition a few of the new teachers we interviewed emphatically stated that they would have resigned if they had not had the support coaches provided. Below are some stories that illustrate the impact of coaching this past year.

### VIGNETTE:

#### Career Tech: Mr. Jones’ Story

*Mr. Jones worked as a professional auto mechanic before becoming an auto repair shop teacher at Constitutions Career and Technical High School. He brought a wealth of practical knowledge and expertise to his shop classes but needed to refine his literacy instruction. He struggled with how to teach the theory and concepts guiding the practical elements of the shop class content and how to guide his students in rigorous exploration of the text. For example, could students create how- to-lists and well-organized text to accompany demonstrations.*

*Constitution coaches soon discovered that career-tech teachers like Mr. Jones were quite receptive to their help. Working with coaches has focused Mr. Jones’ instruction and guided his students’ learning by providing them with a specific purpose and goal for each lesson (BDA). Mr. Jones has also begun to incorporate math strategies into his lessons. He has found two PLN strategies, Do Nows and Text Rendering, particularly useful. His lessons are more aligned with work in math classrooms and he believes that he has contributed to his students’ potential to improve their PSSA scores.*

#### **VIGNETTE:**

##### **Special Needs: Mr. Thomas' Story**

*As an instructional support teacher and a Special Education English teacher, Mr. Thomas has observed engaging lessons teachers have developed with coaches in the classes he supports, and has reflected on the work with a coach in his own classes. Mr. Thomas said "they provide a whole bag of strategies, things that I can try and run," and "I think teachers love having [strategies] to pull out of that bag...they get really excited when they engage the kids."*

*The PLN strategies he has learned have proven to be an invaluable resource for creating focus and calm among special education students. Mr. Thomas observed in a coach- modeled class, that "one of my kids who's really high energy, being lower energy in a good way. It was calm, focused. He was very much engaged." Coaches have been a resource to create well-developed lesson plans that have helped structure classes in a way that is advantageous for Mr. Thomas' students. Mr. Thomas has signed up for the PLN regional training in hopes of adding to his bag of strategies.*

While coaches did not reach all teachers in these groups, this work indicates coaching's potential to facilitate powerful changes in practice.

#### **VIGNETTE:**

##### **New Teacher: Ms. Young's Story**

*New teachers learn some critical skills on the job including, how to: build rapport, plan and organize, deepen their content knowledge and instructional strategies, and engage students in their own learning. Ms. Young, a first-year math teacher says, "My students have become very slowly my closest allies here at [my school], where at first they were my enemies." Working with a coach has helped Ms. Young fill, what she calls, "a deep void" in her instructional delivery. She has learned that in order for students to believe her as a teacher, they first have to see that she cares about them, which she has done by developing engaging lessons, with the support of her coach, that capture the attention of the students.*

*Ms. Young and her coach have co-taught lessons; her coach has taught PLN strategies, modeled lessons, consulted, coached, and provided resources. In interviews, Ms. Young talks about tools provided by her coach to complement her content knowledge that have facilitated student engagement in her classes: "He's shown me a lot of the engagement. I know a lot of good math, but I don't know how to get kids to care about the math."*

#### **CONCLUSION**

Effective teaching requires planning and organizing, good subject and content instruction, and management of the conditions of learning. In PAHSCI, teachers' professional learning and practice was strengthened by attending PLN regional courses and working with a coach. Although the Initiative has not yet reached a majority of teachers in all 26 schools, we found that a respectable number of teachers, many of whom previously worked in isolation, welcomed the opportunity to work collaboratively with coaches to improve instruction. Teachers, who worked with coaches learned strategies for immersing students in reading, writing, talking and listening across the curriculum. In numerous examples, coaches helped new and struggling teachers, and an increasing percentage of veteran teachers, expand their repertoire of effective instructional practices. Early evidence shows that students' reactions to PLN instructional strategies are promising. Students overall found the new PLN strategies to be more fun and active and teachers concurred. Our research confirms other studies that show when building administrators send the message that they expect to see new strategies used in classrooms, teachers are more likely to adopt them.

# Early Impact on Enabling Conditions

*“I have to do a better job with articulating and implementing staff development... They’ve (coaches) largely been relegated to a secondary role.... It’s a very big change... historically our staff development across the district has not been clearly articulated and it hasn’t been well-aligned. So that’s going to be my biggest challenge, to make meaningful, connected, serious staff development, where people will begin to buy in and not just take seat time.” – Administrator*

There is much research about the significant length of time needed to truly change school culture and instructional practices. Neufeld and Roper note, “Despite the urgency of improving teaching and learning, the truth is that it will take several years for teachers to master what are fundamentally new and different instructional strategies.”<sup>22</sup> It is still early in the Initiative implementation. Nevertheless, there are encouraging signs of positive impact on the enabling conditions (leadership, momentum for change, organizational infrastructure and knowledge) that will support changes in teacher practice.

Research underlines that enabling conditions, such as leadership, momentum for change, organizational infrastructure and knowledge, are key to increasing districts’ and schools’ instructional capacity and ability to promote change. A Rand study of the role of districts in fostering instructional improvement states that “district and school capacity greatly affected reform efforts.”<sup>23</sup> School leadership and professional community are important elements of a school’s instructional capacity as well.<sup>24</sup> Researchers also have suggested that coaching is a “plausible way to increase schools’ instructional capacity.”<sup>25</sup> The Annenberg Institute for School Reform summarizes what the existing research tells us about how effective coaching supports development of enabling conditions and school change.

- Effective coaching encourages collaborative, reflective practice.
- Effective coaching promotes positive cultural change.
- Effective coaching supports collective, interconnected leadership across a school system.<sup>26</sup>

One of the most important impacts in Year One is that the Initiative is already serving as a catalyst for changing district and school enabling conditions; in some districts the Initiative is already pushing administrators to take greater leadership in the area of professional development, is increasing district/school capacity to offer effective professional development and is supporting the development of a professional, collaborative culture within schools.

## A CATALYST FOR DISTRICT/SCHOOL CHANGE

PAHSCI is already serving as a catalyst for change in some schools; in interviews, administrators from eight different districts named ways that the Initiative had pushed schools to make changes in a number of areas. As one central office administrator said, the Initiative “is a catalyst that allows us to think differently.”

- Almost half of the changes attributed to PAHSCI centered on professional development.

<sup>22</sup> Neufeld, Barbara and Dana Roper. *Coaching: A Strategy for Developing Instructional Capacity*. (p.22) Washington, D.C. and Providence, R.I.: The Aspen Institute Program on Education and The Annenberg Institute for School Reform: 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Marsh, J., Kerr, K. A., Ikemoto, G. S., Darilek, H., Suttorp, M., Zimmer, R. et al. (2005). *The Role of Districts in Fostering Instructional Improvements: Lessons from Three Urban Districts Partnered with the Institute for Learning*. (p.96) Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation.

<sup>24</sup> McLaughlin, M. W. & Talbert, J. E. (2001). *Professional Communities and the Work of High School Teaching*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Mason, S.A. *Learning From Data: The Role of Professional Communities*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL, 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Neufeld, Barbara and Dana Roper. *Coaching: A Strategy for Developing Instructional Capacity*. (p.1) Washington, D.C. and Providence, R.I.: The Aspen Institute Program on Education and The Annenberg Institute for School Reform: 2003.

<sup>26</sup> King, D., Neuman, M., Pelchat, J., Potochnik, T., Rao, S., & Thompson, J. (2004). *Instructional Coaching: Professional Development Strategies that Improve Instruction* Providence, R.I.: Annenberg Institute for School Reform.

Administrators talked about making professional development a top priority in their schools and districts. Schools changed their schedules or creatively shifted time in order to create opportunities for teachers and coaches to meet or for group professional development. Some schools entered the Initiative with little time dedicated to professional development. The presence of coaches in schools and their ability to provide professional development meant that schools had additional resources for providing professional development. Principals found that it was important to think about how to make best use of these resources. PAHSCI also highlighted pre-existing gaps or inadequacies in school's or district's provision of professional development.

*“When this initiative came aboard back in June and we began writing our action plan, we started tweaking the professional development schedule to include the PA Coaching Initiative.”*

*– Administrator*

*“Time is always difficult...there other needs within the school. But we build in time weekly at least for some small group sessions and the coaches meet more extensively with about 40 percent of our classroom teachers...we've build some time within the schedules, particularly on our (weekly) meeting days, so it has been a challenge but it has to be a priority and you have to build time for that to occur.”*

*– Administrator*

- PAHSCI also influenced some schools to begin developing a more collaborative, instruction-focused professional culture.

Administrators and others began to notice differences in how teachers talked together in the hallway or the teachers lounge.

*“Teachers are beginning to have a common language....The terminology is starting to spread. They're talking more about it”. – Administrator*

Coaches found that study groups were an important step toward creating a more collaborative culture. In many districts, coaches implemented study groups and other forms of cross-teacher collaboration in the latter part of the school year. They describe momentum building toward the creation of a shared understanding of PLN practices and the creation of a more collaborative culture among educators. One said, *“I'm very excited about next year because I have a core group of teachers hat I've been working with that are just at the point now where they're about to start going to each other's classrooms.”* Another said, *“We are certainly seeing more discussion among teachers, what they are doing in the classroom both with us and (with) each other.”* Coaches are poised to build on this momentum in Year Two.

Evaluation forms from networking sessions provide further corroboration of participants' desire to share, reflect, and build their knowledge as a team. In evaluations from the May 2006 Networking Session, the “Home Team Discussion” scored the highest approval rating of any session. Ninety-seven percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed the session was useful. This statistic likely reflects respondents' desire for building their team and, in some cases, also reflects the paucity of these opportunities in their everyday worklife. Such opportunities are crucial for building a collaborative, instruction-focused professional culture.

PAHSCI facilitated changes in school culture to encourage taking risks by trying new teaching strategies and overall encouraging change in teaching practice.

*“When you start to do something outside of the box, other than that stand-and-deliver kind of teaching, you're taking, in [teachers] minds, a risk. So the coaches, they act like mentors....they're support for them taking this risk, stepping out.” –Administrator*

Many of the changes PAHSCI catalyzed occurred at the school level, but there were also indicators of change occurring at the district level.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> With the exception of districts participating in site visits, interviews with central office administrators took place at the beginning of the school year, before PHSCI could play a role as a change agent. RFA will continue to collect data about how PHSCI is serving as a catalyst for change in year two.

In one case, a central office administrator said PAHSCI was “a big reason” that they were thinking about restructuring administration at all their high schools to enable one of two building administrators to focus on academics. A central office administrator from a different district said, “They (coaches) have become a core ingredient in the instructional thinking at the high school.” In these two cases, coaches and PAHSCI seemed to be creating momentum for change (an enabling condition) in instruction.

### **Vignette: Using Supports to Create Better Enabling Conditions**

Here is one story of how PAHSCI’s interventions strengthened and mobilized a school struggling with implementing the coaching initiative.

#### **VIGNETTE:**

##### **Madison High**

*As the 2005—2006 school year began, Madison High reopened its doors to over 2,000 students, many sporting new clothes, new schoolbags, and new sneakers. But this school year also ushered in a new principal, a new initiative (PAHSCI), and a new coaching staff. Since only one coach attended the summer training, being “new” in this case meant that the principal and coaches were only one step ahead of the teachers who were hearing about the Initiative for the first time that day.*

*Several months later, coaches were still having great difficulty getting into classrooms and there was a lack of support at the building level. As one of the mentors described it, “there seem to have been problems before the coaching initiative...teachers wondered ‘Why are these people coming into our school? It’s bad enough we have new administration, now we have new instructional staff as well.’” A mentor and the principal noted that there was confusion about the coaches’ role and, that people “weren’t quite sure who was in charge of the Initiative,” the principal or Foundations or the district central office.*

*The situation at Madison came to the partners’ attention when mentors working at the school reported it and coaches shared their concerns at a December networking meeting.*

*The program directors at PDE and Foundations took the lead in addressing the issue. They met with coaches, mentors and the principal and ultimately crafted a “Mid-Year Course Corrective Action Plan” laying out goals, persons responsible, a timeline and benchmarks. The plan required actions by the principal, the district POC (Point of Contact), coaches and mentors.*

*At a meeting with high-level district officials, partners said that things would need to change for funding to continue. At the same time, they explicitly communicated, “We are not here to blame, criticize or point fingers. We’re here to support and help you.” In this atmosphere, participants were grateful for the plan and worked with the partners to revise it. The principal described working with the partners. “They’re very positive. You couldn’t have any better people involved in representing the program.”*

*In the second six months of the year, the situation at Madison shifted dramatically. As one of the partners stated, the principal is now “the biggest supporter. He changed that school. He doesn’t miss a training or a networking session.”*

*A mentor described some of the changes at the school. “The relationship with the principal solidified in terms of them feeling comfortable working with him...it (PAHSCI) became a part of his priorities as well.” The group professional development in January was a big turning point. “They worked as a team...They got responses that that was the best staff development day the school had had.” In addition, the implementation of study groups late in the year “really helped them to make some positive strides.”*

*The principal said that getting the Initiative going was “like changing the wheels on a bus while it’s moving. But we made that happen; the wheels are on there now.”*

## CONCLUSION

Data from this first year of implementation indicate that PAHSCI is already serving as a catalyst for change for key enabling conditions (e.g., leadership, momentum for change, organizational infrastructure and knowledge) that facilitate the success of instructional coaching. The shifts discussed in this chapter epitomize how the changes PAHSCI brings are creating momentum for further change. The knowledge built by PAHSCI's professional development and mentoring impacts classroom practice and leaders' perspectives about what is needed at their schools. PAHSCI is providing the impetus for leaders to make changes, especially in professional development and the organizational infrastructure which supports it. Through PAHSCI, schools and districts are making professional development a priority and coordinating scheduling and planning so that coaches can provide effective professional development related to the Initiative. PAHSCI is also helping to create a more instruction-focused and collaborative culture in some schools and districts. Lastly, in some schools and districts PAHSCI is facilitating a cultural shift that encourages teacher openness to and adoption of new instructional strategies.

# Conclusions, Lessons and Recommendations

## CONCLUSIONS

The Pennsylvania High School Coaching Initiative is ambitious in its scale, its laser focus on classroom instruction in high-need high schools, and its aim to inform the state and national education reform communities on the efficacy of a promising intervention – instructional coaching. In its first year of operation, PAHSCI has considerable cause for celebration.

Most importantly, PAHSCI activities and supports proved effective in helping teachers to make desired changes in their classroom practice. Teachers who participated in professional development sessions or worked with a coach were significantly more likely to use Penn Literacy Framework strategies for integrating reading, writing and oral communication into the content areas and actively engaging students in their learning. Teachers perceived that their students were very responsive to these new strategies, a perception that reinforced their use of the strategies. Considerable research indicates that the use of these kinds of strategies increases student achievement. While this report does not present data on student achievement, our current positive findings about classroom instruction (a leading indicator) offer encouragement about the Initiative’s potential impact on student learning (a lagging indicator).

In addition, PAHSCI showed particular promise with several subgroups of teachers who are frequently ignored in high school reform efforts – veteran teachers who are “burned out,” special education teachers, and career tech teachers.

PAHSCI is already serving as a catalyst for significant organizational and cultural change in approximately one-half of the schools in which it is working. School leaders were revising their thinking about professional development. They saw the value of more intensive and focused professional development and, as a result, created more time for professional development and for coaches to meet with teachers. In addition, school leaders were thinking systematically and intentionally about how to support, maintain and expand the professional learning communities that were emerging as a result of PAHSCI study groups and regional trainings. PAHSCI is also having an impact on district organizational structures in some of the sites, pushing leaders to rethink instructional roles and responsibilities of building leaders.

PAHSCI successfully implemented a complex support system that required the concerted and well-coordinated efforts of multiple partners and was designed to ensure that instructional coaches had the best possible chance at helping teachers improve their classroom practice. The professional development sessions and regional courses offered by the Penn Literacy Network were given high marks by teachers, coaches, and district and school leaders. Networking opportunities for participants across the Initiative offered the opportunity for sharing best practices and problem solving around shared dilemmas. Leadership and content mentors became conversant in the Penn Literacy Framework and built rapport with district leaders, principals and teachers. Leadership mentors clarified their focus in order to better support administrators in integrating PAHSCI with schools’ existing improvement plans. Content mentors supported coaches in their new roles and, toward year’s end, in increasing their role in professional development, especially via study groups.



PAHSCI coaches worked creatively to craft a role that would meet the needs of the teachers and students and to overcome the obstacles that have caused other high school reform efforts to falter; obstacles such as school and district leaders who did not adequately champion the Initiative; teachers who remained resistant to innovation; and lack of time for adequate planning and debriefing of classroom visits, study groups and other professional development sessions. They increasingly engaged in activities that were more directly related to classroom practice. PAHSCI's instructional coaches were highly regarded by the teachers and principals with whom they worked who saw them as helpmates and sources of new ideas.

## LESSONS

Several early lessons from PAHSCI are worthy of note by others interested in adopting instructional coaching as a reform intervention:

- Take into consideration the enabling conditions – supportive leadership, time, etc. – that are necessary for coaching to work, and design interventions aimed at creating those conditions.
- Systematically learn from your experience and apply that learning quickly in modifications to your efforts.
- Provide instructional coaches with a content focus and offer high-quality professional development on that focus. to school and district leaders and teachers.
- Think hard about the role of coaches and consistently apply that thinking to the position description and job qualifications. Articulate the role and responsibilities clearly and consistently to administrators and teachers.
- Assign more than one coach to a school and consciously build coaching teams.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The challenge for Year Two is to both expand and deepen the work. It needs to be expanded so that larger numbers of teachers and administrators become involved. It needs to be deepened so that the work of mentors, administrators, coaches and teachers moves more deeply into instruction and into activities and practices that will change school culture to support new teaching practices, and increase student engagement and achievement. Teachers who in Year One simply adopted some new strategies need to be supported in moving to a deeper understanding of the framework and how both strategies and framework serve the goals of improving student learning and achievement.

**In order to extend and deepen changes in classroom practice that will most likely result in improved student achievement we recommend that partners continue to:**

- Develop a comprehensive and intensive strategy for promoting writing in the content areas.
- Help teachers examine data (especially student writing) and reflect on their implications for changes in classroom practice.
- Adequately address the needs groups of students including English Language Learners, special education students and the lowest performing students. Devise new instructional strategies and adapt existing PLN strategies. Expand professional development offerings in these areas.
- Implement study groups that bring teachers together to examine classroom practice by focusing on student work.
- Increase opportunities for teachers to participate in PLN courses or in PLN-related professional development opportunities led by mentors and coaches. This will help involve those teachers who were not able to secure a place in the regional courses.



- Attend to the specific needs of math coaches and math teachers within the Initiative. As PLN already did in Year One, continue to reflect on how best to tailor professional development offerings to support the coaching model and the needs of math coaches and teachers. Foundations' mentors will need to be part of this process and to engage in how best to support math coaches.
- Provide coaches with additional tools and skills to deepen the knowledge of teachers that they are currently working with and to reach additional teachers.
- Articulate clear expectations for the roles and responsibilities of coaches and make certain that everyone understands those expectations.

In summary, we urge that the partners discuss where there is greatest leverage for catalyzing instructional changes that will improve student achievement and direct a laser focus on those changes.

**In order to build the enabling conditions that will give coaching the best chance for making a positive impact on classroom instruction we recommend that greater attention be given to:**

- Building the knowledge and commitment of district and school leaders. It is especially important to ensure ongoing and significant professional development in the Initiative for administrators in order to strengthen leadership for change. Administrator involvement can take a variety of forms, including participation in trainings, networking sessions, and work with mentors. Offer administrators additional professional learning opportunities such as attending conferences, presentations, hosting visits to their schools and visiting other schools.
- Clarifying the role of the principal in encouraging collaborative and productive relationships between teachers and coaches. Principals are positioned to do this, but it requires thoughtful consideration in how to convey the expectation that PLN strategies should be used and, at the same time, avoids heavy-handed assignment of teachers to coaches.
- Providing systematic opportunities for district and school leaders to talk to one another about what they are learning about professional development from their participation in PAHSCI and how they might apply those lessons in the design and implementation of other professional development efforts in their districts and schools.
- Providing opportunities for administrative problem-solving across districts about common challenges. For example, it is still difficult for some schools and districts to create adequate time for professional development, teacher-to-teacher visitation, coach-teacher planning and study groups. Administrators could share strategies for making the time available.
- Focusing the work of the leadership mentors on areas that will make the most positive difference in the major thrust of the Initiative — the alignment of classroom practices with the PLN Framework. Mentors can help school and district leaders shape instructional priorities and align them with the PLN Framework. The mentors can also explain, protect and advocate for the work at levels beyond the building administrator.
- Continuing to reflect on and make adjustments to the mentor role. In particular, monitoring the usefulness of the new tools and the need for further adjustments and additional tools. As the needs of coaches, teachers and administrators change and as the project moves into new phases (e.g. more focus on institutionalization), the mentors' role will need to continue to evolve.

**In order to further the coordination of the partners' work and strengthen it we recommend that greater attention be given to:**

- Maintaining partner integration, coordination and close communication. The changes in the leadership structure that are occurring during the writing of this report call for a new round of team-building and clarifying roles. In addition, there is an ongoing and sometimes steep learning curve for all partners since new phases of the project continue to bring new challenges and demands. It will be important to create strong communications among and between partners and participants and with outside constituencies that are positioned to champion coaching as an important reform intervention.

**In order to build the conditions for sustaining and scaling up coaching as a statewide Initiative we recommend that partners give greater attention to:**

- Developing a political and communications strategy.
- Defining more explicitly what would constitute sustainability and expansion.
- Creating processes, timelines and supports for work on sustainability at the school and district level.
- Developing leaders from all ranks — administrator, teacher, coach, parent, community and civic leaders, partner organizations — who will champion coaching and promoting the visibility of these leaders in local, state, and national circles.
- Articulating the relationship between coaching, teacher change and student achievement.
- Helping schools prioritize activities that assist in developing a more collaborative, instruction-focused professional culture.

# Appendix A

## Participating Districts and Schools

District	High School
Bellwood-Antis	Bellwood-Antis
Erie City	Central
	East
	Strong Vincent
Harrisburg	Harrisburg
	Science Tech
	Alternative
	CTA
Hazleton	Hazleton
Intermediate Unit 1	Burgettstown Area
	Charleroi
	Jefferson Morgan
	McGuffey
	Mapletown
	Uniontown
	Albert Gallatin
Keystone Central <sup>28</sup>	Central Mountain
Lancaster	McCaskey East
Philadelphia	Germantown
	Gratz
	Lincoln
	William Penn
Reading	Reading Senior
Scranton	Scranton
	West Scranton

<sup>28</sup> Keystone Central joined PHSCI in Spring 2006

# Appendix B

## Methodology

### OVERVIEW

Research for Action's three-year evaluation of PAHSCI is a mixed-methods study that looks at both implementation and impact. It uses qualitative (e.g., interviews, observations, document review) and quantitative (e.g., surveys, student outcomes data) methods and data. The evaluation has multiple purposes and is both formative (e.g., providing ongoing data and analysis to help program leaders problem-solve, inform decision-making and make mid-course corrections) and summative (e.g., assessing overall program impact). In addition, the evaluation provides useful data and reporting to inform stakeholders in Pennsylvania and beyond about coaching and its impact on high school reform.

In Year One of the Initiative, the research focused on program implementation and its attendant areas of success and challenge and on early indicators of Initiative impact on participant knowledge and practice, and school and district culture and capacity. Year One research focused on these areas because they are leading indicators of change which are likely to emerge in the initial stages of a reform effort. Work in these areas will continue in Years Two and Three and research into outcomes related to student engagement, learning and achievement – lagging indicators which take more time to emerge – will also be a central area of work in those years.

### RESEARCH FOCUS

The evaluation addresses these major research areas and research questions:

- (1) **Partner Collaboration and Initiative Implementation:** How do the coordinating groups [PDE, PLN, Foundations, RFA and the Philadelphia Foundation] work together to implement the program and to develop a shared Theory of Action, shared program goals, and a clear understanding of each partner's roles and responsibilities?
- (2) **Participant Knowledge and Practice:** How does this initiative impact the knowledge and practice of administrators, coaches and teachers?
- (3) **Student Engagement and Achievement:** In the classrooms, schools, districts and intermediate units where PAHSCI is implemented, what are the outcomes related to student engagement, learning, and achievement?
- (4) **School and District Level Changes in Instructional Culture and Capacity:** What kind of capacity and conditions are needed for this model to take root in and positively affect classrooms, schools, districts and intermediate units? Does PAHSCI build the capacity of the school and teachers to meet the learning needs of all students?

## DATA SOURCES

The chart below indicates the data sources for each of the research questions.

Research Questions	Data Sources
<p><b>Partner Collaboration and Initiative Implementation:</b> How do the coordinating groups [PDE, PLN, Foundations, RFA and the Philadelphia Foundation] work together to implement the program and to develop a shared Theory of Action, shared program goals, and a clear understanding of each partner's roles and responsibilities?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant-observation at partner meetings and on conference calls.</li> <li>• Observations of PAHSCI Professional Development.</li> <li>• Evaluations for Professional Development Participants.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Participant Knowledge and Practice:</b> How does this initiative impact the knowledge and practice of administrators, coaches and teachers?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Point of Contact (POC), administrator, coach, teacher, and mentor interviews.</li> <li>• Teacher and Coach Surveys.</li> <li>• End-of-year questionnaire for all PAHSCI coaches.</li> <li>• Observation of PAHSCI Professional Development.</li> <li>• Evaluations for Professional Development Participants.</li> <li>• Site visits to PAHSCI high schools.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Student Engagement and Achievement:</b> In the classrooms, schools, districts and intermediate units where the PAHSCI is implemented, what are the outcomes related to student engagement, learning and achievement?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• POC, administrator, coach, and teacher interviews.</li> <li>• Teacher and Coach Surveys.</li> <li>• Site visits to PAHSCI high schools.</li> </ul>
<p><b>School and District Level Changes in Instructional Culture and Capacity:</b> What kind of capacity and conditions are needed for this model to take root in and positively affect classrooms, schools, districts and intermediate units? Does PAHSCI build the capacity of the school and teachers to meet the learning needs of all students?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• POC, administrator, coach, and teacher interviews.</li> <li>• Teacher and Coach Surveys.</li> <li>• End-of-year questionnaire for all PAHSCI coaches.</li> <li>• Observation of PAHSCI Professional Development.</li> <li>• Evaluations for Professional Development Participants.</li> <li>• Site visits to PAHSCI high schools.</li> </ul>

Site visits to PAHSCI high RFA used the data sources in the chart above to integrate and triangulate qualitative and quantitative data from multiple sources. Data from surveys, evaluation forms and a questionnaire provide a broad picture of the perspectives and experiences of large groups of Initiative participants and make it possible to identify trends, as well as common successes and challenges across sites. The qualitative data provides insight into and context for the survey responses. It also enables us to learn about areas which the survey doesn't or can't address, such as how differing school and district contexts and cultures affect implementation.

## **RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**

The following were the major research activities in Year One.

### **Review of literature**

The project team reviewed academic and professional literature to inform the evaluation overall and the development of research instruments including surveys and interview guides. Areas of literature reviewed included instructional coaching, high school reform, student engagement.

### **Interviews**

- Between July and September 2005, RFA conducted phone interviews with seven district point of contact (POC) people. Within each district, a POC serves as a PAHSCI communications liaison, coordinating between partners and the administrators, coaches and teachers in the district. POC interviews addressed topics including perceptions of the Initiative and the role of the coach; district understanding of and buy-in to PAHSCI; experiences with PAHSCI communication and training; and district policies in relation to research.
- In February and March 2006, RFA conducted phone interviews with 22 PAHSCI high school administrators. Interviews focused on the first six months of PAHSCI implementation, including areas of challenge and perceptions of impact.
- Between March and May 2006, RFA conducted interviews with eight Foundations mentors from its four case study sites. (see below) Interviews were conducted in person or by phone. Interviews focused on implementation of PAHSCI and strengths/challenges of different schools and districts; the mentor role; and perceptions of PAHSCI impact.

### **Coach and Teacher Surveys**

All PAHSCI coaches and all teachers in PAHSCI high schools were included in the sample for the coach and teacher surveys. The coach and teacher web-based surveys were developed in parallel fashion using similar methods and procedures but were administered at different points in time. The development process began with a review of the literature that provided guidance in developing the survey domains.<sup>29</sup> Because the research base about coaching is still relatively small, there were no existing surveys from which to borrow ideas on how to systematically and reliably assess knowledge, attitudes, and self-reported behaviors of coaches and their teachers. RFA and ANALYTICA collaborated on the development of the PAHSCI surveys for coaches and teachers. Surveys were vetted internally within RFA and pilot tested externally with a purposive sample of coaches and teachers at PAHSCI professional development. The final version of the paper surveys was formatted for the web platform and pilot tested again.

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<sup>29</sup> Domains of the coach survey included: previous teacher leader experiences and training; school environment/ethos/level of student engagement; coaches' recruitment, positioning, and training for their role; coaching and instructional/administrative responsibilities; supports; building relationships with teachers and needs assessment for next steps. Domains of the teacher survey included: school environment/ethos/level of student engagement; teacher efficacy/autonomy; administrative leadership styles/support of staff; knowledge about and participation in PAHSCI; experiences with coaches; PAHSCI PD; perceptions re what's necessary for PAHSCI impact and sustainability.

Coach e-mail addresses were obtained from PAHSCI partners. Districts were contacted for teachers' email addresses which were used to administer the survey through the web platform. Because teachers were spread throughout the state of Pennsylvania, there were serious concerns about whether a paper-based survey could be cost effectively administered, scored, and analyzed within the project reporting timeline. The web platform offered a cost-effective and widely accessible medium for administering the survey because District point of contact people interviewed by RFA reported that almost all of the coaches and teachers participating in the initiative had web access and some familiarity with web use.

Prior to administering each survey, coaches and teachers in the sample were sent an email alerting them that the survey link would follow via email. This first email also served to verify that the email address provided in the data file was indeed the correct email address.

The coach survey was administered in February and March 2006. There was a response rate of 94%. Eighty-eight (88) coaches received the survey and 83 completed it.

The teacher survey was administered from February 20, 2006 to June 1, 2006. Of the 1,659 teachers that received the survey, 663 responded (including 61 teachers who declined to participate in the survey.) Thus, 40% of teachers responded to the survey (either declining or completing the survey). Thirty-six percent (36%) completed the survey.

The teacher survey in particular encountered numerous technological challenges. ANALYTICA and RFA, with assistance from the partners, worked together to overcome them. Several schools had "spam blocking" software in place which blocked the email invitation to the teachers. ANALYTICA contacted and worked with the relevant district technology coordinators who were then able to allow the emails access to their server. Some teachers also had problems accessing the link in the email invitation that directed them to the actual survey. A telephone and email "Help Line" was set up so that teachers could have any questions about survey access answered live.

The differing response rates for the two surveys likely reflect coaches high commitment to PAHSCI and some teachers relative lack of knowledge about or commitment to PAHSCI, varied amounts of administrative support for teacher survey participation across districts and the greater degree of technological challenges of the teacher survey. RFA will work with partners to address these issues to increase survey participation in Year Two.

#### **Observations of PAHSCI Professional Development**

RFA attended various PSHCI professional development sessions. RFA attended all centralized trainings (5)<sup>30</sup> and networking sessions (3). In addition, the project team attended special trainings given by PLN for Foundations staff (2), as well as special trainings for coaches that were hired late. RFA also participated in select PLN regional trainings (3).

#### **Evaluations for Professional Development Participants**

RFA conducted event evaluations at four centralized trainings and two networking sessions. The evaluations asked participants to rate the usefulness of various sessions and gave them the opportunity, through open-ended questions, to suggest topics to cover in subsequent trainings/sessions. The participant feedback was analyzed and given to the partner organizations for informing future planning of events.

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<sup>30</sup> This includes three year 1 centralized trainings and the two year 2 trainings completed by August 2006.

### **Participant-Observation at Partner Meetings and on Conference Calls (ongoing)**

The project team attended four partner meetings and one retreat. RFA documented and participated in the partners' collaborative effort in reflection, and planning for subsequent years of the Initiative. In addition, RFA attended three mentor meetings and one PLN meeting.

### **Site Visits to PAHSCI High Schools**

RFA visited 11 high schools in four districts between April and June 2006. Research focused on understanding the current status of implementation at each site, successes in and challenges to implementing PAHSCI, and perceptions of impact. Research activities during the site visits included:

- 47 teacher interviews
- 34 coach interviews
- 16 student focus groups
- 36 observations (e.g., of lessons, professional development, coaches' meetings, shadowing a coach)
- 15 administrator interviews

### **An End-of-Year Questionnaire for All PAHSCI Coaches**

In June 2006, RFA distributed a questionnaire to coaches. The questionnaire asked coaches to indicate how many teachers they had worked with, what percentage of time they devoted to certain activities, and the number of professional development sessions they facilitated. The responses provided a summary of activities that PAHSCI coaches participated in through the Initiative's first year.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **Interviews**

Codes were created and interviews were coded into broad descriptive categories using Atlas.ti. Data within descriptive categories was then analyzed to identify themes that emerged within the codes.

### **Teacher and Coach Surveys**

Analyses were performed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). To understand the basic demographics, background characteristics and distribution of responses, frequency counts were generated and compiled in tabular format (using Excel). In addition, crosstabulations of response patterns between various combinations of items of interest were performed.

Coach survey responses were reported by district to examine differences and similarities in coach responses across districts. Surveys were also analyzed to determine: correlations between coaches' perceptions of principal support and their reports of their school climate; whether coaches reporting positive school climates engaged in different activities than those reporting less positive climates; and correlations between coaches previous positions and the activities they engaged in.

For the teacher survey, Spearman's rho correlational analyses were conducted to determine the association between the number of trainings attended (a continuous variable) and familiarity with the PLN framework (a categorical variable). Overall these analyses were designed to understand how teachers' depth of involvement with the initiative (as measured by training sessions attended or depth of interaction with coaches) affected their use of PLN strategies and their readiness to apply what they are learning. Teacher survey responses were also reported by district.



**Observations**

Data from observations of professional development sessions was analyzed to provide ongoing feedback to partners about PD and emerging issues and to identify districts for site visits. Data from classroom observations was analyzed to identify use of PLN strategies.

**Event Evaluations**

Evaluations were scanned; scaled responses were calculated through SPSS software; and themes in the open-ended responses were identified and coded.

**Coach Questionnaire**

Results from paper surveys were entered into SPSS and analyzed using SPSS software. Respondents were organized by district, then district averages for each question was calculated.



**Research for Action (RFA)** is a Philadelphia-based, non-profit organization engaged in education research and evaluation. Founded in 1992, RFA works with public school districts, educational institutions, and community organizations to improve the educational opportunities for those traditionally disadvantaged by race/ethnicity, class, gender, language/cultural difference, and ability/disability.

Research for Action is funded through grants from foundations and contracts for services from a range of organizations, including the School District of Philadelphia. For more information about RFA please go to our website, [www.researchforaction.org](http://www.researchforaction.org)

#### **RFA Mission Statement**

Through research and action, Research for Action seeks to improve the education opportunities and outcomes of urban youth by strengthening public schools and enriching the civic and community dialogue about public education. We share our research with educators, parent and community leaders, students, and policy makers with the goals of building a shared critique of educational inequality and strategizing about school reform that is socially just.

**ANALYTICA** is a for-profit, minority-owned and operated company founded in 2004. It provides high-quality research analytics to organizations in the social, behavioral, educational, and health-care sectors. ANALYTICA's primary expertise is the systematic design, implementation, analysis, and reporting of randomized controlled trials (randomized experiments). ANALYTICA's secondary expertise is in the areas of research synthesis (or meta-analysis), survey research, internet mediated research, secondary data analysis, advanced methods for dealing with missing data, and writing technical reports and policy briefs. Through the application of its expertise to a variety of applied research genres, ANALYTICA is committed to the development of evidence-based interventions with the potential to improve the human condition across the globe.



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