

What Is Instructional Leadership and Why Is It So Important?

A clearly defined understanding of instructional leadership is imperative if that leadership is to be effective.

Effective school leadership today must combine the traditional school leadership duties such as teacher evaluation, budgeting, scheduling, and facilities maintenance with a deep involvement with specific aspects of teaching and learning. Effective instructional leaders are intensely involved in curricular and instructional issues that directly affect student achievement (Cotton, 2003). Research conducted by King (2002), Elmore (2000), and Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2000) confirms that this important role extends beyond the scope of the school principal to involve other leaders as well. The key players in instructional leadership include the following:

- 1) Central office personnel (superintendent, curriculum coordinators, etc.)
- 2) Principals and assistant principals
- 3) Instructional coaches

Some key elements of instructional leadership include the following:

- 1) **Prioritization:** Teaching and learning must be at the top of the priority list on a consistent basis. Leadership is a balance of management and vision (NAESP, 2001). While leaders cannot neglect other duties, teaching and learning should be the area where most of the leaders' scheduled time is allocated.
- 2) **Scientifically based reading research (SBRR):** Instructional leaders must be well informed of SBRR and effective reading instruction in order to assist in the selection and implementation of instructional materials and to monitor implementation. Leaders' participation in professional development sessions will help them remain informed and will provide a focus for monitoring.

In This Issue...

What Is Instructional Leadership and Why Is It So Important? 1

Central Office Leadership 2

Reading First Leadership at the School Level: The Principal 3
The Principal's Role in Instructional Leadership: One State's Story 5

Reading First Coaches as Instructional Leaders 5
The Reading Coach's Role in Instructional Leadership: A Firsthand Account 6

Helpful Hints 7

Resources 8

Reading First Levels of Participation As of 3/15/05

1,391 district awards representing

4,748 schools have been made.



- 3) Focus on alignment of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and standards: If student achievement is the goal and that goal is measured by standards-based assessments, the curriculum, instruction, and assessments all must be aligned with the standards. If there is a disconnect among these elements, student achievement will not be evident. Alignment is an ongoing process as standards, curriculum, and assessments cycle through improvements.
- 4) Data analysis: In their focus on improving achievement, effective leaders use multiple sources of information to assess performance (NAESP, 2001). Decisions at all levels must be based on pertinent data. Central office staff can use data to help principals become more effective instructional leaders and to make decisions regarding policy and curriculum. Principals can use data to help guide the instructional focus and professional development of teachers. Coaches can use data to determine the effectiveness of instructional strategies. Coaches can also assist teachers in using data to establish student grouping arrangements and pinpoint specific student intervention needs.
- 5) Culture of continuous learning for adults: Effective instruction is a skill that can never be perfected. All teachers can benefit from additional time and support to improve their instruction. Research indicates that effective principals

have “a view of instructional improvement as an ongoing process” (Chase & Kane, 1983). Leaders that maintain learning as a priority will provide released time for teachers to attend relevant training. They will follow up by monitoring and providing the support that sustains the new learning.

The expectations set by the leaders regarding priorities, SBRR, alignment, data use, and continued learning will impact classroom instruction and student achievement. The leaders at all levels of the system have a clear and important role in supporting those improvement efforts.

References:

Chase, G., & Kane, M. (1983). *The principal as instructional leader: How much more time before we act?* Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States.

Cotton, K. (2003). *Principals and student achievement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Elmore, R. (2000). *Building a new structure for school leadership*. Washington, DC: The Albert Shanker Institute.

King, D. (2002). The changing shape of leadership. *Educational Leadership*, 59(8), 61–63.

National Association of Elementary School Principals, (2001). *Leading learning communities: Standards for what principals should know and be able to do*. Alexandria, VA: National Association of Elementary School Principals.

Spillane, J., Halverson, R., & Diamond, J. (2000). *Toward a theory of leadership practice: A distributed perspective*. Evanston, IL: Institute for Policy Research.



Central Office Leadership

Leaders are expanding their traditional roles to include supports for improvements in teaching and learning.

The traditional roles of the central office leadership vary widely from policy implementation and monitoring to budgeting and public relations. As leaders at the central office level move toward a model of instructional leadership, their roles can change dramatically. While traditional responsibilities still must be met, priorities should be shifting toward instructional issues that will impact classroom instruction and student achievement. Some of those elements include promoting a vision; creating alignment of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and standards; focusing on data; and maintaining a culture of continuous learning (Lashway, 2002). By applying for and receiving a Reading First subgrant, a district has recognized the need to focus on instructional priorities and made a

commitment to provide instructional leadership to its participating schools to maximize the likelihood of the program’s success.

The following vignette is a fictional account of what might happen, based on the strongest evidence of best practices, if ideal implementation of instructional leadership transpires at the central office level.

Instructional leaders at the Rising Star School District central office have resolved that early literacy instruction will be a district priority. This district has applied for and received a Reading First grant. The leaders know they are responsible for

creating vision and setting the tone for this change. They have become champions for this important initiative. Their vision and focus have set the priority for the leaders at the school and classroom levels. The district's curriculum director has a solid understanding of scientifically based reading research and effective reading instruction, and the leaders have a clear plan to provide training for other district leaders whose work connects to the implementation of the grant. Whenever possible, they attend professional development sessions in which reading improvement is the focus. The central office leaders meet on a regular basis to share progress made toward the goals outlined in their Reading First grant. They also ensure that competing initiatives do not interfere with the current focus of improvement.

Rising Star's central office content specialists have scheduled K-3 teacher teams to participate in alignment meetings. At these meetings, the teams review and analyze the scope and sequence of the curriculum as well as standards and benchmarks. Not only have the central office leaders put this valuable time aside to discuss these essential documents, but also they have preserved time in their schedules to personally attend some meetings and monitor schools to ensure the alignment efforts are implemented. They also make themselves available to provide needed support.

The district's assessment specialist has helped develop a workable districtwide assessment plan and schedule. This leader also provides guidance and assistance as schools select and administer assessments that will measure and support the Reading First initiative. The assessment specialist provides

the district and schools with compiled assessment data in a timely fashion and in a usable and understandable format that will assist schools in making instructional decisions.

The superintendent is well versed in Reading First requirements and the specifics of the district's plan. He understands the importance of a culture of continuous learning. He offers school principals the autonomy and flexibility to provide time for teachers to improve their practice. Additionally, he monitors progress and implementation to ensure that the learning the teachers participate in is directly connected to the literacy initiative and directly transferred to classroom instruction.

Rising Star is on the right track with a focused Reading First initiative, systems to promote alignment, an effective data collection and dissemination procedure, a process to utilize data to continually refine instruction, and a culture of continuous learning. All of these elements will sustain Rising Star's effort to improve early literacy instruction.

As more leaders adjust their roles to reflect the necessary focus on instructional improvements that will directly influence student achievement, so begins the process of systemic improvements necessary for lasting change.

References:

Lashway, L. (2002). *Developing instructional leaders* (ERIC Digest No. 160). Eugene, OR: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Policy and Management. Retrieved January 18, 2005, from ERIC database. (ERIC No. ED466023)

Lewis, A. (1995). *The anomaly of central office leadership* [Electronic version]. *Believing in Ourselves: Progress and Struggle in Urban Middle School Reform*. New York: The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. Retrieved March 3, 2005, from <http://www.middleweb.com/BIOii9.html>



Reading First Leadership at the School Level: The Principal

Principals are a key element in school improvement efforts. The emphasis on accountability, brought about by the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act, insists that school leaders not only implement effective programs but also provide evidence of their success and justification for changes.

A district's Reading First grant is governed by the district office staff but must be communicated and put into action by the principals. These leaders have the responsibility to

prioritize, align, assess, monitor, and learn in order to achieve improved student outcomes.

Prioritize

Decades of research confirm that those principals who place academics as a priority experience increased student achievement (Bartell, 1990; Cotton, 2000; Johnson & Asera, 1999; Short & Spencer, 1990). Principals typically have sufficient freedom to establish priorities within their schools. With instructional improvement at the top of that prioritized list, principals have the power to organize so that those main concerns, such as improved primary grade reading instruction, are addressed. Reading First principals can arrange instructional schedules, set aside time for grade-level teams to meet, provide released time for teachers to attend professional development, and monitor progress and implementation to ensure that scientifically based reading research (SBRR) strategies are being implemented schoolwide. These, along with other organizational measures, will send a message about what is important at the school.

Align

Alignment is a broad issue that a principal has the obligation to understand and address. Principals must impart upon teachers the importance of aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessment to the standards. The principal must also guide teachers in effective alignment practices. Study groups or departmental meetings can be established with the expectation that teachers will work together to interpret the standards, study the scope and sequence of the curriculum, share effective instructional strategies, examine released assessment items, and analyze student work to determine instructional effectiveness. These activities will help ensure alignment and strengthen the Reading First program.

Assess

The principal plays a key role in selection of schoolwide assessment instruments following the guidelines outlined by Reading First. The administration, scoring, reporting, and appropriate use of assessment data should be stressed by the school leader as a critical element of increased student achievement. Principals should regularly analyze student achievement data to inform decisions regarding policy, programs, and professional development. Teachers may need guidance to effectively administer, score, interpret, and analyze the data and also to utilize the data in making instructional changes. The principal is responsible for ensuring that the teachers receive the guidance they require.

Monitor

Monitoring is a crucial component of the principal's responsibility. It will ensure that the school's Reading First program is implemented with fidelity and that any instructional changes indicated by the data and expected by the principal actually occur. Once data are analyzed and the school staff understands what implications the data have for instruction, instructional decisions are made. The principal follows up by asking questions, visiting classrooms, and reviewing subsequent data to guarantee instructional changes are occurring and progress is being made. Principals should follow the advice of the old adage, "Don't expect what you don't inspect." If instructional changes are not inspected, leaders should not expect improvements.

Learn

As the school leader works to improve student achievement, the principal collaborates with teachers on alignment, instruction, and assessment issues; provides released time for teachers to attend Reading First professional development sessions; and offers constructive feedback and support. Principals have an obligation to be well informed about the professional development teachers are receiving. Providing teachers time for professional growth and personally attending those professional development sessions reinforces the principal's conviction in the positive aspects of a continuous learning environment.

Effective principals are adept at prioritizing, informed about alignment issues, knowledgeable about assessments, and supportive of participants' collaborative efforts to learn and improve. They are the leaders who will open the door to school improvement and increased student achievement.

References:

- Bartell, C. A. (1990). Outstanding secondary principals reflect on instructional leadership. *The High School Journal*, 73(2), 118–128.
- Cotton, K. (2000). *The schooling practices that matter most*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Johnson, J. F., & Asera, R. (1999). *Hope for urban education: A study of nine high-performing, high-poverty, urban elementary schools*. Austin, TX: Charles A. Dana Center, University of Texas. Retrieved March 3, 2005, from <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/urbanhope/>
- Short, P. M., & Spencer, W. A. (1990, Winter). Principal instructional leadership. *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, 23(2), 117–122.

The Principal's Role in Instructional Leadership

One State's Story

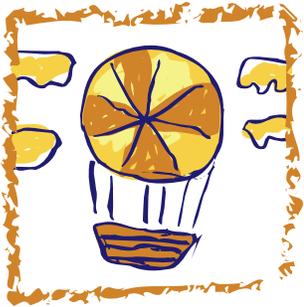
There can be many obstacles that principals must overcome in order to lead an effective Reading First program in their schools. Typical obstacles include teacher resistance to change, districtwide directives that are not aligned with Reading First, and specific state reading initiatives that are not based on scientifically based reading research. Former Reading First director at the Idaho Department of Education Marybeth Flachbart reports that schools with identical curricular programs, similar grant amounts, and comparable student populations can vary dramatically when it comes to student achievement. The difference, as she sees it, is the strength of the principal's leadership skills. Strong instructional leadership may be the key to managing the obstacles that may hinder the success of a Reading First program.

Idaho's Reading First program offers principals many opportunities to grow as instructional leaders. Four 1-day meetings are scheduled per school year for principals to attend leadership academies. There they learn the fundamentals of early reading

instruction, monitoring techniques, and strategies to implement differentiated instruction. They also dialogue with their peers and visit nearby schools that are employing the same core curriculum to observe and discuss implementation issues with other principals. Principals are required to attend all Reading First staff development meetings so that they are aware of, and can monitor, what teachers and coaches are being asked to do. Principals are encouraged to work closely with central office staff to make certain that competing initiatives don't undermine the goals of Reading First.

Collaboration among leaders, the autonomy to adapt district policy to align with the needs of Reading First, and the networking and learning opportunities of the leadership academies are a few of the ways Idaho is increasing the instructional leadership of its Reading First principals.

To learn more about Idaho's Reading First program, go to <http://www.sde.state.id.us/instruct/readingfirst/>.



Reading First Coaches as Instructional Leaders

Instructional coaching is one of the key elements of an effective Reading First program. Coaches provide instructional support, from goal setting to teacher support and mentoring; assessment expertise; and professional development on topics such as effective instructional strategies, current research, and using data to inform instruction.

The training that coaches receive should go above and beyond the training that teachers implementing Reading First receive. This intense training in leadership, assessment, and professional development will help establish the coach as a competent expert who works collaboratively with teachers to develop effective lessons designed to improve student outcomes.

The Coach as Instructional Leader

The Reading First coach assists K-3 teachers in the effective

implementation of their reading program. This may include assisting teachers in setting goals, organizing a workable schedule, observing instruction, demonstrating effective lessons, providing constructive feedback, and serving as a resource for effective instructional strategies and interventions. The coach must have clearly defined responsibilities and scheduled time to accomplish those duties. The coach's time should not be consumed with clerical, fund raising, substitute teaching, or tutorial responsibilities that are unrelated to or not stipulated in the Reading First grant.

The Coach as Assessment Expert

The Reading First coach must have a solid understanding of the screening, diagnostic, progress monitoring, and outcomes assessments. The coach is responsible for guiding the use of and ensuring the proper implementation of these assessments. The coach reviews this data with grade-level teams and discusses student, classroom, and grade-level issues that arise from this analysis. The coach shares the data with the principal, and they work together to make adjustments to ensure goal achievements. The coach also uses assessment data to plan necessary professional development for teachers.

The Coach as Professional Development Provider

It is the coach who is primarily responsible for developing teachers' knowledge and skills as they relate to the goals of

Reading First, including scientifically based reading research, assessment issues, effective instructional strategies, use of the core reading program, and intervention concerns. The Reading First coach should also strive to remain current on reading issues by attending professional development and reading current research. Sometimes, the coach best serves the teachers by recognizing when outside expertise is needed and securing that assistance.

Coaching is a significant responsibility. The success of the coach has considerable bearing on the effectiveness of a school's implementation of Reading First. Coaching can be a challenging yet rewarding experience.

The Reading Coach's Role in Instructional Leadership

A Firsthand Account

By Kathleen Theodore

Instructional coaching is a promising model for teacher development intended to improve teaching and learning (Joyce & Showers, 1988; Lyons & Pinnell, 2001; Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Symonds, 2003). Coaches model and observe lessons and reflect with teachers in order to build instructional capacity. Coaching provides job-embedded professional development combined with reflective and collaborative work among professionals that sustains professional learning. It could be said that coaches serve as a teacher's safety net.

Although reading coaches perform a variety of activities, I have learned that in-class coaching is the most powerful and has great potential to impact classroom instruction. However, the coach's close involvement in the teacher's otherwise isolated world may create anxiety among teachers. That anxiety is often so great that it translates to a strong resistance to change.

I explored the coaching model while guiding reading coaches who worked directly with classroom teachers in the Orleans and Jefferson Parish School Districts in southeastern Louisiana. The biggest challenge in coaching, in my experience, is teacher anxiety and resistance to change. Such resistance can be very difficult to overcome. However, as I visited classrooms, it was clear to me that the coaches with whom I was working had something special going on. There

was mutual respect, trust, and collaboration between coach and teacher.

What seems to lead to this collegial partnership? Each coach had formulated a unique style of in-class coaching. Though the styles varied from coach to coach, they all consisted of modeling and demonstrating lessons for several weeks. When coaches modeled and demonstrated with the teacher's own students, they provided teachers with the technical support they needed. The teacher was able to view an effective lesson that succinctly spotlighted a specific objective, and students were eagerly engaged. The teacher and coach then reflected on the lesson and discussed both its successful aspects and areas that needed further development. This provided an invitation for the teacher to be open to improvement.

Through a delicate dance of pressure and support, teachers experienced success. Teachers were mandated to follow rules and expectations for participating in the apprenticeship. Rules ranged from attending and observing demonstration lessons to participating in follow-up discussions and reflection to modeling and demonstrating in the presence of the reading coach.

The coaches also provided ample support to the teachers. Teachers were assigned parts of a demonstrated lesson to

practice on their own as well as with the reading coach. Chunking the lesson into manageable parts allowed teachers more guidance and created a way for the coach to provide immediate corrective feedback. This cyclical sequence of modeling, teaching, and practicing allowed teachers the opportunity to gain automaticity with effective reading strategies and instruction. Teachers felt empowered from their new discoveries as test scores and reading achievement increased.

There are some lessons to be learned. Teachers often need pressure and support in order to overcome their anxiety toward and resistance to a new type of reading instruction. To help teachers overcome this, we need to create the same environment that we want for our students, that is, one that is nonthreatening with the freedom to make mistakes. Creating

this kind of safety net will help ensure that teachers improve their skills in implementing effective reading practices. In this way, all students may reach grade-level reading achievement.

References:

Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (1988). *Student achievement through staff development*. White Plains, NY: Longman.

Lyons, C., & Pinnell, G. (2001). *Systems for change in literacy education: A guide to professional development*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Neufeld, B., & Roper, D. (2003). *Coaching: A strategy for developing instructional capacity*. Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute Program on Education and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform.

Symonds, K. W. (2003). *Literacy coaching: How school districts can support a long-term strategy in a short-term world*. San Francisco: Bay Area School Reform Collaborative.

Helpful Hints

Dealing With Teachers and Change



Teachers often find change difficult. Researchers have suggested various reasons for teachers' resistance to change, including a lack of congruency between the teacher's educational philosophy and the innovation (Briscoe, 1991; Rich, 1990); lack of adequate training and/or support (Joyce & Showers, 1988; Mathison, 1992); school climate and principal influence (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1997); and practical issues such as availability of materials, class size, and time (Sleeter, 1992). Despite these possible causal indications, there are steps that can be taken to resolve some of the resistance issues.

Teachers want their students to succeed, and given the proper training and support, they are willing to do what is necessary to improve student achievement. The coaching aspect of Reading First offers teachers the in-class support and guidance they need as they begin the implementation of a new program or are asked to refine their instructional delivery. Teachers are more likely to consistently use an instructional strategy once they have evidence of its effectiveness with students (Guskey, 1985, 1986, 1989). One of Reading First's goals is to move teachers away from relying on their personal philosophies when it comes to selecting instructional strategies and resources and toward relying on evidence-based practices. A coach can demonstrate appropriate implementation of the strategy and provide the encouragement teachers need to stick with the strategy long enough to judge its effectiveness.

School leaders—the principal and the coach—can provide teachers with regular feedback on student progress. Since changes that last depend on the effectiveness of their efforts, teachers need tangible evidence that students are growing and improving. Assessment results and observation feedback are just two ways that teachers can be informed of progress being made.

Support coupled with pressure is essential for continuing educational improvements (Guskey, 2002). Support allows teachers dealing with anxiety and possible failures to cope more easily, while pressure is sometimes necessary to motivate those less willing to change. Leaders play a key role in assisting and encouraging teachers to make the sustained changes necessary for increased student achievement.

References:

Briscoe, C. (1991). The dynamic interactions among beliefs, role metaphors, and teaching practices: A case study of teacher change. *Science Education*, 75(2), 185–199.

Fullan, M., & Hargreaves, A. (1997). *What's worth fighting for in your school?* (2nd. Ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Guskey, T. R. (1985). Staff development and teacher change. *Educational Leadership*, 42(7), 57–60.

Guskey, T. R. (1986). Staff development and the process of teacher change. *Educational Researcher*, 15(5), 5–12.

Guskey T. R. (1989). Attitude and perceptual change in teachers. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 13(4), 439–453.

Guskey, T. R. (2002). Professional development and teacher change. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 8(3/4), 381–391.

Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (1988). *Student achievement through staff development*. New York: Longman.

Mathison, S. (1992). An evaluation model for inservice teacher education. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 15(3), 255–261.

Rich, Y. (1990). Ideological impediments to instructional innovations: The case of cooperative learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 6(1), 81–91.

Ross, J. (1994). The impact of an in-service to promote cooperative learning on the stability of teacher efficacy. *Teacher and Teacher Education*, 10(4), 381–394.

Sleeter, C. (1992). Restructuring schools for multicultural education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 43(2), 141–148.

Resources

Leading for Reading Success: An Introductory Guide for Reading First Coaches is a product of the National Center for Reading First Technical Assistance and was developed by the Central Regional Reading First Technical Assistance Center, located at the University of Texas at Austin.

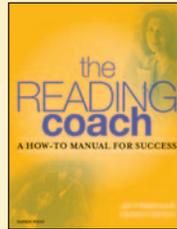
This module is designed to provide professional development to Reading First coaches and other instructional leaders who work directly with Reading First schools and teachers. It presents key information to enhance coaches' knowledge and expertise as they take the lead toward improving classroom reading instruction and, ultimately, student outcomes in reading.

The module, which consists of an introductory guide for coaches and an interactive training component to help them effectively use the guide, was presented at the Reading First State Directors' Meeting in Miami, Florida, on January 11, 2005. A copy of the introductory guide will be disseminated to coaches in all Reading First-funded schools.

The Reading First California Technical Assistance Center at the Reading Lions

Center has a number of Reading First resources available on its Web site (www.cal-read.net). The site describes its technical assistance services, outlines the center's teacher and principal trainings, and presents detailed descriptions of its professional development offerings to Reading First coaches (including training module overviews). There is also a section describing skills assessment information. A helpful list of resources, including training and special topic videos produced by the center, pacing schedules, and research relevant to Reading First, is available as well. All information is specific to either the Houghton-Mifflin Reading program or the SRA Open Court Reading program, depending on which program is being implemented at the school. For more information, contact the California Technical Assistance Center.

The Reading Coach: A How-to Manual for Success by Jan Hasbrouck, PhD, and Carolyn Denton, PhD, is now available.



Teachers are often asked to become reading coaches with little or no training and without

any real understanding of what they should be doing. The Reading Coach: A How-to Manual for Success clarifies and maps the increasingly important classroom role of the reading coach and is a must-read for all grades K–12 coaches, peer colleagues, and school administrators. By using this straightforward guide, coaches will be able to dramatically improve the reading outcomes of their students. The book includes numerous activities for individuals, partners, and small groups and comes complete with reproducible materials.

Coming Soon!

Building Instructional Leadership, the second in a series of National Center for Reading First Technical Assistance professional development modules, is designed for state and local education agency Reading First instructional leaders. This training module, developed by the Central Regional Reading First Technical Assistance Center located at the University of Texas at Austin, presents information, strategies, and tools to help instructional leaders make informed data-based instructional decisions as they implement and monitor their Reading First plans.

This newsletter was created by:



Southwest Educational Development Laboratory
211 E. 7th St., Suite 200 • Austin, TX 78701-3253
800-476-6861 • <http://www.sedl.org>

Editor: Stacey Joyner

Copyright ©2005 by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. This newsletter was produced in whole or in part with funds from the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, U.S. Department of Education, under contract number ED-01-CO-0057/0001.



U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

