



The Executive Coaching Program

A Collaborative Initiative

between

The Connecticut State Department of Education

and

The Connecticut Association of Schools

INTRODUCTION

As we move into a new statewide accountability framework, it is appropriate to review current initiatives that have received funding from the CSDE and report on their present status and effectiveness in supporting our school improvement efforts.

HISTORY AND PURPOSE

The Executive Coaching Program was designed and implemented in the 2007-08 school year as a collaborative initiative between the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) and the Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS) and serves as one component of the Connecticut Accountability for Learning Initiative (CALI). CALI is the state-wide school improvement effort that is being implemented in the 22 districts identified for state intervention (partner and supported districts). As CSDE assessed its work with our Partner and Supported Districts, it was determined that providing support to the principal in identified schools would impact positively on the instructional and organizational capacity of the principal and school leadership teams. The result was the creation of the Executive Coaching Program in which retired school and district administrators are recruited to work closely with those principals identified by their districts as having demonstrated some success and the potential for further success in improving student achievement in their schools. The Connecticut Standards for School Leaders and the Common Core of Leading serve as the foundation for this work. Research influenced the design of the coaching program in that it has shown that it takes five to seven years to turn around failing schools and that embedded on-site professional development has a greater and more long-lasting impact than one day technical assistance opportunities.

CAS entered into a contract with CSDE to recruit, train, supervise and evaluate the executive coaches.

ORGANIZATION, STRUCTURE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Currently, there are forty-six executive coaches serving seventy-two schools in our twenty-two supported districts. Each coach devotes three days monthly on site in the school and a fourth day at the CAS office for professional development and on-going discussion. School leaders also have access to the coach via e-mail and telephone on an unlimited basis.

Retired administrators who demonstrate an interest in the program undergo a formal screening process that includes an interview and review of their professional work and experience. Initial training for new cohorts of coaches is typically held over two days and includes topics such as the role of the coach, coaching techniques, the distinctions between facilitative and instructional coaching, and dealing with reluctant principals. First year coaches also receive the support of mentors who are drawn from the ranks of our experienced coaches.

The coach and the principal confer to develop an action plan that defines the content and manner in which the coach will support the principal. The primary focus is on building the leadership capacity of the principal and his/her leadership team with the ultimate goal of improving student achievement. Because each school is different, the coaching work in each school is contextual. The principal and the coach meet with the assistant superintendent to review the action plan and revise it as necessary to garner the approval of the assistant superintendent. Coaches maintain a regular log of their work which is submitted to CAS twice monthly for review and feedback. CAS administrators also conduct periodic site visits to the schools to confer with principals and central office administrators involved in the program.

The monthly coaches' meetings at CAS have two components. The first is a true professional learning community where coaches discuss and resolve problems of practice, providing insight and strategies to one another. This monthly PLC session is the activity most highly valued by the coaches. The second component is professional development. It is designed to be relevant and timely to the work in the schools and is driven by the expressed needs of the coaches and their principals who are also invited to attend these sessions. In the professional development sessions, coaches are brought up to date on all the CSDE initiatives such as Common Core State Standards and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, and receive training in various aspects of CALI such as data teams, formative assessment, conducting classroom walkthroughs and providing meaningful feedback.

An end of year conference is held by CAS administrators with individual coaches to review student progress, examine the coach/principal relationship and determine the level of future coaching support the following year.

In an effort to engage those principals who recognize that having a coach is an opportunity to grow professionally and expand their leadership skills, a formal application process has been established for those districts interested in the services of an executive coach. Criteria have

been established and specific reasons and needs for a coach must be provided before assignment of a coach is made. The assistant superintendent and principal are required to sign the application. The range of service is differentiated to address the needs of a principal who has demonstrated success and is ready to take the school to the next level as well as a principal who is in need of specific support and guidance in one or more areas of instructional leadership.

CAS and CSDE maintain a formal relationship through a CSDE representative who serves as a liaison to the Executive Coaching Program.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Since its inception the Executive Coaching Program has proved to be a successful initiative. Each year CAS has reported high levels of satisfaction among all of the constituents. During the first three years of the program, the University of Connecticut conducted a program evaluation that sampled a random group of principals and executive coaches. Their conclusions were as follows:

- Executive coaches were readily available and flexible in meeting the needs of the principals.
- The relationship between the executive coaches and the principals strengthened over time.
- As roles were defined, the work between the executive coaches and principals became more focused and aligned with the school improvement plans.
- Principals credited their executive coaches with consistent and persistent support in developing positive working relationships between their schools and parent groups.
- Principals reported that the executive coaches were highly skilled in developing rapport with them and the school staff.
- Principals reported that the executive coaches assisted in focusing the conversation on instructional practice.

Additionally, in February of 2012, CAS administered a survey to all principals (P's) and assistant superintendents (AS's) involved in the program. The survey questions were aligned with the goals of the program. Most of the questions were the same on both scales, but there was one additional question on the principal's survey. Twenty assistant superintendents and 65 principals responded to the survey. Respondents were asked to assess the program based on a

five point scale ranging from a 1 (not at all) to a 5 (very much). Assistant superintendents were asked to leave questions blank if they did not have enough information to answer the question fairly. The results are as follows:

- 94% of P's and 79% of AS's responded with a 4 or 5 when asked to rate the effectiveness of the program.
- 74% of P's and 80% of AS's responded with a 4 or 5 when asked if the executive coach helped to increase the quality of teaching and learning in the school(s).
- 82% of the P's and 74% of the AS's responded with a 4 or 5 when asked if the executive coach helped to create a school climate and culture that is supportive and collaborative.
- 83% of the P's and 85% of the AS's responded with a 4 or 5 when asked if the executive coach helped to create a more data influenced culture.
- 83% of the P's responded with a 4 or 5 when asked if the executive coach helped to expand their instructional leadership skills.
- 94% of the P's responded with a 4 or 5 when asked if the executive coach helped to improve their practice by serving as a sounding board and resource for the principal

CONCLUSION

The CAS Executive Coaching Program is a successful system of support for principals and their school leadership teams. The commitment, professionalism and experience of the cadre of retired school and district administrators who serve as executive coaches, combined with the effective administration of the program by the Connecticut Association of Schools, has enabled those school leaders who are involved in the program to grow professionally and impact positively on the achievement of students and staff in their schools.

Connecticut State Department of Education
Robert Pitocco

Connecticut Association of Schools
Michael Buckley
Susan Kennedy
Everett Lyons