

**March 19, 2015**

**Cambridge District Task Force Meeting on Instructional Coaching**

Present at Meeting:

|                   |                  |
|-------------------|------------------|
| Jon Saphier       | Jennifer Ford    |
| Carolyn Turk      | Eileen Gagnon    |
| Jessica Huizenga  | Bob Ettinger     |
| Jaime Frost       | Liz Hill         |
| Karen Grace       | Khari Milner     |
| Mirko Chardin     | Janice Tingle    |
| Sachiko Rodes     | Victoria Greer   |
| Sarah Foleno      | Nancy Campbell   |
| Dan Monahan       | Julie Craven     |
| Steve Kelly       | Samantha Headley |
| MaryAnn MacDonald | Terri Gist       |
| Kris Newton       |                  |

**Minutes**

On March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015, 22 members assembled on Thorndike St. for the first meeting of the High Expertise Teaching Coaching Task Force. This group is charged with responding to the “Instructional Coaching Review” submitted by Consensus Now and Dr. MAK Mitchell in 2014. The charge of the group is **“To identify and recommend to the Superintendent for consideration, a viable and sustainable model of instructional support for teachers that will continuously develop capacity for skillful practice.”** Carolyn Turk and Jessica Huizenga co-chair the group and Jon Saphier is the facilitator. The Task Force’s recommendations will be submitted by the end of summer 2015 for approval. 2015-16 will be a year to plan for implementation. 2016-17 will be the first year of full implementation of the plan.

Parameters re: the report -- none, some, all or some altogether *new* recommendations may be our final message forward.

The effectiveness of the instructional coaching process is a key element of systemic improvement of High-Expertise Teaching, and thus this task force’s work is a part of that project.

-----  
The group reviewed a selection of norms to commit to for their time together, and voted to adopt these:

1. Trust, meaning we will create this as a safe space to be vulnerable in front of one another and not do any disparaging of individuals in or out of the room.
2. Pay attention to self and others
3. Put new ideas on the table
4. Presume positive intentions of others
5. Follow the 24 hour rule. If you feel offended, speak directly to that person within 24 hours or after that, let it go.
6. Speak up when you disagree with a statement
7. Pause
8. Provide data to back up positions
9. Be personally responsible for staying on track
10. Share the air
11. Balance advocacy and inquiry when discussing or debating points.

The task force group read a summary of the report's main points including points that were hinted at but not expanded. [See Appendix] With the understanding that we all bring our own lenses to the table, facilitator Jon Saphier asked the question: "What are the dominant themes throughout this report?"

The report calls for coaches to swing over to pedagogical coaching for instructional practices and for lesson and unit planning. It moves coaches away from content-specific pedagogy and helping teachers understand curriculum. There is the assumption here that the new curriculum materials and guides being written will provide the guidance teachers need to learn the curriculum. Central office curriculum coordinators take on the mission of supporting teachers with new curricula. These recommendations presume a completed and static curriculum already exists. In reality, the curriculum goes through reevaluation in a cyclical fashion. So how the coach spends his/her time with teachers should vary with what new curricula may be rolling out, balanced against the need to improve their instruction. Sometimes when new curriculum is rolling out, it is important for coaches to help with that.

What the coach does changes depending on content, and once the content is in place, there can be a shift to pedagogical work. The implied assumption that there is a complete and final curriculum in place is inaccurate.

The report suggests **structural** changes. Coaches will be supervised on the school level, as opposed to coaches as vehicles working through the curriculum departments. Coaches are to advocate and work for school-level goals, and will be distanced from the central office.

On the one hand, the recommendations give each school more autonomy by recommending the principal and coach use the coaching structure to carry out local school improvement goals. And all supervision and evaluation of the coach rests with the principal. However the coach is excluded from using time for non-coaching related activities, like direct teaching to intervention groups, doing testing, or substitute teaching. The report is quite strong in advocating that coaches coach, and not be diverted to other duties like supporting beginning teachers. That task is shunted over to principals and mentors so coaches can focus on working with teams.

Coaches are asked to lead teams and teach teams of teachers who share content how to have productive, regular meetings where they examine student work, do error analysis, plan lessons together, and critique these commonly designed lessons. This suggests a major PD project for coaches and team leaders about how to do this, ensuring common planning time for it to happen, and building-based leadership that knows what these sessions look and sound like when they are going well and assists if they don't.

The report converts the school leadership team into a meta-PLC. The implication is that the leadership team uses distributed leadership to get around to all the teaching teams to shepherd the PLC, data oriented practices into full functioning. What they would need to know, learn and commit themselves to is not described.

The report underscores **collaboration**. Principals will partner with coaches as instructional leaders of their school. This theme is hinted at by the report's use of "act in

concert with,” “partner with,” and “teams.” The report does not, however, include implementation strategies on what this collaboration will look like.

Unaddressed in the report is the need for coaches to collaborate with each other. The glue that holds together a coaching structure is a strategic way coaches can learn from one another. Who will bring the coaches together periodically to share cases and learn together?

Many of the recommendations call for structural changes, and some are more about a **shift in culture** and sub-cultures. Structural changes are easier than changes in embedded belief-systems, values, and habits. If we don't go to work on the Adult Professional Culture and how we interact with one another, these structural changes won't make much difference. If a school doesn't have investment from most members, it won't work. It would be disingenuous to tell teachers that changes will happen without teaching them how to implement the changes. Though it was inferred from the report that culture needs to change, there were no recommendations on how to shift it in practice.

**Trust** was a big theme amongst the task force's analysis of adaptive cultural components of this plan. There was a strong emphasis on trust in the norms development at the beginning of this session, and it translated to the implementation of these changes as well. There needs to be trust that goals are being set and followed through by all parties. There needs to be a culture of confidentiality when coaches are working with teachers.

The report needs more **clarity** about the purpose of the plan and the responsibilities of each party involved. If everything is working, what are we holding coaches and principals accountable for? The “life of a coach” and how one would spend his/her time in an ideal implementation needs to be spelled out.

Coaching can be a powerful engine to spread high-leverage teaching skills and practices, but the district has to decide what those are first.

Another theme in the report was **district-wide coherence**, and the priority to get all schools on the same page with regard how coaching is done as well as the current movement to get schools aligned through common assessments and consistent curriculum.

However, there was no acknowledgement that different schools have different needs. For example, an elementary school's structures for coaching cannot apply to a high school setting. This is a point we should debate.

Also, the process of working with a variety of teachers is not present, assuming that all teachers should be collaborated with in the same way. The task force suggested that coaches must learn Differentiated Conferencing in order to reach all of their teachers in a way that matches their level of development and professional needs. Similarly, one model cannot reach across all populations of students.

Finally, the report lacked clarity on the range of district coaches' positions with regard to their subject-area. What about working with new teachers?

There are **professional skillsets** that need to be developed in order to make these changes. We must be certain that coaches are proficient in data analysis, error analysis, lesson planning, and the design of re-teaching as well as facilitating good meetings. A concern with this need for training brings about a tension for coaches between needing supplemental training and needing to be present in the building. There are strong implications but no specifics about what this training should be.

There is a desire amongst the task force members for reciprocal accountability: in the future if everything is going smoothly and according to plan, what exactly are we holding coaches, principals, and central office personnel accountable for?

The central office is to be held accountable for the work, just as teachers, coaches, and principals will be held accountable for their work. The plan cannot work unless all parties are held accountable for working to improve the efficacy of the coaching structure. This theme coincides with the theme of trust. In the report, the central office will use an “earn your independence” model, pulling back when the school has effectively implemented the new approach. Unanswered: what is the relation of this “earn-your-autonomy” management model to coherence between schools?

---

In the next Task Force meeting (April 16th,) the group will share learnings from assigned readings about coaching models. They will examine the research and discuss concrete implementation strategies for strengthening adult professional cultures.

The task force has 2 more afternoon meetings and two complete days of work scheduled for the summer.

## APPENDIX

### **Summary of Report Recommendations**

---

#### STRUCTURES

In each school replace the Math and Literacy coaches (2 people) with one generic pedagogy coach who focuses on instructional delivery.

Eliminate District coaching positions.

Add an interventionist teacher to each grade level team. *[How will they function?]*

End practice of coaches delivering intervention instruction directly to groups of students.

Coaches shift bulk of their time use from individuals to teams. Have building based coach focus time on working with teams to design lessons in common, analyze effect of lessons on student learning by examining student work, and design re-teaching opportunities for students.

Ensure weekly common planning for all teams.

Coaches should share practices across the school. *[H.E.T. connection]*

Principals do hiring and supervision and evaluation of coaches. *[Rubric?]*

Shift the coach's role working with struggling teachers away from the coach and over to mentors and administrators.

---

#### ROLE of COACHES

Common coach training needs are:

- Granular data analysis *[H.E.T. connection]*
- Pedagogical skills *[H.E.T. connection]*
- Differentiated lesson design and delivery *[H.E.T. connection]*

"School coaches should set annual professional goals with their principals and share them with the staff."

"Train coaches on expectations for coach effectiveness" [which implies district-wide agreement on what that is.]

"PD for coaches needs to focus on what teaching for deep understanding looks and sounds like." *[H.E.T. connection]*

Train coaches on the kind of conferencing skills across the spectrum of "coaching heavy" and "coaching light" [Differentiated Conferencing Skills across the Non-directive to Directive continuum.]

Bring more “teacher agency” and goal setting into coaches’ contact with teachers.

---

#### RELATION BETWEEN PRINCIPAL AND COACH

“Principals and coaches work in concert...”

“Construct a tight/loose agreement with principals on duties of the coach

Develop policy around “confidentiality.”

“The principal must be an instructional partner to the coach; they need to schedule and plan as one.”

---

#### PRINCIPAL TRAINING in

“Distributed Leadership”

“Ensuring strong inquiry/PLC coaching model” *[H.E.T. connection]*

Gradual release framework that allow more autonomy from district mandates as “essential coaching conditions and structures” are developed.

For principal and ILT, training in how to function as a meta-PLC for instructional improvement

Support for how to be the “learning leaders” of the school *[H.E.T. connection]*

---

#### CENTRAL OFFICE

Redesign curriculum coordinators positions to be the “key link to customized resources [available to schools like] curriculum lessons and units, customized student data formats for team use, videos of teachers delivering team-designed lessons and intervention supports.”

Reduce district trainings and meetings.

Bring principals, coaches, coordinators, and OSS reps together monthly. *[What kind of agendas and purposes?]*

Reinforce the school feeder pattern as a cohort training and coordinating structure [through which] coaches exchange practical knowledge.

“Assign 2 OSS coordinators to the central office team of content coordinators to assure support to coaching teams for diagnostic/intervention decisions.”

“Curriculum coordinators should invite schools to create pathway optional structures for exchanging and modeling best ideas.”

“Study and learn from the CRLS pilot.”

---

## RECOMMENDATIONS THAT NEED ELABORATION

“Best practices should be agreed upon and shared across the system.

“Coaching should be part of a coherent instructional system.

Re-charter the Instructional Leadership Team of the school to be a “meta functioning PLC” focused on improving instruction for student results.

---

## UNADDRESSED ISSUES:

Who brings the coaches together for PD, case study sharing, and learning from each other; in other words, who is the guardian and shepherd of the coaches?

Time for coaches to meet together

Role of coaches (and principals) in strengthening Adult Professional Culture of non-defensive examination of practice in relation to student results. Thus, operating partnership between coach and principal to deliberately strengthen Adult Professional Culture:

- non defensive examination of practice in relation to student results;
- constant learning about High-Expertise Teaching;
- safety to take risks and be vulnerable with one another;
- joint responsibility for student learning. *[H.E.T. connection]*

Definition of “Pedagogical Coaching” *[H.E.T. connection]*

Evaluation rubric for coaches

Criteria for hiring into coaching positions and the process for hiring

Coaches as champions for implementation of new curricula

---

## CONNECTIONS TO H.E.T. PROJECT

“The district needs to proactively shape the coaches’ role...around the district’s instructional goals and articulate the connection between that work and the school’s overall reform strategy.”