Guiding Questions for Building and Strengthening Coaching Systems

The following questions are framed around the main components of the guidance document, Coaching as Professional Learning: Guidance for Building and Strengthening Effective Coaching Systems.

These questions should serve as reflection starters. They are not intended to be used in a linear fashion, nor should they be used as a "checklist" to be followed. They are provided solely as a resource and it may be helpful to choose the questions related to compelling challenges during implementation.

Part 1: Defining and Rationalizing Coaching

Definitions

- With the definition of Instructional Coaching (from the Guidance Document) as our starting point, would we modify or change any of the definitions?
- What evidence do we have that our teachers understand the definitions/distinctions, and are clear about how each role is operationalized within our system?
- How do our Title II, Part A investments reflect the differentiation in definitions?
- If we have these various roles within our system, have we discussed how cohesive alignment and collaboration happens? What is the relationship between our various defined "roles" within our system?

Benefits: Coaching as High Quality Professional Learning

- What do we value regarding effective instruction and student learning?
- Are the benefits for coaching understood and is there a clear rationale for coaching as a result? What is our evidence? If not, what opportunities can we plan to develop and communicate this information to stakeholders?
- Do we have job descriptions for the coaches? Do our job descriptions provide the necessary information required to provide clarity on roles and responsibilities?

Part 2: Effective Coaches and Effective Systems

Characteristics of Effective Coaches

- There are a number of characteristics associated with effective coaches including (a) belief in the potential and value of the person being coached, (b) knowledge of how to partner with adults, (c) use of effective communication skills, (d) deep content and pedagogical knowledge, (e) skillful use of a continuum of professional learning formats to support differentiated coaching, (f) evidence based decision making, (g), problem solving and management skills and, (h) collaboration. What are we doing to seek, foster, and reinforce these attributes in our coaches?
- What professional learning do we provide to support the development and practice of these characteristics?

Features of Effective Coaching Systems

- What have we identified as our model for coaching? What is our rationale for making this decision? What have we identified as our coaching focus?
- It is important that coaching is aligned with other professional learning initiatives. What would (will) this look like? Are all of the appropriate partners at the table for these discussions?
- What professional learning will we provide our coaches initially and as part of our ongoing support?
- What is (or will be) the process (data) for how coaches are assigned to buildings or specific teachers, grade levels, etc.…
- What is our communication plan for roll-out and/or continuing updates on important program features?

Roles, Responsibilities & Relationships

- Given our articulated goals, what specific coaching tasks (roles) should be given the highest priority in order to accomplish those tasks?
- Do we have the necessary structures to support our proposed level of commitment (time, resources, etc.…)? What is the evidence for our answer? Based on our data, what actions should we take?
- Are all our staff members clear about what the coach's role does not include? What is the evidence for our answer? Based on our evidence, what actions should we take to ensure clarity on roles and responsibilities?
- How will we define confidentiality? What does this translate to policy? How do we communicate our policy to all staff?

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Time

What is the evidence that shows that our allocation of time for teachers and coaches to work together is aligned with the expectations for coaching? For example, if the principal wants the coach to work with teacher teams, is there a common planning period during the day to accommodate this?

Data Analysis

What is the evidence that we are strategically prioritizing coaching needs based on data?

Culture

What is the evidence that we are facilitating coaching that is likely to make a difference to teaching and learning?

Part 3: Evaluating the Effectiveness of the System

- What do we want the desired outcomes for instructional coaching to be in Year 1, Year 2?
- Are our coaches and teachers familiar with methodology (and associated protocols/processes) for evaluating impact such as Guskey, Logic Model, Learning Forward – Eight Step Process)?
- Have we had collaborative discussions to choose our methodology? Have the right people been engaged in these conversations? What action has been taken as a result?
- How and with whom do we share our findings?