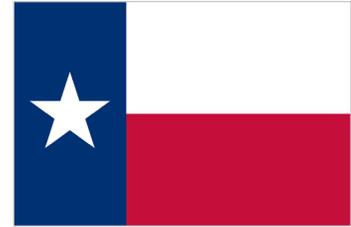


## How Can a State Education Agency Implement Teacher Coaching to Improve the Outcomes of Students with Disabilities?

### Overview

The need to improve outcomes for students with disabilities (SWD) by increasing teachers' skilled use of evidence-based practices (EBPs) has been a pressing challenge around the country. Texas, in particular, has a specific focus on supporting the increased use of teachers' EBPs within their State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP). Therefore, knowing that research indicates that coaching can lead to improved teacher practice and student outcomes<sup>1</sup>, including for

SWD<sup>2</sup>, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) embarked on a journey to use coaching to improve teacher practices. Of critical importance for TEA was to take a strategic approach to implementing aligned coaching across several schools, districts, and regions, which can be extremely challenging<sup>3</sup>. Some of the challenges include: ensuring that the coaching is based on the most effective and research-based practices; providing coaches with ongoing, high-quality professional development; and systematically



collecting data and using that data for continuous improvement. This state spotlight focuses on Texas's implementation effort, which aimed to embed and sustain an effective coaching framework across the state so that SWD could demonstrate marked educational gains.

### State Context

Texas's Part B State-Identified Measurable Result (SIMR) focuses on improving the literacy achievement of students with disabilities in grades 3–8. While Texas employs several improvement strategies to accomplish their goal, one of their largest initiatives is investing in statewide technical assistance networks. These networks are the primary arm of

the state's technical assistance and their collective goal is to support educators' professional learning needs. Networks include: Inclusion in Texas Network; Texas Statewide Leadership for Autism Training (TSLAT) Network, and Tiered Interventions Using Evidence-Based Research (TIER) Network—to name a few. Grantees of the networks consist of either regional education service centers (ESCs) or local

institutes of higher education. While there were nearly 120 network members already working with teachers of SWD across the 9 networks, coaching across these networks was not required by TEA. Therefore, TEA sought to leverage these partners in the statewide effort to implement coaching as a way to increase teachers' use of EBPs with SWD.

1 Kraft, M. A., Blazar, D., & Hogan, D. (2018). The effect of teacher coaching on instruction and achievement: A meta-analysis of the causal evidence. *Review of educational research*, 88(4), 547-588.

2 Reddy, L. A., Lekwa, A., & Shernoff, E. (2021). Comparison of the Effects of Coaching for General and Special Education Teachers in High-Poverty Urban Elementary Schools. *Journal of learning disabilities*, 54(1), 36-53.

3 Pierce, J., Irby, M., & Weber-Mayrner, M. (2019). How coaching takes root. *The Learning Professional*, 40(6), 20-23.

## Strategies for Success

To launch a coordinated coaching effort, TEA began by defining *what* effective coaching consists of and exploring *how* to implement it efficiently and successfully. Learning about effective coaching enabled TEA to create a simple, explicit, and research-informed coaching framework that was summarized in a one-page infographic. Learning about common coaching implementation challenges from research helped TEA develop and launch a simple plan to mitigate barriers and support the coherent use of coaching across their system.

TEA took the following steps:

- **Created a coaching leadership team consisting of TEA staff.** This team's role was to guide all efforts related to implementing coaching, including the development and use of a definition of coaching, a professional learning plan for coaches, and a plan for collecting and using data on coaching. Establishing this leadership team ensured that there was a common vision of coaching across the different network projects<sup>4</sup>.
- **Created an infographic depicting the coaching framework, solicited feedback from coaches and network leads, and revised the infographic based on feedback.** Next, the coaching leadership team created a graphic that illustrated how to conduct coaching sessions with teachers using the most powerful coaching practices. The leadership team solicited feedback on the graphic from network leads and made revisions reflective of the feedback they received.
- **Provided professional learning to the coaching leadership team on effective coaching practices and common implementation challenges.** The leadership team boosted their knowledge on coaching and implementation by viewing an online, self-paced module and related coaching materials from the National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI). The team met with coaching experts to discuss their learning and to develop a plan for kicking off and sustaining the coaching implementation effort.
- **Provided high-quality professional learning to coaches on effective coaching practices, including initial workshops to build knowledge and ongoing support sessions to build support for coaches' use of practices.** 170 coaches and network leads participated in a virtual, interactive workshop on conducting coaching cycles with teachers. The coaching leadership team then facilitated bi-monthly implementation support calls with the newly-trained cadre of network leads that filtered questions, implementation successes, and implementation challenges from their network members<sup>5</sup> (e.g., the coaches). They also identified ways in which the coaching leadership team could further enhance the work of coaches. These bi-monthly support sessions served as a strategy for supporting network leads and coaches—specifically coaches' use of effective coaching practices.
- **Discussed how to begin collecting, analyzing, and using coaching fidelity data to understand links between coaching and teaching and to continuously improve the impact of coaching on teaching.** TEA realized that a central tenant of implementing coaching was collecting fidelity data (e.g., the degree to which coaches adhere to essential practices, meet dosage needs of individual teachers, is of high quality, engage teachers productively<sup>6</sup>) and using that data for continuous improvement<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, the coaching leadership team, in conjunction with external experts, identified

4 Aarons, G. A., Ehrhart, M. G., Farahnak, L. R., & Sklar, M. (2014). Aligning leadership across systems and organizations to develop a strategic climate for evidence-based practice implementation. *Annual review of public health*, 35.

5 <http://www.ihl.org/resources/Pages/HowtoImprove/ScienceofImprovementFormingtheTeam.aspx>

6 Pierce, J. (2018). Measuring the fidelity of coaching. <https://ncsi-library.wested.org/resources/247>

7 Hagiwara, M., Shogren, K. A., Lane, K. L., Raley, S. K., & Smith, S. A. (2020). Development of the Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction coaching model: Implications for research and practice. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 55(1), 17-27.

key questions they wanted to answer in the upcoming years about coaching. These questions included:

- » What is the fidelity of coaching? What practices are coaches using? What is the quality of those practices? How often and for how long are teachers coached? Are teachers responsive to coaching?
- » How does teacher fidelity of practice change when participating in coaching?

Based on these questions, the leadership team identified the following data to collect as a starting point:

- How many coaching cycles teachers completed (e.g., dosage of coaching);
- Teacher fidelity of implementation of an EBP.

The team also identified other data that could be collected in upcoming years:

- Coaching practices used with each teacher (e.g., observing, modeling, providing performance feedback, using alliance strategies<sup>8</sup>);

- Quality of coaching practices used with each teacher;
- Acceptability of coaching to each teacher.

After identifying that an existing data system could be used by coaches to submit data (i.e., Qualtrics), the coaching leadership team is now in the preliminary stages of collecting and analyzing these data to address their questions. Moreover, after a year of learning about effective coaching and how to strategically implement it, TEA remains committed to using their plan as a centerpiece to increasing teachers' use of EBPs, therein improving outcomes among SWD.

## Impact of Strategies

Other states may be similarly interested in using coaching to improve teaching and student outcomes. The next sections offer recommendations for taking a strategic approach to implementing an effective coaching framework.

### Recommendations for States Facing Similar Challenges

States interested in using coaching to improve teaching and student outcomes might consider integrating the following recommendations.

- **Engage stakeholders across the levels of the system.** Commit to continuously engaging with leaders from other levels of the system (e.g., network leads) and coaches from the onset of the implementation effort. Engaging with stakeholders from all levels of the system will build buy-in for the implementation effort from the get-go.
- **Commit to research-informed capacity building opportunities.** Most coaches do not have access to a formal coaching preparation

program, as very few exist in the country. Expect coaches will hold varying levels of expertise and experience in conducting coaching sessions with teachers. Provide differentiated professional learning to coaches based on their needs. Moreover, ensure that coaches receive high-quality ongoing support to continually advance their coaching skills. Research clearly indicates that coaches need coaching, too<sup>9</sup>.

- **Focus on the data.** Getting started with measuring the fidelity of coaching can seem like a daunting task. In keeping with the “think big, start small” mantra, TEA ultimately decided to slowly venture into the world of measuring the fidelity of

coaching. First, TEA collected a limited amount of coaching data rather than jumping immediately to collecting all the data they hoped to gather. Further, TEA relied on self-reported data from coaches, rather than a direct observation approach. After all, direct observations of coaching can be time and labor intensive. TEA anticipates that starting small in the initial years of the implementation effort may allow fidelity measurement to expand slowly over time, ultimately yielding a robust data set on the fidelity of coaching<sup>10</sup>.

- **Embrace innovation.** Facing extreme challenges like COVID-19 or even day-to-day challenges, like limited

8 Pierce & St. Martin, in press. Coaching for teacher and system change. Brookes Publishing.

9 Stoetzel, L., & Shedrow, S. (2020). Coaching our coaches: How online learning can address the gap in preparing K-12 instructional coaches. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 88, 102959.

10 Sanetti, L. M. H., & Collier-Meek, M. A. (2014). Increasing the rigor of procedural fidelity assessment: An empirical comparison of direct observation and permanent product review methods. *Journal of Behavioral Education*, 23(1), 60-88.

resources, doesn't have to derail coaching. For example, many Texas coaches shifted to virtually mediated sessions with teachers when faced with the pandemic. But, because effective coaching practices are the same for both face-to-face (F2F) and virtual coaching, virtual coaching can be just as powerful as its F2F counterpart<sup>11</sup>.

- **Expect to implement coaching for the long term.** Understand that coaching isn't a quick fix for improving teaching and student learning. Nor is it the sole strategy educators should use to produce such improvements. Other strategies include ensuring principals and leaders are effective<sup>12</sup> and that teachers are adequately prepared for supporting the unique needs of all students prior to entering the workforce<sup>13</sup>. Thus, consider using coaching as one way to support significant growth in teaching and learning. Equally important, embark on the coaching implementation journey for the long term. After all, teachers and students can achieve the desired gains when an investment in coaching becomes a permanent part of the system rather than a temporary fix.

## Resources:

**Contact your NCSI TA facilitator or NCSI coaching expert, Jennifer Pierce ([jpierce@air.org](mailto:jpierce@air.org)), for information on implementing effective coaching.**

### **Effective Coaching Practices Infographic**

<https://ncsi-library.wested.org/resources/188>

### **Effective Practices for Coaches**

**(Online Professional Learning Module: Part 1)**

<https://ncsi-library.wested.org/resources/206>

### **Measuring the Fidelity of Coaching**

**(Online Professional Learning Module: Part 2)**

<https://ncsi-library.wested.org/resources/247>

### **Effective Coaching of Teachers: Completed Sample of the Fidelity Tool Worksheet**

<https://ncsi-library.wested.org/resources/189>

### **NCSI Coaching Materials**

[https://ncsi-library.wested.org/resources?t\\_id=70](https://ncsi-library.wested.org/resources?t_id=70)

### **Measuring the Fidelity of Coaching**

<https://ncsi-library.wested.org/resources/247>

**About this resource:** This resource was developed by staff at NCSI including Jennifer Pierce, (AIR), Sarah Benz (AIR), and Kristin Ruedel (AIR), in collaboration with Deanna Clemens and Steven Prater, Managers of Technical Assistance, Department of Special Education, Texas Education Agency. The content was developed under cooperative agreement number #H326R190001 from the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government. Project officer: Perry Williams (March 2021).

11 Kraft, et al, 2018; Allen, J. P., Hafen, C. A., Gregory, A. C., Mikami, A. Y., & Pianta, R. (2015). Enhancing secondary school instruction and student achievement: Replication and extension of the My Teaching Partner-Secondary intervention. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 8(4), 475-489.

12 Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2008). Linking leadership to student learning: The contributions of leader efficacy. *Educational administration quarterly*, 44(4), 496-528.

13 [www.air.org/sites/default/files/downloads/report/Million-New-Teachers-Brief-deMonte-May-2015.pdf](http://www.air.org/sites/default/files/downloads/report/Million-New-Teachers-Brief-deMonte-May-2015.pdf)