

# THE PASSKEY

HELPING TEACHERS HELP STUDENTS

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Pennsylvania High School  
Coaching Initiative

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE COACHING TEAM

by Dianne Arnold, Literacy Mentor, Mapletown and Central Mountain High Schools

What makes the Pennsylvania High School Coaching Initiative (PAHSCI) different from other coaching programs? How do these unique features contribute to increased opportunities for success? Making significant changes in the high school culture to improve student learning requires vision, persistence, hard work, and a lot of support. Ongoing support for coaches, teachers, and administrators in this project

**“As part of a coaching team, coaches also provide support to one another, particularly in problem solving, dealing with resistance within the faculty, and keeping morale high.”**

is part of what makes PAHSCI unique and contributes to each school's chances for success.

As a former high school instructional coach who worked as the only coach in a school district for three years, I have seen the advantages of having more than one coach in a building. Each participating school has one literacy coach and 1 math coach for

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### PAHSCI'S SUCCESS RECOGNIZED IN YOUR LOCAL NEWSPAPERS

The Pennsylvania High School Coaching Initiative (PAHSCI) continues to gain momentum and attention, with news stories and a series of letters to the editor appearing in the Harrisburg Patriot-News, Wilkes-Barre Times-Leader, Hazleton Standard Speaker, Altoona Mirror, and Tyrone Daily Herald. Two of these articles and letters are already posted on our website, [www.pacoaching.org](http://www.pacoaching.org), and more are on the way. But you can read the most recent story and letter related to PAHSCI's participation at an event in Hazleton, Luzerne County, by using the following internet links:

1 - Teachers' coaching program credited for Hazleton Area students' higher test scores

[http://www.timesleader.com/news/latest/20080406\\_06\\_coaching\\_ART.html](http://www.timesleader.com/news/latest/20080406_06_coaching_ART.html)

2 - Teacher coaching initiative scores well

[http://www.timesleader.com/opinion/letters/20080406\\_Eisenberg\\_letter\\_ART.html](http://www.timesleader.com/opinion/letters/20080406_Eisenberg_letter_ART.html)

Professional development and one-on-one instructional coaching are making a difference. And more and more people are beginning to see firsthand the positive ways in which PAHSCI is changing classroom instruction, increasing student engagement and enhancing student learning to prepare our young people with the 21st century skills they need to succeed.

As you know, the Pennsylvania General Assembly continues to look closely at portions of Governor Edward G. Rendell's proposed 2008-09 spending plan, which includes initiatives targeted for the state Department of Education. The department would receive additional support to help school districts meet students' needs, including a \$20 million increase for intensive teacher training to expand "Classrooms for the Future." The department utilizes PAHSCI's services when facilitating professional development for statewide coaching programs, including "Classrooms for the Future."

PAHSCI has been working with the administration, legislators and others to preserve and expand its coaching model, whether through state or federal funding, foundation support or public-private partnership. And it's clear from these recent news stories and letters to the editor that your voices are being heard. Keep up the good work by contacting your state legislators and urging their support of the Initiative. The state budget must be adopted by June 30. Make sure everyone knows how important PAHSCI is to your school, your teachers, and your students.

## LETTER FROM: PAHSCI'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

When teachers and administrators think about “tools of the trade,” they think about curriculum, books, math manipulatives, graphic organizers, and a multitude of other “things” that help support classroom instruction. But rarely do they think about the intangible “tools” that help to engage students and create an environment conducive to teaching and learning. Covering the curriculum, pacing units of study around high stakes testing, and juggling differentiated learning styles have taken center stage over helping the reluctant learner. In light of the NCLB legislation, we have placed our focus on subject area content and scoring well on standardized tests and not on how to help students reach their potential or to recognize the impact of collaboration. The school community seems to have forgotten that “education environments have the power to shape self-concept and determine what we think of ourselves and our abilities” (Educational Leadership, March 2008, Vol. 65, No. 6).

We have forgotten that teachers can hold the power to help students feel comfortable and confident about their learning. This, too, is a tool for learning. Teachers need the tools that can help them encourage, motivate, and arouse their students’ passion in learning. They need the tools to help them engage all kinds of learners with a variety of learning styles. They need to nourish their own professional learning and discover the tools that will help them understand, appreciate, and work with the academically motivated student as well as with the reluctant learner.

**“Each teacher is expected to break down the barriers to learning, teach to a variety of learning differences, make learning interesting, deconstruct any negative school experiences, and capitalize on the positive ones.”**

Teachers need to care about their students’ learning. It is a complex situation. Classrooms are filled with diverse learners who come to class with a variety of experiences. Each teacher is expected to break down the barriers to learning, teach to a variety of learning differences, make learning interesting, deconstruct any negative school experiences, and capitalize on the positive ones. Building relationships with students is a tool, however, that does not come packaged in shrink wrap.

Typical drop-in professional development sessions do not address ways in which practitioners can learn how to cultivate meaningful relationships with their students. PAHSCI instructional coaches bridge that gap and help teachers establish the relationships they need to encourage student growth, convey high expectations for students, and recognize their own professional needs. In the PAHSCI teacher survey, 91 percent of high one-on-one coached teachers report that their coach addresses their needs as a teacher with instructional techniques, reflective practices, and engagement strategies designed to meet the needs of their students. Coaches help teachers create an ethic of caring that truly transforms their classrooms.

Sincerely,



Ellen Eisenberg

## WHY OUR COACHES MADE US CRINGE

by Lynn Kimock, Child Care Teacher, Hazleton Area High School

A few years ago, our school was introduced to the concept of literacy coaches, and we would cringe just at the sight of these coaches walking down the hall. These were our former co-workers with whom we had laughed and shared

many a lunch, yet now they were the “enemy.” The mere presence of these coaches usually meant we had more work to do on top of our already increasing workload. Not only did we have more work to do with the students, but we also had the dreaded mounds of paperwork that accompanied the coach’s suggested strategies. Around the same time all this occurred, we also found ourselves working with a new director of vocational education who was managing to find even more work for us. We were drowning, and there was nobody to throw us a lifeline. It is not that teachers are opposed to hard work, but many of us do have a tendency to be opposed to change.

This change was enough to place me in a panic. I had just changed content areas and was now teaching Child Care, a program that prepares students not for parenthood, as the

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*Team, continued from page 1*

every 400 students. This team approach works well for a number of reasons. By working collaboratively to plan professional learning opportunities and provide instructional support, the coaches are able to support more teachers. They are also better able to address the unique instructional and scheduling needs of teachers. In addition, one coach's personality may work more effectively with a particular teacher. As part of a coaching team, coaches also provide support to one another, particularly in problem solving, dealing with resistance within the faculty, and keeping morale high.

A leadership team, consisting of all literacy and math coaches, the principal, possibly other administrators, and three mentors, meets at least once a month. At these meetings, the team discusses progress toward the goals established in the school's action plan and addresses needs or problems that require attention. The regularity of these meetings and the presence of a leadership mentor, literacy mentor and math mentor are another unique aspect of PAHSCI that contributes to keeping the team focused on their goals. All mentors are experienced educators who have worked in the capacity of the role they are supporting. Leadership mentors support the principal and central administrators in providing coaches with what they need to work effec-

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**“Making significant changes in the high school culture to improve student learning requires vision, persistence, hard work, and a lot of support.”**

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tively with teachers. Literacy and math mentors work directly with the coaches to support them in sharpening their coaching skills and introducing to teachers new approaches for engaging learners.

Foundations, Inc. and Penn Literacy Network offer frequent opportunities to learn and network with other coaches, teachers and administrators involved in the project. These professional learning opportunities provide a foundation of knowledge, skills and common vocabulary in engaging learners to improve achievement in mathematics and literacy across the curriculum. This, in turn, helps the team to build a professional learning community within their own school. At the state-wide networking days offered twice a year, coaches and administrators share what they have done within their own district that has been successful, resulting in a wide network of support.

In designing PAHSCI, the partners recognized the critical role support would play in making significant changes in high schools. A strong knowledge base, opportunities for ongoing learning throughout the project, mentors to support the change efforts, and a school-based leadership team to plan and assess progress help the literacy and math coaches work as a team to support teachers in improving student engagement and achievement.

*Cringe, continued from page 2*

name suggests, but for careers in the educational field. Do these students really know what they are in for? Now I had to learn a whole new program, and the three classes I taught were three different levels. I started to feel overwhelmed. I spent my free time and my planning period preparing my lessons; while this planning took place, I was also doing a great deal of learning.

In addition to this workload, meetings took place with the coaches to discuss many of the strategies one can use in all classes, not just in the academic subjects, to increase literacy and improve test scores. Many teachers expressed concern as to how they were going to cover all the material and then devote time to the Please Do Now and to reflective writing. Once the coaches worked with the staff, modeled lessons, and showed us how to embed these strategies into our curriculum, it became almost automatic. However, this caused concern when, after assigning article summaries to all my classes, the writing samples returned to me were less than acceptable. There were incomplete thoughts, spelling and grammar errors, and poor sentence structure in most of the papers.

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**“Writing is often the first impression someone may have of a person, and my students now have the opportunity to create a great first impression.”**

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I went to the one resource that is always available to me – the coaches. One coach, a former English teacher, came into my sophomore class for three separate lessons and helped the students with strategies to better organize their thoughts and create papers that were grammatically correct. Much to my amazement, papers improved and have consistently made progress.

Writing is often the first impression someone may have of a person, and my students now have the opportunity to create a great first impression. Not only did the coaching staff assist with writing strategies, they assisted me in designing math questions that are relevant to my curriculum. The students have been equally successful in this endeavor. They actually look forward to some of the math problems and have even requested particular types of problems.

With all the assistance received from the coaches, learning became fun and relevant, not only for the students, but for the teachers, a welcome, though somewhat unexpected, outcome.

## ELECTRONIC LOGS MAKE COACHING MORE EFFICIENT

by Michelle Wenger, Math Coach, Reading High School

When I ask myself how the new electronic coaching logs impact my practice as a coach, I just say, "It has been like a breath of fresh air." Before the electronic logs, I felt somewhat restricted because the teacher interactive forms didn't allow for areas of growth or reflection. Now, I can add or make changes to the interaction log and have the opportunity to update my daily log and add additional comments. Finally, I can view how my work has been divided over a period of time and make my own adjustments as needed after reviewing the reports, charts, and graphs.

The new coaching interaction log has made it easier for me to keep thorough records of my time and what I covered while working with a teacher. It gives me the liberty and space to be more specific and thorough when discussing the teacher's perspective and what we observed at the student level. I have more freedom to be reflective of my practices and evaluate what I could have done differently and what I did well during the coaching cycle. The old logs did not allow for such areas of growth. Additionally, the new program breaks up the coaches' duties into four main areas: Curriculum, Assessment, Instruction, and Classroom Management. I like the categorical divisions, though there is no allowance for discussion and reflection in other areas of concern. In general, the electronic coaching interaction log has impacted my coaching practice in a positive manner with just a click of a button and internet access.

The Coaching Daily log has a coaching cycle listed in addition to the well organized meetings, reports/

communication, non-coaching, and professional learning categories. Having a place to make comments at the end of the daily log is very useful and provides a place to write a short summary of my daily activities and additional notations. However, this form contains a number of overlaps. For instance, impromptu coaching conversations and one-on-one instructional conversations are duplicates of what happens in a coaching cycle. I have been placing my time in the coaching cycle and not in the other option areas listed.

**"These logs help to make my job as a coach easier, which allows me to be a more proficient coach."**

Classroom visits, lesson development, and instructional planning are listed separately, but I include them under the coaching cycle.

I have found being able to create monthly summary charts makes it easier to read and analyze the different categories of information. These reports give me more

perspective on where I need to make improvements and how my time is spent. These reports have also been helpful as a personal job reflection.

My experience has been that the old forms were somewhat restrictive, difficult to adjust or add to, and time consuming. It is a bonus to be able to utilize the electronic logs because it allows for recording areas of growth and reflection. The logs can be easily adjusted and readily available in different formats. Former logs did not allow for this much reflection. These logs help to make my job as a coach easier, which allows me to be a more proficient coach. The logs may still need a little more tweaking, but it is a vast improvement over the shortcomings of the old paper logs. It, too, is a "work in progress."

**Please visit us on the web at [www.pacoaching.org](http://www.pacoaching.org)**

## PENNSYLVANIA HIGH SCHOOL COACHING INITIATIVE

Instructional coaching has emerged as a promising strategy for increasing student achievement and affecting education reform nationwide. In 2005, The Annenberg Foundation joined with the Pennsylvania Department of Education to implement the Pennsylvania High School Coaching Initiative (PAHSCI). Funded by The Annenberg Foundation, PAHSCI is a three-year, \$31 million instructional coaching initiative. Four additional partner organizations provide support for program implementation: Foundations, Inc., Penn Literacy Network from the University of Pennsylvania, Research for Action, and The Philadelphia Foundation. Research support is also provided by the Success for All Foun-

ation from the Johns Hopkins University, MPR Associates, Inc., and the Academy of Educational Development.

The PAHSCI model is designed to provide trained teacher-leaders, or coaches, to schools and school districts. The Initiative places one literacy and one math coach for every 600 students in 24 high-need high schools located in 15 school districts across Pennsylvania, with a total enrollment of over 32,000 students. Instructional coaches sustain ongoing, site-based, job-embedded professional development for teachers and administrators. They also facilitate in-class coaching and modeling, peer collaboration, and teacher training in order to improve learning at participating schools.

### PENNSYLVANIA HIGH SCHOOL COACHING INITIATIVE

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