

Strengthening, supporting, and maintaining a collaborative environment in schools is critical for school improvement. As the school year ends and many of our instructional coaches are facing a transition, moving forward in their teaching experience and returning to the classroom provide opportunities to improve practice and redefine the title “coach.” Their role as a teacher leader will certainly change. What will not change, however, is the commitment and dedication to continue their work in school transformation and promote teacher professional development.

This is tricky business. Does coaching from the classroom provide another opportunity to support colleagues in financially stressed times or give policy makers the excuse that we can do more with less? I don’t know the answer but I do know that we must continue to create an evidentiary trail that makes the association between improved student achievement and teachers who are coached.

Highly effective teachers are still the single most important factor in student success and school improvement. That we support our teachers and help them navigate complex literacy learning for all students across all content areas is definitely not the issue. That support does not end with a reduced budget. How we support them, however, will make the difference between maintaining the status quo and experiencing great achievement for both teachers and students.

How can we coach from the classroom? How can we provide a level of support when we have our own classroom responsibilities? Coaches need to be proactive and design a plan of action. They need to maintain the integrity of student engagement and student achievement. They need to regularly implement various evidence-based literacy strategies and help students navigate a variety of texts. They need to ensure that students write every day. They need to foster collaborative work and open their classrooms for peer visitations. They need to engage in conversations about student work and share their thinking about why students are successful. They need to continue to promote book studies, study groups, and professional learning communities designed to address the diverse needs of both teachers and students. Above all, they need to participate in the school’s plans for improvement perpetuating the concept that teacher professional development is not a luxury; it’s a necessity.

Instructional coaches, aka teacher leaders, need to continue receiving ongoing support. This is the very message coaches have shared in their professional learning communities, their schools, and their districts over the last few years. They continue to be members in a community of practice and learning with the shared vision of increasing student engagement

and student achievement. We all need to be reminded what Gen Battisto, PIIC mentor, says is crucial to our own teaching and learning; that is, *"Leadership does not evolve from position."*

Best wishes for a wonderful summer vacation.