

Instructional mentors provide essential support for instructional coaches in Pennsylvania. Hired and supervised by the Intermediate Units (IUs), IU-based mentors play a variety of roles in the IUs and school districts. The Pennsylvania Institute for Instructional Coaching (PIIC) works directly with mentors to provide the professional development and resources needed to sustain instructional coaching across the state. *Content mentors are our spiritual guides. (PAHSCI coach)*

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The dictionary definition of a mentor — “a person looked upon for wise advice and guidance”— is an apt description of an instructional mentor. In the PIIC model of instructional coaching and mentoring, however, not only do mentors provide “wise advice and guidance,” they also assume broader responsibilities for creating a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement throughout the IU.

Who are instructional mentors?

My role is similar to the coaches’ role with teachers. I help them know how to coach, give them tools and support. (PAHSCI mentor)

An instructional mentor is the “coach’s coach.” Mentors are highly experienced educators, knowledgeable about subject-matter content, pedagogy, professional development, and state standards, requirements, and curriculum. They are chosen for their special abilities to work collaboratively with others, to inspire trust among colleagues, to play a variety of roles comfortably, and to maintain confidential relationships with coaches and teachers. Ideally, mentors work full-time in support of instructional coaching in all districts within an IU.

How do instructional mentors work with coaches?

They [mentors] made meaningful connections with us, just like teachers must make meaningful connections with their students. (PAHSCI coach)

Mentors work one-on-one and in small groups with instructional coaches to support them in their efforts to help improve teaching and learning. This support takes a variety of forms: building a team of coaches; visiting coaches in schools and providing feedback; making resources and materials available; arranging for professional development; solving problems; and helping to create professional study groups for coaches and teachers. Mentors help coaches analyze instructional needs in a school and reflect on their own coaching as they help teachers strengthen their practice.

How do instructional mentors work in the IU?

Mentors work with PIIC, the Pennsylvania Department of Education, the IU executive directors and curriculum coordinators, and the coaches to analyze school data and identify learning and teaching needs in districts. They collaborate and help to determine the professional development needs of coaches and teachers and create a plan to meet those needs. They regularly visit schools to consult with school leaders, work with coaches, and foster collaboration among school staff. Mentors also work to ensure that all coaches and other staff in the IU can take advantage of the professional development offered by PIIC.

How does PIIC support mentors?

Mentors participate in all professional development opportunities offered by PIIC and draw upon PIIC resources in their work with coaches. PIIC is currently developing a full program of study that will be available to coaches and mentors. Along with the IU executive director, PIIC's executive team also provides oversight of the IU mentoring and instructional coaching programs. See [PIIC's Program of Study](#) .

Are mentors effective in supporting instructional coaching and improving teaching?

If you look at what's changed in the classrooms and how the strategies are being applied, there's a culture change in how the organization organizes, plans, implements, and reflects on instruction. (Administrator in PAHSCI school)

PIIC is committed to rigorous evaluation of mentoring and coaching in Pennsylvania, so that educators can learn what works, what needs improvement, and how instructional mentoring and coaching have affected student achievement. Some research is available on the Pennsylvania High School Coaching Initiative (PAHSCI), which supported instructional coaching in 26 schools in 16 high-needs Pennsylvania school districts from 2005-2008. Nineteen mentors were a significant part of the effort. The Annenberg Foundation commissioned a study of the PAHSCI mentors, and researchers interviewed mentors, coaches, principals, and other administrators involved in 11 PAHSCI schools. For more information, visit our [Recent Studies](#) section for a summary of these findings.

* All quotes are from *The Role and Contribution of Mentors to the Pennsylvania High School Instructional Coaching Initiative*. Academy for Educational Development, 2008.

Want to learn more about PIIC and Instructional Mentoring? Visit our [FAQ Page](#) .