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Foundations of Coaching & Mentoring At Atlanta Public Schools: Maximizing the Impact of Atlanta Public Schools' Instructional Coaches and Mentors

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Foundations of Coaching & Mentoring

Maximizing the Impact of Atlanta Public Schools' Instructional Coaches and Mentors

LeBron James, Tiger Woods and Alex Rodriguez all have one. And if you are an APS teacher, you can boast that you have one too. This hot commodity that all of you share is the professional coach—an individual who tirelessly searches for the most effective way to bring out the best in you, and whose sole responsibility is to help you bring your A-game. APS provides *all* of its teachers with this incredible resource—a resource so many professionals yearn for, and are willing to pay top dollar for. And there is more good news for APS teachers—it's free.

Why Does APS Invest in Coaching?



It may seem surprising that an employer would invest this level of time and money in an employee, but APS believes that effective coaching is an essential part of building effective teachers.

Flavia Gordon-Gunter is an instructional mentor with Atlanta Public Schools. She points out that although coaching and mentoring fall under the same umbrella, the district distinguishes between the two.

According to Gordon-Gunter, mentors only address the needs of new teachers (those teaching for two years or less), while coaches have specific responsibilities with veteran teachers.

"New teachers are often overwhelmed with all aspects of teaching, so their needs are quite different from those of veteran teachers," said Gordon-Gunter. "Furthermore, 50 percent of all new teachers in this country leave the field within the first five years on the job, and it is usually due to a lack of support. Most of these teachers teach in schools with a high minority/high poverty population. Therefore, the students in this fragile population are much less likely to get highly skilled teachers. So it is essential to provide new teachers with support in order to reduce teacher attrition, and increase student achievement."

What are the goals of teacher coaching and mentoring?

Master Instructional Coach Linda Smith states, "APS has two primary goals with its coaching model : to provide coaches with a systemic coaching language and a common coaching approach to support district teachers in a continuum of growth, and to create coaching practices that will trickle down to increased teacher effectiveness and higher student achievement."

What exactly do teacher coaches and mentors do?

Mentors provide one on one mentoring in the classroom, provide professional development through new teacher seminars, and accompany new teachers to veteran teacher observations. Teachers should view mentors as someone they can trust, and a solid source of support.



Neither mentors nor coaches are evaluators. And although they do meet with principals to determine what areas they need to address with teachers, none of what is discussed or observed in the classroom is reported to the principal.



Coaches serve veteran teachers at one school, and they are at the school everyday to help teachers. The coaches use the reflective coaching model and work with the teacher to create a planning strategy, observe the teacher's implementation of the strategy during a lesson, and reflect and discuss the lesson afterwards.



Andrea Dziengue, Project Administrator, with Project G.R.A.D., and Qualyn McIntyre, Teacher-In-Residence, with the Department of Learning Excellence, state that coaches are expected to do for teachers everything the district expects teachers to do for students. Coaches should be on top of the latest research, bring new and exciting things to teachers for support, be prepared to work with teachers every day, and identify the teacher's needs.

APS believes that when teachers learn practices and implement those practices themselves, the practice becomes habit, and the teachers become more effective.

Advice From Coaches and Mentors

Gordon-Gunter, Smith, Dziengue, and McIntyre all offer the following advice to teachers:



- "Teachers must be honest about their needs and understand that the mentor/coach is not there to judge or evaluate, but to support."
- "Be honest with your mentor/coach. It's okay if you don't know something."
- "Use your mentor/coach. Your coach's sole purpose is to help you become a better teacher."
- "Reflect on your practice and recognize where you can improve. Teachers need to set goals with coaches in those areas in which they feel they can improve. They need to ask coaches for help when they are struggling."
- "Remember that asking for help is not a sign of weakness, but instead the sign of someone who is interested in improving their craft and becoming a better teacher for their students."

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Teachers Get Informed First

An e-Newsletter for the Atlanta Public Schools Effective Teacher In Every Classroom Initiative