



# LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING COACHING PROCESS

## Leadership for Learning Coaching Framework: Combining Practical Data with Customized Support

School and district educators are charged with improving instruction by being data-driven and evidence-based. However, most of the data that they use are: (1) autopsy data on last year's achievement outcomes; (2) classroom evidence that is judgmental and perceptual; and (3) teacher evaluations that are often not useful for changing practice. Rather, leaders need current and practical data, and they need customized support to understand the data and chart a course forward for professional learning and continuous improvement.

### **Practical Data**

Data help educators and education leaders focus their attention and initiatives on the most relevant areas for improvement. Practical, action-oriented data provide immediate targeted results and feedback on how to improve rather than simply providing a snapshot of the current status. Implementing the Comprehensive Assessment of Leadership for Learning (CALL) or the WIDA School Improvement System (WIDA SIS) helps school and/or district leaders obtain that kind of data and encourages them to reflect on how better to attend to the learning of all students.<sup>1</sup> The CALL and WIDA SIS data are comprehensive, and the feedback system provides a wide range of research-based practices to implement as part of the existing school and/or district improvement planning process.

### **Customized Support**

Even with practical data, schools and/or districts using CALL or WIDA SIS may benefit from strategic and customized support. This support enables leaders and leadership teams to analyze the data, develop ideas about how to move forward, implement next steps, and monitor implementation and ongoing progress..

The Leadership for Learning Coaching Process cultivates sustained relationships with leaders,, as described by Elena Aguilar in *The Art of Coaching* (2013). As she writes: "*Coaching is not consulting. A coach is not necessarily an expert who trains others in a way of doing something; a coach helps build capacity of others by facilitating their learning*".<sup>2</sup> Leadership for Learning coaches are not positioning themselves as the sources for solutions, telling practitioners what to do. Rather, coaches learn about a school's context while helping leaders and school teams identify their own solutions based on action-oriented data and research. This process involves identifying strengths, areas for growth, barriers, and resources.

---

<sup>1</sup> Richard Halverson and Carolyn Kelley, *Mapping Leadership* (SF, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Elena Aguilar, *The Art of Coaching* (SF, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2013) 19.

## **Elements of the Leadership for Learning Coaching Process**

Schools and districts are complex systems that require authentic and customized approaches to transformation and continuous improvement. The Leadership for Learning Coaching framework and process align to education and leadership literature and are driven by the following key concepts and ideas:

- ***Inquiry***: Leadership for Learning Coaches apply the approaches from the National Equity Project and *Learning-Focused Supervision*<sup>3</sup> that prioritize an inquiry-based approach to problem-solving by using open-ended, non-judgmental questions, paraphrasing, and active listening skills during individual and group coaching sessions. In this way, leaders develop a collective understanding of the problems and possible steps forward. Often, effective next steps are within reach. An inquiry stance in coaching puts school leaders in charge and guides them to identify expertise within their environment.
- ***Distributed Leadership***: School improvement is not the result of the work of one person...and neither is effective leadership. Beginning with the data-collection process and continuing through developing action steps, it is important to *focus on the work*, rather than on one individual.<sup>4</sup> An effective coaching process utilizes a distributed and collective leadership perspective for understanding systems-level opportunities for growth and moves toward actively distributing leadership to build capacity for sustainable, ongoing improvement. One goal with a coaching process is to develop the capacity to lead teams of people, who then take on leadership responsibilities as well.
- ***Systems thinking***:<sup>5</sup> By thinking in terms of systems, coaching can enable leaders to analyze data, identify root causes, consider barriers to change, and problem-solve to overcome barriers, ultimately directing leaders' attention to key levers for change within a school or district.
- ***An adaptive***<sup>6</sup> ***approach to leadership coaching***: School and district change is complex and difficult work. There is no "magic bullet" or technical quick-fix for the significant challenges in education. An adaptive approach to leadership coaching recognizes the complexity, time, and cultural shifts leaders need to make to meet the academic, social, and emotional learning needs of all students.
- ***Mindful support to leaders***: A growing number of professional organizations from Mindful Schools, American Federation of Teachers, and the National Association of School Psychologists recognize the need to create more mindful schools that attend to the social and emotional well-being of both the students *and* adults in schools. An effective leadership coaching process works to build and sustain relationships among the coaches and the

---

<sup>3</sup> Laura Lipton and Bruce Wellman, *Learning-Focused Supervision*, (Charlotte, VT: Miravia, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Richard Halverson and Carolyn Kelley, *Mapping Leadership* (SF, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Peter Senge, *The 5th Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Crown, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Ronald Heifetz & Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leadership* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2002).

leaders. This process includes mindfulness exercises as part of the work to support leaders' presence and ability to think differently about potential solutions to complex challenges.<sup>7</sup>

- **Equity:** A critical goal within a leadership coaching process is to support leaders in creating more equitable outcomes for students. Educational excellence is achieved *through* equity and is achieved using a range of effective organizational, curricular, and leadership approaches to the complex challenges of closing opportunity and achievement gaps.<sup>8</sup> Within a coaching process, educational inequities are addressed by applying a culturally and linguistically responsive lens.<sup>9</sup> Leadership for Learning coaches guide leaders in engaging in self-examination and exploring one's role in inequitable educational outcomes.

The Leadership for Learning Coaching Process meets leaders where they are in their own continuous improvement journey. Combining practical data and customized support creates a leadership coaching relationship that works for school and district leaders, which, in turn, works for the school and district communities in which they lead.

---

<sup>7</sup> Caryn M. Wells. *Mindfulness: How School Leaders Can Reduce Stress and Thrive on the Job* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> Alan Blankenstein and Pedro Noguera, *Excellence Through Equity: Five Principles for Courageous Leadership to Guide Achievement for Every Student* (Virginia: ASCD, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> Zaretta Hammond, *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2015).