Coaching: Supporting Improvement (From Taking the Lead (NSCD))

Who Has Coaches?
Michael Dell, Tiger Woods, Boston Public Schools, Michael Jordan, Venus and Serena Williams, the state of Georgia, Douglas County Colorado Public schools all have something in common. This commonality is not accident. It is a result of wanting to improve, to move to increased efficiency, higher performance, and greater results. Most elementary and middle schools in Florida have a reading/literacy coach. Every teacher in Adams 12 Five Star Schools in Thornton, Colo., has a coach. Every aspiring vice-principal seeking a principal position in Howard County, Md., has a coach. Executive directors of professional associations and no-for-profit organizations and CEOs of corporations have coaches. Community sponsored youth sports teams have coaches. The national and international investment in coaching is substantial and for good reason: Coaches help people and organizations improve.

Why Coaches in Schools?
Richard Elmore (2002) states that “American schools and the people who work in them are being asked to do something new—to engage in systematic, continuous improvement in the quality of educational experience of students and to subject themselves to the discipline of measuring their success by the metric of students’ academic performance. Most people who currently work in public schools weren’t hired to do this work, nor have they been adequately prepared to do it either by their professional education or by their prior experience in schools” (p.3) District and school administrators know students are not likely to perform at higher levels until teachers begin performing at higher levels. These educators also know they cannot wait for institutions of higher education and teacher preparation programs to change. Professional development is the only practical tool at their disposal to increase the instructional effectiveness of current classroom teachers. Coaching is a critical component of an ongoing, job-embedded, collegial professional development structure. The Annenberg Institute for School Reform (2004) has studied coaching for a number of years. In a recent publication about instructional coaching the institute claims, “coaching provides the supports necessary to build collective leadership and continuously improving teacher instructional capacity and student learning.”

What Roles do Coaches Serve in Schools?
1. Resource provider: Coach locates information, resources, materials, equipment, assessments, examples of best practice, classroom management systems, etc.
2. Data Coach: Assist teachers and leaders to analyze a variety of data (student achievement, perception, demographic, and school process data) to make teaching decisions.
3. Curriculum Specialist: Assists teachers to understand curriculum structures, align written, taught, and tested curriculum, embed standards in teaching, etc.
4. Instructional specialist: Assists teachers and principal so that teachers are implementing effective, research-based instructional strategies that are engaging, challenging, meaningful, and built on relationships.
5. Classroom supporter: Assists teachers directly in improving the classroom practice through modeling, co-teaching, classroom observations, etc.
7. Mentor: Assists new teachers in developing their teaching skills as novices, and aides in school-wide induction activities.
8. School leader: Work collaboratively with principal and district leaders to design, implement, and assess school change initiatives to focus on intended learning results.
9. Catalyst for change: Create disequilibrium: seeks to influence change for improvement by introducing new ideas, making observations, questioning current teaching and leadership practice, & challenging current mental models.
10. Learner: Leads the learning in schools. The coach is the lead learner, and models continuous learning—in themselves, their work, and the field of education. “The most important role of the coach is to model attitudes and behaviors that teachers need to be successful. The most important of these is the desire to learn” (Mizell 2004).