

# Establishing Alignment Between Instructional Coaches and Administrators

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## **Background That Led to Your Inquiry:**

This is my sixth year as a Principal at Greenbriar Elementary School. The district is opening an 8th elementary in two years so we were blessed to have a co-principal join myself and my assistant principal this year. It was great to have extra hands in our building, however we needed to ensure we were all on the same page with evaluations.

We have three instructional coaches of which one supports math, one supports reading and one supports writing instruction. The coaches plan with grade levels weekly and quarterly as well as model best practices in the classrooms. The three coaches, my assistant principal, my co-principal and I make up our core leadership team.

All three administrators observed weekly planning sessions and began to notice a disconnect with information being given by the coaches to the teams. Teachers began sharing a frustration with me about mixed messages. It was important that we all had the same message in regards to curriculum and instruction. Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to strengthen my leadership team at Greenbriar.

## **Statement of Your Wondering:**

With this purpose, I wondered how I could strengthen my leadership team to ensure a common vision is communicated to all staff effectively.

## **Methods/Procedures:**

To gain insights into my wonderings, I had weekly meetings with the three coaches and the other two administrators to review and analyze previous and current student data. It was critical that we know where we have been and where we need to go academically.

We have thirty five classroom teachers with eight of them being new this year. The weekly planning with coaches would be critical as we discussed how to close our achievement gaps. As evaluators (administrators), we knew we needed to challenge instruction that was ineffective and support our new teachers.

In order to ensure we were leading teachers as a leadership team, we needed to observe classrooms together and share our thoughts. Each coach observed a classroom with each administrator scripting what they saw, what they noticed and questions they needed answered. We then met as a team to review the observations and share our thoughts. We utilized SFS as a tool to observe as this is our primary evaluation system for teachers.

We completed nine observations and then took time to analyze our overall data to find similarities and differences. Overall, our observations were very similar in what we would expect to see in a classroom, but differentiation, planning and engagement seemed to be areas we needed to address.

## **Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:**

As a result of analyzing my observation data, I learned that we needed to refine our critical core instructional practices, teams needed a specific focus each week for planning, and we needed to continue our dual observations.

We worked hard on our school improvement plan and shared with staff, but we were still missing critical core instructional practices that we wanted to see daily. We refined those after we completed our observations. These included objectives, engagement, differentiation, planning and intentionality. As we completed evaluations this year, we listed these areas in SFS and stated whether we observed them, partially observed them or not at all during our visits to the classrooms. We collected this data each semester and shared with staff so we could continue to be transparent about our work.

During the weekly collaborative planning sessions with the grade levels and coaches, I created an agenda for them to complete in Google to ensure they were focused on a specific objective. The coaches worked with the grade level team leader to define the objective, resources that were needed, follow up needed and materials. This was helpful if I was unable to attend the planning sessions, I could follow up with team leaders and share with ENL and SPED staff. This is something that we will continue to use next year.

The last thing that I learned was that we need to continue our dual observations with coaches and administration. The first round of nine observations, we did not share with staff the findings as we were focusing on our consistency. We shared our findings with staff overall and discovered that they would like the feedback from these observations whether they are formal or informal observations. This has allowed us to open our lines of communication between teachers and all focus on core instructional practices.

## **Providing Concluding Thoughts:**

This action research journey has been a powerful experience for me this year. As we embarked on closing our achievement gap, we were adding additional supports and I wanted to ensure we were aligned. Having six people on our core leadership team can be very powerful, yet also offer challenges.

In the past, the assistant principal and I have calibrated our observations at the beginning of the year, but we never involved the coaches in these observations. Our coaches are an extension of me and are involved in daily instructional conversations with staff. I need them to be able to articulate my vision as a leader in the building to build capacity. I learned that breaking down our observations and creating core instructional practices that we want to see has allowed all staff to have common expectations.

Next year, I would like to invest time in instructional rounds with teachers so they are observing other teachers in the building along with the coaches. In the past, we have done this with new teachers, but veteran teachers have expressed an interest in observing. We will need to work on a field guide that aligns with our core instructional practices. I am excited to continue our administrator and coach observations next year along with adding instructional rounds with all the staff.

## **References:**

N/A