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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *Moves for Launching a New Year of Student-Centered Coaching* by Diane Sweeney, Leanna S. Harris, and Julie Steele.

**LEARN MORE** about this title!

# Section II

## Make Intentional Decisions With the Principal



# Move 5

## Establish How You'll Work as a Principal- and-Coach Team

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**I**t's the principal's role to go beyond simply supporting a coaching effort to actually leading it. Strong leaders build partnerships with the coach, understand how to separate coaching from evaluation, and position the coach to be a valued resource within the school community. Yet many leaders receive very little direction regarding how to best deploy a coach.

To make things even trickier, principals are asked to wear an increasingly growing number of hats. Principals are often pulled from one crisis to another, which makes it easy to understand the temptation to use the coach as a quasi-administrator, but utilizing coaches to manage discipline issues, administer testing, and lead administrative tasks is a good way to confuse teachers about the coaching role. While we understand the temptation to use coaches to help with administrative duties, we know that the most meaningful coaching happens when there is a strong partnership in which the coach can focus on work that directly impacts teacher and student learning. Therefore, it's important to set up this partnership early in the year. Taking this step will get the coaching effort off to a solid start.

## Reflect



Why do you think it's important to have a strong relationship with your school leadership?

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## What This Move Looks Like

As we mentioned, having a strong principal-and-coach partnership will make or break a successful coaching initiative. Below are some strategies to build these partnerships right from the beginning.

### 1. Set Norms for Working Together

Even if you've worked with your principal in the past, either as a teacher or as a coach, it's important to establish or reestablish norms for working together at the beginning of each school year. This involves having a discussion about when you'll meet, what each of your roles will be, and how you'll communicate about the coaching work that is taking place. Assuming a mindset of "we know each other really well, so it will all just work out" instead of intentionally addressing these topics can lead to a lack of direction and differing expectations. Even with the best intentions, it's hard to have a true partnership when both parties aren't on the same page.

## 2. Plan for When and How You'll Meet

Without a commitment to meet regularly, it's easy to see how weeks and even months can go by with only on-the-fly communication between a principal and coach. Therefore, we suggest planning to meet weekly, and that this time is scheduled on the calendar to happen on a specific day and time. In addition to committing the time to collaborate, it's also critical to establish what you will be discussing in these meetings. It's all about setting a clear expectation that the discussion will focus on the current work the coach is engaging in, trends that are being seen by the principal, and the next steps for ongoing professional learning. In doing so, you will avoid getting stuck in the rut of talking about, and being tasked with, everything under the sun *besides* coaching. In the Tools and Artifacts section, we include an example of an agenda for meetings that aligns with this process.

## 3. Define Both of Your Roles

There may be nothing more important to set a coach up for success than making sure that their role is clearly defined. This keeps coaches from taking on an evaluative role, being seen as part of the administrative team, or being pulled to take on countless other duties that have little to do with impacting learning. Clarifying the coaching role also helps when it comes to communicating about coaching to the broader school community.

In addition to defining the coach's role, it's valuable to understand the principal's role in leading the coaching effort. This helps both members of the partnership to hold one another accountable, support each other, and each stay in their appropriate lane. The following figure from *Leading Student-Centered Coaching* (Sweeney & Mausbach, 2018) offers suggestions for how coaches and principals might start thinking about each of their roles.

## Behaviors of School Leader and Coach in Providing Pressure and Support

SCHOOL LEADER	COACH
Sets high expectations for teacher and student learning	Provides support to teachers so they can meet the expectations that have been established by the school leadership
Holds teachers accountable for meeting the needs of the students	Organizes coaching so that it aligns with the accountability measures that are in place
Establishes a vision and sets priorities for how to move student learning forward	Prioritizes work that has the most potential to impact student learning
Makes strategic use of the coach to move teacher learning forward	Articulates the role of the coach and engages teachers in the coaching process
Leads the decision making about the scope and breadth of the content that is taught	Helps teachers design instruction that aligns with expectations about the content that is taught
Knows what high-quality instruction looks like and sets the expectation that this is the norm throughout the school	Skillfully supports teachers to implement high-quality instruction
Is aware of situations when students are underperforming and works to address the issue	Works with teachers across all levels of performance
Leads data-driven conversations with teachers and the coach	Participates in data-driven conversations with teachers and the principal
Spends time in classrooms and provides teachers with feedback as a result of the observations	Spends time in classrooms to support the delivery of effective instruction
Creates the structure and time for teachers to collaborate with each other and the coach	Designs and facilitates collaboration among teachers

Source: Sweeney and Mausbach (2018).

#### 4. Get Clear on Confidentiality

When we first started coaching many years ago, our motto was “confidentiality is king.” We now know that, while well-intentioned, keeping our coaching work a secret in order to protect teachers actually undermines the open, risk-taking, learner-centered culture that is needed for coaching to thrive. By taking the time to clarify what is meant by *transparency* and how coaching will be discussed, a principal and coach are able to forge a partnership in which coaching and ongoing learning are both expected and celebrated.

So, rather than focusing on confidentiality, we take the stance of protecting the respect and dignity of teachers by taking an asset-based perspective. This ensures that a principal and coach can openly discuss their work while honoring the learning of others. In the Tools and Artifacts section, you'll find an example of norms for discussing our coaching work.

## How to Partner With the Principal on This Move

This move is all about partnering with the principal. As you think about each of the ideas we've shared, consider some additional questions to guide the conversations that you will be having together.

- ▶ What is your vision for coaching and how does it translate into your expectations for the role?
- ▶ How can we be sure to separate coaching from supervision and evaluation?
- ▶ How can we talk about the coaching work in a way that's professional, transparent, and asset based?
- ▶ What are the best ways to support each other so everyone in our school can get the most benefit from coaching?
- ▶ If there is more than one coach in a school, or a coach is part-time, how will we collaborate?

## Moving Forward

Coaching is hard, messy work. While it may feel good to have the trust of a school administrator to “do your thing,” this kind of hands-off approach is not enough to ensure that coaching will really thrive. Instead, principal-and-coach teams need to start the year off right by making sure that all the pieces are in place for a strong partnership. In this way, coaching can truly reach its maximum potential.

## Next Steps



How will you work to establish a strong principal-and-coach team at the beginning of the year?

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## Tools and Artifacts

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**TOOL**

Principal-Coach Agreement



**SAMPLE**

Agenda for Principal-and-Coach Meetings



**TOOL**

Norms for Discussing Our Coaching Work