Student-Centered Coaching: The Moves

Second Edition

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CORWIN

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Acknowledgments

As we began writing this second edition, we knew it was important to update the accompanying videos to illustrate how each coaching move looks in action. We were fortunate to collaborate with the Shawnee Mission School District in Kansas, who helped bring this vision to life.

Working closely with Dr. Brittany Gonser, Director of Professional Learning, we tapped into the district's deep well of talent while also supporting their confidence and readiness to share their work with a wider audience. What you'll see in the videos is authentic and reflects exactly where they are as a team of coaches who have been committed to implementing Student-Centered Coaching for the past six years. We are deeply grateful to the principals, coaches, and teachers who generously agreed to be part of this book.

Principals	**Coaches**	**Teachers**
Elyse Caspermeyer	Kelly Bornheimer	Kelsey Baker
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Tayler Ramsey	Christi Bullock	Chris Heady
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About the Authors

Diane Sweeney is the author of *The Essential Guide for Student-Centered Coaching*, *Moves for Launching a New Year of Student-Centered Coaching*, *Leading Student-Centered Coaching*, and others. Each of these books is grounded in the simple but powerful premise that coaching can be designed to more directly impact student learning. Diane spends her time speaking and consulting for schools and educational organizations across the country. When she isn't working in schools, she loves to spend time outside with her family in Denver, Colorado.

Leanna Harris is the author of *The Essential Guide for Student-Centered Coaching* and *Moves for Launching a New Year of Student-Centered Coaching*. She has worked as a teacher, coach, and consultant across grades K–12 and currently works with Diane Sweeney Consulting to help schools and districts implement Student-Centered Coaching. Her work is based upon the belief that professional development for teachers is most effective when it is grounded in outcomes for student achievement—for every child, every day. Leanna is a passionate skier and cyclist. She lives in Denver, Colorado, with her husband.

Introduction

As we celebrate the 10th anniversary of our first edition of *Student-Centered Coaching: The Moves*, we've realized that our learning has continued to evolve based on our experiences and the ever-changing contexts in our K–12 schools. With this 2nd edition, we've added several brand-new chapters as well as new videos, examples, and tools that span grades K–12. We cherish the fact that we've continued to grow our thinking, and we can't wait to share it with you.

Student-Centered Coaching is an instructional coaching framework that focuses on partnering with teachers to help them reach their goals for student learning. If this is your first book on the subject, our goal is to help you develop a vision for putting the coaching moves into action. If you've already read *The Essential Guide for Student-Centered Coaching*, you'll find that we will help you sharpen your skills by breaking down each core practice so that these moves can be put into use in elementary and secondary settings.

No matter what your entry point is, we hope that by writing this book we will help you ensure that coaching grows the teaching and learning that occurs in your schools.

WATCH THIS MOVE!

Video: An Introduction to Student-Centered Coaching

https://qrs.ly/uch8unv

In this video, Diane and Leanna introduce the philosophy behind Student-Centered Coaching, including how it is designed to impact student and teacher learning.

WHY STUDENT-CENTERED COACHING MATTERS

During a recent meeting, a principal who we work with asked a profound question: "Should it matter who a child gets as their teacher?" We know that, theoretically, the answer is that no, it shouldn't matter. But in reality, what students experience from classroom to classroom and teacher to teacher can differ a great deal. Just think about how high stakes it can feel when a high school student is finding out their class schedule for the next semester. Or how much a parent anticipates that day in late summer when they learn who their child's teacher will be for the next school year. This, then, is our work as coaches—to help ensure that every teacher in every school is ready and able to meet the needs of the students in front of them.

Many school districts are developing Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) to ensure that they are providing high-quality, evidence-based instruction that supports the learning of all students. As the foundation of MTSS, "Tier 1" or "core" instruction are the learning experiences that impact the most students. We know that intervention is vital within the MTSS framework, but we also know that without high quality Tier 1 instruction, schools can become overwhelmed by the need to provide Tier 2 and 3 to so many students. Therefore, we must invest in core instruction so that we have fewer students needing extra support. This is the path forward to closing the achievement gap. It is also where Student-Centered Coaching thrives because we coach with the goal of impacting both the instruction and student learning that takes place every single day in K–12 classrooms.

WATCH THIS MOVE!

Video: Implementing Student-Centered Coaching Across a School District

https://qrs.ly/wih8uo0

A district leader shares both the "why" and "how" for implementing Student-Centered Coaching in a large school district. She focuses on concrete steps for consistently supporting coaches, principals, and teachers throughout the process.

HOW STUDENT-CENTERED COACHING COMPARES WITH OTHER COACHING MODELS

As you dig into this book, you may be wondering how Student-Centered Coaching compares with other approaches to instructional coaching. We define *coaching* as being "student centered," "teacher centered," or "relationship driven," and Figure I.1 outlines each of these methods in terms of the role of the coach, the focus for coaching, the use of data and materials, how the coach is perceived, and the role of relationships. We find that starting here helps coaches and school leaders understand how Student-Centered Coaching compares with other approaches to coaching.

FIGURE I.1 ● Student-Centered Coaching Compared With Other Approaches to Coaching

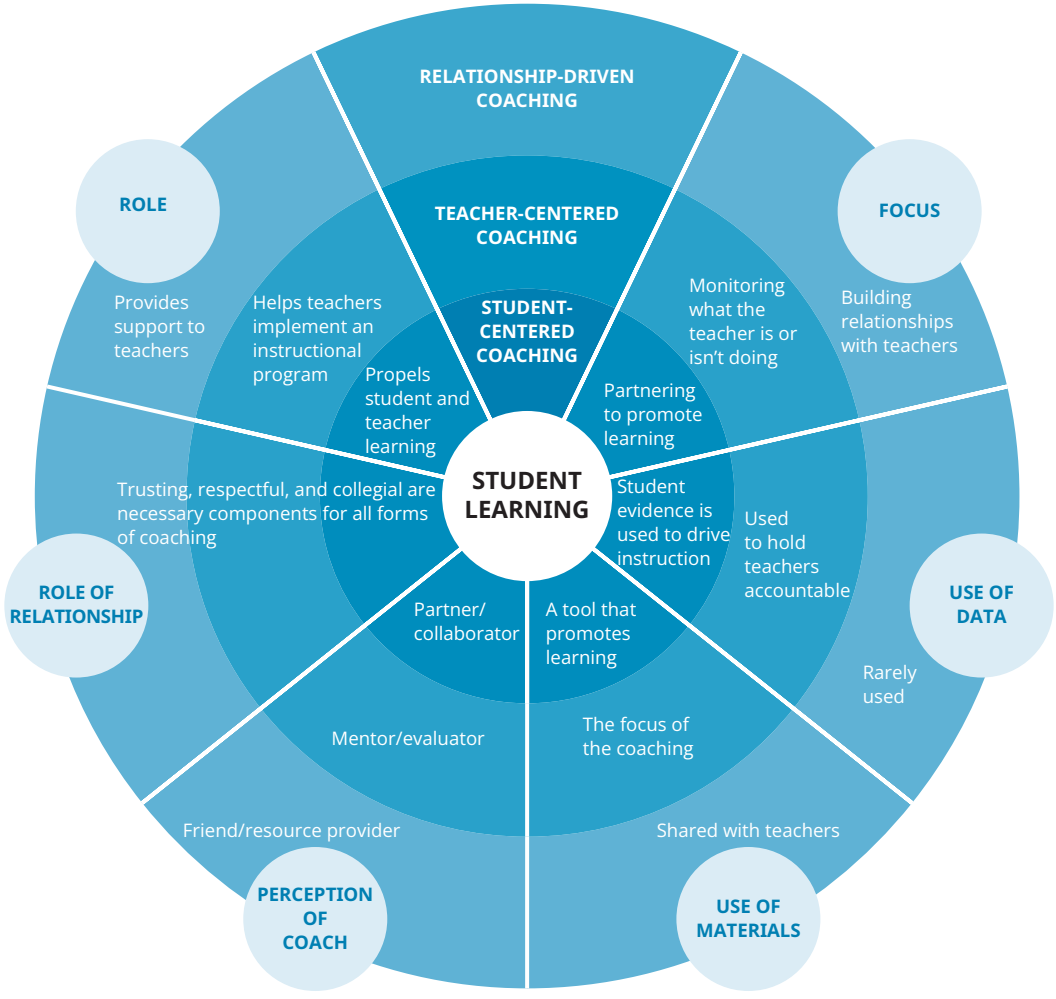


TABLE I.1 ● Student-Centered Coaching Compared With Other Approaches to Coaching

	STUDENT-CENTERED COACHING	TEACHER-CENTERED COACHING	RELATIONSHIP-DRIVEN COACHING
Role	Propels student and teacher learning	Helps teachers implement an instructional program	Provides support to teachers
Focus	Partnering to promote learning	Monitoring what the teacher is, or isn't, doing	Building relationships with teachers
Use of Data	Student evidence is used to drive instruction	Used to hold teachers accountable	Rarely used
Use of Materials	A tool that promotes learning	The focus of the coaching	Shared with teachers
Perception of the Coach	Partner/collaborator	Mentor/evaluator	Friend/resource provider
Role of Relationships	Trusting, respectful, and collegial relationships are a necessary component for this type of coaching.		

While Student-Centered Coaching focuses on student learning, teacher-centered coaching is framed by the theory that if we develop the technical expertise of teachers, then student achievement will increase as well. The emphasis is on guiding teachers to use a specific program or set of instructional practices in a certain way. It often blurs the line between coaching and evaluation and may create distrust and resistance among teachers.

Relationship-driven coaching, on the outer ring of the graphic, is less about holding teachers accountable and is more about being a helping hand by providing resources to teachers. We have found that when coaches haven't been provided with a framework for their coaching work, they may get stuck in the role of resource provider, which in turn erodes the potential impact of coaching.

We aren't suggesting that every coaching interaction should lie in the center of the bullseye. This wouldn't be responsive to the complex environment that we encounter in schools. Instead, we suggest that a school or system organize their coaching work to be as close to the center of the bullseye as much of the time as possible, since this is where student learning happens. In this book, we'll help you get there.

OUR COACHING BELIEFS

While this book will drill down into the *moves* for Student-Centered Coaching, we have also come to realize that they don't

mean a lot if these moves aren't grounded in a set of beliefs about why we are here in the first place. We find that whenever we are struggling, it might mean that it's time to revisit the beliefs that drive our work.

The following question that was sent to Diane underscores how our beliefs drive our work. You'll notice that her response brings the coach right back to her beliefs and how they impact her work with teachers.

MESSAGE TO DIANE:

Can Student-Centered Coaching work when a teacher does not have good classroom management or routines? Should I work with the teacher first on classroom management, routines, and procedures or dive in with Student-Centered Coaching?

DIANE'S RESPONSE:

The key is that you work on a goal that the teacher has set. Not a goal that you think the teacher should set. In my experience, the teacher has to be an invested partner in the process. We find that while classroom management may be an entry point to coaching, we hope to see the learning standards driving our coaching cycles. That way we can make sure that we are impacting student learning.

COACH'S RESPONSE:

Thank you! I have to change my mindset and be an advocate for change. We haven't necessarily been willing to give teachers, especially teachers who are struggling in certain areas, the opportunity to set their own goals. This, of course, is not always well received. Still trying to switch!

In reading this exchange, you may have picked up on the fact that the coach was feeling unsure about where to start with her coaching. Leading her back to the belief that teachers own their own work and set their own goals reminded her that we need to avoid the trap of "fixing" teachers—a belief that is essential when it comes to working honestly and authentically with adult learners.

We recommend that coaches ground their work by creating a list of their beliefs. Being clear about them, and then aligning them with our actions, is a powerful step toward being an effective coach. To set the tone, we thought we'd share our beliefs. If you haven't written down your own beliefs, we suggest that you do so as well.

1. Increased student achievement—for all students every day—is why we are here.
2. It's not our job to fix teachers or to be the expert on all things. Everyone brings varied experience and expertise to the table.
3. The goals of others drive our work. We can't tell people what to care about.
4. Our work is ongoing—it doesn't happen in single conversations.
5. Relationships are an important factor but not our goal.
6. We are smarter together, and collaboration is critical.
7. Everyone is a learner, and our work is never done.
8. We assume best intent. Everyone cares about kids and is doing the best job that they can.

STUDENT-CENTERED COACHING IS DRIVEN BY STUDENT EVIDENCE

Carol Ann Tomlinson (2014) writes, "A great teacher is a habitual student of his or her students. A keen observer, the teacher is constantly watching what students do, looking for clues about their learning progress, and asking for input from students about their status" (p. 10).

While schools are awash in summative assessments and high-stakes test results, we don't find these types of data to be particularly useful during coaching cycles. We do understand that progress monitoring is an important piece of the bigger picture of school improvement; we just feel that it doesn't inform our day-to-day coaching conversations.

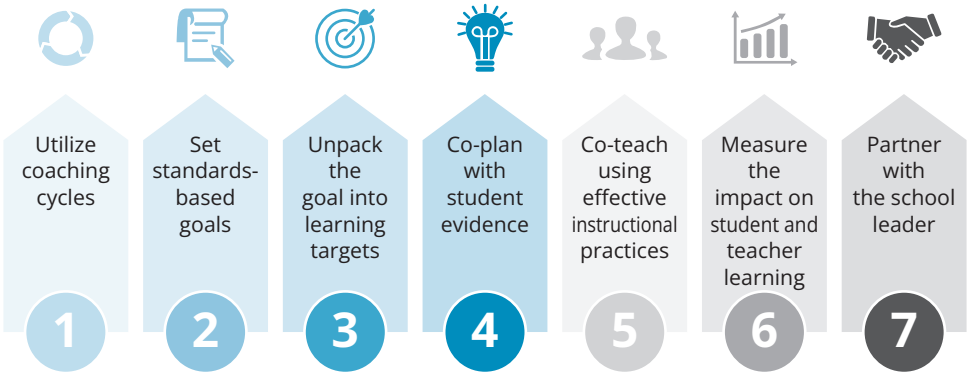
The notion of formative assessment, and of the teaching and learning cycle in which we assess, plan, and teach, is fundamental to the implementation of Student-Centered Coaching. For example, we work with teachers to interpret their formative assessment data (or *student evidence*, as we prefer to call it) so they can scaffold, support, and extend learning—in the next moment or in the next day's lesson. Short responses to reading, exit slips, writing samples, or problem-solving tasks from a math class are just a few examples of the types of student evidence we use.

With an emphasis on using qualitative data, we are guided toward our next steps in the classroom. This continual use of student evidence is what allows us to ensure that students are progressing as learners.

CORE PRACTICES FOR STUDENT-CENTERED COACHING

There are seven core practices that are foundational to Student-Centered Coaching. We will touch on each core practice so that you are empowered to use them in your day-to-day work with teachers.

FIGURE I.2 ● 7 Core Practices for Student-Centered Coaching



1. UTILIZING COACHING CYCLES

One-shot opportunities for professional development do little to improve student learning. Coaching cycles provide job-embedded professional learning that is ongoing and evidence based. Taking a cyclical approach to coaching provides the time that students need to reach the standard-based goal and the time that teachers need to develop their skills in delivering instruction that moves student learning forward. More on this in Chapter 1.

2. SETTING STANDARDS-BASED GOALS

Coaching cycles are driven by goals for student learning rather than by what we think the teacher *should* be doing in the classroom. This keeps coaching cycles focused on student learning and protects the coach from being viewed as an evaluator. More on this in Chapter 2.

3. UNPACKING THE GOAL INTO LEARNING TARGETS/SUCCESS CRITERIA

Learning targets serve as a success criteria for what it takes for students to reach the goal that has been set. This ensures that when we are in coaching cycles or are working informally with

teachers, we are focused and deliberate about what we teach and how we assess student learning. More on this in Chapter 3.

4. CO-PLANNING WITH STUDENT EVIDENCE

Using student evidence means that we formatively assess on a continual basis. This creates opportunities to make informed instructional decisions throughout all types of coaching conversations. We sort student work based on the learning targets so we can identify patterns and then deliver differentiated instruction that matches exactly where the students are on any given day. More on this in Chapter 4.

5. CO-TEACHING USING EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

Student-Centered Coaching is based on a partnership approach where the teacher and coach work together in classrooms to assess student learning and respond with high-leverage instructional moves. When co-teaching, it can sometimes be hard to tell the difference between a coach and a teacher because they are in sync and working side-by-side to collect evidence and act based on what is happening at any given moment. More on this in Chapter 5.

6. MEASURING THE IMPACT ON STUDENT AND TEACHER LEARNING

As coaches, we have an obligation to make sure that our coaching is impacting student and teacher learning. Therefore, we emphasize collecting data that captures the impact of our coaching cycles. We use the Results-Based Coaching Tool and a series of coaching logs to support this process. More on this in Chapter 6.

7. PARTNERING WITH THE SCHOOL LEADER

Coaches can't do this work without the support of school leaders. Developing strong principal and coach partnerships is essential, yet we often find that principals are left out of many of the conversations that are taking place about coaching. Working with principals to establish clarity about what coaching is and isn't, helping them learn how to be strong advocates, and planning how they will communicate high expectations around teaching and learning are principal behaviors that create a culture where coaching thrives. More on this in Chapter 7.

MOVING FORWARD

We are often asked if coaches are "doing it right." It is our hope that this book will help you answer that question for yourself by learning what it looks like to engage in Student-Centered Coaching across a rich array of contexts. We also hope you will walk away from this book with a variety of coaching moves and tools, along with an understanding of exactly what they look like and why they matter. But remember that your insights, experiences, and beliefs are just as important as anything that we share in these pages.

CHAPTER 1

Partnering With Teachers to Launch Coaching Cycles

When Diane was in college, she lived in a rental house with three of her best friends. When they moved in, they were excited to set up the house with cute furniture, pillows, and other decor. But as the first semester got started, Diane realized that she wasn't always on the same page as her friends when it came to taking care of things around the house. Diane told her mom over the phone one evening, "No one picks up after themselves. There are dirty dishes everywhere and it just feels like people aren't respecting each other's space." Her mom asked, "Did you talk about any of this up front before you moved in? Maybe you need to go back to square one and set up some house rules."

After a few rough weeks, Diane took her mom's advice and suggested to her friends that they sit down to talk through how they were going to live together. They created a set of house rules (Clean up after yourself. Put your dishes in the dishwasher. Don't eat other people's food without asking.), a cleaning and trash schedule, etc. The subtle tension that had been building among the friends dissipated now that they had a shared game plan. From that day on, the house ran a lot more smoothly, and they had a wonderful year living together.

Living with a house full of roommates is a partnership of sorts, and as Diane and her friends learned, partnerships work a whole lot better when they're built on shared understanding of

what's expected of each other. The same is true for our coaching work. We always benefit if we take the time to *partner with teachers to launch coaching cycles*.

THE MOVE—*PARTNERING WITH TEACHERS TO LAUNCH COACHING CYCLES*

In our book, *The Essential Guide for Student-Centered Coaching* (Sweeney & Harris, 2020), we present coaching cycles as an essential practice based on the idea that if "the outcome of coaching is improved student learning, then coaching has to be in-depth and sustained over time" (p. 27). This is why we advocate for coaches to spend at least 60% of their time in coaching cycles. This chapter focuses on the steps coaches take to establish partnerships that will lead us there.

Getting clear on the beliefs that underpin our work is an important first step to establishing robust coaching cycles. This takes time because our work is unique from many other approaches to coaching, as we saw in the bullseye graphic in the Introduction (Figure I.1). For example, our emphasis on the use of student evidence to guide our coaching conversations may be a departure from what teachers have experienced in the past. When coaching is "teacher centered," meaning the coach's role is mostly focused on implementing specific instructional strategies, it includes the use of practices such as modeling lessons, observing teaching and providing feedback about the instruction, or planning lessons with teachers that are driven by a curriculum or resource rather than by student evidence. You can imagine how confusing it would be for teachers who think coaching is teacher centered, when it really is something else entirely.

When we take the time to *partner with teachers to launch coaching cycles,* we create clarity around what should be expected in our work together, which in turn allows us to build authentic partnerships that are built on trust and respect.

WHY *PARTNERING WITH TEACHERS TO LAUNCH COACHING CYCLES* IS IMPORTANT

Daniel Pink is known for his work on what motivates the adult learner. In his bestselling book *Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us* (Pink, 2009), he argues that engaging adults through the use of carrots and sticks (or rewards and mandates) can often

lead to decreasing intrinsic motivation, diminished performance and creativity, and may even foster short-term thinking (p. 57). A coach we have worked with in the past refers to this as horizontal versus vertical coaching. She argues that horizontal coaching is doing the work *with* teachers rather than *to* them. Vertical coaching, on the other hand, is more directive in nature.

We know that we can't force teachers to engage and then expect it to be meaningful. Rather, we must work with them to craft a clear vision for our partnership. A team of coaches we work with in Central Iowa refers to this part of the work as "Meeting Zero" because it happens before the first step of a coaching cycle, which is setting the goal. Here, the coach and teacher(s) work out all of the details that will help their collaboration be successful.

Partnering with teachers to launch coaching cycles is important whether you're in a single school or if you are assigned to more than one school. Sure it might take a bit more time to work with teachers to build strong partnerships at the outset, but just like teachers who take time at the beginning of the school year to set up rituals and routines with their class, this up-front investment pays off in spades and results in work that is collaborative, impactful, and even joyful.

WHAT *PARTNERING WITH TEACHERS TO LAUNCH COACHING CYCLES* LOOKS LIKE

Partnering with teachers to launch coaching cycles is our chance to gain clarity, answer questions, set expectations, and come to a shared agreement for what our partnership will look like. It may feel tempting to make assumptions that all of these pieces are already in place, especially with teachers who we know well. But we find that investing in this move makes all the difference in our ultimate ability to have a meaningful impact on both student and teacher learning.

UNCOVER PRIOR UNDERSTANDING AND CLEARLY DEFINE WHAT COACHING CYCLES ARE

In *Moves for Launching a New Year of Student-Centered Coaching* (Sweeney, Harris, & Steele 2023), we recommend having a strong messaging and marketing campaign that gets the word out about coaching in "multiple times and in multiple ways." While this is no doubt a great way to ensure that teachers understand what Student-Centered Coaching is and how it differs from other forms

of coaching, we can't assume that everyone is 100% clear about this approach and what it means for them personally. That's why it's important to sit down with a teacher or group of teachers before the cycle starts to simply ask what their experience with coaching has been in the past, and to see if they have any questions. Instead of assuming that everyone shares the same vision, this is a great way to uncover any misconceptions or misgivings and to provide a high level of clarity about what's involved in a coaching cycle.

Once we've established teachers' prior knowledge about coaching and have addressed any questions they might have, it's time to share what to expect when it comes to coaching cycles. This builds trust in the process and provides a predictable structure for everyone who is involved. So let's take a look at what coaching cycles are all about.

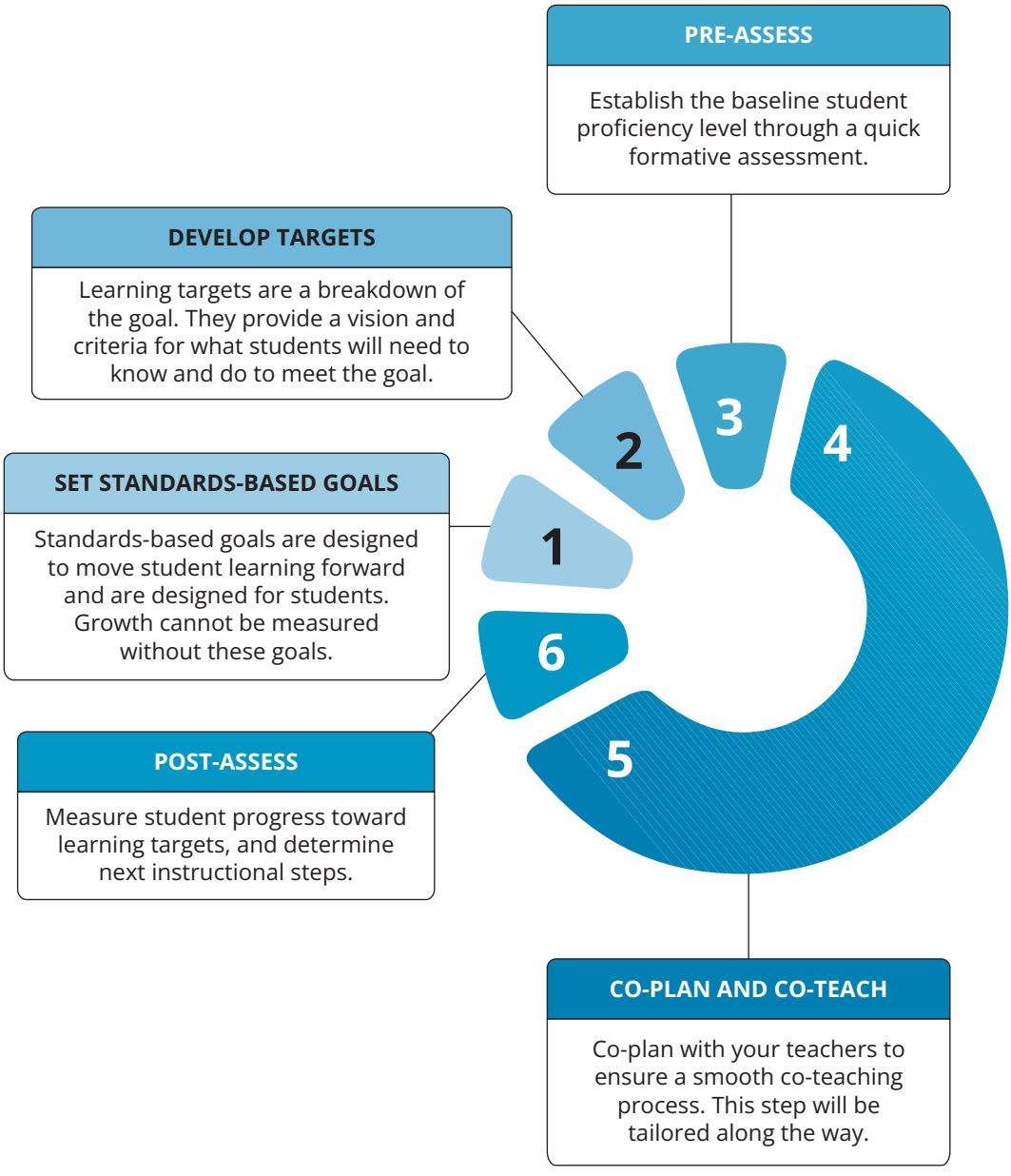
Coaching cycles have the following characteristics:

- They focus on a goal for student learning that is driven by the standards.
- They are tied to a unit of study and last approximately four to six weeks.
- They include at least one weekly 30- to 45-minute planning session to analyze student work and design instruction.
- They include one to three times per week for the coach to work alongside the teacher in the classroom.
- They involve in-depth work with a small group, a pair, or an individual teacher.

As you can see in Figure 1.1, we begin our coaching cycles by identifying a goal for student learning. Then we unpack the goal into student-friendly learning targets. The learning targets then serve as the success criteria and become a roadmap for instruction. Coaching cycles also include a pre- and post-assessment so that we can understand where students are starting and celebrate student growth across time. The coach and teacher(s) co-plan at least once a week throughout the cycle and work together in the classroom between one and three times per week as well. We'll explore each of these components of a coaching cycle in upcoming chapters.

Mini coaching cycles are another option for support. They share the same attributes as full coaching cycles but are narrower in focus, and shorter in duration. They are a great way for teachers to experience coaching without making a four- to six-week-long commitment. Mini coaching cycles are also helpful for coaches

FIGURE 1.1 ● Stages in a Coaching Cycle



who work in more than one school or at the district level and have the following characteristics:

- They are short-term partnerships that last one to two lessons.
- They focus on a single learning target.
- They include one to two co-planning sessions to analyze student work and design instruction.
- They include a single teacher.

As we learned from Daniel Pink, it's best to provide choice in not only the type of coaching cycle that is used, but also when it takes place, who participates, and what the focus is. This ensures that teachers not only understand the process but engage authentically as well.

WATCH THIS MOVE!

Video: Getting Ready for a Coaching Cycle With a Sixth-Grade Math Team

http://qrs.ly/7s59num

In this video, a coach works with two teachers to help them gain clarity about what to expect in an upcoming coaching cycle. You'll notice that the coach is clear about the process while also creating space for choice and ownership.

CREATE A PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

In the book *Taking the Lead* (2006), Killion and Harrison emphasize that partnership agreements are crucial for defining the bounds of professional relationships. By establishing these agreements, coaches can create a trusting and collaborative relationship with teachers that makes the process inviting.

Early in her work as a literacy coach, Diane was beginning a coaching cycle with a third-grade teacher. Unaware of partnership agreements, she jumped from the invitation to work with Rhonda straight into her classroom on the first day of the cycle. She figured that since they were friendly and even shared some interests outside of school, what could go wrong? When she arrived on the first day of the coaching cycle, it became apparent that they had a different vision for what it meant to work together in the classroom. Rhonda met Diane at the classroom door, pointed to a large set of wooden cubbies, and said, "Right here, I have cubbies set up for my students. I wanted to let you know that I made a cubby for you, too. I'll put the papers there for you to use with your small group, and then you can put them back when you leave. Here's a list of the students you will be working with." Diane wasn't sure what to say. It seemed as if she was expected to go off in the corner and teach a small group of students. She wondered how coaching would happen under these circumstances.

As she stood there with a stack of papers in her hand, Diane wished she could press rewind and talk with Rhonda about what their partnership would look like. She considered settling

in at the back table to work with the small group for the next few weeks, call it a coaching cycle, and then move on. This felt safer than nudging Rhonda in a direction that she didn't seem interested in going. Or, she could sit down with Rhonda to reframe the purpose for a coaching cycle. This felt like a riskier option. But after giving it some thought, Diane decided to at least try to salvage the coaching cycle by recommending other ways they might work together, including co-planning and co-teaching.

Having this conversation wasn't easy, particularly since the coaching cycle had already begun. When she brought up the option of co-teaching, Rhonda seemed unsure. So Diane suggested, "How about if we plan and then teach some of the lessons together?" After thinking it through, Rhonda agreed to give it a try. And as their work shifted to more of a partnership, the cubby went unused. But even with these positive steps, Diane couldn't help but notice that the coaching cycle felt strained. She suspected that Rhonda had hoped that she would work with one specific group of struggling students, and when she reframed her role as a coach, Rhonda may have felt that she wasn't getting what she had signed up for.

This experience provided an invaluable lesson about setting agreements *before* a coaching cycle rather than working from assumptions about what we think will happen. It even got Diane thinking about how they can be revisited throughout the cycle to ensure that all parties are on the same page and feeling positive about the work they're engaging in together. The bottom line is, if a coaching cycle is built on a shaky foundation, it almost always feels strained. And when coaching cycles feel strained, we diminish our ability to impact student learning.

We've included an example of a Partnership Agreement that can be used with individuals, pairs, or groups of teachers in the Tools and Techniques section at the end of the chapter.

WATCH THIS MOVE!

Video: Using a Partnership Agreement With a Fifth-Grade Teacher

https://qrs.ly/w3h8uo2

In this video, you'll see a coach getting established in their work using a partnership agreement. They leave the conversation with a clear vision for what their work together will look like.

CREATING PARTNERSHIPS WITH GROUPS OF TEACHERS

Student-Centered Coaching is often about working with individual teachers, but there are many advantages to working with groups of teachers during coaching cycles as well. While coaching groups of teachers may take a little extra preparation and thought, it can increase collective efficacy and is an efficient way to extend the coach's reach.

We have found that group coaching cycles are ideally made up of two to four teachers because this still allows the coach to get into each teacher's classroom on a weekly basis throughout the cycle. Sometimes these are informal groupings, and other times they may be grade-level teams or departments. In either case, it's important to decide at the outset who will be a part of the upcoming cycle.

At times, working with groups of teachers is a piece of cake. The teachers are on the same page. They are predisposed to working together and are focused on moving student learning forward. At other times, it can feel a little tricky. This may occur when groups of teachers aren't completely aligned, are confrontational, or have different philosophies about teaching and learning. If the coach senses the latter, they may recommend not pursuing the small-group coaching cycle at that time. Instead, they can offer other options for support, such as individual coaching cycles, a coaching cycle with a different combination of people, or support through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) or data teams. There is nothing wrong with adjusting the plan, especially if it is off track right from the beginning.

GET IT ON THE CALENDAR

Teachers are often anxious about how coaching will be scheduled. For this reason, we recommend starting there when discussing partnership agreements. As we mentioned earlier, we co-plan a minimum of once a week and co-teach one to three times per week during coaching cycles. Yet if we begin a cycle without committing to when these sessions will take place, we find that they may not happen. Once again, this lack of clarity can lead the coach to feel like they're pestering or pressuring a teacher to make the time for their collaboration.

This is why it's important to commit to the specific days and times when the co-planning and co-teaching will happen before the cycle even begins. Doing so can accomplish several

things: It reinforces the shared commitment to engaging in a coaching cycle, it allows the coach to build a consistent schedule that accommodates several cycles at a time, and it provides a sense of predictability for the teacher and students for when the coach will be in their classroom. Of course the occasional disruption of a fire drill, school assembly, or weather event may interrupt the schedule. But for the most part, having set times on the calendar will allow the cycle to run smoothly and have the maximum impact on student and teacher learning. We will discuss this further and include a sample schedule in Chapter 7.

BE OKAY WITH SLOWING DOWN

We find that much of our coaching work involves slowing down the pace of instruction because our goal is to help students demonstrate deep levels of learning. While teachers know that formative assessment, providing opportunities for discourse and dialogue, differentiating instruction, and providing feedback to students are all effective practices to use in the classroom, they may feel too rushed to do these things in ways that truly impact student learning. Instead, they may feel pressured to move through the pacing guide, teach the lessons, and hope that the students will learn. If the emphasis is on keeping on pace, it may be hard for teachers to give themselves permission to do anything differently.

Coaching cycles are a powerful way to slow down instruction because the coach and teacher are able to spend the time they need to analyze student learning and adjust the instruction to meet their needs. This can sometimes lead a teacher who is in a coaching cycle to get off track from other teachers in the department or grade level. On certain teams, this can put the participating teacher under some degree of stress because the other teachers may take more of a lock-step approach and may pressure the participating teacher to do the same. Therefore, we recommend having a conversation up front about the pacing of instruction throughout a coaching cycle. For example, the coach may say, "We are going to be working hard to meet your students' needs. That means we will be guided by the learning targets and formative assessments, and we may get off pace from the rest of your team. But you can be assured that your students will be learning." Being clear on what to expect for the teacher and sharing it with his or her team and even the principal are ways to ensure that slowing down becomes a positive part of the coaching work, rather than a source of stress and anxiety.

MAKE SURE THE PRINCIPAL IS A PARTNER TOO

In *Leading Student-Centered Coaching,* Sweeney and Mausbach (2018) write, "The principal's role is to go beyond simply supporting a coaching effort. The principal must lead it. It takes a well-informed and strategic principal to do just that" (p. 6). While coaches are building strong partnerships with teachers, they are also doing the same with the principal(s) with whom they work so they can work together to build a culture for learning.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of a school culture that embraces coaching is that it's an "all in" versus "opt in" approach. By this we mean that coaching isn't invitational and only for those who wish to engage, nor is it something that's mandated for all teachers. Rather, a culture is created where coaching is viewed as a positive and vital resource that is utilized by everyone in order to meet the needs of every student in the school. To create this "all-in" culture, we need to work with the principal to plan how we will make coaching feel relevant and valuable to all teachers. This starts with building clarity as a principal and coach team. Just like our recommendation to use partnership agreements with teachers, we find that it is beneficial to use partnership agreements with the principal as well (see Tool 1.1).

TOOL 1.1 ● Principal and Coach Partnership Agreement

Principal:

Coach:

Date:

I. Scheduling Principal and Coach Meetings

- When will our weekly meetings take place?
- How will we handle situations when our meetings are interrupted?
- What agenda or protocol will be used for the meetings?

II. Norms for Principal and Coach Meetings

- How will we maintain an asset-based stance when discussing our work?
- How can we show up curious and ready to learn from each other?
- What do we need in order to have honest and respectful conversations with one another?

III. Maintaining Our Roles

- How will the principal set clear expectations for instructional practice throughout the school?
- How will the principal get into classrooms for short and informal visits?
- How will the principal advocate for coaching without assigning teachers to be "fixed"?

THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN *PARTNERING WITH TEACHERS TO LAUNCH COACHING CYCLES* ACROSS LEVELS

For the most part, setting agreements, determining who will participate, and clarifying shared expectations around the coaching work should look fairly similar across grade levels. But there are a few things to keep in mind, especially when considering how to schedule the work. Let's take a look at how this might differ in elementary, middle, and high school.

AT THE ELEMENTARY LEVEL

Many elementary schools have literacy blocks that can go as long as two-and-a-half hours. They may cover foundational skills, reading comprehension, writing, and more. For coaches working with teachers within the area of literacy, it may seem overwhelming to think about how they would co-plan for such

a wide range of content, while still having time to work with other teachers. Even more challenging would be blocking off this much time to be in a single classroom a few times per week.

For this reason, it's important to set the expectation that the coach will focus on co-planning and co-teaching around a specific goal for learning, as you will see in Chapter 2. In elementary English Language Arts (ELA), this would mean determining a goal that relates to either reading *or* writing, and drilling down to something more specific within that subject area. When it comes to scheduling, this makes it easier to figure out what times the coach will be in the classroom, based on when those lessons are being taught within the literacy block. Clarifying for a teacher or group of teachers up front that you won't be in their classroom for instruction that doesn't pertain to your shared goal can help with scheduling and help avoid misunderstandings further down the road.

AT THE MIDDLE SCHOOL LEVEL

In middle school, teachers often have several sections of the same class. When this is the case, a natural misconception is that the co-teaching work will be taking place across several classes throughout the day. While that may seem like a smart approach, there are a few potential pitfalls. First is that it could take up a large portion of a coach's available time and preclude them from being able to work with other teachers. Second is that it may lead to coaches jumping from class to class over the course of the cycle and missing the opportunity to see growth across a specific group of students. For these reasons, we recommend that coaches clarify at the onset that they will be partnering with the teacher only in one class, even if they teach it more than once.

If a coach and teacher are working on a goal for seventh-grade math, for example, and the teacher has three sections of this class, they will need to identify which specific section they will be partnering in. This allows for both consistency for the students as well as the ability to accurately measure growth from the beginning of the cycle to the end. We've found that there's also an added benefit: many teachers appreciate being able to take what they do with their coach in one section and try it out in their other sections on their own.

AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

These days, many high schools operate on a block schedule with "A" and "B" days that alternate over a two-week period of time. This structure can seem confusing to folks who aren't familiar with it, and it's no surprise that high school coaches and the teachers they partner with can find scheduling for cycles

to be a challenge as well. How do you find time to coach in the classroom several times a week, and how do you figure out what this looks like when the daily schedule changes from one week to the next?

In these cases, it's important to remember that the suggestion to co-plan at least once per week and co-teach one to three times a week is based on a traditional school schedule. First off, it doesn't make sense to be in a class for the entire 90-minute block since this is really the equivalent of two days of instruction. Instead, coaches and teachers should work to determine the 30 to 40 minutes of the block that best aligns with the goal they're working on and commit to that time together. This will allow the coach to be in the same class more than once a week and to still have time to work with other teachers as well. Next, it helps to keep in mind that a full week of instruction occurs across a two-week period. So building out a coaching schedule that repeats every two weeks is crucial. A coach may be in a certain class one time during the week that class meets twice, and twice in the week the class meets three times. Coaching is never meant to be a one-size-fits-all endeavor. If the school schedule is different from the "norm," then it stands to reason that the coach's schedule would be, too.

LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

In a recent project, Leanna had the opportunity to work with Robert, who was new to coaching. When they first met, Leanna had no doubt that Robert had the disposition of a coach. He was kind, a good listener, and understood how to engage his students as learners.

During a check-in three months later, Leanna asked him how he was feeling about getting his coaching up and running. He looked a little bit sheepish and said, "That's something I've been wanting to pick your brain about. To be honest, I'm having a hard time making inroads with certain teachers. They seem standoffish, and when I do get into their classrooms, they don't seem very engaged. I'm not sure what I'm doing wrong."

As she listened, Leanna suspected that Robert's challenges might have something to do with the coaching practices that he was using. She asked, "Can you tell me how you have been spending your time as a coach?" Robert responded, "Mostly I am going into classrooms and observing teachers. Then we sit down afterward to debrief. During the

(Continued)

(Continued)

debriefing session, I usually celebrate what's going well, and then I give the teacher feedback about what they could do differently next time."

Leanna wondered if Robert's observations were affecting his ability to forge partnerships with teachers. While she was certain that he had a kind and generous soul, she suspected that he had diminished these qualities by limiting his coaching practice to observation. She pointed out that, though while it wasn't his intention, this choice may have put him in the role of evaluator. She suggested, "What if you decrease your time observing teachers and increase the time you spent working in partnership while in the classroom? It seems that this is what teachers will really need if they are going to reflect and grow in their practice." As he thought about what Leanna was suggesting, Robert began to understand how the teachers perceived him. While he viewed himself as a partner, his actions weren't necessarily matching that vision.

As they worked together to shift Robert's coaching practice to include less observing, he pointed out that an important first step would be to communicate his plan with the principal and teachers. He felt that if he had support from leadership, then he would be able to adjust how he had been going about his coaching. After that, he would work with teachers to consider options. He didn't want to step on anyone's toes, so he thought he'd get their input regarding what it might look like.

Leanna helped Robert draft a letter to teachers that framed his new vision for coaching. By sharing his thinking with teachers in an open and honest way, he hoped that the teachers would see him in a new light and that this would create more meaningful opportunities for how they could partner.

He knew that a big piece of it was to help teachers understand what it would look like when they were in the classroom together. This would allow him to shift away from taking on the role of observer. He knew that changing his approach would take time but felt that working side by side with teachers would make a big difference in how he was perceived throughout his school.

Robert's Letter to Teachers

Dear Friends,

As many of you know, I have been on a steep learning curve as an instructional coach. One of my favorite parts of the job has been spending time with each of you in your classrooms. It has been a rare treat to get to know all of the students in our school. I am also struck by the unique qualities that each of you bring to your teaching. It has been a gift to get to know each of you.

As we move into the second quarter, I am thinking about how I might improve my coaching. The time I've spent observing in classrooms has provided wonderful opportunities to learn from you and your students. Yet I feel it is limiting our ability to work together to increase student learning. Lately, I have been wondering if you might have felt the same way.

In the next few weeks, I'd like to check in with you to discuss how we might work together while I am in your classroom. While I have a few ideas, I'm sure you do as well. I think by brainstorming a bit, we will figure out a way to work together that meets both your and your students' needs. Thank you for your patience with me as a coach. I look forward to continuing our learning journey.

Warmly,
Robert

When Leanna checked in with Robert a few months later, he let her know that he was working with more teachers in coaching cycles. He explained that everything felt more natural and teachers seemed to be more engaged. Most importantly, he understood that defining his role is where he had to start to build strong relationships with teachers.

TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

TROUBLESHOOTING CONVERSATIONS AROUND *PARTNERING WITH TEACHERS TO LAUNCH COACHING CYCLES*

As we've said throughout this chapter, a big part of *partnering with teachers to launch coaching cycles* is to make sure we're all on the same page. When teachers say things that demonstrate a lack of understanding about what Student-Centered Coaching is, this presents a great opportunity to clarify both the purpose and process for coaching. Table 1.1 provides scenarios to help coaches troubleshoot these types of conversations.

COACHING LOG FOR CREATING PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

As we mentioned earlier, creating a partnership agreement with teachers is an important first step in setting the stage for doing meaningful work together. This agreement is the first in a series

of logs that take us through the process of a full coaching cycle. We will explore this tool in its entirety in Chapter 6.

TABLE 1.1 ● Scenarios for Partnering With Teachers to Launch Coaching Cycles

IF I HEAR . . .	THEN I CAN USE THE FOLLOWING LANGUAGE . . .
I'd really like to do a coaching cycle with you, but I just don't think I can give up any of my planning time right now.	I know how hard it is to have such limited time to plan these days. The good thing is that when we are in a coaching cycle, our shared time would be devoted to the planning that you already need to do, instead of something extra. And my goal is that with two heads instead of one, the time will be even more efficient and productive.
Three of us on our team want to do a coaching cycle with you, but I guess we can't because our other two teammates aren't interested.	Actually, that's not a problem at all because there's no rule saying that the entire team needs to be in the cycle together. I can approach the other two to see if they have any interest in doing an individual cycle or as a pair, but the three of you can proceed either way. And we can definitely plan to integrate our group coaching work into what you all are doing in your PLC so it still feels like you're all on the same page.
I'd love to work with you because I can really use another teacher in the room during small group instruction.	It's great that you're interested in working together, and I'd like to clarify a bit about what our school's approach to coaching is. Instead of coming into your class to take a small group or manage the other students, this is about a partnership where we co-plan and co-teach to help students meet a learning goal that we set for them. I'd love to find a time to meet so I can tell you more about it and answer any questions you might have.

TOOL 1.2 ● Coaching Log 1: Establish a Partnership Agreement

Date:

I. Scheduling

- Based on our goal for student learning, what days and times work to co-plan? We should plan to do this at least once per week.

- When will we partner in the classroom to help the students meet the goal that we've chosen?

II. Communication

- Outside of our scheduled co-planning times, how do you prefer to communicate?

- Everything we do together will be recorded on shared documents and kept in this coaching folder that we both have access to. Does that work for you?

III. Co-Planning

- Is there a typical planning template or structure that you use?
- Are there any students with special needs that I should know about?
- Are there any curricular resources you are using that I may not already be familiar with?

IV. Co-Teaching

- Are you okay if we jump in when the other is leading instruction or do you prefer for us each to only teach our designated parts?
- How will we handle student behavior?
- Do you have any specific rituals or routines that I should know about?

Notes and Next Steps:

A Final Thought

Partnering with a coach requires some degree of audaciousness on the part of the teacher. We bare our souls when we engage as learners, and this demands high levels of both trust and risk taking. When we aren't quite sure what this partnership should look like and what our respective commitments to one another are, things can go off the rails pretty quickly just like they did with Diane and her housemates. Yet, when we set ourselves up to collaborate in a productive and meaningful way, we create countless opportunities for growth and reflection. We no longer

wish for do-overs because we are on the same page right from the beginning.

If we take the time to *partner with teachers to launch coaching cycles*, we will chart a path that is clear and builds upon shared expectations and mutual respect. From there the sky's the limit for all the learning that's possible to achieve.