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## **Using Leadership and Peer Instructional Coaching to Improve Communication and Classroom Instruction**

Dedric Antwon Porter

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**Using Leadership and Peer Instructional Coaching to Improve Communication and  
Classroom Instruction**

Dedric A Porter

Capstone Project: A School Improvement Plan

Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa

### **Abstract**

This paper looks at the partnership between several components in a school's community and how they could connect better to create a culture that defines a school community. The purpose is to provide an overview of how these parts, the administration, educators, students, and parents could work together throughout the school year to create the foundation of the school's community and culture. In recent years, school administrators have hired instructional coaches to improve the quality of education provided to the students. Studies have shown that having an instructional coach can have a significant positive impact on a teacher's classroom performance. These coaches can aid in addressing various challenges that teachers may face in their classrooms, as well as help to improve communication between educators and administrators. The study suggests that to establish a positive school culture, an administrator should consider implementing an instructional coach, restructuring and reinforcing the curriculum, and improving communication among the school's residents. These steps can lay a strong foundation for a healthy and collaborative school community.

*Keywords:* leadership, communication, curriculum, instruction

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## **Using Leadership and Peer Instructional Coaching to Improve Communication and Classroom Instruction**

Not only schools across the United States would benefit from having an instructional coach, but so would the international schools that strive to follow in the footsteps of the American school model. “The essence of coaching lies in helping others and unlocking their potential” (Stanier, 2016, p. 15). International schools must manage the revolving door of teachers coming for no longer than 2 or 3 years with very few staying longer. The exploration of instructional coaching is not vast outside of the United States and only exists in a few other countries on a wider scale. Ideally, many schools would like to make it a part of the fabric of their school culture but do not know how to go about bringing it into existence. “Leadership effects are usually largest where and when they are needed most” (NASSP, 2013, p. 3). Providing the opportunity to leaders in the school, and unlikely leaders, is how the effects would be felt the most. In international schools, many teachers feel underrepresented, not heard on matters of change, and unappreciated when attempting change inside the classroom and amongst colleagues. The problem is that many teachers are unable to reap the benefits of the experience around them since the lines of communication do not function in a manner best suited to support them.

The purpose of this school improvement plan is to organize the teachers in a manner to create reliable support and strategies for the issues they may face in the classroom. Studies around the world focus on the idea that instructional coaching and support have made improvements that echo throughout a school from its teachers’ well-being to the flow of communication between the administration parents and teachers, to the support felt by the students because of the shift they felt in the classroom and actions presented by their teacher.

The school improvement plan will present opportunities for communication and community growth among the teachers as well as the administration and parents. This research will provide an in-depth analysis of how the interaction between the administration and teachers could be managed and improved. Also, how a good style of communication could lay the foundation of the relationship that is necessary to create a positive school culture. “We often don’t know what we actually want. Even if there’s a first, fast answer, the question “But what do you *really* want?”, will typically stop people in their tracks (Stanier, 2016, p. 80).

Research for this literature review utilized both Google Scholar and the DeWitt Library at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa to collect scholarly journals. All twenty peer-reviewed scholarly journals included in this literature review were published within the past ten years. The author focused on finding articles connected to instructional coaching and teacher well-being. The author focused primarily on finding research studies that included instructional coaching that identified with the levels of education such as the teachers, students, and administration and how they possibly impact the school culture and classroom environment.

There are a few areas throughout the literature that the author found to be highly interesting regarding improving the communication, community, and standards of the school. These areas consisted of principal leadership, teacher-educator mentorship, and teacher well-being. These outline the necessities needed for educators’ best intentions to be reflected in the classroom. Classroom intelligence growth by the students and individual behaviors can be guided with an approach to improvement that is inclusive of these abovementioned qualities. These will occur because teachers will be implementing strategies that are research-based best practices and provide support through instructional assistance. For example, the notion of which questions are the right questions to ask in a leadership role that works for teachers and students,

administration and teachers, or even instructional coaches and administration. Also, the reflection of teachers understanding how their health and mentality affect the classroom and their need to be at or very near their best to create this environment. Moreover, support and how it is used also plays an integral role in any teacher's well-being. "However, when it comes to teacher well-being, the importance of finding the most suitable coping strategies for one-self in different situations and also adding problem-focused coping strategies to one's coping repertoire should be acknowledged to possibly decrease teachers' stress and to ameliorate their sleep (Aulen, A -M et al., 2021. p. 8).

The author has organized the literature review by key areas deemed effective in implementing the use of an Instructional Coach and the impact that is possible on the school's culture. The literature review will begin with the importance of principal leadership and teacher-educator support mentorship. Next, the literature review will cover the importance of teacher educator well-being to produce desired results with individual students as well as the class. When teachers are physically and mentally healthy, they are better equipped to create a positive environment that can positively influence their students' attitudes and mentality, leading to improved productivity.

### **Literature Review**

This literature review is a collection of informative journals to provide a wider scope of why an instructional coach or a peer-led system of instructional coaches may result in a confident, more communicative staff of teachers who feel supported by the community surrounding them. These reviews speak to the culture, community, standards, and mental health that a teacher requires in their multi-tiered position. The review begins with the culture and community leadership and its impact on the school community. It then moves through teaching

standards and classroom leadership to focus on how instruction influences the classroom and what a leadership structure looks like between teachers, students, and administration. Lastly, this review approaches mental health, the focus that has by magnified after the pandemic, and the importance that is highlighted for the teachers especially.

### **Culture and Community Leadership**

Through several observations and reviews of journals, they most certainly acknowledge the need for a strong school culture that is cultivated by its leaders: those in the community, and those developing the school's culture themselves. "The change of behaviour that's going to serve you most powerfully is simply this: a little less advice, a little more curiosity. Find your own questions, find your own voice" (Stanier, 2016, p. 144). Choices are made throughout the building process; however, everyone still has a role to adhere to which will require a moment of leadership regardless of whether the effort is transactional or transformative. Furthermore, Kalkan et al quotes' in *The relationship between school administrators' leadership styles, school culture, and Organizational Image*, "A leader is the one who has specific characteristic features that motivate individuals in the organization to help reach the common goal that conveys his or her experiences, the one who prepares them to change by interacting with them, motivates the staff by creating a synergy, exceeds the usual practices and authorities, and affects and directs the behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes of the staff who are under his or her management" (Altınay, 2015; Aydın, 2010, p. 272). In contrast to the more traditional style of leadership which is likened to a military role in command. The leader gives the order, and the subordinate follows the command. The role can be seen transitioning over the years to be more inclusive in their ideas and support toward the leader to create this synergy.



This leadership can never belong to only one person such as the principal, a teacher, or some specific person in administration. Several leadership roles develop a school culture and these roles often come from leadership roles in the community and can also assist these people to take on leadership roles in their communities. “Principals’ relationships with their supervisors, schools, and communities affect their leadership. Processes to assess principal practice should accommodate local contexts, reflect a principal’s years of experience, be job-specific, and give supervisors sufficient flexibility so that a standard process used district- or statewide can accommodate differentiation that is based on principals’ work and grade-level responsibilities” (NASSP, 2013, p. 8). An instructional leader is possibly developed, supported, or fulfilled by a teacher, principal, or even an administrator if the role cannot be properly filled by introducing new personnel. Similar to the way a coach of a sports team understands the abilities of their players, this can be attuned to the method of any leadership role. Once the leaders understand the roles that their support provides, their foundation is strengthened, and everything has the possibility to progress in a firmer setting.

The leaders that are filling the roles of teacher, principal, or administration either know the school culture and what is needed to cultivate it, or they also know the community in which they have the experience to become a great leader within that culture and strengthen its foundation. A leader in the school’s culture and one in the community needs to maintain focus on the objective for a school to reach its desired goal. “Many hours are spent on leadership tasks on a daily basis in our schools, and those with leadership responsibility have multiple and sometimes conflicting demands on their time. Schools are very busy places and it can be easy to get caught in ‘activity traps’ where people are working extremely hard in their daily leadership tasks but valued student learning outcomes are not actually improving” (Le Fevre, 2021, p. 3).

The difficulties placed on leaders that represent the school's culture and often its community are normally placed solely on its teachers. In the article, *Using uncertainty as a learning opportunity during pre-lesson conferences in the teaching practicum. Teaching and Teacher Education*, presented by Costache et al quoted that, "Collaboration with a cooperating teacher, I who challenges student teachers' thinking, and encourages reflective experimentation with new practices and ideas, can help to build a shared sense of purpose and tolerance towards the uncertainty of the profession" (Helsing, 2007). Schuck and Buchanan (2012), provide an example of the leadership pressure that is placed on teachers with or without support.

Additionally, these pressures not only come from parents but from the administration as well as the teachers themselves. The support that is needed in the classroom not only comes from the supplies the teacher is set with but also their tools like instructional coaching, professional development, and collaborative opportunities with colleagues that can remove some of the uncertainty and doubt. Similar to the many steel beams needed to support a bridge or the village it takes to raise a child, a teacher benefits from those around them set to support and assist.

### **Instructions for Teaching Standard**

The role of the teacher is that of an instructional guide as well as an example leader in which Kalkan et al of *The relationship between school administrators' leadership styles, school culture, and Organizational Image*, recited that "Utilizing the human and material resources of educational institutes and sustaining their existence depend on an effective management approach, strong cultural texture, and strategic leadership that is compatible with the changing conditions of the world (Vélez et al., 2017; Yukl, 2008)". In addition, they go on to quote that "The multidimensional field of leadership has led to different approaches and new developments, which demonstrates that leadership depends on personal aspects and progresses

*as various properties are determined: the behavioral approach, which mentions that leadership behaviors could be learned in the afterward; the modern leadership approach, which centers on human relationships in organizational structure; and the contingency approach, which emphasizes that different conditions require different leadership styles (Aydin, 2010; King & Vaiman, 2019)”. This demonstrates the importance of guidance and support that teachers have not received in the past and so desperately deserve and need in the present day.*

Without an introduction to the importance of instruction or even the guidance of an instructional coach to assist in their development, most teachers are forced to find questions on their own and discover the answers as well. “Education involves helping a novice develop strong, readily accessible background knowledge. It’s important that background knowledge be readily accessible, and this occurs when knowledge is well rehearsed and tied to other knowledge” (Rosenshine, 2011, p 12). Additionally, “Although most teachers provided some guided practice, the most successful teachers spent more time in guided practice, more time asking questions, more time checking for understanding, more time correcting errors, and more time having students work out problems with teacher guidance” (Rosenshine, 2011, p. 16). In contrast, teachers without guided practice and support do not feel as though they have the time to make mistakes, ask questions, or reinforce what they have learned.

Effective instructional coaching supports the administration by bridging any gaps that have evolved between themselves and the teaching staff as well as supporting a teacher’s developmental process that allows them to deliver a more well-rounded approach to their students. “Teachers have to manage complicated and demanding situations, channeling the personal, emotional, and social pressures of a group of 30 or more youngsters in order to help them learn immediately and become better learners in the future. Standards can be raised only if

teachers can tackle this task more effectively” (Black & Wiliam, 2010 p. 2). Also, this maintenance presents the opportunity for newly incorporated staff to have a better understanding of how a school operates.

If the school has this teaching standard, the expectations and approaches to teaching are different. “One of the roles of the coach is to make the new teaching strategies as easy as possible to implement, by providing each teacher with dedicated implementation support materials such as class strategies, class plans, repertoires of tools, and a “*strategy box*”. The coach’s role is to remove any potential barriers to its implementation, by simplifying and clarifying the practice and “*translating*” the standards and research into on-the-ground strategies” (Devine et al., 2013, p. 1128). To expand on this, Daza et al highlighted in their article that “*Recently, more dialogue and collaborative research have occurred between scholars, practitioners, and policymakers on how to increase coherence and cooperation for professional practice in ITE. Some examples of these efforts are the redefinition of professional practice and the development of a learning community model (Le Cornu, 2010; Le Cornu & Ewing, 20 08); the fostering of PSTs’ resilience within learning community models (Le Cornu, 20 09); the implementation of long-term partnerships (Peters, 2011); enhancing program coherence, authentic workplace learning, and collaborative partnerships (Allen & Wright, 2014; Canrinus et al., 2017; Darling-Hammond, 2014; Morrison, 2016); and implementing models to promote teacher capacity for mentoring in professional practice (Betlem et al., 2018).*

Additionally, these barriers that are dismantled by the instructional coach’s support are only removed because of the work that the teacher does for themselves and their students. The collaborative measures taken ensure a long-standing community and partnership because of the gap that is bridged between the administration and staff.

As teaching standards are adjusted periodically, a representative who has a focus and connection with that community would prove to be imperative. Their feedback without judgment, only searching for opportunities for improvement that impact the individual and the classroom, provides balance, security within themselves, and a safe space for growth. “Feedback can lead to a change in the perception of the learner’s knowledge or self-esteem, thus affecting the learner’s motivation to further engage in strategic behavior” (Dignath, & Veenman, 2020, p. 492). In contrast to the periodic inaccurate feedback that is not in-depth enough and does not provide teachers with a path forward but only a critique of their classroom performance. The position of the instructional coach supplies the teachers with an avenue to create, alter, adjust, and cater to their students without judgment but understanding how to create more impressionable moments of instructional implementation.

### **Classroom Leadership**

Many opportunities between teacher and student have been lost because of the teacher’s classroom management style or instructional style which leads to the frustration of many students. Additionally, the motivation of teachers is often detracted because of the lack of support which in turn affects their leadership style, and often the decrease in motivation is reflected in student’s in-class behavior. “Although past research suggests a range of possible motives, none of the existing studies has investigated teachers’ motives for entering teacher education in relation to occupational outcomes such as job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion” (Richter et al., 2021, p. 1). In contrast to many opinions regarding a teacher’s motivation, there have been many instances where they have pointed out the satisfaction of reaching a single student and continuing to push forward to the rest. The instructional coach’s role supports that motivation and often is the mediation needed to continue key points of interest

for the teacher and keep them connected with the administration. Similarly in this thought, Pérez-Albarracín, A., & Fernández-Baena mentioned in *Beyond conflict resolution: Socio-emotional learning in student mediators* on page 340, *Consequently, there is controversy over whether the effectiveness of mediation should be approached from the number of agreements reached, or whether a more educational perspective should be taken, evaluating benefits of mediation in terms of its promotion of socio-affective learning and improved interpersonal relations* (García-Raga et al., 2018; Ibarrola-García & Iriarte, 2014). As a result, the idea of mediation exists as something positive including between students and can be trusted to affect mentalities with positive progression rather than seen as aggression or creating conflict. This act of mediation often builds a connection between the parties involved and supports a positive outcome.

Several learning opportunities exist for teachers to improve their classroom performance but often are not equipped with the right tools or are not comfortable with expressing the necessity for support out of fear of judgment. “Our findings provided evidence that coaching, mentoring, and supervision with trained CTs are more effective than traditional approaches without trained CTs” (Mok & Staub, 2021, p.8). This acknowledges that these interventions provide stability for teachers and help to improve their in-class performance, including, impacting their leadership presence in the classroom. “Educators have several options for interventions that help students develop these competencies through classroom curriculum, changing the learning environment, engaging family and community members, and providing opportunities to learn and practice competencies outside the classroom and in out-of-school-time contexts” (Grant et al., 2017, p.70). The same approach and intention can be made available to the educators inside the classroom presenting those educators with the best opportunity to enhance their environment from the point of view of the student, administrator, and educator. On

the contrary, it is not to say that even by making all the tools available to the educator or administrator their leadership role will be successful. “As most school leaders are drawn from the teaching ranks, such work may seem a natural extension of the leader’s prior teaching role. However, this task may prove more difficult when the leader must supervise and support the development of teachers whose content area is not closely linked to the leader’s own expertise” (Quebec Fuentes et al., 2015, p 196). Even teachers who receive the support of an instructional coach or peer instructors may not be able to progress beyond the borders they have placed in their path.

### **Educators’ Mental Health**

Educators are no strangers to pressure and their role in the community as well as their school’s culture. These educators answer to their students, the student’s parents, the administration, and sometimes other teachers in collaborative experiences. This places an extensive amount of pressure on the educators and they, themselves, need coping mechanisms to progress through a day, the month, and the school year. “Consequently, four profiles emerged concerning teachers’ reported use of different coping strategies: Low-coping users, Problem-focused-coping users, High-coping users and Emotion-focused-coping users” (Aulen et al., 2021, p. 5). The following text discusses coping strategies that educators use to handle stress at all levels. These coping strategies are similar to those used in everyday life. For example, some educators cope with stress by practicing meditation. “Similarly, more than half the teachers mentioned exercise and well-being, rest and relaxation, and hobbies (emotion-focused coping)” (Aulen et al., 2021, p. 4). In this instance, focusing on their mental help allows educators to better focus on the importance inside and outside the classroom. Exercise, relaxation, and

hobbies assist in emptying the educator's mind and granting them the opportunity to have a different focus for a specific amount of time, even if for a short period.

In addition to coping strategies to deal with stress, instructional and peer coaching offer strengths, and collaborations that encourage the growth of educators without the worry of administration judgment and the support in accessing more tools in their toolkit. "A few qualitative studies on teacher educators contain information that can help to understand how teacher educators perceive their work as teachers" (Richter et al., 2021, p. 3). Additionally, the teacher educators' perspective has been often overlooked or disregarded by the administrative staff and/or parents because the teacher educators' viewpoint has been devalued. In contrast, the perspective value of a teacher educator is significant because of the time spent amongst the students and administration staff. "This could be because in a specific situation, a teacher might be accustomed to having a certain repertoire of problem-focused coping strategies to choose from, whereas when considering coping strategies in general, these strategies might not come to mind. Teachers' work is also versatile, and they have a multitude of situations to cope with each day" (Aulen et al., 2021, p. 7). In this statement, the concern for educators' mental health would need to become a priority soon if not now simply because of their day to day.

As the educator experiences the needed support, the effects begin to show throughout their day-to-day in various ways. Instructional and peer coaching can allow the teacher educator mental stability alongside the accompaniment of coping strategies that have their uses outside the classroom but especially inside the classroom. "Students hear other viewpoints, talk things out, and help each other learn and understand the material. Teachers can be a part of these discussions, or they can oversee smaller groups or pairings and help guide the interactions as needed" (Staake, 2023, p.1). A healthy open classroom supports a dynamic of multiple



discussions and interactions that are interesting and profound between the students themselves and the student and educator. A teacher educator who has the support and understands the opportunities of coping strategies available to them gives them an advantage in their classroom.

This advantage promotes a school culture that creates a community experience and a safe and secure environment for the students, educators, and administration. “Given the many demands on teachers, principals, and other school staff, educators may also find an additional expectation to improve students’ social and emotional competencies daunting” (Grant et al., 2017, p.6). When educators receive support from their administrative staff, instructional team, or peer coaches, it has a measurable impact on both their classroom productivity and their mental well-being. With a sense of support and assurance, educators are better equipped to utilize all the tools available to them, which leads to improved teaching quality. Furthermore, this support fosters an environment of growth and change, where educators can confidently explore new teaching strategies and ideas. In addition, Costache et al quoted in recognition of teachers’ coping strategies that, “*Managing uncertainty and developing a positive attitude towards it is important because uncertainty is an enduring component of teaching and forms a part of teachers' daily work in classrooms (Floden & Clark, 1988)*”. Teachers are constantly adapting and enduring their daily lives without expecting support to maintain their mental health. However, they often observe changes in others around them which makes them question whether they themselves should be receiving support for their mental health.

### **School Profile**

#### **Community and School Characteristics**

This school has been an integral part of the community for more than three decades and was established as a bilingual academy in the mid-nineteen-nineties. It has worked hard to

involve itself in the community so that the community feels supported by what the school achieves. Since it is a private school, the access available to it is not on the same level as many other schools in the area. The students create donation drives that deliver school supplies to less fortunate students across the city or bake sales to raise funds for other schools to support a class trip to the Gold Museum in a nearby city.

The districts are divided into levels by which the top level or location for schools is in a neighborhood or neighborhoods that are classified as a six and they receive the same support from the government regardless of whether it is a middle-income private school or an academically strong public school. The differences in socio-economic statuses separate the community greatly and so the schools at the higher level or that are private allow students from other neighborhood levels to become part of their school community. Public schools that are academically high provide students with the opportunity to take an exam to receive entrance into the school community. Private schools offer the same, however, they provide what is called a “*Beca*” or scholarship to afford the student entrance into the school community. Depending on the school, there are between seven percent to twelve percent of the student body positions in the schools that are set aside for this contribution each year as they admit new students.

### **School Mission and Vision**

The mission and vision of our school are centered around the way the community supports the schools and how the schools, in turn, support each other at all levels. The goal is to cultivate bilingual learners who can thrive in many different communities, be it at the regional, national, or international level. It strives to blend the academic standards of both the United States and Colombia, creating an environment where all students can learn, think critically, and be themselves, regardless of their surroundings. In addition, the school is committed to helping

its students achieve academic excellence and high ethical standards. Additionally, it encourages students to commit to their community and work towards a better future for generations to come.

### **Student Portfolio & Performance**

The school's student learning goals are currently undergoing changes since the curriculum is being revamped. In the previous year, the student's goal was to perform well on standardized tests, but those scores did not contribute towards their final grades. The school is a private institution and follows the US standards for graduation, which means that students only need to pass their final exam to receive their diploma. In the current academic year, the focus continues to be on the performance of students on standardized tests. However, teachers are also working towards creating a curriculum that sets a baseline of performance and organizes it both horizontally and vertically.

The school is a bilingual international institution that focuses on developing bilingual leaders. Its mission, motto, and philosophy work together to create a guided curriculum and student development that focuses on achieving this goal. The school has a total of eighty-five teachers, including twenty-five native English-speaking teachers and twenty-two support teachers. This creates a student-teacher ratio of approximately 10 to 1. The support staff consists of three full-time counselors, a college counselor, a speech pathologist, and an occupational therapist (who is an extern). Additionally, there is a full-time professional nurse to provide health care services. Extracurricular activities at the school include Model United Nations and the National Honor Society. The latter program has expanded to lower grades and created a Junior National Honor Society to prepare students for the responsibilities and challenges of entering the program. Besides academics, the school also emphasizes team building and partnerships with

programs such as robotics, art society, drama, and a range of sports such as basketball and volleyball.

### **Parent Involvement**

The parents of the school are highly involved in their children's education and extracurricular activities. They often sponsor various events, such as donation drives, to support families in need and also organize Model United Nations conferences for secondary students on campus. The Parent Teacher's Association collaborates with the school's administration and teachers in finding ways to support their students' academic journeys and provide them with every possible benefit. One such example is the remodeling of the school library that was lost during the pandemic due to unregulated climate control, resulting in damage to the books. Though not completely rebuilt, the library now has a climate-controlled system and new books that were either purchased or donated by parents and local bookstores.

### **Teacher Work**

As it comes to the work that the teachers are doing, it can be described as giving no less than their best to support every student. The introductions that teachers have made to students and new programs have resulted in better in-class performance from students overall and improved productivity in classwork. An example of one of these programs is the study period that was created. This period allows teachers to send students who may need additional support in a subject or have had too much time away from school and need to focus on catching up. The program is supported by other teachers and support-teachers to ensure that the students are receiving proper guidance during this time. The students are also enrolled with specific instructions on the tasks they need to complete which are sent by their teacher. Although the academic side of the program is seen as successful, a large focus of that has been behavioral

issues as the reason the in-class work is not completed successfully. The teachers have been faced with this issue for many reasons but one for certain is the revolving door of international teachers every two years. However, those who have continued have learned to lean on one another for support.

### **Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment**

Curriculum design has been a matter of concern, as teachers who leave often take their created content with them because the school has not implemented any set curriculum. This has been a significant issue for teachers in the past, and it comes up frequently in conversations. Teachers have been advocating for curriculum development and design to reflect the school's vision and be reflective of student excellence. As a result, teachers have started collaborating more closely to address the significant gaps in the current curriculum. One significant example is the collaboration between teachers across grade levels to ensure that students' development is continuous and transitions smoothly between grades. This has resulted in more STEAM initiatives and the introduction of more Project/Problem Based Learning into the curriculum, creating smoother transitions for students between levels.

Teachers are becoming more aware of the importance of collaborating horizontally across grade levels. For too long, they have focused solely on their own teaching methods without considering how they can be applied more broadly. To address this, teachers have started sharing instructional strategies with their colleagues and holding self-organized professional development sessions. They are also working together on daily lesson planning to develop inclusive strategies that can be adapted based on individual teacher delivery styles. However, there are some baseline instructions that are not changed or altered in any way other than by the individual teacher's presentation.

Over the last few years, there have been changes in the way students are assessed. Previously, teachers would create their own assessments based on the performance of their class. However, this was not standardized across grade levels and did not ensure a smooth transition between them. Nowadays, teachers focus on aligning their classrooms to a standardized level of performance. This means that assessments are designed to reflect all students' performances across the grade level at any given time. This has led to an improvement in testing performance, even for students who may not score high. They are now more focused on the exams themselves and learning how to become better testers.

### **Professional Development Practices**

When it comes to professional development, very few teachers believe that the training provided by the school is helpful and supportive of what they face in the classroom. Consequently, many teachers feel that their time would be better spent in the classroom or collaborating with their colleagues to build a stronger curriculum foundation. The administration consistently makes decisions about which professional development courses to offer without consulting teachers about their specific needs. Despite teachers proposing this option to the administration, the decision has been made repeatedly without their input. Giving teachers the option to choose their own professional development path based on their needs does not seem to be a priority for the administration. Instead, teachers feel that they are being given busy work.

### **Needs Assessment**

Over the past two years, many teachers at this school have expressed the need for a curriculum that works seamlessly across all grade levels. This has been a recurring topic of discussion in almost every meeting, even when the meetings were about other subjects. The lack of a well-designed curriculum has been identified as a major issue at the school. One of the key

indicators of the problem was the disparity in test scores between classrooms and grade levels. After the first round of standardized testing, it was found that the scores varied by as much as 15 points between different fifth-grade classes and by a full grade level and 2 months between a fourth-grade class and a fifth-grade class. In response, the teachers of the classes with scores close to the average met with other grade levels to help synchronize their curriculum. This helped to bring the grade levels closer together, but there was still no clear plan for vertical transition between the grade levels. Towards the end of the school year, the teachers met again to plan for the first trimester of the following year. Each grade level met with the one above and organized their end-of-year standards with the start-of-year standards for the next grade level, with an overlap in standards to ensure consistency. While this has helped teachers stay closer to what is being taught in the classroom, there is still a need for a foundational curriculum that rotating and new teachers can easily follow. “Often confused with the true goal of student learning – attainment of the standards – curriculum is not the end in and of itself. Rather, it serves as the means to the end” (Ainsworth & Donovan. 2019).

Classroom instruction can be a challenge in any school, but there is usually a common method for delivering it. However, there is no set standard for instruction in this particular school. Without a foundation to begin with, most teachers present their class instruction differently. For instance, when teaching literature, some teachers may start with vocabulary and introduce the book's topic to the class, while others may begin by reading the book and having the students annotate certain words. Some may choose to combine both methods. “In contrast, students are placed as problem-solvers and decision-makers through providing learning space in a position that offers opportunities for students to explore knowledge, problem-solving, and decision-making based on the instructional process that has been done” (Rasmitadila et al., 2020,

p. 56). The use of different instructional strategies may result in discrepancies in the formative or summative assessments used to measure what information the students retained. Moreover, the assessments themselves may differ between teachers.

The belief is that implementing curriculum design and instructional strategies in schools is crucial. By consistently carrying out these strategies over the years, schools can establish a solid foundation for a different culture. “This instructional strategy is expected to be practiced by teachers, academics, as well as a reference for other researchers always to be able to renew instructional strategies that are in line with educational development, especially in the design of instruction in inclusive classrooms for all levels of education” (Rasmitadila et al., 2020, p. 88). This will help teachers feel confident in guiding students through the curriculum and secure in their instructional strategies. They can also add their personal touches without changing the message too much between classes. Additionally, the administration can ensure that each student has set standards that transition throughout grade levels.

### **Data Analysis**

Upon reviewing the data of students who have taken these assessments, it has become apparent that there are discrepancies between classrooms. This analysis has brought these discrepancies to the attention of a few teachers. The author has noticed that a stronger curriculum fluidity and an instructional or peer coaching system would be beneficial. By building these foundations, a stronger school culture can be developed, ensuring that each grade level delivers a horizontally and vertically aligned curriculum, along with an instructional message that is also aligned. Schools use various methods to assess student levels and track their progress throughout the academic year. At Liceo Ingles, students are evaluated through a single test or exam that measures their academic performance and predicts their progress for the next few months.



However, the exams given by different teachers at different grade levels, and sometimes the same grade level, are not well-coordinated, and the instructional strategies used also vary greatly. This leads to inconsistencies in student knowledge and performance in certain subjects due to the lack of coordination between teachers. Therefore, the analysis of student progress will be based on two different data sets.

The MAP test is a primary data set that is used to examine the performance of students. It is designed to automatically adjust the difficulty level of questions based on how well the student is performing. If the student answers a question correctly, the test will present a more challenging question to assess their knowledge in greater depth. This adaptive approach helps ensure that the MAP test provides an accurate measure of a student's knowledge and understanding. If the answer is correct, the questions become more difficult, and vice versa for incorrect answers to level the student out. The other data set assessments were a literary exam that was designed for fifth-grade students but was created by one teacher and “edited” by the others in that level to suit their students’ acuirements. The last was not an assessment but a tool used to increase the growth of the student’s fluency in literacy over a period of three months.

The primary area of review is the MAP assessment which assesses various areas and examines the student’s growth potential across all areas assessed. The data presented is evaluated to provide students with an understanding of the curriculum covered in the past, present, and future. While the standards for the curriculum have been established, educators' development of the curriculum and instructional strategies is what determines the foundation of their students' educational attainment. This examination is carried out three times a year in the Fall, Winter, and Spring semesters of a school year. Various private schools here in Colombia that subscribe to the American Common Core Standard, observe the same challenges regardless of if they are local

national schools or international schools. The measurements are executed within the same design.

The use of this assessment is more of a reflection of the curriculum that is developed at a school and less of a focus on the instructional strategy that is implemented. However, it is acknowledged that the instructional strategy does carry some influence on how the students execute certain tasks or understand some activities within the assessment. As the first set of assessments are analyzed over the three terms or trimesters, overall, there is a drop in performance from the students who participated in the assessment. As shown below in Figure 1A and Figure 1B the difference in one trimester between separate classes following different instructional strategies.

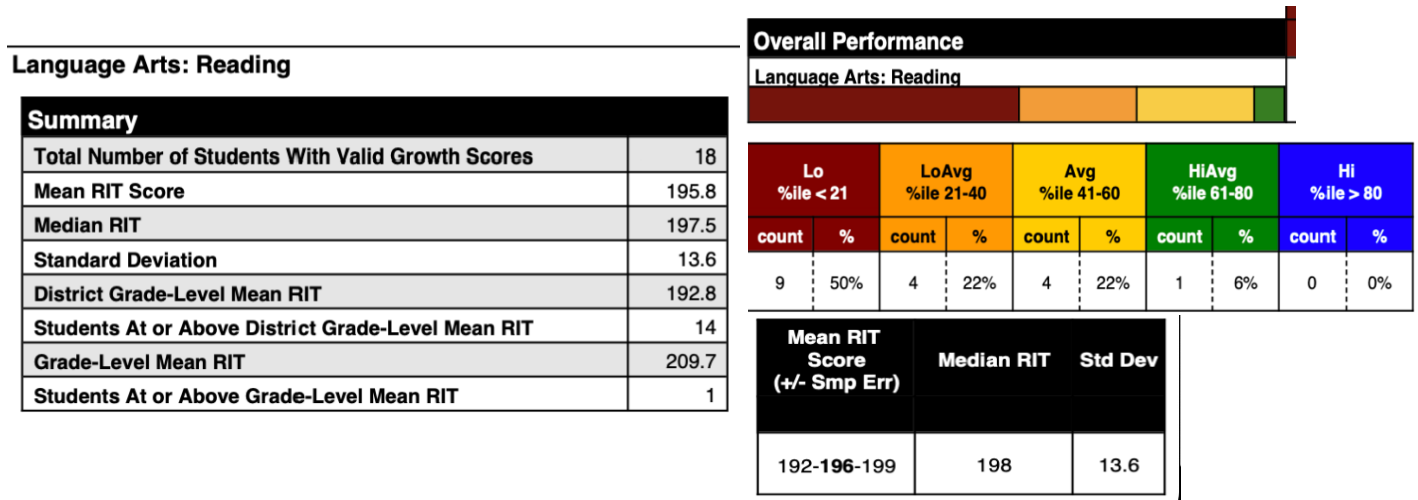
Figure 1A

*Reading Summary of Class Performance of MAP Exam*

Language Arts: Reading		Overall Performance									
<b>Summary</b>		Language Arts: Reading									
Total Number of Students With Valid Growth Scores	19	Lo %ile < 21		LoAvg %ile 21-40		Avg %ile 41-60		HiAvg %ile 61-80		Hi %ile > 80	
Mean RIT Score	195.9	count	%	count	%	count	%	count	%	count	%
Median RIT	199	7	37%	3	16%	4	21%	4	21%	1	5%
Standard Deviation	16.6	Mean RIT Score (+/- Smp Err)		Median RIT		Std Dev					
District Grade-Level Mean RIT	194.5	192-196-200		199		16.6					
Students At or Above District Grade-Level Mean RIT	11										
Grade-Level Mean RIT	204.5										
Students At or Above Grade-Level Mean RIT	8										

Figure 1B

*Reading Summary of Class Performance of MAP Exam*



These differences can be seen in the results of the Lo/LoAvg students and the HiAvg/Hi students between the classes. This is not to say that one class is better than the other only to present that one instructional strategy present as more impactful. The results of the following trimester when the teachers began to share their instructional strategy and implementation process, the classes began to create similar results for their usage of language assessments as depicted in Figure 2A and Figure 2B below.

Figure 2A

*Language Usage Summary of Class Performance of MAP Exam*

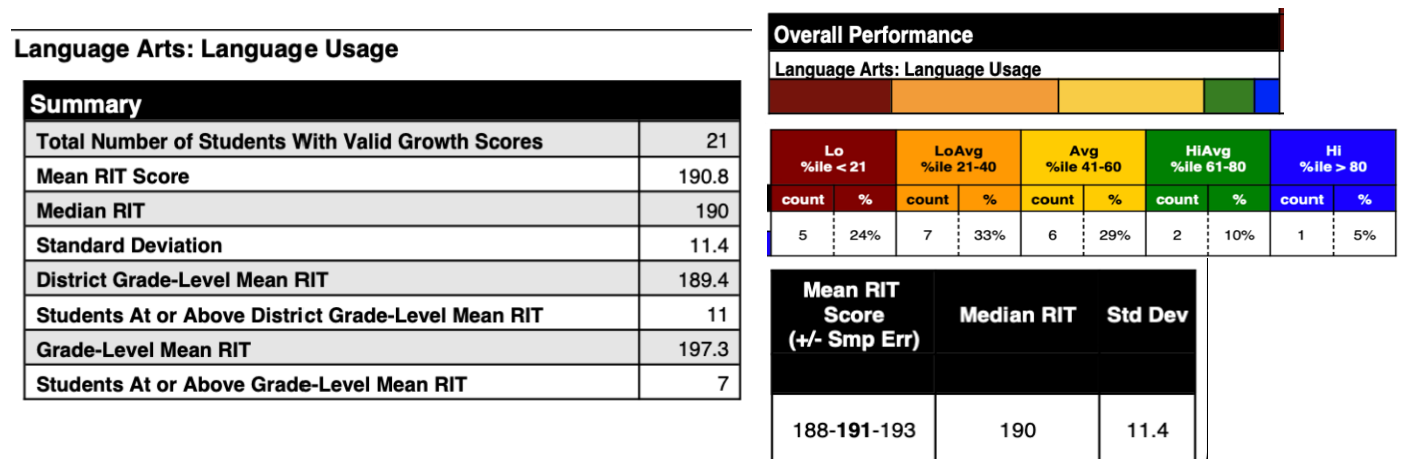
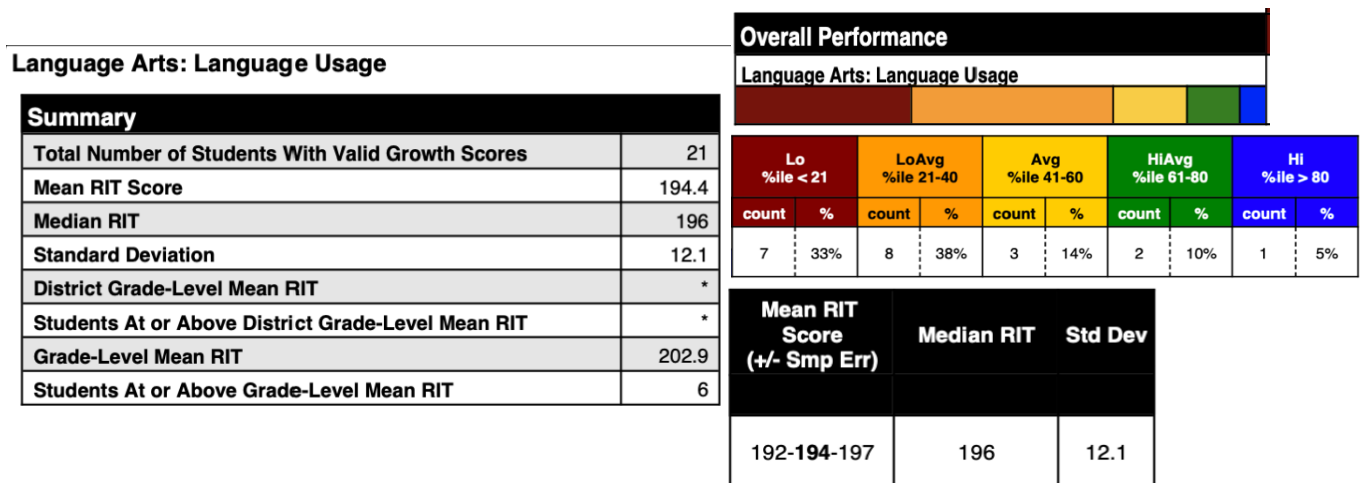


Figure 2B

*Language Usage Summary of Class Performance of MAP Exam*



Although there is a gap between the number of average students, the number of students that performed at HiAvg/Hi was on par and the details of the assessment allowed the educators to understand the underdeveloped areas to make improvements. Using this data and similar instructional strategies for all groups would allow them to assess their students on a more balanced foundation. Furthermore, since this data provides a detailed partition of the educational knowledge the students are acquiring, the teachers will also understand which areas of the curriculum may need to be strengthened throughout the school year.

Through the efforts of the educators, the different instructional strategies presented to the groups were seen as an opportunity, and with the adjustments they were able to apply these conditions to the groups to create improvements. Even with all the areas of opportunities, the educators were able to create consistency in the curriculum that they organized at the start of the school year. The results stated in the figures provide evidence of what a similar instructional strategy and performance tasks to provide balancing at each grade level. “Central to teaching for understanding is the use of guiding or key questions. The act of framing these open or generative

questions causes teachers to focus on the reasons why they are teaching that particular body of information and thus it helps them ensure that the knowledge and skills they are teaching are relevant and meaningful.” (Saxton and Hill, 2014, p. 46). Moreover, further assessments would need to be carried out in other subjects such as Mathematics to verify the complete impact that instructional strategy could have on the students and the implementation of the curriculum.

### **Action Plan**

Implementing an academic strategy and instructional methodology that aligns with the teaching style of educators and curriculum development is crucial to advancing the school. So, to move forward with the implementation process of this program for Liceo Ingles, the administrators and educators need to have a foundational start. Several strategies could be implemented to provide support for the outcome; however, we will focus on three. The first will be developing a rigorous curriculum using the research completed by Larry Ainsworth that depicts the connections between the curriculum and instructional strategy by educators. This process will take place through professional development sessions over the first half of the school year and will decrease in the second half. As this implementation process begins there is an expectation of negative feedback from some of the educators. “A question that I hear regularly from educators and leaders attending my professional development sessions is “How do we get ‘buy-in’ from colleagues who are resistant to adding anything to their plate?” (Ainsworth, 2019. P. 18). So, giving a more detailed outline of the possible outcomes and the steps of the process will be very beneficial for educators.

The next section focuses on instructional strategy and leadership. Once the curriculum has been solidified and cross-checked for horizontal and vertical alignment, it will be presented in the next step. The instructional strategy will begin when the teachers first report for the

coming school year and will continue throughout the school year. At every level, there will be a detailed strategic plan for delivering lessons. Teachers will collaborate within their level to ensure that their messages resemble one another. Although each teacher has their own way of teaching their subjects, these educators will be working towards the delivery of a similar message. “Simply put, the instructional leadership practices of leaders and teachers in schools increases student achievement by improving teaching and learning in the school” (Le Fevre, 2021, p. 2). Providing students with proper feedback is crucial for desired results and cannot be achieved by instruction alone.

Each teacher will be assigned a leadership peer coach/mentor who will assist in the needs of the educator for classroom management strategies to implement, behavior management, as well as implementation of instructional strategies to target various students affected by educational disadvantages. This process is ongoing throughout the school year, as the educators' needs vary depending on the time of year and the area of the curriculum they are covering. Other factors also come into play, such as how well the students are receiving the information presented, which may require the use of different tactics. “When you build a coaching habit, you can more easily break out of three vicious circles that plague our workplaces: creating overdependence, getting overwhelmed and becoming disconnected” (Stanier, 2016, p.16). The role of a peer coach/mentor is to provide support to educators in areas where they need improvement, rather than reporting to administrative staff about classroom ongoings. Additionally, they can act as liaisons between educators and administrative staff to improve communication by addressing changes, concerns, and challenges within the school community.

Implementing a process to strengthen the curriculum, by re-evaluating the standards and ensuring vertical and horizontal alignment, will improve the transitional curriculum between

grade levels. Additionally, when teachers validate an instructional strategy that works well within the curriculum, it will consolidate the efforts of the educators. This means that although educators may present differently to their students, the foundation of the message remains consistent among all educators representing each particular grade level. Furthermore, a peer coach/mentor can support educators in their role and assist them in improving communication with the administrator, reducing miscommunication, and improving school culture and confidence in the overall staff. Within these adjustments, Liceo Ingles produces the opportunity to create success and continue that success as a tradition and school culture that goes beyond the classroom and reaches into the communities.

### **Implementation of School Improvement Plan**

#### **Timeline**

To understand how this implementation will cultivate and bring forth a new school culture that is recognized locally, nationally, and internationally, the process has to happen and recorded improvement throughout a certain period. By setting a guided timeline with a specific end goal in mind, the school's progress or decline can be tracked, analyzed, and adjusted accordingly, unless the plan fails to show any noticeable results. During the academic year, these steps may overlap but support each other while educators work towards their goals, set between themselves and their mentors. For instance, while the first trimester's curriculum is being planned and evaluated, educators may also be working on enhancing their instructional strategies. At the same time throughout each semester, constantly or periodically, they may receive support from their peer coach/mentor for improvements or adjustments they want to apply to their classroom or teaching pedagogy through one-to-one meetings and class observations.

During the first three weeks, the educators will work with their levels to organize the curriculum for the first trimester in order to synchronize these weeks. The first week will be before the students arrive in which the educators will set the standards that are to be prioritized and supporting the curriculum. During the same week, educators will select and organize the lessons that are planned for the upcoming weeks in that trimester. While the curriculum is being curated, the peer coach/mentor will utilize this time to collaborate with the levels on the instructional strategy that they want to implement in their classrooms. They will use this time to lay the groundwork for the instructional strategies that will be delivered in their lessons.

### **Resources**

After the premiere three weeks, the peer coach/mentor will work with the teachers of their level weekly through the same method of classroom observation or one-to-one as needed or requested by the educator. In these meetings and observations, the goal for each, educator and mentor, will only be to offer support for opportunities assessed in the classroom. Also, support for the educator for professional attributes they seek to improve. For example, when an educator looks to improve their class flow during a lesson so that the students do not have too much free time when transitioning from one lesson to the next. The peer coach/mentor may present several options regarding transitioning methods in the classroom to the educator but not recommend a specific tactic unless requested by the educator because of the observational lessons witnessed. The goal then becomes for the educator to reflect on how their classroom has been altered by their feedback and analysis of their mentor and collaboration on adjustments made to their class regarding behavior, classroom management, transitioning, etc. However, this is something that must continue either, weekly or monthly and as needed by the educator from the mentor to



continue their professional development. It is also something that will manifest in the school's culture because of the support allotted to the educators.

Within the first few months of the implementation, success will appear in several different ways. The educators may see differences within themselves as they conduct a lesson and guide their classroom with the assistance of the peer coach/mentor. Educators may face more challenges than progress when implementing a new process or technique in the classroom. This could be due to classroom dynamics, the implementation process, or the frequency with which the process is applied. However, this does not mean that the implementation has failed. It may simply require more time or a different approach. During any rough period, the support of a peer coach/mentor is essential, and maintaining a consistent meeting time with them will benefit the educator as it provides them with the necessary support.

### **Responsibilities**

During the school year, there will be several questions and concerns about what will need to be done and the roles that will need to be fulfilled. In the table Figure 3 below, the roles are presented in the first-trimester timeline and the details of their responsibilities are highlighted. For example, curriculum development will be managed by all three roles, however, each has very different responsibilities. The educator's responsibilities will focus on the development of the curriculum for their classroom whereas the administrator will review the set curriculum and verify how they fit and meet the school's set standards. Lastly, the peer coach/mentor's responsibility will be to observe and advise the curriculum development process.

Figure 3

*Implementation Timeline and Strategy for the First Trimester*

<i>First Trimester</i>	Curriculum Development	Instructional Strategy	Professional Development	Timeline	Outcome/Expected Outcome
Educator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prioritize Standards and support standards</li> <li>▪ Curate subjects and themes taught the first 3wks – end of trimester</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identify crossover between educators</li> <li>▪ Create common foundation IS message</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Weekly or biweekly meetings with peer coach/mentor</li> </ul>	Continuous or as need over the school year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identify curriculum needs for the students and educators</li> <li>▪ Develop a horizontal/vertical message through curriculum</li> <li>▪ Support development of educator inside and outside classroom</li> </ul>
Administrator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Review standards set for school and accepted by educators to approve final curriculum settings</li> </ul>	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Weekly or Bi-monthly meeting with peer coach/mentor for communication improvement and educator support</li> </ul>	Throughout school year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improved communication with educators</li> <li>▪ Deeper understanding of the educator’s methodology</li> </ul>
Peer Coach /Mentor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Observe and support changes with advice based on self-experience and educator’s experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Assist with implementation strategy</li> <li>▪ Present different method options for the educators to assist in finding a common foundation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide support for the educators regarding classroom, management, and other professional development aspects for advisory</li> </ul>	School year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Bridged communication between educator and administrator</li> <li>▪ Supportive foundation for struggling and/or developing educators</li> </ul>

**Teachers**

For example, the educators of Classroom A and Classroom B have decided that they would like to improve their classroom behavior for their entire class. The peer coach/mentor observes both classrooms and talks with both educators about the approaches they would like to exercise with their class. The educators chose a very similar technique in which they model the

behavior they would like to see in the classroom and acknowledge the students who follow the example and those who are attempting to follow the example.

### *Students*

Most students in Classroom B responded somewhat successfully to this method, with almost all of them recognizing their classmates' behavior and following their example. Soon after, classroom behavioral issues are reduced to 1 or 2 students and the educator proceeds with further steps for those specific students. Something different has happened in Classroom A. The students observed the behavior of the others responding to the educator's requests, however, no changes occurred in their behavior. The educator proceeds to implement the strategy, yet unsuccessfully and so schedules another observation for the peer coach/mentor.

### *Peer Mentors/Coaches*

The peer coach/mentor views the implementation of the strategy and after the class revisits the previous methods that were discussed. The educator decides to take a different approach in an attempt to find better classroom management tools. As the coach/mentor supports their option to change their approach, another observation is conducted to verify the implementation of the strategy and discuss how the educator feels about the transition.

### *Administration*

Administrators have the option to visit the classroom environment in many moments but often schedule their time with preparation from the educator as to what the lesson may cover. The administration must observe the classroom during multiple lessons and the educator be aware of the visit but not completely scheduled if they would like the administration to witness the true experience of a lesson. With that in mind, the educator, peer coach/mentor, and

administrator would be able to debrief with the peer coach/mentor providing context as to how it is possible to move forward and acknowledge the progress or regression and ideas moving forward.

### *Parents*

A parent's role during the entire school year would be reinforcement and reporting. With the parent community having such a key role in the school community, it would be imperative that the parent and educator stand side-by-side. Clear communication between parents and educators is crucial when it comes to creating a united front in dealing with behavioral issues in the classroom. By working together and sharing information, educators can better understand how to handle a student during a difficult period, while parents can be informed of any changes in their child's behavior at school versus home. This type of partnership, much like a peer coach or mentorship, thrives on openness and a willingness to share information with one another.

### **Success or Failure**

Measuring success regarding the implementation of this plan will not be able to be measured fully over the first few months, however, after the first year, it will be possible to take stock of how the implementation has performed. Within the group of educators, success or failure would be realized in three ways. The first would be how well they were able to create a rigorous curriculum. The curriculum would need to be reviewed and updated after each unit has been completed or at the very least, by the end of the trimester. At that moment, the educators will be able to share their reflections on various units and how well it was implemented in the classroom.

For educators, success may look like minor adjustments to the curriculum due to the level of acquisition of knowledge the students obtained, and failure may look like various large changes throughout the curriculum to adjust for students' learning levels. Success in instructional strategy would look very similar and fit closely with the curriculum. Leveling the foundation of an instructional strategy to be very balanced among educators would produce an effect of balanced standardized testing. Like any exam, there will be outliers however, the testing should have a majority of the students around an average number with some performing higher than average and others below or well below.

Peer coaching/mentorship is going to be a process of growth, although, progress would have educators more receptive to the coach/mentor to assist in their professional growth and regression would appear as educators closed off to the idea of receiving this type of support. It may make the educators more welcoming of the idea if the assignment was for someone within the school who already knows the community. However, it would not guarantee any certain outcome.

### **Barriers**

Ideally, everything would proceed as planned and the obstacles would be limited or nil. However, even the best plans have bumps along the way. The obstacles we can foresee are both obvious and obscure. As the school will be working to create a modified school culture, not all educators may be enthusiastic about the change or the challenge it presents. Parents may also have concerns about any changes that occur in the school that will involve their children. Therefore, it will be necessary to keep them informed of any changes that may or will take place over the coming school years and request their support for the changes as they happen in the classroom, which could affect the students at home.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of this plan for school improvement is for educators to offer reliable support and strategies for the challenges they face in the classroom. Many studies worldwide have demonstrated that instructional coaching and supporting improvements that can benefit the well-being of educators, and improve the communication between administration, parents, and educators as well. The support felt by students due to the changes in the classroom will also be the actions taken by their educator. Through the school improvement plan, teachers, administrators, and parents will have opportunities to communicate and grow together as a community and establish the foundation of a positive school culture.

The literature review has highlighted the importance of supporting the culture, community, standards, and mental health of teachers in their multi-tiered positions. By keeping this in mind, the improvements made can have a positive impact on the classroom work of teachers. The school's mission and vision are reflected in the characteristics of the community and the school, which aim to create local, national, and international learners. By implementing this improvement plan, it will be possible to gain a true perspective of students' academic acquisition levels and identify necessary adjustments that may be required in the future.

According to the data, there is a scope for improvement from both the students and the educators as well as the administration. This presents an opportunity to create a stronger foundation to support the academic community in various ways, ranging from the educators, parents, administration, and especially the students. It is essential to provide the necessary support that educators need to be more effective in the classroom and to establish communication lines to increase efficiency around the classroom.

The success or failure and limitations only express possible outcomes that travel along the implementation of any new process. These possible pitfalls are only overcome by creating the foundation needed to introduce and maintain such practices. Leadership from within may very well be the key to creating a successful school culture and spreading it across the school's community. Various ideas will be presented to make changes but none of them will matter if the school does not create a culture of proper communication and implementation of any program they look to install. In that sense, it will remain with the leaders of various areas to gain the support of the educators and model the possibilities of the new implementations and how the benefits will outweigh any disadvantages.

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