

HAMILTON COUNTY SCHOOLS: INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING MODEL EVALUATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....	4
Introduction.....	7
Organizational Context.....	8
Research Questions.....	9
Literature Review & Conceptual Framework	10
Design & Methods.....	14
Data.....	14
Sample	15
Methods.....	17
Limitations	18
Key Findings.....	19
Discussion.....	30
Recommendations.....	32
Conclusion	34
References.....	35
Appendices.....	38

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the accountability era, schools across the nation are under pressure to improve student learning outcomes. Instructional coaching has emerged as a leading theory of action to drive student achievement. Coaches directly work with teachers to improve teacher instructional practice in service of bettering student learning. In recent years, Hamilton County Schools (HCS) has developed an instructional coaching model to support teacher development and student achievement in the district. HCS seeks information about the current state and impact of their model, with the goal of refining the model in the coming years. This capstone study examines the functioning of the HCS instructional coaching model, as well as its impact on teacher development.

Research Questions

1. To what extent are the time and actions of instructional coaches helpful to the development of teachers in their planning and execution of instruction?
2. To what extent do instructional coaches influence teachers' level of effectiveness?

To answer these questions, we used a mixed methods approach with both quantitative and qualitative data collection. We surveyed instructional coaches, principals, and teachers to assess the activities and time of instructional coaches, clarity of the role within the model, and their perceptions of impact on teacher development and student achievement. We then interviewed thirty-two instructional coaches to learn more about their experience supporting teachers with their instruction. Finally, we used level of effectiveness (LOE) data from HCS from the 2017-2018 school year to the 2021-2022 school year.

Key Findings

1. Time and actions of instructional coaches are supporting teacher development.

- a. *There is an initial increase in teachers' level of effectiveness (LOE) the first year the coaching model was introduced, followed by a decline that is likely due more to the pandemic.*
In the school year following the introduction of the HCS coaching model, all learning communities saw an increase in average LOE scores. The effects of the pandemic likely explain why LOE scores have steadily declined since the onset of the coaching model in 2018-2019.
- b. *Coaches say coaching cycles are the heart of their work.*
When discussing their primary daily activities, coaches discuss their work in coaching cycles with teachers that they believe directly benefits teachers.
- c. *Principals and coaches agree that coaches' time and actions are spent according to the Teacher Development Framework and that their work is having an impact on teacher development and student achievement.*
While the level of agreement differed, coaches and principals agree that coaches are spending their time engaging in the activities aligned to collaborating with teachers according to the Teacher Development Framework. Additionally, both groups agree that coaches are making improvements to teaching and student achievement.
- d. *Some teachers believe that instructional coaches are crucial to their development, while others do not.*

Teachers report that their coaches spend on average less time in the activities stated in the HCS Teacher Development Framework compared to coaches. When discussing their instructional coaches, some teachers reported challenges and others, expressed their appreciation for the support and effectiveness.

2. Across the district, varying school coherence presents varying experience for coaches.

- a. *Principles with prior coaching experience or new to the role positively impact coaches' ability to operate in their role.*

The principal and administration directly impact the level of collaboration between teachers and coaches within schools. Coaches report that principals with prior experiences as instructional coaches support their efforts according to the Teacher Development Framework

- b. *Administration requiring additional duties of coaches negatively impacts their experiences.*

Instructional coaches report the many responsibilities they can be assigned within their schools. As a result, they often feel they are unable to prioritize their time collaborating with teachers, the core component of their role.

- c. *Administration assignment of teachers and content limits coaches.*

Many coaches are experiencing large caseloads of teachers as well as specific tested subjects to prioritize. They report feeling unable to support all teachers in their building as a result of their load and prioritized content.

3. Instructional coaches' need to build positive relationships with the district, administration, and teachers inhibits them from focusing on improvement.

- a. *Instructional coaches view themselves as harmonizers.*

As an extension of the district, a member of the administration, and a coach, coaches feel they need to mediate relationships with all stakeholders. They focus on building positive relationships to support their work.

- b. *Feedback from coaches leans heavily affirmative rather than constructive.*

To avoid conflict, instructional coaches prioritize affirmative feedback and avoid constructive feedback that aims at improving teacher practice.

- c. *Instructional coaches are seeking professional development around coaching practice.*

Instructional coaches recognize the importance of professional development as they develop in their craft but seek more opportunities to learn about providing feedback in their practice.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, we recommend HCS consider:

1. Reframe the role of the instructional coach to be aimed at improvement.

While collaborating with teachers, administrators, and teachers is a responsibility of the instructional coach, constructive observation and feedback needs to be

prioritized by instructional coaches. Clarity of the core components of the instructional coach role will prevent overly positive feedback to teachers that misrepresents their development.

2. Providing professional development to instructional coaches on observation, feedback, and in-class supports.

As instructional coaches reprioritize providing feedback to teachers, the Department of Teaching and Learning should strategically develop professional learning experiences that target transferable coaching skills. PD should focus on how to conduct observations, develop action steps, provide feedback, and support in classrooms. Training instructional coaches in the activities will support teacher development.

3. Providing instructional coach development and establishing cultures of feedback professional development for principals and administrators.

HCS can develop a professional learning experience for principals and administrators that focuses on developing instructional coaches and establishing a culture of feedback. As a primary instructional leader, principals have a responsibility to model the time and activities of coaches. Through training, there will be more cohesion across schools in HCS of the coaching model.

4. Specializing instructional coaches to specific grade bands and content areas.

Instructional coaches need to focus on specific grade levels and content areas. Leaders could be assigned by identifying school-based needs from student achievement data or teacher LOE scores. Narrowing the focus for instructional coaches will allow for more precise feedback to support teacher development and student learning.

5. Developing a future study to explore instructional coaches' impact on student achievement.

This study was limited in its ability to draw conclusions about instructional coaches' influence on teacher development and student learning. A future study could be developed that tracks coach-teacher pairs from across the district over time to determine impact on LOE scores and student achievement data. It would also include a control group of teachers without coaching to support with drawing appropriate conclusions.

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of American public education most recently prioritizes accountability for student learning outcomes. The passage of No Child Left Behind (2001) and the reauthorization of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 solidified the federal government's growing involvement in the nation's school system (Mehta, 2013). To emphasize the country's focus on high academic achievement, the government offers incentives to improve learning outcomes and applies sanctions to schools that fail to do so (Grissom, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2017).

Research exploring how the accountability era manifests in America's classrooms finds that schools respond to the demands on student learning outcomes in both productive and unproductive ways. Studies reveal that administrators have reallocated resources, cheated on assessments, increased instructional time, fostered teacher collaboration, and expanded school choice options, along with many other strategies to improve student achievement in their schools. Despite the various approaches to advance learning outcomes, improving instruction in classrooms emerges as a leading method (Grissom, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2017).

In fact, districts frequently employ instructional leaders to coach teachers on their practice in the hopes of subsequently increasing student achievement (Woulfin, 2018). As a new improvement effort, instructional coaching takes on many forms including novice teacher mentoring, curriculum development, leadership coaching, and teacher professional learning (Woulfin, 2018).

Recent research seeking to explore the impact of instructional coaching on learning outcomes finds mixed results (Booker & Russell, 2022; Woulfin & Rigby, 2017; Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015). However, early research suggesting that instructional leadership does improve student learning outcomes defines specific conditions of coaching that maximize effectiveness (Booker & Russell, 2022). Studies outline the appropriate use of leaders' time (Kane & Rosenquist, 2019), the specific coaching activities (Gibbons & Cobb, 2017), and district-level systems to improve student learning (Kane & Rosenquist, 2019). But how do coaches impact teachers under these conditions? Our research seeks to explore the interactions more deeply between coaches and teachers in support of instructional development and student learning.

To ensure the presence of evidence-based conditions to maximize instructional coach effectiveness, our study takes place in Hamilton County Schools (HCS). In 2008, HCS implemented an instructional leadership model to invest in teacher development and instructional improvement, aligned to the extant research. Currently, HCS is preparing to refine the instructional coaching across the district in hopes of continuing to improve instruction and student learning. In particular, HCS district leaders have expressed interest in examining the impact of their instructional coaching model to determine future investments in the program. We begin by exploring the organizational context of Hamilton County Schools.

ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

As the sixth largest school district in the state of Tennessee, Hamilton County Schools is committed to ensuring that all children thrive and experience a future without limits. The district prioritizes creating pathways to a bright future for all students in their community by helping to equip them with the skills, knowledge and support required to meet their full potential. HCS believes that every student deserves access to an excellent teacher, every teacher deserves access to an excellent leader, and every school deserves access to excellent resources to meet the needs of diverse students. Located in Chattanooga, the district serves about 44,000 students within 79 schools. The school system is diverse with 52% students of color, 37% economically disadvantaged, 12% students with disabilities, and 11% multi-language learners (Hamilton County Schools, 2023).

HCS has made significant progress toward its goals of improving student learning. The district is showing progress in both growth and achievement in the state of Tennessee. Based on the 2021-2022 TNReady Assessment results, HCS outperformed the state of Tennessee in 24 of 28 metrics and was a level five in growth (TVAAS) in all measured areas (Hamilton County Schools, 2021).

Since 2003, HCS expanded the Teaching and Learning Department to include more personnel focused on teacher development and improving instructional practice across the district in efforts to positively influence student outcomes. In 2018, HCS launched their district-funded instructional coaching model. In the program's current model, the Executive Director of Teaching and Learning oversees the instructional leadership support across all five learning communities. Learning communities are groups of schools based on geography within the HCS school district. Each learning community has an academic lead that supports the learning community Superintendent with the program as well as overseeing the instructional coaches and content leads within the area. All the K-8 schools in the district have been provided with an instructional coach by HCS. Additionally, the two highest need learning communities (Midtown and Missionary Ridge) have also been provided community content leads that develop and deploy curriculum to allow coaches and teachers to focus on the instructional practice. In their high schools, the district has supported principal autonomy in hiring instructional coaches based on need. As a result, the number of instructional coaches employed across K-12 schools varies.

Throughout the launch of the program, HCS developed clear roles and responsibilities for administrators, instructional coaches, and content leads. The district also created frameworks for instruction, coaching, and leadership. In addition, HCS collected a large amount of data on student achievement and growth outcomes as well as teacher evaluation scores.

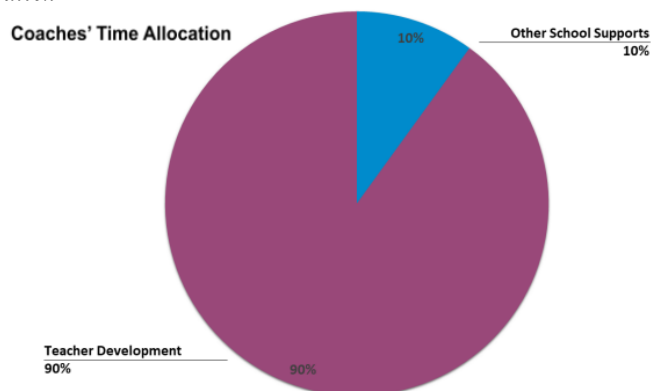
Teacher Development Framework

HCS is deeply committed to the learning of all students within the district. As a department, leaders generated a theory of action to improve student learning. HCS states, "if a systematic and responsive approach to teacher development is executed, then teacher instructional quality will continue to improve increasing student learning outcomes" (HCS Teacher Development Framework, 2023, p. 2). Instructional coaches play the pivotal role in providing opportunities for teacher development and support at the school-level.

The teacher development framework was created by HCS to ensure clarity of the role of the instructional coach and implementation across the district. Figure A reveals the allocation of instructional coaches' time to fulfill the district's theory of action. The framework further breaks down the 90% of instructional coach time spent on teacher development. 60% of the time should be spent on coaching cycles, collaborative planning, and professional learning communities (PLCs) to

prioritize collaboration with teachers. 15% of the time should be spent in learning walks and individual walkthroughs to observe the implementation of instructional practices. The final 15% of the time should be spent engaging in instructional coaching professional development to improve their effectiveness as a leader (HCS Teacher Development Framework, 2023).

Figure A: *Coaches' Time Allocation*



The framework further specifies the collaboration needed between instructional coaches and administration to plan and progress monitor school wide teacher development. Additionally, the teacher collaboration activities that instructional coaches engage in are clearly defined by type. Coaching cycles include five components: (1) diagnose and learn, (2) set goals and measures, (3) plan instruction, (4) support with implementation, and (5) reflect on results. Collaborative planning values all voices, develops artifacts, is grounded in standards, responds to current learning, anticipates student responses and misconceptions, and plans for differentiation and scaffolds. PLCs are similar to collaborative planning but include data, common assessments, and data-driven instructional decisions (HCS Teacher Development Framework, 2023).

Teacher Evaluation

To formally assess teacher development, HCS adapted the Project COACH Evaluation model. The framework includes 40 indicators within six domains. The domains include planning and preparation for learning, classroom management, delivery of instruction, monitoring, assessment, and follow up, family and community, and professional responsibilities. Scores on each indicator within the domain range from highly effective, effective, improvement necessary, and does not meet standards. Teachers are scored across multiple, 10-minute, unannounced “mini-observations.” The observations are followed up with a conversation and coaching session. The sum of the scored indicators is then used to calculate an overall rating, also known as the teacher’s level of effectiveness (LOE) (Hamilton County Department of Education, 2022).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In a Request for Assistance to the Vanderbilt Doctor of Education Program, HCS expressed that, despite the clear program model, framework, and data gathered, the district has not been able to determine how much of the instructional practice and academic improvement can be attributed to the instructional leadership program. Further, they aim to determine if specific roles are more impactful than others and be given clarity about gaps that may exist within the current instructional leadership structures. Therefore, the goal of this work is to ultimately provide HCS with advice

about the functioning and impact of their instructional support model as they determine future investments into the program.

In collaboration with HCS, we designed a mixed-methods study that explores the relationship between the time and activity allocation of instructional coaches on teacher development and improvements in teacher effectiveness. We aim to support the Department of Teaching and Learning's staffing model evaluation by helping district leaders to better understand:

1. To what extent are the time and actions of instructional coaches helpful to the development of teachers in their planning and execution of instruction?
2. To what extent do instructional coaches influence teachers' level of effectiveness?

With the organizational context and teacher development as well as the evaluative framework that guides the work of HCS's instructional coaching model in mind, we begin our exploration of these research questions by considering the broader context of instructional coaching to support student learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW & CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Evolution of Instructional Support

Early in the implementation of instructional coaching, the responsibility fell solely on the principal. As the instructional leader, the principal is responsible for defining the mission of the school, overseeing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school climate (Hallinger, 2010). Evidence finds connection between principals as instructional leaders and improvements in teaching and learning, while noting the necessity for strong instructional leadership, regardless of the principal's role (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015). In response to the increasing accountability for school improvement and achievement of students in the late twentieth century, principals shifted to a shared instructional leadership model (Marks & Printy, 2003).

Principals started to employ distributed instructional leadership throughout their schools for instructional coaching. Distributed leadership refers to "a set of practices that are enacted by people at all levels rather than a set of personal characteristics and attributes located in people at the top" (Leithwood et al., 2004). Sharing leadership throughout an organization allows individuals to benefit from more capacity, capitalize on various strengths, and develop interdependence (Leithwood et al., 2004). Distributing leadership within schools is associated with greater influence and lasting, sustainable change within organizations (Hallinger, 2010; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). As schools shift away from the principal as the sole instructional coach in a school, recent research finds that multiple roles within schools, both formally and informally, provide instructional leadership (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015).

However, research on distributed leadership warns that allowing more people with expertise to influence organizations is not enough; school leaders must also develop their leadership. Elmore explains that school leaders need to work to build common knowledge and skill for leadership practice and develop the systems to provide people with opportunity to learn it (Elmore, 2008). There is a growing body of work on the importance of professional development for instructional leaders to develop the skill needed to engage in coaching work (Kraft, Blazar, & Hogan, 2018; Woulfin, 2018; Managing & Dunsmore, 2015).

In schools, instructional leadership is often distributed to teachers, encouraging development as teacher leaders. In some cases, school leaders attempt to empower teachers to offer expertise and facilitate learning without a formal instructional coach role (Marks & Printy, 2003; Mangin &

Dunsmore, 2015). However, schools more commonly establish instructional coach positions. While coaches serve as personnel to provide ongoing and embedded professional learning opportunities, “the coach’s role is not yet institutionalized; it varies across states, districts, and even within schools” (Woulfin & Rigby, 2017, p. 323; Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015). Research overwhelmingly indicates that instructional coaches at the school level vary widely in professional background, roles, and responsibilities, despite the field’s aligned effort to distribute coaching from only the principal.

District leaders influence instructional coaching within schools. Recently, school districts have employed instructional coaching as a level to advance instructional reform at scale (Woulfin, 2018). The conditions and model of the district can shape instructional coaching at the school level. For example, districts can influence individual versus team coaching, instructional leaders’ teaching responsibilities as well as administrator roles, leadership professional development, and enactment of district policies and reforms. In sum, district structures, policies, and norms widely influence the work of coaches (Woulfin, 2018). Overall, instructional leadership has taken a variety of forms and evolved throughout its growing prominence during the accountability era. Ultimately, the field leverages coaches to distribute expertise from the district and school level to facilitate improvement in teaching and learning.

Effective Instructional Coaches

Throughout its evolution, instructional coaching has served as a model that integrates professional development and training for teachers in a way that should ultimately improve teaching; theoretically, by improving teachers, instruction will improve which will lead to better student outcomes (Hiebert & Morris, 2012). However, there is not an agreed-upon model of coaching that has been duplicated and multiplied across the education field with impactful results. Although instructional coaching can be seemingly hard to measure, there is much research regarding what makes an effective instructional coach. Among researchers, how coaches use their time, the activities they engage in, and the coherence of the system they operate in seem to be conceptually agreed upon “bins” in which theory behind effective instructional coaching lies.

TIME

Instructional coaching can vary vastly from school to school, as well as between districts and states. Ultimately, a factor that leads to effective instructional coaching regardless of the location is time; both for the training of the instructional coaches, and for the time coaches spend with teachers. Effective coaching should be intensive and ongoing to have lasting impacts in school systems and on teachers (Gibbons & Cobb, 2017). In past studies, it was seen that coaching models were unsuccessful because coaches spent little time working with teachers on instruction; rather, their time was being spent on administrative duties assigned to them by school administrators (Kane & Rosenquist, 2019; Gibbons & Cobb, 2017). Instructional coaching, then, should be less focused on administrative tasks and more directed towards individual time with teachers to build knowledge in instructional routines, core practices, and curricular products (Hiebert & Morris, 2012).

The time coaches spend training is also an incredibly integral aspect of the coaching model. To understand what is expected of them within school systems and to ensure fidelity of implementation amongst all instructional coaches, it is necessary to have sufficient training before allowing them into the classroom (Russell, et. al., 2020). A study of the Tennessee Math Coaching Project provided 55 hours of training to instructional coaches prior to the launch of their 1:1 coaching model, which set up the necessary expectations to align coaches, ultimately leading to rigorous coaching and sustained student growth throughout the district (Russell, et. al, 2020, Kane & Rosenquist, 2019).

With the expectation that coaches would be trained properly, the next layer of accountability is to ensure there is ample time for coaching to occur. Prior research suggests that coaching needs to be intensive, ongoing, and integrated into teachers' daily work to provide the best outcomes (Kane & Rosenquist, 2019; Wilson, Rozelle, & Mikeska, 2011). The National Center for Education Statistics show that the caseload of an instructional coach also influences the amount of quality time each coach can spend with their teachers. A two-year case study argues that an average of nine teachers is an acceptable load for coaches per coaching cycle to ensure that coaches can spend a minimum of 30 minutes with each teacher per week (Bakhshaei, et. al, 2018). These recommendations come with an understanding that in many school systems, the caseload for one instructional coach is much larger than 9 teachers, reducing the amount of time for adequate coaching cycles to occur.

ACTIVITIES

Although it would be ideal that coaching would occur several times per year, the quality of the coaching matters more than the quantity (Booker & Russell, 2022). Quality of coaching is viewed as the activities that take place in the sessions and professional development. Teachers often argue they want professional development and necessary training that focuses on problems they encounter in their daily work, allowing them to situate new concepts in a context that originates directly in their classroom (Gibbons & Cobb, 2017; Matsumura, et. al., 2009). To meet teachers' needs while engaging only in coaching that matches evidence-based strategies that are deemed effective, it is important for the coaches to partake in many different activities directly with their teachers, both in individual and group settings (Reddy, Dudek & Lekwa, 2017). Core components include one-on-one discussions in the teachers' rooms, modeling lessons, analyzing classroom video together, engaging in discipline discussions, studying student work, and interacting often in lesson study (Gibbons & Cobb, 2017; Matsumura, et. al. 2009). Observation and feedback are the core components of instructional coaches' work, creating opportunity for pedagogical and content-specific expertise to come to the forefront in place of administrative tasks and duties (Kane & Rosenquist, 2019).

COHERENCE

Although the proposed list of activities for instructional coaches and educators to partake in together most likely occur often in capacities outside of "scheduled" instructional coaching, it is important to ensure that the consistent cycling of planning discussions, observations, and feedback can happen in a way that is structured individually and in large groups (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2014; Booker & Russell, 2022). After spending the time necessary to become skilled in teaching and good at building trusting relationships, it is imperative that both school-administrators and district leaders build structured systems for coaching to take place. Effective coaching most often happens when groups of teachers can build knowledge together, and for this to occur, sessions must be held consistently with individual teachers and then again in small groups (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2014).

Yet, school-hired coaches have limited opportunities to work with teachers, as their time is often dictated by rising pressures of district accountability systems. Often, coaches are used to mitigate school administrative issues and oversee the implementation of policies and expectations, such as serving in the testing coordinator position (Kane & Rosenquist, 2019). Ultimately, research shows that district-hired coaches can spend more of their time engaging with teachers directly as they may not be receiving the administrator-directives to handle various school-based issues that arise. However, this doesn't require all instructional coaches to be district-hired; rather, it is recommended that districts and administrators alike ensure that systems are designed to provide directive to instructional coaches to spend most of their time coaching, while all other administrative

duties be assigned to others hired to take on those responsibilities (Kane & Rosenquist, 2019; Mangin & Dunsmore, 2014).

Systems-level change in teacher practice occurs at higher rates with instructional coaches who can dedicate their time to the practice, partake in specific coaching actions with educators, and are supported by both school and district officials. Another piece of the puzzle to produce the most effective instructional coaches is to ensure that each coach is content-specific, allowing coaches to contribute more precise feedback to an individual and group of teachers (Booker & Russell, 2022). Coaching in math and reading typically have larger impacts on student outcomes than coaching on general teacher practice, suggesting that coaches who can be content-specific can produce larger growth with their focused guidance (Booker & Russell, 2022). When instructional coaches can be utilized in one content-area, they have significantly larger pedagogical expertise and are able to spend their time more productively (Kane & Rosenquist, 2019). Ultimately, content-expertise can provide better and more effective support to teachers in the domain, with the goal of increasing teacher effectiveness and student achievement outcomes.

The time and actions of coaches, while integral to producing effective teachers, can falter when the establishment of relationships and the necessary trust between teachers and instructional coaches has not been built. Teachers and coaches should communicate about the process of working together and what feels most conducive to growth for the teacher and students, reducing anxiety or concern from the teacher and leading to more productive relationships immediately. Teachers cannot be forced to engage in coaching, even when the district or school is mandating it. Therefore, building trusting relationships prior is a positive approach to give teachers a choice, set expectations, and identify needs (Knight, 2007).

Further, coaches and teachers are likely to have a more effective coaching experience when it is collaborative, either in a group of teachers or one-on-one. In an environment where inquiry is rewarded, teachers can feel open to questioning their pedagogical choices and feel support in processing instructional feedback (Walpole, et. al., 2010). Building a trusting relationship prior to the coaching cycle can encourage vulnerability and inquiry with the intentions of bettering practice, reinforcing the educators to feel positive about the coaching experience and willingly partake on their own.

Impact of Instructional Coaches

As the instructional coaching reform effort continues to expand across the nation's schools, many studies have been conducted to examine its impact on improving teacher practice and student achievement. Overwhelmingly, instructional coaching appears to positively impact teacher practice, especially when it is content-focused. Numerous studies find that the coaching model is correlated with improvements in teacher efficacy and instructional practice (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015; Woulfin, 2018; Kane & Rosenquist, 2019; Matsumara et al., 2009). Further, the "impact of content-focused coaching on promoting teachers' adoption of instructional practices has been determined" (Woulfin, 2018, p.2). Consensus on instructional coaches' positive influence on improving teacher practice satisfies the first step in the reform effort's theory of action.

However, the impact of instructional coaching on student achievement is mixed. Some researchers have found that teacher coaching has a positive effect on student learning outcomes, determined by standardized test scores (Kane & Rosenquist, 2019; Kraft, Blazar, & Hogan, 2018). Others have not found a measurable effect of instructional coaching on student achievement (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015; Matsumara et al., 2009). As with teacher practice, "we see smaller effects on student achievement for general coaching programs than content-specific programs" (Kraft, Blazar, & Hogan, 2018, p. 564). The outcomes of coaching tend to lean more positive than not, although there are challenges when trying to implement coaching at scale.

Researchers attribute the mixed results of examining the impact of instructional coaching on teaching practice and student achievement to challenges of context and scale. Studies on instructional coaching impact find that the variation in school type, coach roles and responsibilities, teacher tenure, professional development, among others, greatly influence the mixed results on impact (Kane & Rosenquist, 2019; Matsumara et al., 2009; Russell et al., 2020). Additionally, when instructional coaching models are scaled up, the impact of leaders on teaching practice and student achievement becomes less effective (Kane & Rosenquist, 2019). Given the challenges of context and scale, researchers warn about implementing instructional coaching broadly as a school reform effort. Studies do recommend clear guidelines of how personal should use their time and engage in activities as well as how schools should build coherence of instructional improvement in the system as strategies to mitigate the challenges associated with context and scale.

In many cases, instructional coaches highlight a lack of clarity around role and responsibilities as key features of the challenges of school context. While aiming to support school improvement by coaching instructional practice to increase student learning outcomes, instructional leadership frequently feel confusion in how to support change. They cite “[confusion] about how they could push for the changes being advocated by their district and still operate within the constructs of their coach role” (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015). The challenges associated with being a liaison between the district initiatives and the school programs strains relationships between coaches and teachers. As a result, instructional leaders continuously struggle to support both individual growth with teachers and systemic reform in instructional practices (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015). The lack of alignment and clarity around the instructional coaches’ district and school level role poses challenges to assessing impact of the school reform lever.

Conclusion

The extant literature reveals the type of instructional leadership, the activities, time, and other strategies to ensure effectiveness in instructional coaching, as well as impact on student learning and teaching practice. Instructional coaches can, in theory, make an impact on system-wide change and student outcomes within school and district systems. However, impact is dependent on implementation, and implementation does not always happen with fidelity.

DESIGN & METHODS

To answer our two research questions, we designed a mixed-methods study. Our analysis of the HCS instructional coaching model uses level of effectiveness data from teachers in Hamilton County Schools from the 2017-2018 school year to the 2021-2022 school year. We also compiled data from a web-based survey of all instructional coaches, teachers, and principals in 2022-2023. Finally, we gathered data from qualitative interviews with instructional coaches across the district in Fall 2022. We triangulated the data from all sources to answer both of our research questions.

Data

QUANTITATIVE

Level of effectiveness data comes from a file provided by the district. LOE scores were provided for all teachers in HCS by the school and learning community from 2017-2018 to 2021-2022. LOE data is missing for 2019-2020 school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. LOE scores

are determined by summing all of the scored, domain indicators in the Project COACH evaluation model to calculate an overall rating, also known as the teacher's level of effectiveness (Hamilton County Department of Education, 2022). Scores were provided for all teachers throughout the district based on a unique identification number that can be tracked from year to year if the teacher remained in the district. The number of teachers varied from year to year. There are scores for 2,379 teachers in 2017-2018, 2,401 teachers in 2018-2019, 2,505 teachers in 2020-2021, and 2,166 teachers in 2021-2022. In order to account for the variation in sample size for each year, we tracked teachers who were present in the district for all four years and those who were in the district for the first two years.

We developed a web-based survey for instructional coaches that adapted certain questions from the Tennessee Education Research Alliance Instructional Coach and Teacher Core surveys to match the program in Hamilton County Schools (Tennessee Department of Education, 2022). In our instructional coach survey, we asked instructional leaders the frequency in which they engaged in all activities aligned to the teacher development framework and recorded responses on a scale of 1 (*never*) to 5 (*frequently*). Next, we presented instructional coaches with the time they spent on all activities according to the framework and recorded responses on a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*daily*). We then asked instructional leaders about the clarity of their role, principal support, and perception of impact on teacher development and student achievement on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The survey concluded with a series of contextual items.

We replicated and adapted the web-based 2022 survey for instructional coaches for teachers and principals. We asked about the frequency of their coaches engaging in all activities aligned to the teacher development framework and recorded responses on a scale of 1 (*never*) to 5 (*frequently*). Next, we asked about the time they spent on all activities according to the framework and recorded responses on a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*daily*). Finally, for principals, we asked about the clarity of the instructional coach's role and perception of impact on teacher development and student achievement on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). For teachers, we asked about the usefulness of the coaching activities aligned to the teacher development framework on a scale of 1 (*not useful*) to 5 (*very useful*). Both surveys concluded with a series of contextual items.

QUALITATIVE

Additionally, data was collected from focus group interviews conducted at the November Instructional Coach Professional Development session on November 15, 2022. The Department of Teaching and Learning sent recruitment emails to all instructional coaches prior to the session. Focus group interviews were conducted in 6, thirty-minute sessions in a conference room at the Professional Development session. The size of the focus group interview varied based on the time of the session. Interviews were audio recorded using an iPad. Each interview was recorded and transcribed using the Otter transcription software. All instructional coaches provided consent prior to beginning the interviews. A copy of the interview protocol is provided in Appendix A.

Sample

QUANTITATIVE

The Department of Teaching and Learning in HCS distributed the survey to instructional coaches, teachers, and principals across the district. The first survey was provided to the 140 instructional coaches at a Professional Development session on November 15, 2022. To prepare the data for analysis, each survey item was reviewed to determine if any missing values were present. Missing data was found for several survey items, and the responses with missing values were

removed from the dataset. 75 instructional coaches responded to the survey, and after removing the missing data, the final dataset included 63 complete responses, a reduction of 12 responses, or 16 percent of the original dataset. The final dataset represents a 45 percent response rate for instructional coaches. The instructional coach sample population by learning community is presented in Table 1 below.

The principal survey was provided to all principals across the district by the Department of Teaching and Learning in December 2022. There are 79 principals across HCS that were provided the survey. As with the instructional coach survey, to prepare the data for analysis, each survey item was reviewed to determine if any missing values were present. Missing data was found for several survey items, and the responses with missing values were removed from the dataset. The dataset originally included 32 responses, and after removing the missing data, the final dataset included 30 responses for a reduction of two responses, or one percent of the original dataset. The final dataset represents a 38 percent response rate for principals. The principal sample population by learning community is presented in Table 1 below.

Finally, the teacher survey was distributed to all teachers across the district by the Department of Teaching and Learning in January 2023. There are nearly 2,8000 teachers in HCS that were provided the survey. As with the other two surveys, to prepare the data for analysis, each survey item was reviewed to determine if any missing values were present. Missing data was found for several survey items, and the responses with missing values were removed from the dataset. 329 teachers responded to the survey and after removing the missing data, the final dataset included 298 responses for a reduction of 31 responses, or nine percent of the original dataset. The final dataset represents an 11 percent response rate for teachers. The teacher sample population by learning community is presented in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1						
<i>Descriptive Statistics of Teacher, Leader, and Coach Sample</i>						
	Teacher		Coach		Leader	
Learning Community	M	N	M	N	M	N
Midtown	.057	17	.238	15	.100	3
Missionary Ridge	.205	61	.302	19	.100	3
Harrison Bay	.275	82	.143	9	.133	4
North River	.245	73	.143	9	.333	10
Rock Point	.218	65	.175	11	.333	10
N Count		298		63		30

QUALITATIVE

Six focus group interviews were completed with current instructional coaches across all learning communities in HCS. No coach names nor identifying information were included in this report to protect the anonymity of the interview. Of the 140 instructional coaches in attendance at Professional Development on November 15th, 32 instructional coaches participated in focus group interviews. Of the 32 instructional coaches, 7 coaches work in North River, 6 work in Rock Point, 7 work in Harrison Bay, 5 work in Midtown, and 7 work in Missionary Ridge.

Methods

QUANTITATIVE

To analyze the LOE data, we began by averaging scores by the learning community for all school years provided in the dataset, 2017-2018, 2018-2019, 2020-2021, and 2021-2022. We looked specifically at learning community averages because Midtown and Missionary Ridge are the two high need learning communities in the district receiving additional instructional coaching support with content leads and we wanted to explore this additional layer of the model. After averaging the scores for each learning community in each year, we looked at the change in scores over the timeframe for each learning community. We then analyzed the survey data by examining the descriptive statistics on key coaching activities, time reports, and perceptions of role and impact. We then conducted t-tests to examine statistically significant differences in level of agreement between the coaches, leaders, and teachers in HCS. Specifically, we ran t-tests to examine differences in level of agreement with the activities and time spent of instructional coaches for teachers, coaches, and leaders. We also ran t-tests to examine statistically significant differences in level of agreement with perception of role clarity and coaching impact on teacher development and student achievement for coaches and leaders.

QUALITATIVE

We used our interviews with instructional coaches to better understand the potential differences in level of agreement from teachers and leaders seen in the survey responses. Semi-structured, focus group interviews were conducted with instructional coaches, with a pre-established interview protocol (Appendix A). The protocol was developed in accordance with the research-based characteristics of effective instructional coaching from our conceptual framework. Specifically, questions aimed to explore the time, actions, system coherence, and content-specific support of the instructional coaching model in HCS.

Interviews were audio recorded using an iPad. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in the Otter transcription software. Hagengruber listened to each audio recording and read transcripts using the Otter transcription software. To start, she engaged in open coding. She read the interview transcripts and made notations of data that appeared relevant to the study. Open coding is the first step in the process of qualitative analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Next, analytical coding was employed to allow for “interpretation and reflection on meaning” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 206). Hagengruber completed a matrix for each focus group interview that included themes and key illustrative quotes. The matrices coalesced the significant themes using the conceptual framework as a foundation. The matrix included the bins from the conceptual framework and related themes and critical quotes for each concept. After completing each focus group interview matrix, we came together to review the findings to check for consistency of interpretation and strengthen the trustworthiness of findings. Together, we completed a master matrix to summarize themes and quotes across all instructional coaches in HCS. The master matrix included trends, patterns, and highlighted points of convergence from each focus group. The master matrix is included in Appendix B.

LIMITATIONS

We acknowledge a number of limitations across our study. Although we had large quantitative and qualitative sample sizes, there were analyses we could not run due to the limitations within our data sets. With the Level of Effectiveness (LOE) data for teachers, we were only able to disaggregate by learning community; we were not able to control for grade taught or location within the learning community, which has its own drawbacks for the conclusions we are making. Further, we do not know which teachers within the learning communities were receiving coaching consistently or at all; we were looking at all teachers within the K-12 grade band. Therefore, we could not track specific teachers who participated in coaching cycles over multiple years and those that did not. Another consideration is that many schools choose to have more than one coach, which ultimately changes the teacher to coach ratio; this could also impact some of the effectiveness data.

Our qualitative research contains many threats to external validity. We had 75 coaches respond to the survey out of the 140 present at the November professional development training. However, completion of the survey reduced our N count to 63 instructional coaches: less than half of the total number of coaches. An additional limitation exists in that the instructional coach survey was only sent to the coaches present at the professional development training; 20 coaches were not present on this day and did not receive the opportunity to participate in our data collection. The absence of these 20 coaches seemed to be random and individualized for each coach.

The teacher and principal surveys had much lower response rates than the instructional coach survey. The principal survey had a final N count of 30, representing just over a third of the total principals in the district. For both Midtown and Missionary Ridge learning communities, three principals completed the survey, an important consideration when drawing conclusions for these learning communities. Some learning communities had more administrators complete the survey than others, which could allow for the data to lean more favorably towards Rock Point and North River. We had 329 teachers respond to the survey, but a final N count of 298 that completed the survey and produced data points usable for our research. As a result, only 11 percent of teachers across the district are represented in our sample.

Similarly, our qualitative research contains threats to external validity. We were able to interview 5-7 coaches from each learning community but cannot disaggregate them by grade level or other demographic information. While there was instructional coach representation from each learning community and multiple grade bands, focus groups were held with only 32 of 140 coaches present at the November training, representing 23 percent of the total number of coaches present at professional development, and 20 percent of instructional coaches overall. We did not conduct interviews or focus groups with the teachers and principals, so the data we present from both groups come strictly from the survey responses. This could produce an incomplete picture of the experiences that teachers and principals have had with instructional coaches.

In both our qualitative and quantitative research, we are not able to discern which coaches, teachers, and leaders work at schools with multiple coaches. The HCS instructional coach model is not uniform across all learning communities and schools in the district due to the autonomy provided. We did not include questions about the number of coaches at school campuses. Therefore, we cannot disaggregate the data to determine which coaches were at a school independently in comparison to schools with multiple coaches, which could impact teacher, coach, and principal perceptions of the instructional coaching model.

KEY FINDINGS

In the triangulation of our qualitative and quantitative research, we were able to determine strengths and areas of needed growth in the Hamilton County School instructional coaching model. We concluded that there is promising evidence that time and actions of instructional coaches are improving teacher outcomes. However, the coherence of the model and the implementation across schools and learning communities is weak. Coaches feel that relationships with teachers are necessary to do their job well, which undermines their ability to give constructive feedback. Our survey and focus group interview data address our first research question, while our survey and LOE data address our second research question.

Research Questions

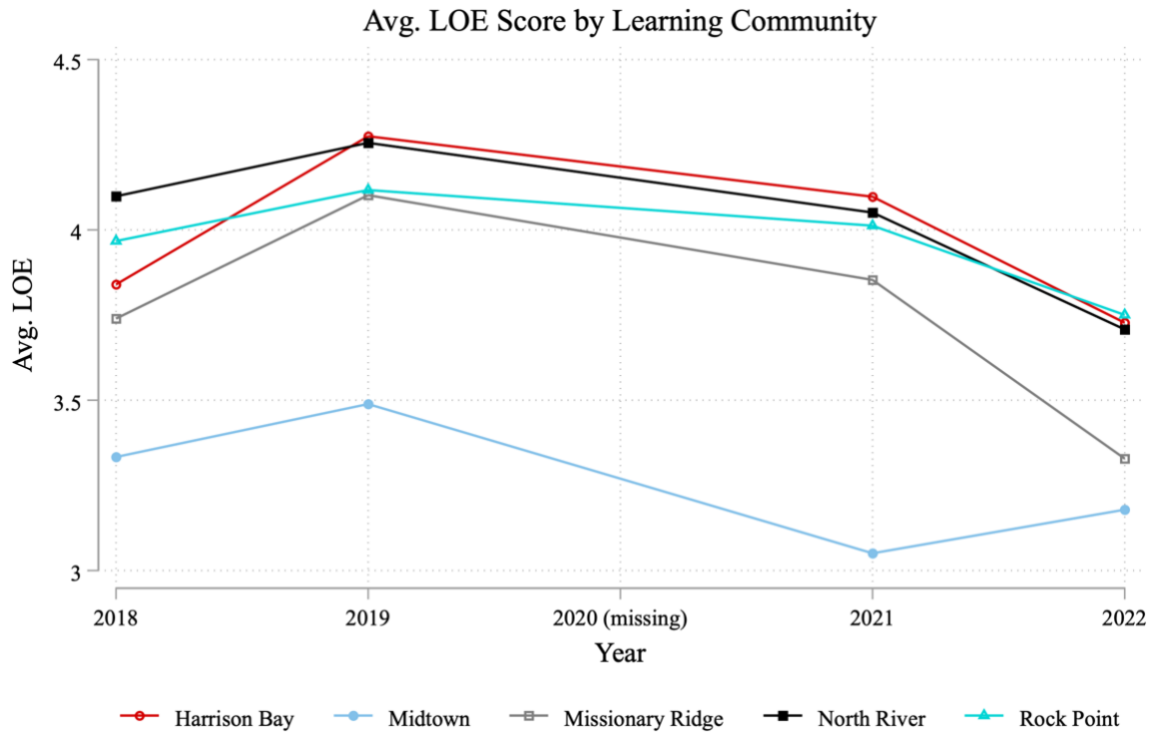
1. To what extent are the time and actions of instructional coaches helpful to the development of teachers in their planning and execution of instruction?
2. To what extent do instructional coaches influence teachers' level of effectiveness?

FINDING #1: TIME AND ACTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES ARE SUPPORTING TEACHER DEVELOPMENT.

1a. There is an initial increase in teachers' level of effectiveness the first year the coaching model was introduced, followed by a decline that is likely due more to the pandemic.

An analysis of teachers' level of effectiveness scores since the launch of the instructional coaching model provides possible promising evidence of the impact on teacher development. We gathered LOE data on all teachers throughout the district from the year prior to the launch of the district-funded instructional coaching model (2017-2018) through the most recent school year. We then calculated the average score for each learning community for each school year, given the additional support provided to the high need learning communities: Midtown and Missionary Ridge. Figure B illustrates the average LOE scores for teachers across HCS by learning community from the 2017-2018 school year (indicated by 2018) to the 2021-2022 school year (indicated by 2022). Average LOE scores for 2019-2020 are missing due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure B: *Average Level of Effectiveness Scores by Learning Community*



The average teacher LOE score in each learning community increased in the school year following the introduction of the HCS district-funded coaching model. Harrison Bay and Missionary Ridge saw the largest increases in average LOE score across the district. All learning communities, with the exception of Midtown, saw an average LOE score above 4 points on the 5-point scale. While Midtown performed below the other learning communities, there was still an increase from 2017-2018 to 2018-2019. The increase of average LOE scores across all learning communities in 2018-2019 offers potentially encouraging evidence of improvement in teacher development across the district after the onset of the HCS coaching model.

In the year following the missing data due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the district saw a decrease in average LOE scores across all learning communities. The decline continued in 2021-2022, with the exception of an increase in Midtown. However, no learning community has returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Further analysis finds similar to the patterns illustrated in Figure B. When learning community scores are averaged for teachers in the district for all four years and those in the first two years, the initial increase is evident as well as the decline since the pandemic. The averages are also similar to those presented in Figure B. Therefore, sampling issues likely did not affect the pattern seen in Figure B.

LOE encompasses planning and preparation for learning, classroom management, delivery of instruction, monitoring, assessment and follow up, family and community, and professional responsibilities (Hamilton County Department of Education, 2022), all which were impacted negatively by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly during the transition to and from virtual instruction. Therefore, the decline in average LOE scores across all learning communities in the past two school years is likely due to the pandemic, leaving the initial increase in average LOE scores possible promising evidence of the model's impact on teacher development.

1b. Coaches say coaching cycles are the heart of their work.

The HCS Teacher Development Framework specifies that coaches' most valuable asset is the time within the school day that they spend working side-by-side with teachers. It outlines coaching cycles, collaborative planning, and PLCs (professional learning communities) to be the key three collaborating activities that instructional coaches should engage in, equating to 60% of their time. Participating in learning walkthroughs and professional development, both given to coaches and given for coaches, should result in the other 30% of their time, leaving only 10% of time for "other school supports" (HCS Teacher Development Framework, 2023). Ultimately, coaches agreed that their time was spent in appropriate coaching activities, with coaching cycles to be the most crucial aspects of their role.

In the focus group interviews, we asked coaches about how they spent their time and what activities felt the most productive. Among all learning communities, coaches reported that most of their time was spent in coaching cycles. Planning lessons, supporting implementation, and reflecting on results, are the key coaching moves for the cycle, according to the HCS Teacher Development Framework (HCS Teacher Development Framework, 2023). Instructional coaches highlight the key moves when discussing their daily work in their schools. When one coach shared how they spent their day, they said: "...visiting classrooms and providing feedback for teachers, not formally. Collaborative training, coaching cycles, data review, model or co-teaching, and gathering resources if they need." Another shared, "...finding a time to go in and plan a good lesson, do the enactment and then do a debrief with teachers." Coaches highlight that planning instruction, executing lessons side-by-side with teachers, and planning next steps are key components of their daily work.

In fact, the coaching cycles are seen as the most important and effective aspect of instructional coaches' job, with many coaches reporting that all teachers should work with a coach at some point during the school year, regardless of their experience level or subject taught. In the focus group interviews, one coach expressed their administration's belief around the necessity of coaching, stating, "Our principal has phased it to where everyone gets coaching now... now [both] the veteran teachers and new teachers don't feel like it's a punishment", while another coach said, "Everybody gets coaching and we work really hard on that culture...every single teacher no matter how many years of experience they have." Coaches agree that they are working consistently in coaching cycles and believe that coaching can benefit all teachers regardless of experience or expertise.

Coaches also reported that being active in professional development and collaborative planning sessions led to more requests for coaching cycles by teachers, rather than coaching cycles becoming administratively directed. The process can occur organically: "Most of my time is spent in collaborative planning and then as the things are happening in collaborative planning, I'm being requested by the teachers to do a coaching cycle." Teachers' eagerness for coaching cycles contributes to the coaches' desire to prioritize the activity in the Teacher Development Framework.

Finally, coaches and administration prioritize the work of instructional coaches in the coaching cycles. Coaches stated that principals prefer they spend a bulk of their time in coaching cycles, even if "lately it's been mini coaching cycles, "due to the size of their teacher caseload. Holding the coaching cycle as a sacred activity for instructional coaches demonstrates a commitment to supporting teacher development.

1c. Principals and coaches agree that coaches’ time and actions are spent according to the Teacher Development Framework and that their work is having an impact on teacher development and student achievement.

When asked about the same activities and time of coaches, principals, on average, agree with coaches. Table 2 describes the differences in level of agreement with survey questions between coaches and principals about the time coaches spend collaborating with teachers. The first two columns capture the average level of agreement for coaches and principals, respectively. The last column is the p-value of independent t-tests of differences between the groups. The final column (“C-P”) captures whether responses are statistically different between principals and coaches.

Table 2 reveals that coaches and principals are largely in agreement about the time and actions of coaches with limited statistical differences between the two averages. The largest agreement between coaches and principals is the amount of time coaches spend observing teachers, co-teaching, and facilitating PLCs, key components of the coaching cycle.

There are some areas of discrepancy between coaches and principals. For example, coaches state they spend less time providing resources to teachers, engaging in data-driven conversations about students, and delivering professional development to teachers than principals believe they do. However, overall, the coaches state that they are engaging in the necessary coaching activities that are set forth by the HCS Teacher Development Framework, and principals largely agree.

TABLE 2			
<i>Coach and Principal Agreement with Statements Time Spent Collaborating with Teachers</i>			
	Coach	Principal	P-value of Difference
Item	Mean	Mean	C-P
Planning with Teachers	4.1	4.4	0.063
Modeling Lessons	3.1	3.4	0.137
Co-Teaching	3.5	3.4	0.466
Observing	3.9	4.0	0.737
Providing Resources	3.8	4.2	0.036
Analyzing Data	3.3	3.6	0.027
Facilitating PD	2.8	3.3	0.002
Facilitating PLCs	3.0	3.2	0.502
Observations	63	30	

We similarly asked coaches and principals about how their instructional coaches’ efforts and time impacts teacher development and student learning. Table 3 describes the extent to which coaches and principals are in agreement with what kind of impact coaches have on a 4-point Likert scale 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). We ran a series of independent t-tests to test if there are

differences in responses and we found that coaches and principals diverge on our survey items about coaching impact on teacher improvement and student achievement; there are differences between coaches' and principals' opinions. Coaches do not agree as strongly as principals that their efforts ($t = -5.294, p < 0.001$) and time ($t = -5.575, p < 0.001$) are leading to improvement in teaching and their efforts ($t = -4.235, p < 0.001$) and time ($t = -3.935, p < 0.001$) are spent leading to student achievement. Principals more strongly agree that their coaches' efforts and time are leading to improvement in teaching and student achievement. While the strength of agreement differs, coaches and principals, on average, report the efforts and time of coaching are improving teaching across the district.

TABLE 3 <i>Perceptions of Impact of Instructional Coaches by Coaches & Principals</i>		
	Coaches	Principals
Unweighted sample size	63	30
Impact		
Coaching Efforts Improve Teaching	3.2	3.8***
Coaching Time Improves Teaching	3.1	3.8***
Coaching Efforts Improve Student Achievement	3.2	3.7***
Coaching Time Improves Student Achievement	3.2	3.7***
Note –Differences in means tested for significance. Significance levels are indicated on the larger of the two numbers based on t-test. Instructional coaches and principals perceived the above independent variables using 4-point Likert scales of agreement. * $p < .10$ ** $p < .05$ *** $p < .01$		

1d. Some teachers believe that instructional coaches are crucial to their development, while others do not.

When asked about the time and actions of their instructional coaches, teachers consistently had statistically significantly different responses compared to coaches. Table 4 describes the differences in level of agreement with survey questions between teachers and coaches. The first two columns capture the average level of agreement for teachers and coaches respectively. The last column is the p-value of independent t-tests of differences between the groups. Column three (“T-C”) captures whether responses are statistically different between teachers and coaches. Teacher responses are comparatively lower across every survey question on which they have a statistically significant difference with coaches and principals as seen in Table 4. Teachers report that their coaches spend on average less time in the activities stated in the HCS Teacher Development Framework. There were low averages for modeling lessons and co-teaching as well as observing

from our teacher survey, suggesting that some teachers do not feel instructional coaches are engaging in key components of the coaching cycle as frequently as coaches perceive themselves to be.

TABLE 4
Teacher and Coach Agreement with Statements Time Spent Collaborating with Teachers

	Teacher	Coach	P-value of Difference
Item	Mean	Mean	T-C
Planning with Teachers	2.2	4.1	0.000
Modeling Lessons	1.3	3.1	0.000
Co-Teaching	1.3	3.5	0.000
Observing	1.9	3.9	0.000
Providing Resources	2.6	3.8	0.000
Analyzing Data	2.5	3.3	0.000
Facilitating PD	2.3	2.8	0.000
Facilitating PLCs	2.3	3.0	0.000
Observations	298	63	

Teacher responses to the open-ended survey item offers further insight into the various perceptions of the coaching occurring and the time spent with them as well, leading us to understand that the impact of coaching varies greatly in the district. For some teachers, instructional coaches are not seen as supportive of their development. As one teacher shared in the open-ended survey item:

“Our instructional coach does not follow the HCS suggested job description. We never see coaching cycles happening, no walk throughs, PD/PLC, department meetings of any substantial material. Teachers do not see them as an instructional leader rather as an admin assistant.”

Another said, “Someone should coach instructional coaches on what they are supposed to do.” Teachers were asking for the activities in the Teacher Development Framework stating, “I would love more lesson modeling and co-teaching opportunities.” One teacher even went on to say that “It would be nice if my instructional coaches would do anything to assist in my development as an educator.” It is clear that despite a desire for development, some teachers feel that instructional coaches are not supporting their growth as educators.

In contrast, some teachers find that their instructional coach is crucial to their development. Teachers identify the observations, feedback and support are important to them. One teacher said, “we are very lucky to have our instructional coach. She is always willing to help and provide suggestions and feedback whenever and wherever she can.” Another shared, ““My instructional coach now is extremely supportive and will help any time I ask. I never feel I am being judged when

she enters my room to observe.” Other teachers spoke to the desire of their coach to engage in the coaching cycle: “My instructional coach is great and wants to be helping in my classroom often.” Finally, as a result of their encouragement and work, a teacher stated, “My school has always been fortunate to have extremely supportive and effective instructional coaches.” Despite differences across the district, some teachers find that their instructional coaches play an important role in their development as educators.

FINDING #2: ACROSS THE DISTRICT, VARYING SCHOOL COHERENCE PRESENTS VARYING EXPERIENCES FOR COACHES.

2a. Principals with prior coaching experience or new to the role positively impact coaches’ ability to operate in their role.

Instructional coaches were clear across all focus group interviews that the support of their administration team was conditional to maximizing their effectiveness as a coach. Instructional coaches named administrators as key players in setting the tone for teacher development at the school level. In fact, one coach said:

“I would bank on the fact that it doesn’t matter how strong you are as a coach. If you don’t have an administrator that sets the culture and the tone, your effectiveness will be reduced. Even if you’re strong...it’s that critical...it is the most important.”

As a result, some coaches shared experiences of principals making their job easier by being direct and clear on expectations for coaching in classrooms. For example, “our principal has phrased it as everyone gets coaching now.” Ultimately, as one coach explained, “my principal has really shaped my role.”

The principal directs the coaches and determines the capacity in which the coaches will serve the school, explained in the focus groups as, “[we] once worked for the district, and were assigned to a school to work with the principal. Now coaches work for the principal. So it looks very different...” Principals utilize their own understanding of the coaching role, as well as the perceived need of their school, to determine the placement of the instructional coaches and define the position. This varies based on the principal and their past experiences. One coach stated that “my principal would rather [me] spend the bulk of my time in coaching cycles...”, while another said:

“My administration has the expectation that everybody gets coaching regardless of what level you are, how many years you’ve been teaching, and the expectation immediately takes down any barriers that we may have as coaches.”

The principal and administration can directly impact the level of collaboration between teachers and coaches, extra administrative tasks that are additional responsibilities, and the caseload of assigned teachers.

With so much of the coaching role being determined by school leaders, instructional coaches stated that it helps to have principals who have prior experience with coaching. One coach said, “My principal was actually an instructional coach first, and then moved into assistant principal, and then that was principal... I’ve worked with her as a teacher and then now as part of the admin team.” The prior experience promotes mutual respect between the instructional coach and administrator. Principals who have previously been instructional coaches also are able to communicate expectations with coaches in a way that seems meaningful and helpful, with a coach stating:

“My principal is really good at communicating. She does walkthroughs and then she comes to the coaching team and she’s already highlighted what she wants to happen in classrooms, so it makes the job as a coach much easier. And then she sends an email to both parties... She’s already done all that legwork. And then her observations are focused on that work. Like, either you didn’t do your job as a coach or the teacher is not taking the feedback. So it’s very direct and very clear on expectations for everybody.”

Principals with direct coaching experience are able to build capacity at their school sites to make the coaching experience more productive and impactful. Their understanding of the collaborative model between coaches and teachers allows them to formulate a school-wide model that serves all involved parties.

Similarly, coaches stated that working with newer administration teams led to productive work environments. One coach articulated this, saying “I have a very new admin team...it’s a unique opportunity for me to take what I’m doing with teachers and share it with them in a way that they know what to look for when they go in for observations.” In assuming the expert role, coaches are able to help define expectations with their school leaders. Coaches agreed that being able to contribute to the process of defining their role with administration was appreciated and needed to be successful. Ultimately, coaches unanimously agreed that:

“it doesn’t matter how strong you are as a coach. If you don’t have an administrator that sets the culture and the tone, your effectiveness will be reduced. Even if you’re strong. Like it’s that critical. Like it is the most important.”

With the change of structure to place coaches under administrative oversight rather than reporting directly to the district, principals play an integral role in defining the terms that instructional coaches must work under.

2b. Administration requiring additional duties of coaches negatively impacts their experiences.

Per the Teacher Development Framework created by HCS, instructional coaches should spend only 10% of their time on “other administrative tasks”; this would include anything that is not directly connected to collaboratively planning with teachers. Coaches expressed that, although they are spending a majority of their time engaged in the necessary coaching activities, their administration can have expectations of them that take away from their experience. One coach stated that much of the extra work “falls on us because there’s really no one there.” When asked how the role is set up within schools, a coach stated that, “For me, it’s almost exclusively teachers approaching me. I feel like my admin sees me kind of like a dumping ground...” while another said:

“I set up my own schedule, but it’s more of like theory versus practice...A lot of stuff gets crossed out or moved, because high school is different. We get pulled in to sub. So we’re doing important work but it isn’t always coaching.”

In being directly overseen by the principal, the role of the coach can vary vastly at each school depending on the needs that arise, and the perception of the role instructional coaches should play within the building.

Instructional coaches serve many roles within their schools beyond just collaborating with teachers, functioning as an extension of the district, an administrator, a coach, and often, a teacher:

“...the coach can do all those things. You know, they can run RTI and be the testing coordinator and run all these new programs and implement them and do all the subbing...we don't have an eighth grade language arts teacher so someone has to do all the planning and grading and prepping and stuff every morning. I feel like it falls on us because there's really no one there...”

With the ability to fill multiple gaps within the school comes the burden to take on more than only their coaching responsibilities, many of which are placed by their administrators. Oppositely, some coaches shared their principals were organized and structured in their expectations. One said:

“I have an agenda that I have created with my principal and assistant principal and we meet every Monday morning and everyone has an opportunity to add something to the agenda. They never do....I show what I've done in the past and what I'm planning to do and he's [principal] really good about not giving me anything extra that's not quite related to what I do.”

Ultimately, the experience of the instructional coach is largely formed by the understanding of the role by the administration. When coaches are kept primarily in coaching cycles and leading professional development, instructional coaches are able to fulfill their duties set forth by the Teacher Development Framework. However, instructional coaches feel the burden of added extra responsibilities within their schools that can negatively impact their experience working with teachers.

2c. Administration assignment of teachers and content limits coaches.

Additionally, instructional coaches report their caseload of teachers limits their effectiveness in their role. One coach said, “We have two coaches, but we have 90-some teachers.” Another said, “chaos, lack of organization, instructional support...these all prevent me from being able to do what I need to do...too many teachers to coach.” As a result of large caseloads, administration often directs coaches to prioritize teachers of tested subjects over others. One instructional leader said, “my admin has given me a directive of if I'm focusing my time with our EOC tested subject areas. So, then I have that extra confinement, I guess I would say, about who I work with.” Another shared, “it's going to be math and English that are prioritized. I'm a generalist, but it's an expectation to meet with ELA and math teams.” By having too many teachers and prioritizing tested subjects, instructional coaches express frustration about their inability to fulfill their responsibility of developing all teachers in their schools.

In schools with multiple coaches, coaches named it was easier to serve all teachers. However, many schools only have one coach present in the building, with expectations that all teachers would be served by the coach. Coaches stated they “would prefer it [coaching] be more narrowed”, naming the number of teachers and breadth of subjects they are expected to support as a challenge. When asked about what was the largest roadblock to their success, one coach said that, “being a generalist is too hard... not enough time,” to dedicate to each teacher. This sentiment was echoed by other coaches throughout all focus groups. When given the chance to share any last thoughts with us, almost all focus groups ended with the same theme: coaches want more time to make more meaningful connections, and to do that they need a more narrowed caseload.

FINDING #3: INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES' NEED TO BUILD POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE DISTRICT, ADMINISTRATION, AND TEACHERS INHIBITS THEM FROM FOCUSING ON IMPROVEMENT.

3a. Instructional coaches view themselves as harmonizers.

Within the focus groups, coaches continually discussed the challenges of balancing their support of administration, the district, and teachers. Coaches feel that the best way to provide a promising coaching cycle with teachers comes only after the relationship is established; so much so, that “A lot of it [coaching] has just been finding entry points and building relationships.” Once the relationships are built, coaches feel that their teachers are more trusting of them. An instructional coach put it simply, saying, “When a teacher has a positive experience, they’re going to have a perception that I was coached by an effective coach.” The consensus among instructional coaches was that coaching can only happen when positive relationships are built with teachers.

Because of the unique role instructional coaches hold, they try to balance their job supporting the district and administrators with meeting the needs of teachers. Coaches said they feel like the bridge between teachers, administrators, and the district, noting:

“I am part of the administration team, in a sense, but kind of my own lone island where they [teachers] know they can come to me and there’s not certain things I will say and vice versa. I can say things to them too.”

In being the bridge, they also note that many district initiatives can be harmful to their relationships and perceptions among teachers when the district can ask them to shift towards a more administrative role. A coach said, “There’s been a disconnect between the decisions that are made at the top.” Therefore, many coaches attempt to separate themselves from the district and administration to ensure positive relationships with teachers. A coach said:

“It is also important that your admin doesn’t treat you like an admin or that you might be part of the administration team. You’re not doing formal evaluations. You’re not getting formal feedback. You are in this separate line where teachers feel comfortable to come to you if needed.”

This statement reiterates their efforts to be viewed positively to keep relationships with teachers. Given their position, coaches leverage the opportunity to mediate relationships with all stakeholders, potentially taking precedence over other coaching activities. As a result, instructional coaches emphasize their role as a harmonizer in their schools.

3b. Feedback from coaches leans heavily affirmative rather than constructive.

Coaches expressed their understanding that feedback should be more affirmative to minimize potential conflict with their teachers. One coach stated:

“Feedback depends... When I do a walkthrough I have a little coaching note that says what I saw and what I heard. And on the bottom, it says ‘if you’d like to talk about it further, I’m around’. I always talk in the positive tone if I’m in a coaching cycle. I am going to model ‘noticing and naming.’”

Some coaches feel uncomfortable providing feedback even when asked directly to give action steps, stating:

“...it does put you in an awkward position because you pop in for 10 minutes, you haven’t been involved in the planning, so you have no contextualization...inevitably someone will seek me out and say, ‘I really need feedback’...and we’ve been really trying to separate this, like this isn’t the time for me to provide individual feedback. So that’s been tricky.”

Coaches name coaching cycles to be the most important aspect of their position, with feedback serving as a lever to support growth and better teaching practice. Instructional coaches offer affirmations and potential ideas for growth to avoid providing constructive feedback because they fear harming their relationships with teachers.

When asked to define feedback, coaches unanimously agreed that it was “having a reflective conversation; a feedback conversation.” When coaches discussed the conversation, they emphasized the need for them to remain positive. One coach said:

“I’ve also learned that when I have a teacher who just needs to work on a lot I’ll say, ‘We’ll talk about it in a day or two, but I’ll leave you with this’ and leave a sticky note of 6 positive ‘glows’ for one potential ‘grow.’”

They feel the need to offer affirming feedback in order to ensure:

“a teacher has a positive experience, [because] they’re going to have a perception that I was coached by an effective coach. I think that shapes people’s view of the role of students too, right?”

Coaches were unable to define feedback as anything other than a conversation. This could be in part because coaches do not want to be seen in an evaluative role, with one coach saying, “You’re not doing formal evaluations. You’re not giving formal feedback. You are in this separate line where teachers feel comfortable to come to you if needed.” In functioning between principals and teachers, coaches go to great lengths to ensure their relationships cannot be harmed within the vulnerable process of the coaching cycles. This leaves feedback to remain mostly strengths-based and leaving many areas of growth unnamed for the teachers within the coaching cycles.

3c. Instructional coaches are seeking professional development around coaching practice.

Throughout focus group interviews, instructional coaches spoke specifically about professional development opportunities and the specific learning they wanted sessions to discuss. Acknowledging, as one coach said, “the time away from the building interrupts momentum,” coaches seek professional development activities that will specifically improve their feedback work. When asked what they would do with additional time, one coach mentioned, “if I had an hour it would be either putting something together with a different grade or participating in intense training.” However, they named that “we want to learn” how to coach. Regardless of content and grade-level, instructional coaches want more professional development on the specific coaching activities that allow them to provide feedback to improve teaching practice.

Instructional coaching can lead to increased teacher level of effectiveness scores and increased student achievement data if implemented correctly and with efficacy (Hiebert & Morris, 2012). Many of our findings supported and reiterated the already-established literature. The activities that coaches engage in and the time in which they spend executing these activities with teachers can impact teacher efficacy and instructional practice. Coaches feel they have more impact when they have a smaller caseload and administrative support, and relationships are an integral part of an effective coach-teacher relationship. While we were able to conclude that our findings largely mimic previous research, we also identified additions that could impact instructional coaching on a larger scale.

Effective Instructional Coaches

The HCS Teacher Development Framework aligns with the previous literature and research, showing that the time coaches spend directly with teachers, and the activities they engage in during coaching, matter in terms of the effectiveness of coaching (Reddy, Dudek & Lekwa, 2017). Coaches consistently stated they were partaking in coaching cycles, leading PD, and participating in collaborative planning with their teachers; this is where the bulk of their time is spent. Coaches named participating in coaching cycles and collaborative planning with teachers as the most fruitful aspect of their role. Although coaches can name activities they are engaging in, there is not a uniform understanding around *how* to engage in those activities with the teachers, which is specifically seen with providing feedback. This points to a lack of coherence across coaches, which could be mitigated with district and school standardization around how to best complete and participate in effective coaching strategies.

Teachers across HCS had differing perceptions of the coaching occurring and the time spent with them as well, leading us to understand that the impact of coaching varies greatly in the district. Some teachers shared frustration with the functioning of the instructional coaching model. One teacher said, “Someone should coach instructional coaches on what they are supposed to do”. For coaching to have the intended outcomes, it is necessary that continual monitoring of coaching cycles aligned to the framework with teachers takes place. Ultimately, teachers cannot be forced to engage in coaching in a productive manner, and they must be willing to participate for growth to occur (Knight, 2007). From the literature, it is clear that teachers want training and coaching that is directly correlated to problems they face daily in their classrooms (Gibbons & Cobb, 2017; Matsumura, et. al., 2009). To ensure this is happening, it is necessary that schools assess the coaching sessions from both stakeholder positions, teachers and coaches. Teachers are willing to participate in coaching, but the coaching must be formulated in a way that feels beneficial and purposeful. Coaches believe they are leading sessions and cycles that would fit those parameters, but the clear lack of agreement between instructional coaches and teachers leaves room for further inquiry to understand what is not working well.

Instructional Coach Challenges

Instructional coaches face numerous challenges to maximize their effectiveness in the role. Throughout interviews, when asked about the greatest barriers in their role, coaches quickly named challenges that were then echoed by other coaches and across focus groups. The need for administrative support, content expertise, and strong relationships consistently came up for instructional coaches seeking to improve their work.

Unsurprisingly, instructional leaders need the support of their school administration to prioritize coaching activities. School leaders need to develop structures to allow for coaching to take place while minimizing the need for coaches to engage with other administrative duties (Kane & Rosenquist, 2019; Mangin & Dunsmore, 2014). When coaches spend their time ensuring the enactment of district policies and operationally supporting the school, they are unable to prioritize teacher development. The need for cohesion is significant, yet difficult to ensure (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2014). Many instructional coaches say that they often take on additional responsibilities because, as one explained, “it falls on us because there’s really no one there.” Another said, “we’re doing important work, but it isn’t always coaching.” This is further reinforced by the statistical differences in clarity of the role and responsibilities of the instructional leaders by principals and coaches, with principals more likely to agree. Given that instructional leaders feel the impact of structural gaps preventing them from engaging in coaching activities that principals may not be aware of, the statistical difference between these two groups makes sense.

Additionally, instructional coaches need the ability to be content experts to provide targeted support for teacher development and student achievement. Studies have found that math and reading coaches have a greater impact on student outcomes than generalists, potentially as a result of the capacity to provide more precise feedback (Booker & Russell, 2022). Many of the coaches we spoke with discussed the number of teachers and subjects they were responsible for within their schools. Additionally, in our survey, many of the instructional coaches in the sample reported coaching over 30 and up to 100 teachers. The burden of coaching load and content knowledge is so great that, when asked what they would do if they had more time in a day, a coach shared, “it would be putting together something with a different grade.” To attempt to mitigate the challenges of large caseloads and subject expertise, administration directs coaches to tested subjects like math and reading. However, under that directive, coaches are sacrificing the development of teachers in non-tested subject areas. As one teacher put it, “none of the instructional coaches in the district that I have interacted with, have social studies in their background, and therefore they have not been all that helpful with content planning and Social Studies Practices (SSPs) that we would like some support with.” This instructional model clearly needs work to truly support the development of all teachers for the success of all students.

Relationships with teachers are conditional for instructional coaches to engage in teacher development activities. Given that teachers are not required to attend coaching development, trust is imperative to fostering involvement in this reform strategy (Knight, 2007). Beyond initial participation, to truly engage in the coaching process, a safe space for vulnerability is required (Walpole, et. al., 2010). Whether novice or veteran, instructional coaches spoke to the challenges or need to develop relationships with their teachers. When reflecting on their past year, a coach explained, “teachers had to take time to get to know me.” Several coaches shared that building relationships with teachers is among their most pressing priorities in their role. As a result, this often takes precedence over the outlined coaching activities in the model.

Impact of Instructional Coaches

The impact of instructional coaches in Hamilton County Schools supports the findings in the literature. Research conducted on the impact of instructional coaching on teacher efficacy and instructional coaching largely finds positive improvement in teacher growth and student achievement (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015; Woulfin, 2018; Kane & Rosenquist, 2019; Matsumara et al., 2009). The increase of average LOE scores across all learning communities in 2018-2019 offers encouraging evidence of improvement in teacher development across the district after the onset of the HCS coaching model. Principals and coaches similarly agree that coaches are making improvements in teaching and student achievement. The promising evidence of the HCS

instructional coaching model's impact suggests that additional support with coherence and implementation could only further improve teaching and student outcomes as the program continues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION #1: REFRAME THE ROLE OF THE INSTRUCTIONAL COACH TO BE AIMED AT IMPROVEMENT.

Instructional coaches need to clearly understand their primary role in teacher development and student achievement. Based on our findings, coaches spend a significant amount of their efforts mediating the various stakeholders in the school system: teachers, administrators, and district leaders throughout their work in coaching cycles. It is no surprise that coaches are prioritizing relationships given the potential consequences of not doing so (Knight, 2007). However, coaches are attempting to build positive relationships with teachers by providing positive feedback. Research clearly defines observation and feedback as the core components of the instructional coaches' work (Kane & Rosenquist, 2019) and therefore, should be constructive. There should be distinct clarity of instructional coaches' primary role as observing teacher practice and providing action steps to drive student achievement. Any factors obscuring the role of the instructional coach should be addressed as the district continues to center teacher development in service of student achievement. Reframing the role of the instructional coach to focus on observation and feedback aimed at improvement should be prioritized.

RECOMMENDATION #2: PROVIDE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES ON OBSERVATION, FEEDBACK, AND IN-CLASS SUPPORT.

To complement the reframing of the instructional coaches' role, the district must provide professional development on coaching activities. Clear responsibilities and frameworks only support leaders so much without the training on how to implement the activities. In fact, research finds that coaching PD can clarify the coach's role while also supporting coaches in learning how to engage in feedback conversations (Kane & Rosenquist, 2019). The district needs to engage in strategic planning on instructional coach development. Professional learning experiences should train participants in transferable coaching skills including how to conduct observations, develop highest-leverage action steps, provide feedback to teachers, and support in classrooms. The coaching cycle names supporting implementation as a critical step of the framework (HCS Teacher Development Framework, 2023). Therefore, without strategic professional development on coaching activities, coaches' ability to improve instructional practice will remain limited.

RECOMMENDATION #3: PROVIDE INSTRUCTIONAL COACH DEVELOPMENT AND ESTABLISH A CULTURE OF FEEDBACK PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR PRINCIPALS AND ADMINISTRATORS.

Training coaches on how to coach is immensely important, but without a cohesive understanding between coaches and administrators across the board, the coaching is only a fraction as effective as it could be. Ultimately, principals and administrators must take on an instructional leader role with their coaches; they must set the expectations and model effective instructional leadership. The experience of each coach is formed around the understanding of the role by each administrator, and the results can vary vastly as a consequence. The cohesiveness and structure of this role is imperative for its success, with school administrators and district leaders building the systems for coaching to take place (Magnin & Dunsmore, 2014). The most effective coaching will be able to occur when all school-based administrators have the same understanding of what effective coaching is, communicate best practices with the district, and are trained just as vigorously as the instructional coaches themselves. Professional development for administration that focuses on developing instructional coaches and establishing a culture of feedback in their schools could be instrumental in providing the alignment necessary to improve instructional coach effectiveness across the district.

RECOMMENDATION #4: SPECIALIZE INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES TO SPECIFIC GRADE BANDS AND CONTENT AREAS.

The literature around instructional coaching is clear that coaching appears to positively impact teacher practice when it is content-focused, showing a correlation in improvements in teacher efficacy and instructional practice (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015; Woulfin, 2018; Kane & Rosenquist, 2019; Matsumara et al., 2009). We recognize that increasing the number of coaches in each school to have content-area specific coaches is not sustainable for the school district financially, our recommendation is to use student achievement data within the school to determine where the instructional coach(es) will specialize for the following school year. Using the already-resourced coaches to support content and grade-band specific growth will allow coaches to focus more energy and time on fewer teachers and move away from the “generalist” mindset, encouraging deeper learning and modeling in the necessary growth area. The content and grade-band focus can change yearly based on the priority areas developed from the yearly student achievement data. Through its implementation, coaches would contribute more precise feedback to smaller groups of teachers.

RECOMMENDATION #5: DEVELOP A FUTURE STUDY TO EXPLORE INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES’ IMPACT ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT.

Although this study has led to new information that could inform the practice of instructional coaching, the key findings offer insight into the implementation of the model rather than the impact. To truly evaluate the HCS instructional coaching model, we recommend an impact study that would follow teacher and coach pairs over the course of a full coaching cycle. The observation of a coach and teacher pair from every school, or even multiple from every learning community, could reveal important information about the impact of the coaching cycle on the teacher’s LOE scores and student achievement data when compared to teachers who would not participate in coaching cycles. Effective coaching should be intensive and ongoing in order to have lasting impacts in the school systems and on teachers (Gibbons & Cobb, 2017). The only way to understand the potential lasting impacts of instructional coaching on school systems and teachers is

to do a longitudinal study. This research could transform the teacher development and student achievement in Hamilton County Schools.

CONCLUSION

The landscape of education is constantly changing to mold to the needs of students. Instructional coaching is a tool that, when implemented with fidelity utilizing a framework that is backed by research and enacted by experienced individuals, can be beneficial to teacher growth and student achievement. Our contribution in this paper begins to shed light on the inner workings of the coaching system, and that, although coaches can name the steps they need to take to grow teacher performance, they do not understand how to perform those steps. Throughout our research experience, we were able to glean areas for future research and investigation.

We found in our research that instructional coaches rely heavily on the relationships they make with teachers to perform their jobs well, believing they are the bridge between teachers, administrators, and the district. Although coaches can describe the time spent and activities participated in with teachers, their definitions of those activities vary based on their administrator's understanding of the position, the number of teachers on their caseload, if they are content-specific, and if they are the single coach in the building. It would be beneficial for the district to add training in for coaches and administrators that explicitly address the intricacies of each activity coaches should lead, and norm how to implement these activities with fidelity across the district.

Our research has led us to understand that the role of an instructional coach can be complex and can mold and shift based on the needs that arise in the school. Often, the coach can be a dumping ground of sorts; filling in where gaps may arise within the building. Ultimately, it is imperative that coaches spend 90% of their time in coaching activities or learning how to coach well in professional development sessions (HCS Teacher Development Framework, 2023). Although we have been able to bring attention to areas for improvement in the instructional coaching model at HCS, it would serve the district well to move forward with future studies specifically focused on impact. Our study spanned implementation and impact, with a high emphasis on the former. With the recommendation that the instructional coaching model is standardized between all coaches and administrators, it would be positive for HCS to continue research to understand the true impact of the coaching model.

Instructional coaching has the potential to provide great change to student outcomes and teacher growth, benefitting schools and districts. As the interest in instructional coaching continues to grow and become more standardized, it is necessary to ensure coaches are learning how to coach well; recognizing that it first starts with them.

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Appendix A Interview Protocol

RQs (for reference):

1. *To what extent are the time and actions of K-8 instructional coaches helpful to the development of teachers in their planning and execution of instruction?*
2. *To what extent do K-8 coaches, teachers and administrators perceive the time and actions of the K-8 instructional coaches helpful to improving instructional practices and student learning?*

What are we exploring:

- How coaches may or may not be influencing teaching
- How coaches time and actions are being spent, and if the time and actions mimic the HSC protocol
- The perceived helpfulness of instructional coaches
- The actual helpfulness of instructional coaches

Professional Background / Introduction:

- How long have you been in the education field? What is your background in education?
- How long have you been serving in an instructional coaching role?
 - Did you have experience teaching before?
- Have you had an opportunity to be an instructional coach in any other school within this district? In another district?

Effective Instructional Coaching:

- How did you come to be an instructional coach? Did it begin prior to you joining HSC?
- From your experience, is there a clear understanding of what an instructional coach should do within your school and school district?
- What existing training did you receive prior to starting your instructional coaching role?
- What does the coaching model look like within your school? Are you the only coach? Do you feel like you have a deep understanding of what your job is?

Time & Actions:

- How often do you meet with teachers? Are you responsible for meeting with all teachers at the school? If so, how do you balance your time?
 - If not, which teachers do you spend most of your time with?
- Do you feel like you have adequate time to perform your instructional coaching duties? What do you believe those duties to be?
- What does an average day at work look like for you? Do you feel like you have time to do your job well?
- Explain the way you interact with teachers. What does a normal interaction look like? What types of activities do you most often engage in when working with a teacher?
- Are these activities chosen by you? The teacher? The school? The district?
- What does the process of giving feedback to teachers look like? Would you say that they find your time together helpful?
- Do you use the weekly log of your time with coaches? What trends do you notice?

Embedded in Systems & Content-Specific Support:

- How is your position treated at the school? Within the district? Do teachers value your role at the school? Administrators?
- What is the culture like around instructional coaches at your school?
- Explain the process for you to partner with teachers at your school; is there a procedure? Do they have to schedule a time with you in advance? Are you assigned to work with some teachers more than others?

Appendix B
Interview Coding Matrix

Index Code	Focused Code	Illustrative Quote
Role	Bridge	“I kind of felt like a bridge to different areas for [teachers] them, whether it’s resources, support with curriculum, or planning”
	Thought Partners	“Teachers look at me as a support person, and as a thought partner”
	Isolation	“It can be a very lonely position in the building... a lot of times people think you know everything, and you don’t...”
Actions	Coaching Cycles & Facilitating PDs	“Most of my time is spent in collaborative planning and then as the things are happening in collaborative planning, I’m being requested by the teachers to do a coaching cycle”.
	Affirming Feedback	“Feedback depends... When I do a walkthrough I have a little coaching note that says what I saw and what I heard. And on the bottom, it says ‘if you’d like to talk about it further, I’m around’. I always talk in the positive tone if I’m in a coaching cycle. I am going to model noticing and naming”
	Work out of Scope	“...the coach can do all those things. You know, they can run RTI and be the testing coordinator and run all these new programs and implement them and do all the subbing...we don’t have an eighth grade language arts teacher so someone has to do all the planning and grading and prepping and stuff every morning. I feel like it falls on us because there’s really no one there...”
Relationships	Entry Point	“A lot of it [coaching] has just been finding entry points and building relationships..we are starting to get to a point now where some teachers are seeking out coaching because they are struggling....lately its been mini coaching cycles, not any long term residencies.”
	Evaluative	“We’re not supposed to be seen as evaluative but I don’t think there is any way that they will ever think that I’m anything less than that...”

	Administration Support	“I would bank on the fact that it doesn’t matter how strong you are as a coach. If you don’t have an administrator that sets the culture and the tone, your effectiveness will be reduced. Even if you’re strong. Like it’s that critical. Like it is the most important.”
Case Load	Challenge vs. Expectation	“We have two coaches but we have 90 some teachers, and it’s going to be math and English that are prioritized. I’m a generalist, but it’s an expectation to meet with ELA and math teams”

Appendix C
HCS Educator Survey: Instructional Coach

Activities

1. How often do you engage with each of the following activities when coaching, on average?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently
Coaching Cycle				
a. Planning with teachers	1	2	3	4
b. Modeling lessons for teachers	1	2	3	4
c. Co-teaching with teachers	1	2	3	4
d. Observing teachers and providing feedback	1	2	3	4
e. Conducting formal observations	1	2	3	4
f. Helping teachers obtain resources and materials	1	2	3	4
g. Supporting teachers with data analysis	1	2	3	4
h. Providing professional development to teachers	1	2	3	4
Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)				
i. Planning to lead professional learning communities (PLCs)	1	2	3	4
j. Leading professional learning communities (PLCs)	1	2	3	4
Other School Supports				
k. Working with students	1	2	3	4
l. Other administrative duties (e.g., acting as a substitute, student assessment)	1	2	3	4
Walkthroughs				

m. Participating in School Leadership Learning Walks	1	2	3	4
n. Participating in individual walkthroughs	1	2	3	4
o. Participating in District Learning Walks				
Professional Development				
p. Meeting with school/district administrators to discuss instructional improvement	1	2	3	4
q. Meeting with other coaches for your professional learning	1	2	3	4

Time

2. How often do you engage in the following activities, on average?

	Not at All	A couple of times during the school year	A couple of times per month	A couples of times per week	Daily
Coaching Cycle					
a. Planning with teachers	1	2	3	4	5
b. Modeling lessons for teachers	1	2	3	4	5
c. Co-teaching with teachers	1	2	3	4	5
d. Observing teachers and providing feedback	1	2	3	4	5
e. Conducting formal observations	1	2	3	4	5
f. Helping teachers obtain resources and materials	1	2	3	4	5
g. Supporting teachers with data analysis	1	2	3	4	5

h. Providing professional development to teachers	1	2	3	4	5
Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)					
i. Planning to lead professional learning communities (PLCs)	1	2	3	4	5
j. Leading professional learning communities (PLCs)	1	2	3	4	5
Other School Supports					
k. Working with students	1	2	3	4	5
l. Other administrative duties (e.g., acting as a substitute, student assessment)	1	2	3	4	5
Walkthroughs					
m. Participating in School Leadership Learning Walks	1	2	3	4	5
n. Participating in individual walkthroughs	1	2	3	4	5
o. Participating in District Learning Walks					5
Professional Development					
p. Meeting with school/district administrators to discuss instructional improvement	1	2	3	4	5
q. Meeting with other coaches for your professional learning	1	2	3	4	5

Perceptions of Impact

3. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. The coach roles and responsibilities are clearly defined.	1	2	3	4
b. The principal understands the teaching practices the coach shares.	1	2	3	4
c. The principal prioritizes coaching time	1	2	3	4
d. The principal believes that the coach's ongoing professional growth is an important part of effective coaching.	1	2	3	4
e. My coaching efforts are leading to improvement in teaching.	1	2	3	4
f. My time is spent leading to improvement in teaching.	1	2	3	4
g. My coaching efforts are leading to improvements in student achievement.	1	2	3	4
h. My time is spent leading to student achievement.	1	2	3	4

District Support

4. Which of the following do you most frequently approach for support in your development as an instructional coach? Select up to **two options**

1. Other coaches in my school
2. School administrators
3. Academic Leads
4. Content Leads
5. 2-Day Monthly Professional Development
6. Resources and materials I seek out for myself
7. Other (please specify) _____

Background Information

5. In what content areas do you provide instructional coaching? (Please select all that apply.)

- a. Reading or English/Language Arts
- b. Math
- c. Science
- d. Social Studies
- e. Technology
- f. RTI2/Intervention
- g. Other (Please specify) _____

6. In which grade levels do you provide instructional coaching? (Please select all that apply.)

- a. Pre-K
- b. Kindergarten
- c. First
- d. Second
- e. Third
- f. Fourth
- g. Fifth
- h. Sixth
- i. Seventh
- j. Eighth

7. How many teachers have you worked with during the 2022-2023 school year? (Write in number between 0 and 100) _____

8. What learning community do you provide instructional coaching in?

- a. Midtown
- b. Missionary Ridge
- c. Harrison Bay
- d. North River
- e. Rock Point

Optional: Additional Feedback

Do you have any additional feedback about your work as an instructional coaches?

Appendix D
HCS Educator Survey: Teacher

Activities

1. How often do you engage with each of the following activities with an instructional coach on average?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently
a. Co-planning lessons with your coach	1	2	3	4
b. Observing your coach model a lesson	1	2	3	4
c. Teaching with your coach	1	2	3	4
d. Having my coach observe lessons for non-evaluative purposes	1	2	3	4
e. Having my coach observe lessons for my formal evaluation	1	2	3	4
f. Receiving resources and materials from my coach	1	2	3	4
g. Have a conversation about instructional practices with my coach	1	2	3	4
h. Have a conversation about my students' data with my coach	1	2	3	4
i. Participating in a professional development led by my coach	1	2	3	4
j. Participating in professional learning communities (PLCs) led by my coach	1	2	3	4

Time

2. Please indicate the frequency with which you engage in each of the following activities with an instructional coach.

	Not this	Once or	About once	Two or	Once a

	year	twice a semester	a month	three times a month	week or more
a. Co-planning lessons with your coach	1	2	3	4	5
b. Observing your coach model a lesson	1	2	3	4	5
c. Teaching with your coach	1	2	3	4	5
d. Having my coach observe lessons for non-evaluative purposes	1	2	3	4	5
e. Having my coach observe lessons for my formal evaluation	1	2	3	4	5
f. Receiving resources and materials from my coach	1	2	3	4	5
g. Have a conversation about instructional practices with my coach	1	2	3	4	5
h. Have a conversation about my students' data with my coach	1	2	3	4	5
i. Participating in a professional development led by my coach	1	2	3	4	5
j. Participating in professional learning communities (PLCs) led by my coach	1	2	3	4	5

Perceptions of Impact

3. Please indicate the usefulness of your coach interactions in each of the areas below.

	Not useful	Somewhat useful	Useful	Very Useful
a. Co-planning lessons with your coach	1	2	3	4
b. Observing your coach model a lesson	1	2	3	4

c. Teaching with your coach	1	2	3	4
d. Having my coach observe lessons for non-evaluative purposes	1	2	3	4
e. Having my coach observe lessons for my formal evaluation	1	2	3	4
f. Receiving resources and materials from my coach	1	2	3	4
g. Have a conversation about instructional practices with my coach	1	2	3	4
h. Have a conversation about my students' data with my coach	1	2	3	4
i. Participating in a professional development led by my coach	1	2	3	4
j. Participating in professional learning communities (PLCs) led by my coach	1	2	3	4

District Support

4. Which of the following do you most frequently approach for support in your development as a teacher? Select up to **two options**

- a. Other teachers in my school
- b. Instructional coaches
- c. School administrators
- d. Academic Leads
- e. District PD
- f. School-Based PD
- g. Content Leads
- h. Resources and materials I seek out for myself
- i. Other (please specify) _____

Background Information

5. In what content areas do you teach? (Please select all that apply.)

- a. Reading or English/Language Arts
- b. Math
- c. Science
- d. Social Studies
- e. Technology
- f. RTI2/Intervention
- g. Other (Please specify) _____

6. In which grade levels do you teach? (Please select all that apply.)

- a. Pre-K
- b. Kindergarten
- c. First
- d. Second
- e. Third
- f. Fourth
- g. Fifth
- h. Sixth
- i. Seventh
- j. Eighth

8. What learning community do you teach in?

- a. Midtown
- b. Missionary Ridge
- c. Harrison Bay
- d. North River
- e. Rock Point

Optional: Additional Feedback

Do you have any additional feedback about your work with instructional coaches?

Appendix E
HCS Educator Survey: Principal

Activities

1. How often does your instructional coach engage with each of the following activities when coaching, on average?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently
Coaching Cycle				
a. Planning with teachers	1	2	3	4
b. Modeling lessons for teachers	1	2	3	4
c. Co-teaching with teachers	1	2	3	4
d. Observing teachers and providing feedback	1	2	3	4
e. Conducting formal observations	1	2	3	4
f. Helping teachers obtain resources and materials	1	2	3	4
g. Supporting teachers with data analysis	1	2	3	4
h. Providing professional development to teachers	1	2	3	4
Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)				
i. Planning to lead professional learning communities (PLCs)	1	2	3	4
j. Leading professional learning communities (PLCs)	1	2	3	4
Other School Supports				
k. Working with students	1	2	3	4
l. Other administrative duties (e.g., acting as a substitute, student assessment)	1	2	3	4

Walkthroughs				
m. Participating in School Leadership Learning Walks	1	2	3	4
n. Participating in individual walkthroughs	1	2	3	4
o. Participating in District Learning Walks				
Professional Development				
p. Meeting with school/district administrators to discuss instructional improvement	1	2	3	4
q. Meeting with other coaches for your professional learning	1	2	3	4

Time

2. How often does your instructional coach engage in the following activities, on average?

	Not at All	A couple of times during the school year	A couple of times per month	A couples of times per week	Daily
Coaching Cycle					
a. Planning with teachers	1	2	3	4	5
b. Modeling lessons for teachers	1	2	3	4	5
c. Co-teaching with teachers	1	2	3	4	5
d. Observing teachers and providing feedback	1	2	3	4	5
e. Conducting formal observations	1	2	3	4	5
f. Helping teachers obtain resources and materials	1	2	3	4	5
g. Supporting teachers with	1	2	3	4	5

data analysis					
h. Providing professional development to teachers	1	2	3	4	5
Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)					
i. Planning to lead professional learning communities (PLCs)	1	2	3	4	5
j. Leading professional learning communities (PLCs)	1	2	3	4	5
Other School Supports					
k. Working with students	1	2	3	4	5
l. Other administrative duties (e.g., acting as a substitute, student assessment)	1	2	3	4	5
Walkthroughs					
m. Participating in School Leadership Learning Walks	1	2	3	4	5
n. Participating in individual walkthroughs	1	2	3	4	5
o. Participating in District Learning Walks					5
Professional Development					
p. Meeting with school/district administrators to discuss instructional improvement	1	2	3	4	5
q. Meeting with other coaches for your professional learning	1	2	3	4	5

Perceptions of Impact

3. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. The coach roles and responsibilities are clearly defined.	1	2	3	4
b. The principal understands the teaching practices the coach shares.	1	2	3	4
c. The principal prioritizes coaching time	1	2	3	4
d. The principal believes that the coach's ongoing professional growth is an important part of effective coaching.	1	2	3	4
e. My coaching efforts are leading to improvement in teaching.	1	2	3	4
f. My time is spent leading to improvement in teaching.	1	2	3	4
g. My coaching efforts are leading to improvements in student achievement.	1	2	3	4
h. My time is spent leading to student achievement.	1	2	3	4

Background Information

5. In what content areas does your instructional coach provide? (Please select all that apply.)

- a. Reading or English/Language Arts
- b. Math
- c. Science
- d. Social Studies
- e. Technology
- f. RTI2/Intervention
- g. Other (Please specify) _____

6. In which grade levels does your instructional coach provide support for? (Please select all that apply.)

- a. Pre-K
- b. Kindergarten
- c. First
- d. Second
- e. Third
- f. Fourth

- g. Fifth
- h. Sixth
- i. Seventh
- j. Eighth

7. How many teachers does your instructional coach support? _____

8. What learning community are you located in?

- a. Midtown
- b. Missionary Ridge
- c. Harrison Bay
- d. North River
- e. Rock Point

Optional: Additional Feedback

Do you have any additional feedback about the work of your instructional coach?