Instructional Coaching Cycles in EL Schools

Purpose of Instructional Coaching
Instructional coaching in EL schools increases the achievement and engagement of every student by bringing out the best performance of every teacher. Coaches use both student-centered and teacher-centered methods to help teachers improve the decisions they make about their instruction.

Coaching Cycles
Instructional coaching in EL schools is focused on evidence of student achievement and engagement connected to the instructional choices of the teacher. Coaching involves an ongoing cycle of goal-setting, learning, observation and data collection, and reflection. However, the beginning point in this cycle is not the same for every teacher. Some coaching relationships may enter the cycle at the learning stage, while others might enter through data collection or reflection.

- **Goal Setting:** All instructional coaching involves setting goals. In fact, the very definition of coaching is built on the presence of clear, focused goals related to teacher practice and student achievement. While not necessarily the first step in every coaching relationship, formal coaching cycles should be guided by goals articulated by the teacher and informed by larger school improvement priorities.

- **Learning:** Instructional coaching must be viewed, first and foremost, as a form of learning. The power of coaching comes through the intentional focus on clearly identified goals specific to each teacher and connected to the school's larger professional development/EL work plan goals. Teachers learn through school-based professional development, institutes, and practices such as looking at student work, reading and discussing educational texts, observing best practices (e.g. model teaching, peer observation, use of video), co-teaching, and collaborative planning of curriculum, instruction and assessment.

- **Observation and Data Collection:** Instructional coaching always involves the collection of data coupled with focused, descriptive, non-evaluative feedback. These data are specific to the teacher’s goal for the coaching cycle and incorporates the coach’s observations and analytic feedback about instructional practices and student learning and engagement. The aim is to use data as a mirror or lens through which the teacher can see his/her practices more clearly. The goal is not to evaluate or judge a teacher’s overall level of competence, but rather to focus attention on critical aspects of achievement, engagement and instruction in alignment with each teacher’s goals.
**Reflection:** Through strategic questioning and discussing evidence of student learning, coaches support teachers in developing the habit and practice of reflection. In the reflection phase of the coaching cycle, teachers and coaches make connections, question assumptions and habits, analyze evidence of student progress, and identify answers to challenges. It is important that the coach help the teacher stay focused on *solutions* rather than excuses or problems. Over time, the goal of reflection is to support the discovery of insights that unlock new ways of thinking and acting.

Instructional coaching methods and practices vary across EL schools and no two approaches are exactly the same. However, impact and sustainability increase when each stage of the coaching cycle is present and clearly connected to the other components.