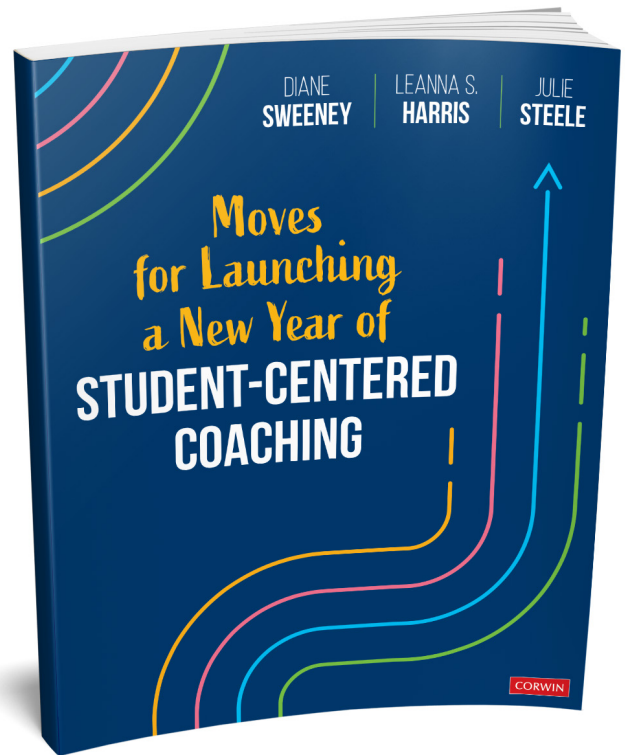


Start the Year Strong with Student-Centered Coaching!

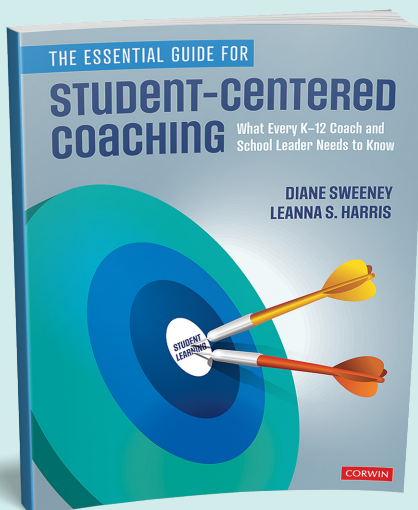
Engaging teachers in coaching is an ongoing process that requires planning and intentionality. Whether you are new to a school or have been there a while, the beginning of the year brings forth the opportunity to envision what your work will look like and how you will deepen the impact it makes on teacher and student learning.

Designed to ensure a successful start to the school year, this guidebook provides strategies for coaches, principals, and district leaders to successfully launch a new year of Student-Centered Coaching. Organized into fifteen moves, this resource provides:

- Concrete ideas for how coaches can connect with new and returning teachers
- Strategies for supporting teachers to increase student engagement and build classroom community
- Steps for building strong principal and coach partnerships that will last throughout the year
- Tools and artifacts that can be used to message and market coaching
- Ideas for scheduling coaching that is flexible and meets teachers' needs
- Videos and other resources that dig deeper into each of the fifteen coaching moves that are included

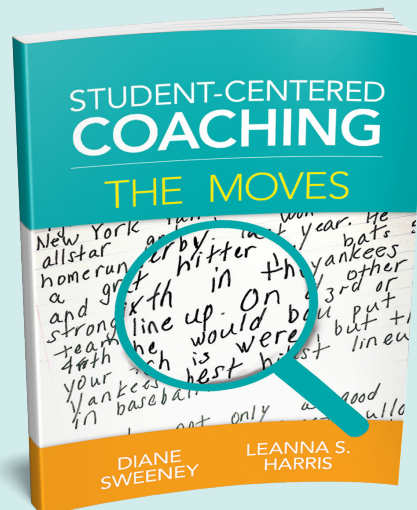


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Introduction

Engaging teachers in coaching is an ongoing process that requires planning and intentionality. Whether you are new to a school or have been there a while, the beginning of the year brings forth the opportunity to envision what our work will look like and the impact it will have on teacher and student learning.

There's nothing like the first few weeks of school; it's a time to reconnect, reimagine, and dream. But just like anything else, starting a new year requires planning and patience. An apt metaphor is the spring gardening season—we just can't wait to plant all those beautiful flowers we picked up at the nursery, but a voice in our head reminds us that before planting, we need to first clean out the beds, till the soil, and add mulch. While this preparation isn't the glamorous part of the job, we know that if we put beautiful plants into soil that isn't ready, they will fail to thrive. The same is true for our coaching: the first few weeks of school are when we do all the work that sets us up for success in the months that will follow.

Starting the year off right always includes establishing a strong principal and coach partnership. We've all recently experienced incredible disruption, and coming together around this work will be an important step forward. That said, this guidebook isn't just about the past few years, but should be viewed as a timeless resource that can be used year after year. We will always need to attend to the important work of practices such as partnering with the principal to get crystal-clear expectations about the coaching role, understanding how to create a culture for coaching, and getting teachers excited to engage. If you are like us, you are ready to plan an amazing new year. Let's craft that plan together.

How to Use This Guidebook

We've designed this guidebook with the goal of providing a clear path for coaches, principals, and district leaders to follow when launching a new year of Student-Centered Coaching. This resource is geared toward returning coaches, those who are new to a school, and those who are new to the role. We've included fifteen coaching moves that will take you through the first four to six weeks of the school year. Think flexibly as you explore these moves. They are meant to be a progression rather than a lockstep list of required actions that every coach must take in the same way. For example, you may already have strong relationships within your

school community; if this is the case, you might want to focus on other sections within the guidebook. If you are new to coaching, you may feel the need to follow every move as a road map to implementation. As with everything, where you put your attention will depend on where you are in your journey as a coach.

Throughout the text, we have included strategies, tools, and artifacts to support your work, as well as moments to pause and reflect on your own and with the principal. We truly hope you will mark up these pages with new thinking and ideas to try. We also recommend pairing this guidebook with our other resources, *The Essential Guide for Student-Centered Coaching* (Sweeney & Harris, 2020), *Student-Centered Coaching: The Moves* (Sweeney & Harris, 2016), *Leading Student-Centered Coaching* (Sweeney & Mausbach, 2018), and *Student-Centered Coaching From a Distance* (Sweeney & Harris, 2021). These will take you deeper into the philosophy and practices of Student-Centered Coaching, and they will support your work far beyond the start of the year.

We often find that with coaching, you have to go slow to go fast. Let's slow down and invest carefully in those first few weeks of school so that beautiful things can grow throughout the year.



Note From the Publisher: The authors have provided video and web content throughout the book that is available to you through QR (quick response) codes. To read a QR code, you must have a smartphone or tablet with a camera. We recommend that you download a QR code reader app that is made specifically for your phone or tablet brand.

Section I

Build Relationships

Move 1

Be Visible

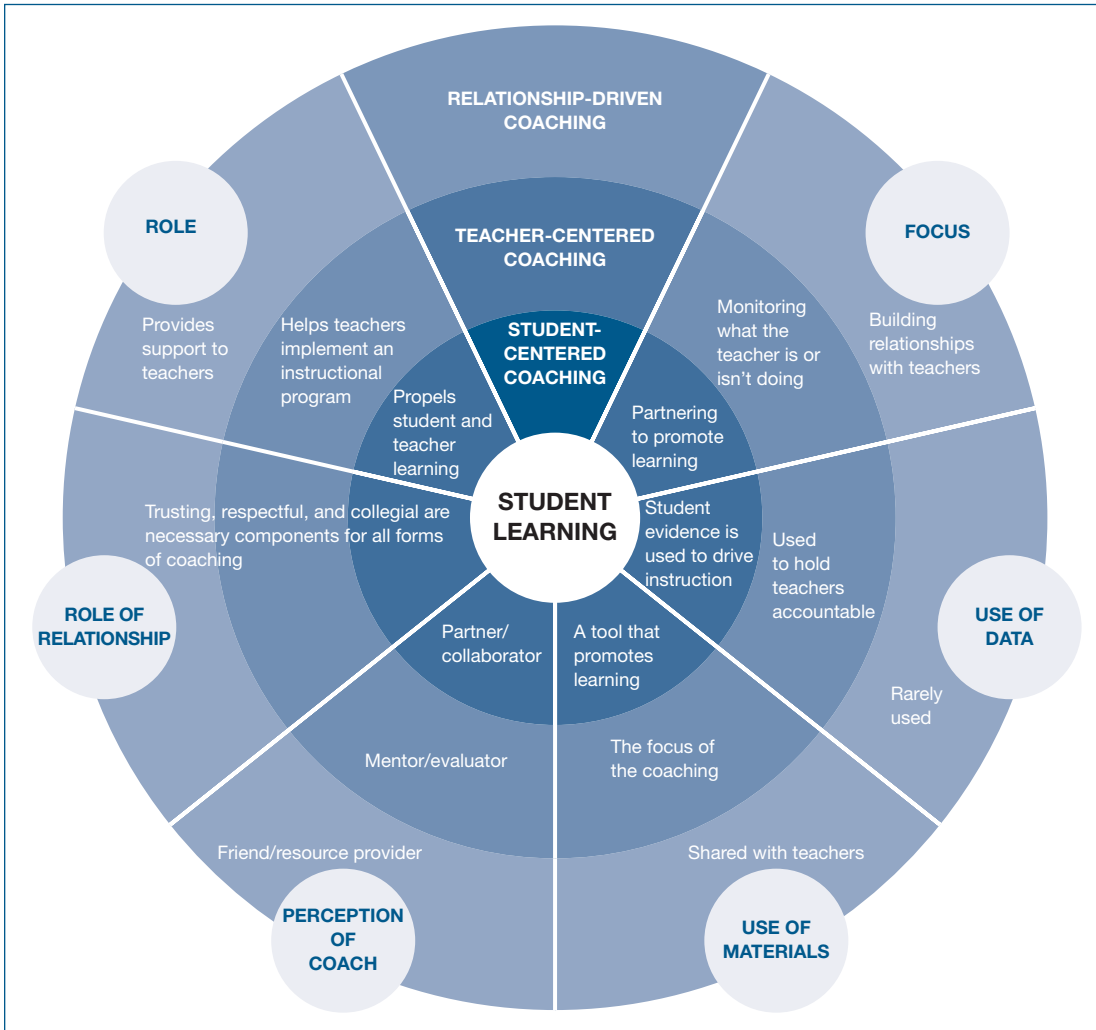
Relationships are the foundation for all coaching. Whether you are new to a school, new to the role, or have been in the position for a while, now is the time to be known and visible throughout the school community. This might include helping teachers set up their classrooms, organizing materials, greeting students and families, and supporting the establishment of the day-to-day operation of the school.

In *The Essential Guide for Student-Centered Coaching* (Sweeney & Harris, 2020), we introduced the following figure to compare Student-Centered Coaching with other approaches to instructional coaching. You'll notice that we use the language of *relationship-driven*, *teacher-centered*, and *Student-Centered Coaching* to describe what we've seen in schools as we've supported coaching over the past decades. This figure describes the role, focus, use of data, and other common coaching behaviors in each type of coaching. We like to think of it as a dartboard. When playing darts, we aim for the bullseye at the center; in this case, the center is student learning. The closer our darts are to the bullseye, the bigger the impact that will be made on teacher and student learning. While it would be nice if we could hit the center every time, we may find ourselves in the outer rings at the start of the school year. This can feel scary because we know that we don't want to get trapped there forever. To avoid this, it's helpful to think of this move as an investment that we make early on with the knowledge that a shift to coaching cycles will soon come.

It's also important to point out that conversations with the principal are an essential step in creating norms and expectations around the

coach’s duties. We often hear from principals and coaches that anchoring your focus in the following graphic is a concrete way to clarify that while right now a coach may be serving as a resource provider, deeper coaching is right around the corner.

Student-Centered, Teacher-Centered, and Relationship-Driven Coaching



Source: Sweeney and Harris (2020).

Reflect



What does *being visible* mean to you?

What This Move Looks Like

The following strategies are about building relationships and cultivating your identity as a coach. Pretty soon, you won't need to actively work toward being visible because you will have established strong partnerships with teachers.

1. Create a Welcome Letter or Video

Whether you've already been a coach in your school or are just getting started, a welcome letter or video is a great way to introduce yourself, share your beliefs, and build excitement around coaching. Because every year introduces new members of the school community, it's important that this strategy isn't overlooked just because you may have been in the school for a while. Possible audiences for welcome videos include teachers, students, and even families who might be interested in the coaching program. In the Tools and Artifacts section, we share a few examples of welcome letters.

2. Help Teachers Set Up Classrooms and During Transition Times

One of the best times to be out and about in a school is during transition times. Rolling up your sleeves and helping with these kinds of duties sends the message that you are a team player. This includes

welcoming students each morning, being present during passing periods, and supervising drop-off and pick-up. Coaches can also help teachers get their learning spaces ready for students. All you need is an informal sign-up sheet, like the example we've provided in the Tools and Artifacts section. Teachers will appreciate all the help they can get as they race to prepare for the arrival of their students.

3. Help With Beginning-of-the-Year Assessments

While we caution against becoming full-time testing coordinators, this doesn't mean we can't help out with assessments at the beginning of the year. When it comes to supporting assessments, we recommend that coaches cover classrooms rather than directly administering the assessments themselves. This reinforces the importance of teachers getting to know their students as learners and protects the coach from becoming an interventionist. Coaches can also support new teachers in understanding how district assessments are administered, where to find necessary resources, and how to input testing data.

4. Be a Learner

One of the most important ways that we can build relationships is by maintaining a learning stance. Being curious and open sends the message that we aren't there to "fix" teachers or tell them what to do. Seek opportunities to spend time in the classroom of an unfamiliar subject, grade level, and so on; doing so reinforces this learning belief because it means a coach recognizes that teachers have something to teach them. Spending time in classrooms as a learner is a great way to make connections with more veteran teachers as well as with those in grade levels you may not have worked with in the past.

How to Partner With the Principal on This Move

It's vital that we work with the principal to create boundaries around these early-in-the-year tasks or we run the risk that they will become our core work. We recommend the coach and principal talk through the following questions to ensure that they are set up to shift to coaching cycles as the school year gets up and running.

- ▶ What are some early-in-the-year tasks that the coach can help teachers with?
- ▶ What is the start date for kicking off coaching cycles?
- ▶ How will we monitor the tasks the coach is involved in?



Tools and Artifacts



VIDEO

Student-Centered
Coaching in the First
Few Weeks of School



SAMPLE

Sign-Up Sheet for
Informal Support



SAMPLE

Welcome Letters

To read a QR code, you must have a smartphone or tablet with a camera. We recommend that you download a QR code reader app that is made specifically for your phone or tablet brand.

Section II

Make Intentional Decisions With the Principal



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

It's the principal's role to go beyond simply supporting a coaching effort to actually leading it. Strong leaders build partnerships with the coach, understand how to separate coaching from evaluation, and position the coach to be a valued resource within the school community. Yet many leaders receive very little direction regarding how to best deploy a coach.

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

Reflect



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

What This Move Looks Like

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

1. Set Norms for Working Together

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

2. Plan for When and How You'll Meet

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

3. Define Both of Your Roles

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

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

Behaviors of School Leader and Coach in Providing Pressure and Support

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

Source: Sweeney and Mausbach (2018).

4. Get Clear on Confidentiality

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

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

How to Partner With the Principal on This Move

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

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

Moving Forward

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



Tools and Artifacts



TOOL

Principal and
Coach Agreement



SAMPLE

Agenda for Principal
and Coach Meetings



TOOL

Norms for Sharing
Our Coaching Work