

Your Significant Other is Tired of Hearing You Vent: Why All School Leaders Need a Leadership Coach

Updated: Mar 6

Guest Author

Mark Comanducci

[The 305 Education Group](#)

It's an all too familiar scene; you get home from work, sit down to eat dinner, and the flood gates open. Your significant other (spouse, partner, friend, or the family pet) gets bombarded with all the challenges, headaches, and frustrations that come with you being a school leader. One day the venting is about a teacher who is unwilling (or maybe unable) to meet instructional expectations. Another day it is about students who are making poor choices in the cafeteria. The next day it is about a classroom without air conditioning and having to move that classroom outside for the afternoon.

No matter the issue, your significant other lends a caring ear, listens to you vent, then passes you the roasted potatoes and another slice of meatloaf and you both move on. But what did this conversation really accomplish and, more importantly, how will it make tomorrow better?



Leadership Coaching: The Why

Talking (or venting) about work with your significant other is usually healthy. However, this cycle is symptomatic of school leaders who are not properly supported, specifically via a leadership coach. It is well documented that:

The two most impactful levers in increasing student learning are teachers and school leaders (principal, leadership team, etc.); (1, 2)

- School leaders are the most important lever in improving outcomes related to student, family, and staff satisfaction and retention;
- Emphasizing coaching and mentoring of principals refocuses school communities on improving student achievement, retains more teachers, and strengthens school climate. (3)

Despite the vital importance of supporting and developing school leaders, most school-level coaching, development, and support is only focused on teachers. I am not advocating to reduce coaching and development provided to teachers. I would argue that the impact of those teacher-facing supports (as well as most every other school-level initiative) is reduced when school leaders are struggling to lead through challenges, action plan, or adapt to unexpected situations. As such, it is imperative that all school leaders have a leadership coach, which is a person to thought partner with and who provides support, guidance, and professional development tailored to school leaders' unique needs.

Leadership Coaching: The How

Most industries provide coaching or mentoring to employees to increase sales, reduce customer complaints, or improve efficiency. Unfortunately, this practice is all too uncommon in education. As such, it is essential that school leaders are provided a coach, ideally externally or by a "third-party" partner to help them increase their impact and improve outcomes. An external/"third-party" leadership coach will:

- Create a safe space, where leaders can be open and vulnerable about the challenges they are facing, which is not often possible with a boss, evaluator, or employer;
- Provide guidance from a shared experience, as they have walked in a school leader's shoes;
- Work in parallel with the resources, expectations, or goals set forth by the school's Board of Directors, mission, or existing beliefs and commitments and not create competing priorities.

There is not a certain profile of school leader who should be afforded a leadership coach. I have provided leadership coaching to:

- New and veteran school leaders;
- School leaders at high-performing and struggling school;
- Individual school leaders and entire leadership teams.

Leadership Coaching: The Impact

Investing in school leaders produces student academic gains and dramatic academic growth. (4) I can attest that all school leaders deserve this type of support and investment in themselves. The leadership coaching I have provided:

- Increased student proficiency rates as measured by the Department of Education;
- Increased the amount of annual student learning as compared to the local school district, charter schools within the district, and all public schools state-wide, as measured by the Department of Education.

Educator satisfaction and retention increase when coaching is provided. (5) At schools where I have provided leadership coaching:

- The retention rate of school leaders was 91%;
- Teacher retention increased from 59% to 83%;
- The percentage of teachers who rated their experience at their schools as "Satisfied or Better" increased from 50% to 89%.

Family/student satisfaction increases when school leaders are empowered to affect change and better meet the needs of their stakeholders. At a cohort of schools where I provided leadership coaching:

- Families/students who rated their overall experience as "Satisfied or Better" increased from 68% to 97%;
- Families/students who stated their school was a safe learning environment increased from 61% to 95% over the course of the coaching relationship.

Advocate For School Leaders

School leaders (and their district and Boards of Directors) are often laser focused on the needs of their teachers. While those needs cannot be overstated, the impact of those supports, resources, and the overall development of teachers are diminished if school leaders are unable to effectively lead their schools. It is imperative that schools, districts, and Boards of Directors provide external/"third-party" leadership coaching to their leaders (and for school leaders to advocate for this support on their own behalf).

This modest financial investment, much less than it costs to bring a new principal on board (6), will increase school leaders' joy and retention, as well as increase student learning, staff satisfaction and retention, and family/student satisfaction. Not to mention, it will foster happier dinnertime conversations for school leaders and their significant others, where they can truly enjoy their roasted potatoes and meatloaf.

Mark Comanducci is the Founder and CEO of [The 305 Education Group](#), a school-support organization that coaches school leaders and leadership teams. For information about receiving leadership coaching, support, and development please email Mark at mark@305edgroup.com

Footnotes

1. Louis, Karen S., Leithwood, Kenneth, Wahlstrom, Kayla L., Anderson, Stephen E., *Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning*, 2010.
2. Opper, Isaac M., *Teachers Matter: Understanding Teacher's Impact on Student Achievement Data*, 2019.
3. Aldrich, M. W., *How Do You Improve Schools? Start by Coaching Principals, Says New Study*, 2018.
4. Superville, Denisa., *6 Districts Invested in Principals and Saw Dramatic Gains. Dozens More Will Try to Do the Same*, 2020.

5. De La Rosa, S., *Principals Value Coaching, But the Model Still Isn't Widespread*, 2019.
 6. School Leaders Network, *CHURN: The High Cost of Principal Turnover*, 2014
-
-