

Moves for Launching a New Year of Student-Centered Coaching

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About the Authors



Diane Sweeney is the author of *The Essential Guide for Student-Centered Coaching* (2020), *Leading Student-Centered Coaching* (2018), *Student-Centered Coaching: The Moves* (2017), and *Student-Centered Coaching From a Distance* (2021), published by Corwin. Each of these books is grounded in the simple but powerful premise that coaching can be designed to more directly impact student learning. Diane spends her time speaking and consulting for schools and educational organizations across the

country and abroad. She also designed and is an instructor for a certification program in Student-Centered Coaching from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. When she isn't working in schools, she loves to spend time outside with her family in Denver, Colorado.



Leanna S. Harris is the author of *The Essential Guide for Student-Centered Coaching* (2020), *Student-Centered Coaching: The Moves* (2017), and *Student-Centered Coaching From a Distance* (2021), published by Corwin. She has worked as a teacher and coach and is now a senior consultant with Diane Sweeney Consulting, where she helps schools and districts implement Student-Centered Coaching. Her work is based on the belief that professional development for teachers is most effective when it is grounded in outcomes for student achievement—

for every child, every day. Leanna is a passionate skier and cyclist and lives in Denver, Colorado, with her husband and three kids.



Julie Steele has been in public education since 1998 as an elementary teacher, instruction specialist, and consultant. In 2019, she chose to pursue a full-time career in consulting to have a broader impact on students and teachers around the country. Her consulting projects include in-person and online support related to the implementation of Student-Centered Coaching. In addition, Julie has a passion for continuous learning that has led her to present at numerous educational conferences, provide professional learning for school districts around best practices and high-impact

instruction, and author several blogs on equity. Julie resides with her husband and kids in the Kansas City, Missouri, area and she spends as much time as she can in her second home in Buena Vista, Colorado.

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.

Resources may also be accessed at
www.dianesweeney.com/launching-tools

Section I

Build Relationships



Be Visible

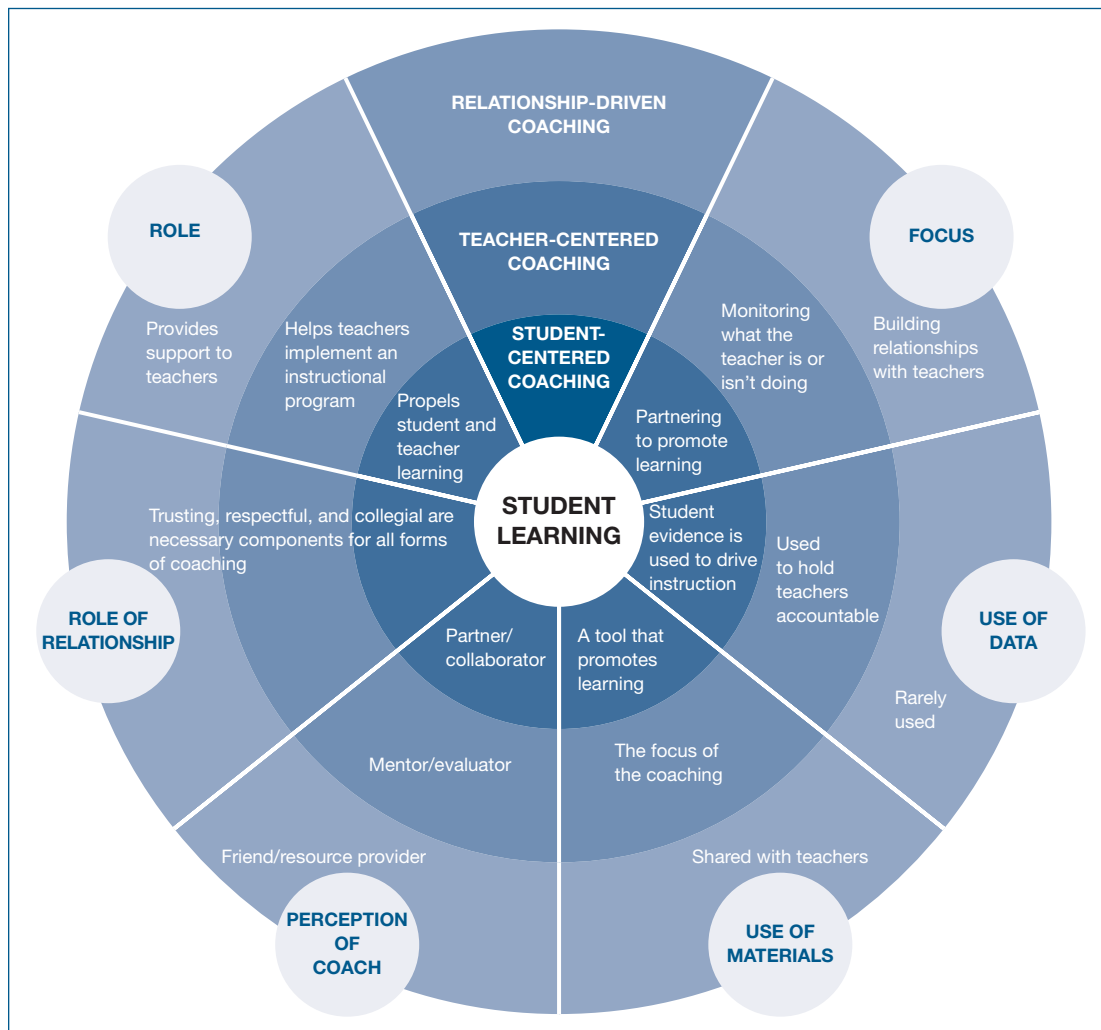
Relationships are the foundation for all coaching. Whether you are new to a school, new to the role, or have been in the position for a while, now is the time to be known and visible throughout the school community. This might include helping teachers set up their classrooms, organizing materials, greeting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

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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?

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Moving Forward

As you plan to be visible in the first few weeks of school, think broadly about the school community. Get to know, or continue to build relationships with, the principal, teachers, specialized teachers (art, music, and PE), and even parents. The goal is for everyone to not only know you but also to understand the role of the coach. This investment will pay off as the school year shifts into high gear.

Next Steps



How will you foster relationships by being visible in the first few weeks of school?



Tools and Artifacts



VIDEO

Student-Centered
Coaching in the First
Few Weeks of School



SAMPLE

Sign-Up Sheet for
Informal Support



SAMPLE

Welcome Letters

www.dianesweeney.com/launching-tools

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.