



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

THOMAS D. WATKINS, JR.
SUPERINTENDENT OF
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

MEMORANDUM

TO: State Board of Education

FROM: Thomas D. Watkins, Jr. 

DATE: May 24, 2004

SUBJECT: Presentation on the ABCS Coaches' Institute

The Alliance for Building Capacity in Schools (ABCS) is a collaborative effort of a number of the state's leading educational associations and organizations. It was created to expand Michigan's capacity to assist schools identified as high priority by the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. To accomplish this goal, ABCS competed for and received a grant from the State Board through the Michigan Department of Education's (MDE) Title II Competitive Grant Program to create the Academic Coaches Institute, one of four strategic initiatives set by the MDE to assist high priority schools.

ABCS developed a single-model curriculum for effective coaching. This curriculum acknowledges the fact that successful school improvement does not come from a pre-packaged, one-size-fits-all intervention. Rather, effective coaching involves deep, sustained work on-site with practitioners to understand the particular needs, culture, capacity, and constraints of individual schools. To be effective, coaches must work with the principal, teachers and support personnel to analyze student demographic and achievement data, identify and prioritize school needs and goals, and establish a sustainable plan of improvement. That plan must include the development of new approaches to teaching, learning and leadership that will increase student achievement for all students in the school.

An initial cadre of 18 candidates was chosen to form a Core Faculty to help co-create the training curriculum. Position announcements were placed in every major newspaper in the state, as well as on professional association web sites and in association newsletters. Approximately 160 candidates submitted resumes and responses to three essay questions. These materials were screened and a pool of 120 candidates was selected for interviews. Of these, 83 were offered candidacies and 78 accepted offers. In all, over 90 ABCS coaches will be available to assist high priority schools. Applicants were selected to reflect both ethnic and geographic diversity; candidates represent communities as diverse as Calumet and Detroit, Saginaw and Battle Creek.

Selected members of the Coaches' Institute will present to the State Board of Education to provide an overview of the process and activities involved in becoming a school reform coach in this very innovative approach to building statewide capacity for technical assistance.

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608 WEST ALLEGAN STREET • P.O. BOX 30008 • LANSING, MICHIGAN 48909
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Alliance for Building Capacity in Schools

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Improving Teacher Quality State Activities Competitive Grant Program**

What is the ABCS Coaches Institute?

The Alliance for Building Capacity in Schools (ABCS) is a collaborative effort of a number of the state's leading educational associations and organizations. It was created in response to a call from the Governor and the State Board of Education to expand Michigan's capacity to assist schools identified as high priority by the federal No Child Left Behind Act and Michigan's Education YES! accreditation process.

To accomplish this goal of increased capacity, ABCS competed for and received a grant from the State Board through the Michigan Department of Education's Title II Competitive Grant Program to create the Academic Coaches Institute, one of four strategic initiatives set by Governor Granholm to assist high priority schools.

The terms of the grant required ABCS to create an Institute that could meet four main objectives:

1. **Build state-wide capacity for helping high priority schools meet the performance criteria set by No Child Left Behind.**
2. **Develop and implement a sustainable training curriculum for school improvement that is research-based, reflective of practice, experiential and focused on student achievement.**
3. **Develop and maintain an updated registry of trained academic coaches for schools to access.**
4. **Conduct ongoing evaluation of the model's effectiveness, revise the curriculum accordingly, and disseminate lessons learned from the project to educators and stakeholders across the state.**

As required by the grant, the ABCS Coaches Institute has been grounded in the principles of process consultation as developed by organizational development expert Edgar Schein. Schein's principles of process consultation are reflected in the training curriculum and the standards that have been developed to guide the coaches' assessment process.

Also required by the grant, ABCS developed a single-model curriculum for effective coaching. This curriculum acknowledges the fact that successful school improvement does not come from a pre-packaged, one-size-fits-all intervention. Rather, effective coaching involves deep, sustained work on-site with practitioners to understand the particular needs, culture, capacity, and constraints of individual schools. To be effective, coaches must work with the principal, teachers and support personnel to analyze student demographic and achievement data, identify and prioritize school needs and goals, and establish a sustainable plan of improvement. That plan must include the development of new approaches to teaching, learning and leadership that will increase student achievement for all students in the school.

ABCS also established a set of standards to inform both the training and the practice of these academic coaches. These standards are research-based and reflect best practice:

**Kalamazoo Public Schools • Michigan Association of School Administrators • Michigan Association of School Boards •
Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals • Michigan Business Leaders for Education Excellence •
Michigan Education Association • Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association •
Michigan Federation of Teachers and School Related Personnel • Middle Cities Education Association •
Michigan Congress of Parents, Teachers, and Students • Michigan State University • SPEC Associates • University of Michigan**

- I. An ABCS coach is an experienced practitioner who uses research-based practices, models and strategies to facilitate organizational and academic improvement in priority school communities.
- II. An ABCS coach is an experienced practitioner who promotes effective instructional programs that build on national, state and local standards and measures the effectiveness of that curricula through learner performance against those standards.
- III. An ABCS coach is an experienced practitioner with a focus on success for all in a learning community through a supportive school culture, a dynamic instructional program, and professional and staff growth.
- IV. An ABCS coach is an experienced practitioner who promotes and models the use and analysis of relevant data in school improvement and decision-making.
- V. An ABCS coach is an experienced practitioner who promotes effective leadership in priority schools by providing ready access to research on proven leadership models and supportive strategies for problem-solving.
- VI. The ABCS coach is an experienced practitioner who assists Learning Communities to achieve school improvement goals by linking schools and classrooms with community resources and agencies.

Over the course of three months, coaching candidates participated in over 100 hours of intensive, sustained, interactive professional development in the most important issues facing priority schools: instructional coherence, school climate, parental involvement, using data to inform practice, new grade level content expectations in mathematics and literacy and school leadership.

Who has been Involved in the Institute?

Content experts: The content experts included Michigan State University and University of Michigan faculty, Alliance members, MDE consultants, Partner Educators, a selected team of accomplished K-12 teachers, principals and superintendents, and a process consultation specialist.

Coaching Candidates: The ABCS Academic Coaches are a diverse group of highly qualified educators selected for their experience, perspectives on and success in previous school improvement efforts.

Staff: Members of the Michigan State University Office for K-12 Outreach Programs coordinated the curriculum and standards development and candidate selection processes and dealt with the considerable logistical considerations involved in providing intensive, extended training in three regional sites – Detroit, Flint and Kalamazoo. The MSU Office of Outreach and Engagement has provided support and training for the use of special on-line curriculum and communication resources, including a secure, on-line virtual learning community called ANGEL that provides coaches with access to e-mail, threaded discussions, bulletin boards and document dissemination.

Assessment teams: Personnel from the MDE Office for School Improvement and the MDE Partner Educators provided evaluation team members for the candidate assessment process.

What is an Academic Coach?

An academic coach sees the school from a systems perspective, understands and uses organizational strategy to help build a coherent plan for school improvement, builds trusting relationships with school staff, understands the use of data as a tool to drive improvement, and recognizes the importance of working with multiple players in a complex system.

How were the Coaches Selected for Training?

An initial cadre of 18 candidates was chosen to form a Core Faculty to help co-create the training curriculum. Position announcements were placed in every major newspaper in the state, as well as on professional association web sites and in association newsletters. Approximately 160 candidates submitted resumes and responses to three essay questions. These materials were screened and a pool of 120 candidates was selected for interviews. Of these, 83 were offered candidacies and 78 accepted offers. In all, over 90 ABCS coaches will be available to assist high priority schools.

Applicants were selected to reflect both ethnic and geographic diversity; candidates represent communities as diverse as Calumet and Detroit, Saginaw and Battle Creek.

How were the Candidates Evaluated?

Upon successful completion of all 12 training sessions, candidates prepared themselves for assessment by making and reviewing a videotape of themselves in a role play exercise practicing the skills and dispositions covered in the training. Candidates were required to complete an extensive reflection log in which they rated their own proficiency in the principles of process consultation and on the coaching standards, providing evidence for their ratings. Finally, candidates faced three-person assessment panels for another role play and defense of their journal ratings. Panels were composed of non-Institute professional educators with experience with and in high priority schools, including MDE Office of School Improvement consultants and Partnership for Success Partner Educators.

How will Priority Schools Find an ABCS Academic Coach?

The grant requires ABCS to post and maintain a registry of ABCS coaches on its web site. Currently under construction, the registry will allow schools and districts to search a database for coaches by geographic location and area of expertise.

How will the Success of the Institute be Gauged?

An outside evaluator, SPEC Associates, Inc., of Detroit will complete a thorough evaluation of the project and the impact of the training on the candidates. In addition, MSU professors Gary Sykes and Susan Printy and graduate students will study the impact of the coaching model on priority schools.

