

Student Success Through Academic Coaching



As educators, it is our responsibility to provide an educational environment that supports students' needs. Do you have students who might benefit from more one-on-one support from a caring adult? Academic coaching is one solution.

Creating an academic coaching program in your school is easy to accomplish. Staff members can serve as students' academic coaches, meeting with them weekly to review grades, set goals, address areas for growth, and celebrate success. Students can experience positive results in terms of academics, behavior, and social skills.

Selecting Participants

When I was principal at Bethel Elementary School, we started an academic coaching program. To start, our school identified students who could benefit from having a staff member serve as an academic coach. Students were selected based on factors such as student achievement scores, atten-

dance, homework completion, and parental involvement. Our goal was to select students who were not being served by special education or other intervention programs, but who could benefit from one-on-one interaction with a staff member beyond the classroom. Typically, these were students who were, for whatever reason, not meeting their potential. We chose students at the end of the first-quarter grading period, and they met with their academic coaches for the remainder of the year.

Our academic coaches included our assistant principal, instructional coach, guidance counselors, and me. (This configuration may vary, depending on the resources at your

school.) Each staff member was assigned a small group of students to coach for the entire school year. Coaches sent home notes to parents to explain the purpose of the program and to provide an opportunity for two-way communication between the home and school. Parents were given the contact information for their child's academic coach.

Implementation

The academic coaches obtained information from the classroom teachers (including standardized test scores and report card grades) regarding the students' strengths and areas for growth. Each week, during a time that was convenient for the child's teacher, coaches met with the students individually and/or in a small group.

During the first few meetings of the school year, the coaches worked to build positive relationships with the students. Coaches assisted students with setting individual goals to address areas for growth. Over the course of the school year, coaches used these weekly meetings to review students' graded work to be sent home and discuss what was going well and what areas needed improvement. Coaches also worked with students to track grades on the district portal and identify next steps for success. The academic coaches signed a parent communication folder that went home each week, which allowed parents to see that our school was working with them to support their child. These weekly sessions provided encouragement, support, and accountability for the students in the program.

Reflection and Results

Students had very positive feedback about the program, which we used to make improvements. They enjoyed the individual attention and they liked being able to track their progress (such as their subject area grade averages) on a weekly basis. Some of these students did not have an opportunity to access this information from a home computer, so it was a valuable

learning experience to understand how assignments were weighted and averaged to create a numerical grade. The students were eager to share their progress each week, and they gained confidence as a result of having an academic coach.

The feedback from the academic coaches was also positive. Teachers noted a marked improvement in the students' homework completion and academic achievement, as well as with their behavior. The program also provided our school's leadership team an opportunity to play an active role in improving achievement one student at a time. That proved to be a very rewarding experience for us.

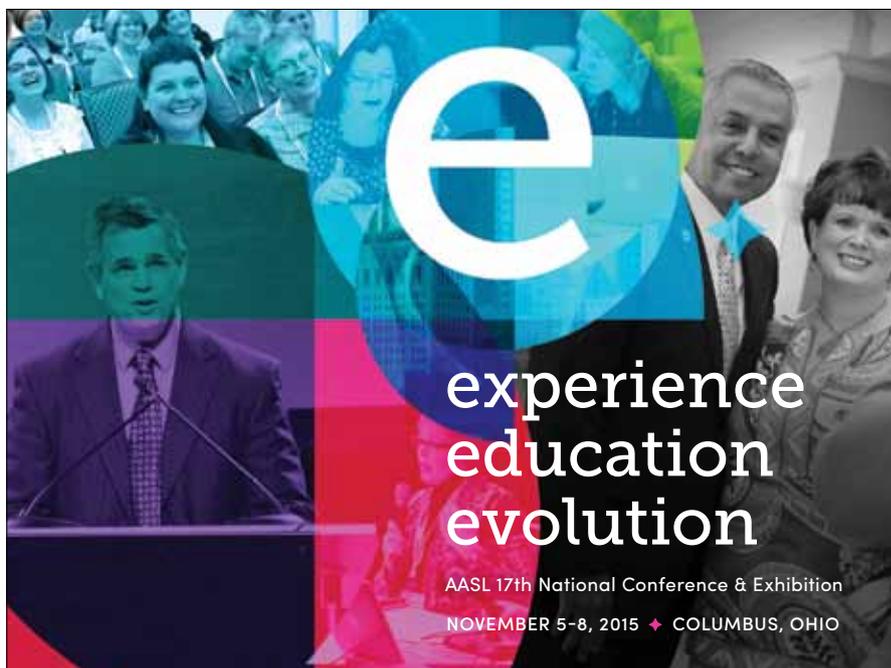
Customizing the Experience

We tracked the students' progress and used this information to determine the effectiveness of the strategies used by our academic coaches. Based on students' progress, we determined whether the students should be coached again the following year. If needed, coaches could remain with a particular student as he or she went from grade to grade. This provided students with consistency and structured support.

An academic coaching program of this type has a great deal of flexibility. Based on need, a school can identify which grade levels to focus on, who will serve as coaches, and which specific curricular areas to emphasize. This program could be expanded to include teachers, aides, and office staff as academic coaches, as well.

Examine the specific needs of your school and tailor the program to address them. Our children depend on us to make a significant impact in their lives each and every day. Often times, the resources to make it happen are already available to us. 

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