

Mission Accomplished

As a school leader, any time you implement something new in your school—be it a new technology, protocol, or methodology—it is important to get buy-in from all stakeholders to help ensure the success of that initiative. This involves thoughtful planning, open communication, and hands-on participation on the part of a principal.

At my middle school, I recently spearheaded the implementation of a video coaching initiative. I prioritized video coaching because I believed it could help my instructional coaches (and me) provide the personalized professional learning needed to support and retain quality teachers at my school.

I knew that the implementation needed to be well-planned to be well-received. Here's how I approached the process to ensure success.

1. Identify the need for—and the goal of—the initiative. Any new technology initiative should be targeted and help improve operations or outcomes in some way. In our case, our goal was to use technology to more effectively deliver differentiated professional development. In my experience, teachers desire professional development that is geared to their personal needs, is relevant to their content area, and is not some “cookie-cutter” workshop where everyone learns the same instructional practices regardless of their prior knowledge. A differentiated approach takes into account the varied experiences that each teacher brings to the table, and it validates teachers' expertise. I wanted to make sure our initiative took this all into account.

2. Research and identify a technology that will support the initiative. Implement a technology that will enhance and support the given initiative, not hinder it. Principals should research the various technologies on the market and find a technology partner that will work hand in hand with them to make sure their needs and goals are being met. In the research stage, this can include pilot testing a product and talking to other schools or districts that have used the technology to learn about the pros and cons of their experiences.

With our initiative, we researched options and chose a video coaching platform called Edthena because it

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offered a flexible toolset for using video as part of professional learning. Our teachers follow an action research cycle and select their own area of personalized development based on a self-assessment rather than being assigned one using a top-down approach. They then record their teaching in action and upload it to the platform so they can see and reflect on their teaching practice. Each teacher's coach, who the teacher selects, can also view the videos and provide valuable individualized feedback.

3. Set expectations. Trying something new can be scary. This is why it's imperative that teachers understand how the technology will be used and how it will impact them, so they feel positive and comfortable

using it on a regular basis. As part of this, you should communicate to your teachers that there is no penalty if they don't use the technology the “right” way or if they don't experience the results they thought they would. For example, we made it very clear to our teachers that the videos inside the platform, and associated coaching, would not be part of any type of formal evaluation. Knowing this helped further support their buy-in. When appropriate, you also can make involvement in the initiative or in using the technology voluntary at first, so teachers, especially those who may be more technology-reluctant, can ease into using the technology at their own pace.

4. Roll up your sleeves and participate. There's no better way to show your teachers you and your administrative team wholeheartedly believe in the technology's intended purpose than to jump in and use the technology yourself. I did this by completing an action research project focused on giving presentations, an area in which I feel I could improve. Like my teachers, I recorded myself, uploaded the videos to the Edthena platform, received feedback, and then used the data to improve my practice. I've also found that having an advocate—such as a teacher who is really enthusiastic and on board with the new technology from the start, and who other teachers can turn to with questions—helps ensure a positive experience.

5. Monitor progress. Set benchmarks and have checkpoints throughout the year to make sure the program is going well and to adjust as needed. Recognizing teachers' involvement and success with a new technology initiative, through an end-of-year celebration, for example, is another good (and fun) way to show your teachers they are supported and appreciated. 

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