



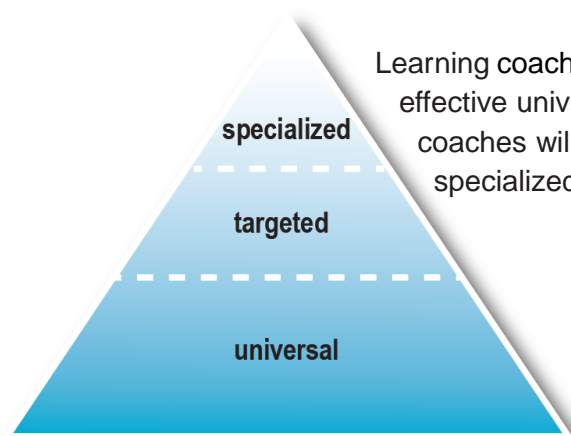
THE LEARNING COACH IN ALBERTA SCHOOLS

Alberta Education is committed to ensuring success for every student. When teachers are skilled at making learning relevant, students are more engaged and enthusiastic about learning. One strategic approach that enhances this vision is to implement supports for school-based learning coaches. Learning coaches work to improve student learning by providing local support to teachers to strengthen inclusive and instructional practices.

WHAT IS A LEARNING COACH?

Learning coaches are teachers who are knowledgeable about inclusive education and are skilled at facilitating teacher collaboration and sharing promising practices. School-based learning coaches serve as members of their school's learning support team, and facilitate job-embedded and ongoing professional development for teachers. The learning coach advocates for, facilitates, and supports improved instructional practices with teachers, but does not perform supervision or evaluation. Working under the direction of the school administration, learning coaches contribute to school plans and support the realization of school authority and provincial goals for student success.

Learning coaches help facilitate change and are drivers of capacity building and teamwork. Their goal is to facilitate professional learning to improve school staff knowledge of the curriculum as well as student engagement, instructional strategies and creating positive and supportive learning environments. As instructional leaders, learning coaches continue to gain knowledge about emerging trends, technologies and research-based instructional practices.



Learning coaches support teachers in building their capacity to provide effective universal supports for all students. In addition, learning coaches will help school staff to provide and access targeted and specialized supports for students.

EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITIES: BUILDING CAPACITY WITHIN A COLLABORATIVE SCHOOL CULTURE

The focus of the learning coach is on the success of all students and on creating a culture within the school for continuous improvement of teacher practice. Overall, the job of the learning coach is to work collaboratively, along with the learning support team, to build the capacity of the school and its teachers for creating and sustaining inclusive educational environments that meet the diverse learning needs of all students. The opportunity for interaction with classroom teachers is crucial to a learning coach's ability to foster change. To be most effective, the learning coach is highly skilled at building positive relationships and spends the majority of his/her time working collaboratively with teachers (e.g., identifying instructional needs, promoting reflection, joint problem-solving, modeling, observing, co-planning, and demonstrating instructional strategies through co-teaching). For learning coaches to be successful and make a difference in building teacher capacity, it is essential that there be dedicated time for this role and collaboration.

As a team member, the learning coach can help teachers analyze the learner profile of their students, interest inventories, and ongoing formal and informal assessments to support instructional planning. As the team collaborates, they identify barriers and opportunities. Together, the learning coach and teacher work together as a team to design learning experiences that are accessible, effective and engaging for all students. The learning coach may share additional materials, resources and ideas for leveraging technology to achieve student outcomes. Reflective conversations between the learning coach and teacher help identify successes and strategies to address the challenges. This collaborative process assists in building capacity and enhancing student learning.

Tasks performed by the learning coach will vary from school authority to school authority, depending on the specific strengths and needs of teachers, students and the school community. The following functions are examples where a learning coach may contribute to teacher and student success.

Resource Provider:	Providing information and resources upon teacher request. Routinely providing updates on new resources.
Instructional Leader:	Building teacher capacity to explore the use of research-based instructional strategies (e.g., differentiated instruction, positive behaviour supports, universal design for learning, response to intervention) and innovative practices to ensure that all students have access to meaningful and effective learning opportunities.
Classroom Supporter:	Building teacher capacity to explore and enhance innovative instructional practices through systematic modeling, co-teaching and feedback.
Learning Supporter:	In collaboration with staff, identifying school needs to implement professional learning plans that enhance teachers' abilities to address the unique strengths and needs of all learners in the school community.
Mentor:	Building and maintaining relationships with teachers so that a high level of trust is created and maintained between the teacher and the learning coach.
School Leader:	Working closely with colleagues to promote and support school improvement that aligns with school authority visions and provincial goals.
Assessment Guide:	Helping teachers select, understand and use data to improve instruction.
Change Agent:	Promoting exploration and change in instructional practices (e.g., introducing innovative ideas, questioning practices, making observations, new technology).
Lifelong Learner:	Modeling, experiencing and promoting continuous learning experiences (e.g., asking questions, researching possibilities, seeking a variety of options).

Adapted from: Killion, J. and C. Harrison, *Taking the Lead*, National Staff Development Council. (2006), Oxford, OH.

RECOMMENDED COMPETENCIES

To support an inclusive education system, these competencies are viewed as a continuum of training and experience for teachers engaged in learning coach activities.

Minimum of a Bachelor of Education degree with coursework and experience in meeting students' diverse learning needs.	Graduate degree or coursework in educating students with diverse learning needs (e.g., Differentiated Instruction, Assistive Technology for Learning)
Demonstrated understanding of the Alberta Programs of Study	In-depth understanding of the Alberta Programs of Study and how programs connect to one another across subject areas and across grade levels
Demonstrated knowledge and use of an array of instructional approaches, resources, and technologies across subject areas	Established knowledge and ability to access and leverage a wide range and variety of instructional approaches, resources, technologies, specialists and support systems across subject areas and grade levels
Demonstrated understanding of and commitment to inclusive education	Demonstrate cross cultural understanding and ability to adapt practices and access resources to meet the varied needs of students, staff, and families
Skilled collaborator with strong interpersonal/communication skills who can develop open and trusting relationships with teachers	Ability to build a collaborative team that creates a school culture which encourages open communication and creative problem solving among all members of the learning team
Demonstrated understanding of adult learning	Ability to design, develop and support high quality professional learning opportunities for teachers and other school staff
Committed to lifelong learning, actively investigating innovative evidence based instructional practices	Ability to motivate others to implement innovative instructional practices that respond to the needs of every student
Ability and willingness to collaborate with colleagues to promote student learning and success	Ability to mentor adults in a supportive, collaborative manner that allows them to model, observe and provide constructive feedback to colleagues
Demonstrated knowledge and use of a variety of assessment approaches to guide instruction	Demonstrated skills in collecting, analyzing and using data to inform instructional planning