

Aurora Chase and Pat Wolfe

supportive, so that teachers felt they could take risks. As one teacher said, "Anything worth doing is worth doing poorly, at first."

Beyond the training itself, financial and logistical support from the district was essential. Our superintendent and principals allocated funds for training, released time, and follow-up activities. To solve the problem of conflicts between meetings, for example, in 1987-88 the district scheduled peer coaching meetings monthly on faculty meeting days. And the principals agreed not to schedule staff meetings on the second Wednesday of each month to free that time for peer coaches from all four schools to meet together.

Further, the principals provided direction for the program by attending workshops with the coaches, modeling coaching behaviors, and responding to coaches' concerns. They also "ran interference" to free up time for teachers to coach and to be observed and saw that agreements and timelines were established and that coaches followed through on commitments.

Reaping the Benefits

The spirit that characterized the training environment has now become a part of the school culture. Coaching—or "Peer Sharing and Caring"—is a norm in Old Adobe. Each new teacher is assigned a coach who assists with instruction and introduces him or her to the way things are done at the school. Twenty-one new and probationary teachers have served since the program was initiated.

Prior to the program, parents as well as experienced teachers and the staff had voiced concerns about newly hired teachers. The overall impression was that, as a result of lack of experience, new teachers were covering the material too fast, that they were not assigning appropriate amounts of homework, and that the children were not achieving their potential. As peer coaches began spending time with the new teachers, these complaints decreased, and the new teachers also reported feeling less overwhelmed and stressed.

As a result of Peer Caring and Sharing, topics of conversation in the staff room are less often about personal matters and more frequently about the

"Peer coaching lets me take greater risks in teaching—now I can try out new strategies and get feedback on whether they're working."

"If the support for peer coaching were to end tomorrow, I guess we'd just continue it subversively."

"We have a lot of activities now that get teachers together, focusing on what goes on in the classroom."

In schools across the nation, teachers and administrators are singing the praises of peer coaching. This innovation promises to reduce teachers' isolation, to create a collegial and professional environment in the school, and to promote the transfer of skills from training to the workplace. To help peer coaching achieve these results, educators may find these guidelines useful.

- *Know what peer coaching is and what it is not.* Peer coaching is a confidential arrangement between peers that includes a focused classroom observation and feedback on that observation. It is not evaluation; it does not certify a teacher's effectiveness. Instead, coaching provides teachers a means of examining and reflecting on what they do in a psychologically safe environment where it is all right to experiment, fail, revise, and try again.

- *Develop a clear understanding of the various forms of peer coaching.* The interaction between teacher and observer generally falls into one of three categories: mirroring, in which the coach records but does not interpret classroom action; collaborative coaching, in which the observer collects and helps analyze the data; or expert coaching, in which the observer gives feedback to help the teacher learn or refine particular skills. Typically, too, peer coaching models follow the familiar steps of preconference, classroom observation, collection of data, data analysis, and postconference.

- *Assess your school's culture.* Each school has its own set of conditions, norms, values, and beliefs. Consequently, a peer coaching program that has succeeded in a neighboring district may be inappropriate for your school. Trust levels, administrative support, the history of past change efforts, the role of the teachers' union, the experience of the staff, the size of the school—all will influence a program's acceptance and growth.

- *Design your program and its implementation around the characteristics of your school.* Begin planning with knowledge of your school's culture in mind, and build in flexibility and sensitivity to staff needs so that changes can be made as the program evolves. Extend your planning by looking at practical matters. Your budget, for example, will influence how much training you can provide and how much time you can free up for observations and conferences. Staff size and number of grade levels will affect coaching arrangements. Trust levels will influence the composition and selection of coaching teams, and the history of past efforts will influence the kinds of support required.

Whatever their differences from school to school, successful peer coaching programs share these conditions: verbal and tangible support from administrators, adequate training in coaching skills, trust among participants, and program adjustments responsive to the changing needs of staff members. Successful programs help new teachers learn the norms of professionalism and help all teachers develop collegiality.

Like many innovations, peer coaching is more complex than it appears at first glance, but a well-grounded, flexible program based on a match between coaching models and each school's needs offers unparalleled support to teachers in their efforts to find new and better ways to educate children.

Aurora Chase is a Staff Development Specialist, Fairfax County Public Schools, 7423 Camp Alger Ave., Falls Church, VA 22042. **Pat Wolfe** is an Educational Consultant, 555 Randolph St., Napa, CA 94559.

act of teaching and classroom management. Many teachers say they have been able to let go of "having to be perfect," realizing that it is okay to let their rough edges show. There is an atmosphere of experimentation and openness to new ideas. Teachers eagerly consult their colleagues for assistance and share their own expertise. "In our diversity," one teacher remarked, "we are richer and can offer

more to each other and to our students."

In addition to promoting collegiality and providing new teachers the support they so urgently need, the program has had beneficial effects on experienced teachers. The act of coaching gives the teacher-coach an opportunity to observe a classroom from an objective perspective. The in-

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