Reports from the Field

Shifting Administrator Leadership Practices Through Individualized Coaching

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This report shows the impact that a two-year, coaching based, job-embedded administrator credentialing program is having on the leadership development of new administrators. The Clear Administrative Services Credential (CASC) program is centered on a conceptual framework founded on six professional learning standards combined with real life professional learning contexts, coaching conversations, professional development, and reflection. CASC participants have reported a high level of satisfaction and leadership development as a result of their inclusion in the program. CASC is provided at no charge to participants demonstrating their district's commitment to investing in and growing their own future leaders.

Keywords*: coaching, California Professional Standards for Education Leaders' (CPSEL) standards*

In July 2015, the new clear administrative services credential requirements changed for administrators in California. The new requirements shifted to a two-year induction process focused on job-embedded, real-life learning, combined with coach-based professional development (CTC, 2016). The induction experience includes an annual minimum of 60 and a maximum of 90 clock hours of professional learning centered on coaching, reflection, professional development, and assessment. Induction is anchored on six professional learning standards that describe critical areas of leadership that support and guide administrators into sustainable, effective practice (CTC, 2014). The shift places a heavy emphasis on individualized coaching (40 of the 60 hours) with the goal of developing leadership competency. In response to the new induction requirements, a large urban school district (District) established the Clear Administrative Services Credential (CASC) program. CASC seeks to spur much needed systemic change throughout the district's schools by providing professional development for administrators, and coaching them to think systemically and act strategically to empower leadership teams to impact instructional quality and student achievement.

We looked at: 1) how CASC implements the coaching portion of the induction program, 2) participant self-reported perceptions of how CASC coaching impacts their leadership development, and 3) observations and ratings of coaching competencies. Coaching is at the heart of this program and is the most expensive portion of induction. Most administrator credentialing programs rely on retired administrators to fill the demand for coaches. A participant can expect to pay between $7,000-$10,000 for the two-year program at a university or county office of education.

The District superintendent made a commitment to invest in and grow its own leaders. CASC is available only to District administrators and is provided free of charge to participants. CASC employs eight full time coaches whose primary responsibility is to provide professional development and job-embedded coaching. Although the program is free of charge to participating administrators, the per-participant cost to the District is approximately $12,000 for the two-year program. Through reflective coaching conversations, the District intends for CASC participants to gain insight into effective leadership practice.

Conceptual Framework

Numerous studies have documented the importance of school principals for school outcomes (e.g. Grissom, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2015; Halliniger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Quality leadership is essential to accelerating student achievement in underperforming schools. "The most important factor in a successful turnaround is having the right leader. The right leader taking the right actions can overcome barriers that would otherwise prevent success" (Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2009, p.23). On the other hand, researchers have found that ineffective leadership can result in the spiraling conditions that lead to persistent low performance within schools (Ingersoll, Alsalam, Bobbit, & Quinn, 1997).

In an effort to provide guidance on foundational leadership practices, CASC uses six professional learning standards for education leaders as the underpinning of its induction program. The standards include creating a shared vision of student success, instructional leadership, systems and operations, family and community engagement, ethics and integrity,

and external context and policy (CTC, 2014). These standards serve as the framework for new administrator preparation and are the basis for coaching conversations.

To ensure a high-quality coaching component of administrator induction, CASC follows six steps in guiding the work: 1) recruitment and selection of coaches, 2) initial training and preparation, 3) calibration, 4) continued professional development, 5) assessment, and 6) refinement of practice (Nava, Estrada, Ramos, Crossin, Rodriguez & Sotomayor, 2018). Herman et al. (2008) found that successful school leaders use data-based analysis and decision-making to identify performance problems and develop appropriate action plans to address them. CASC selected school principals that matched Herman's description to serve as full-time coaches. CASC coaches receive 24 hours of initial coach training to build their capacity as facilitators of learning and reflection. CASC coaches meet on a weekly basis to share coaching stories, ensure uniform messaging of induction requirements, calibrate the quality of work samples, and share promising practices.

Coaches engage in scenario based conversations centered on the District's Coaching Cycle and its associated coaching competencies framework that includes the four coaching components of preparation, relationship building, pushing for depth and reflection, and action/closure (see Figure 1). To assess the level of impact and effectiveness, CASC participants completed anonymous surveys regarding their experience with their coach and some were selected to participate in a focus group session. This provided a rich data set to monitor and assess the quality of coaching conversations. District personnel occasionally shadowed a coach and candidate to observe, script, and provide ratings about the quality of the coaching conversation.

Figure 1

District Coaching Cycle
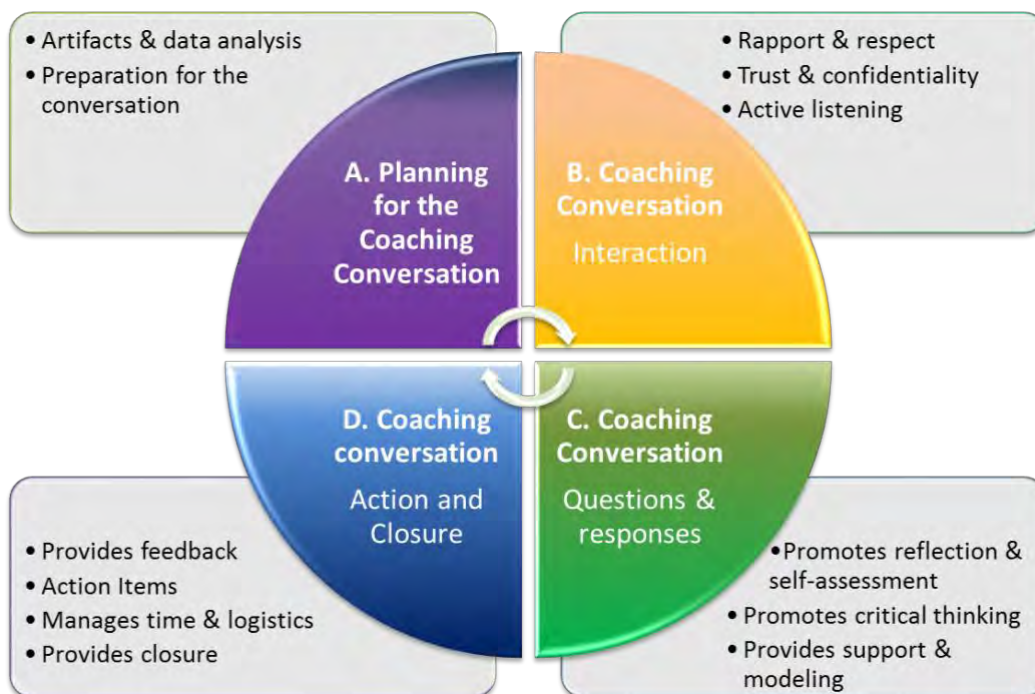
Feedback, anchored in the coaching competency framework, was provided to coaches to help them reflect on their own practice. Using data and feedback, CASC coaches continually worked to refine and improve their practice in order to support new administrator leadership development.

The Procedure

This report relies on four data streams: an online survey, a focus group protocol, an assessment of coaching competencies from qualitative observation and rubric scoring of coaching practice, and Most Significant Leadership Change (MSLC) interviews. This data was derived from participants in CASC year one. Cohort 1 through 6, and 10 were selected when they completed the two-year cycle for the MSLC interviews. An anonymous survey was distributed online to 177 participants. A total of 160 questionnaires were completed with a 90% response rate; 65% of these responses were from school site administrators and 35% non-school site.

Focus groups were conducted at the end of the first year with a purposive sample of participants in each cohort to discuss the successes and challenges experienced during their first year. The researchers designed a semi-structured focus group protocol to provide focus group participants with the opportunity to elaborate on survey data previously collected (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). Focus group participants were recruited via email by research staff. Two separate focus groups were conducted for each pair of cohorts; school-site and non-school site personnel participated in separate focus groups. A total of 28 participants were interviewed.

At the end of CASC's first two-year cycle, individual interviews were conducted with 10 participants. These interviews were called the MSLC interviews and aimed to identify what the most impactful change to participants' leadership development occurred. Interviews were 15-20 minutes in duration. The open-ended question was: "What was your Most Significant Leadership Change as a result of participating in CASC?" There was minimal prompting to probe more deeply into responses.

As part of a cyclical refinement of coaching practice, and to control for bias, during the 2017-2018 school year, one coaching session of each CASC coach was observed by a member of the District's Human Resources Division but external to the CASC program. Evidence of coaching competency in the form of scripted notes aligned with the District Coaching Cycle and component coaching competencies framework, as well as rubric ratings were gathered from each coach. These ratings were also summarized at the program level.

Results

Through the survey protocol, CASC participants reported a high degree of satisfaction with the induction program and a positive impact that the coaching relationship had on their leadership development. Some findings from the survey are summarized below; complete survey results are in Appendix A. 157 of 160 administrators completed the entire questionnaire and three administrators partially completed it.
1. 98% of 158 respondents indicated that CASC has been instrumental in improving their leadership practices
2. 97% of 158 agreed that CASC coaches have been instrumental to their growth as leaders

3. 99% of 158 reported that their coach guided them to find their own solutions to issues/concerns they faced
4. 100% of 156 reported that their coach provided appropriate and constructive feedback on their induction work

The following are the initial focus group findings:
1. High-quality implementation of the CASC induction program components led to increased satisfaction among participants.
2. Coaches have been integral to the success of program participants.
3. Participants indicated the CASC program has had a positive impact on their leadership practice, knowledge, and skills.
4. Participants were grateful that the program was free, but agreed that if a cost was required, they would still continue to participate.

Observation of coaching competencies revealed that on a scale of ineffective (1), developing (2), effective (3), and highly effective (4), coaching was rated effective overall (mean=3.38; sd=0.57) with elements in the coaching interaction (respect and rapport, trust and confidentiality, and active listening) rated highest (mean=3.78; sd=0.43), and elements in action and closure (feedback, action items, management of time and logistics, and provides closure) rated the lowest (mean=3.13; sd=0.55). As coaches received and discussed their evidence and ratings with CASC colleagues, a noticeable improvement was made over 4 months, especially in the areas of action and closure. See Appendix B for the average ratings across all coaching competency components.

Themes from the Most Significant Leadership Change Interviews were:
1. Participants reported improved self-reflection rooted in a more holistic understanding of their roles and responsibilities as a leader;
2. The CPSEL standards provided them with goals based on six core areas;
3. Coaches served as role models and participants now understand the importance for them to coach their faculty and staff; and
4. Participants were more purposeful and strategic with their decision-making as a result of taking more time to stop and understand why they were doing what they were doing.

Recommendations

School districts invest a vast amount of resources into new administrator growth and development. Data collected in this report suggests that new administrators valued convenient professional development time and coaching. Although the induction and coaching components are more expensive than traditional administrator credentialing programs, participants reported that the program was worth the cost to the District. Comparing CASC with other professional development formats would be useful.

Further study should examine the choice of retired principals as coaches. Are they in the best position to help participants navigate credentialing requirements and support new administrators, as these administrators endure evaluation and seek promotion?

While new administrator participants appreciated the opportunity to network vertically and horizontally across the District, expressing their satisfaction with this induction and coaching program, the authors recommend continued regular collecting, analyzing, and use of

formative feedback from participants, to ensure that participants continue to find added value in this program. Through this program, CASC is investigating how best to support new administrators provide successful leadership.

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Appendix A
Responses to All CASC Questionnaire Items: Year 1, Cohorts 1 through 6

1. I am a/an (check all that apply):

Position	Percent	Count
Principal	12.3%	19
Assistant Principal	54.2%	82
Coordinator	8.4%	31
Director	1.8%	1
Specialist	23.9%	37
Other --- Write In (Required)	0.6%	1
	Total	**155**

2. Which location type best matches your primary work location?

Work Location	Percent	Count
School Site	64.5%	100
Local District Office	18.1%	28
Central District Office	16.1%	25
Other --- Write In (Required)	1.3%	2
	Total	**155**

3. How strongly do you agree or disagree with each statement about the CASC Year One program in the following areas?

Survey Item	Strongly Agree Percent Count	Agree Percent Count	Disagree Percent Count	Strongly Disagree Percent Count
A. The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) and CASC clear administrative services credential requirements for year 1 were clearly explained.	75.5% 120	22.0% 35	1.9% 3	0.6% 1
B. The induction days provided me with the information needed to understand the California Professional Standards for Education Leaders (CPSELs).	77.1% 121	21.0% 33	1.3% 2	0.6% 1
C. The CASC Problem of Practice helped me understand the importance of using a cycle of inquiry and reflection in my leadership practices.	66.0% 105	30.8% 49	1.9% 3	1.3% 2
D. My coach provided effective support of my work on the Problem of Practice.	82.4% 131	15.1% 24	1.9% 3	0.6% 1
E. Holding induction days and coaching sessions during work hours was an effective use of my time.	87.3% 137	10.8% 17	1.3% 2	0.6% 1
F. My work in the CASC program was connected to work in my current role as an LAUSD administrator.	85.5% 136	12.6% 20	1.3% 2	0.6% 1
Overall, the CASC program has been instrumental in improving my leadership practices.	74.1% 117	24.1% 38	1.3% 2	0.6% 1

4. In what ways could the CASC program be improved to better meet your needs? (Themes determined through thematic analysis and content coding)

Response theme *(sample comment)*	Count by cohort 1-2, 3-4, 5-6	Percent
Positive *(Everything is great. I wouldn't change anything.)*	8 10 13 31	25%
None *(None at this time)*	5 10 13 28	22%
Coaching beyond requirements, Different coach *(More coaching less tutoring)*	1 0 0 1	1%
Applicability for non---school participants *(Make it dually comprehensible for School Site and Non-School Site administrators)*	2 0 0 2	2%
Clearer expectations *(The initial logistical organization instructions could have been clearer as it took some time for me to understand exactly what I needed to do to organize all the components)*	10 3 1 14	11%
Coordination with other PLLD program *(Graduate of CASC = Meets APP program requirement)*	1 0 0 1	1%
Management support, site issues *(Meet with our administrators at the beginning and the end of the program to assist us with meeting the requirements of the CASC, obtain their full cooperation, provide feedback)*	2 0 0 2	2%
Material, PD improvement *(Integrate the Learning Log and Induction Plan into one form. Have year end reflection as a separate form)*	2 0 0 2	2%
Meetings, more, collaborate, meeting/work time *(I would benefit from having one or two more meetings per year. I find that it is very helpful to talk with other administrators in the program, and these meetings are the only opportunity for collaboration)*	7 9 5 21	17%
Meeting location, times *(Meetings on Saturdays/evenings, online collaboration?)*	2 4 2 8	6%
MyPLN improvement *(Better platform than mypln)*	2 2 0 4	3%
Recommendation *(Maybe create a blog where we can check in to see if FAQs are there, more examples of CPSELs)*	2 3 6 11	9%
Grand Total	**44 41 40** 125	**100%**

5. What challenges, if any, have you experienced with your participation in the CASC Year One program? (Themes determined through thematic analysis and content coding)

Response theme (*sample comment*)	Count by cohort 1-2, 3-4, 5-6	Percent
Positive, coach (*Any challenges that I had were negated by the flexibility and support of my coach*)	4 3 2 9	6%
None (*No challenges at this time*)	6 10 17 33	23%
Time, time management (*The challenges have been the "regular" work overload not enough time challenges*)	13 19 11 43	30%
Amount of work (*A lot of work on top of regular duties*)	0 5 2 7	5%
Clearer expectations (*In the initial phase of the program the logistical explanation of how to post and deadlines were unclear*)	7 6 0 13	9%
Issues with evidence collection (*Identifying evidence within my everyday work for some of the CPSELs, It's important to be diligent at documenting*)	0 2 9 11	8%
MyPLN, Negative (*The platform is not easy to navigate...*)	8 0 2 10	7%
MyPLN, Positive (*Uploading evidence was time consuming but at the same time the platform made it practical*)	1 0 0 1	1%
Management support, site issues (*At times, other administrators not in the program who I report to have not understood the "job--embedded" aspect...staff has been immensely helpful in intervening and communicating this whenever necessary*)	3 0 0 3	2%
Coach Issue (*Appointment times to meet were very limited, stressful sessions, Having two coaches. Their opinions could not have been more varied*)	2 0 1 3	2%
Applicability for non---school participants (*The CPSELs are not written for non--school based administrators. I have had some difficulty tying my work to the CPSELs at times*)	2 0 0 2	1%
Issue with administrative assignment, multiple schools	0 1 1 2	1%
Coordination with other PLLD program (*Ineffective communication regarding APP program*)	1 0 0 1	1%
Off---site requirements (*It was a bit challenging arranging my schedule around the induction days because it required me to be away from my site(s) all day*)	2 0 1 3	2%
Specific CPSEL issue (*My only challenge was centered around CPSEL 6 and my lack of experiences in this area.*)	1 0 0 1	2%
Grand Total	**50 46 46** 142	**100%**

6. Think about your relationship with your CASC coach. How true were each of the following statements about your interaction with your coach?

Survey Item	Always Percent Count	Some-times Percent Count	Rarely Percent Count	Never Percent Count
A. I could reach my coach when I needed support.	94.3% / 149	5.7% / 9	0.0% / 0	0.0% / 0
B. My coach guided me to find my own solutions to the issues/concerns I faced.	93.0% / 147	6.3% / 10	0.6% / 1	0.0% / 0
C. My coach provided appropriate and constructive feedback on my work.	94.9% / 148	5.1% / 8	0.0% / 0	0.0% / 0
D. I felt comfortable discussing challenging issues with my coach.	93.0% / 147	5.1% / 8	1.9% / 3	0.0% / 0

7. How much do you agree or disagree with this statement about your CASC Coach?

Survey Item	Strongly Agree Percent Count	Agree Percent Count	Disagree Percent Count	Strongly Disagree Percent Count
Overall, my CASC coach has been instrumental to my growth as a leader.	**85.4%** / **135**	**11.4%** / **18**	**3.2%** / **5**	**0%** / **0**

8. In what ways might your CASC coaching experience be improved? (Themes determined through thematic analysis and content coding)

Response theme (sample comment)	Count by cohort 1-2, 3-4, 5-6	Percent
Positive *(I have a highly qualified and experienced coach. I do not have any suggestions for improvement, None, N/A)*	22 16 17 / 55	50%
Positive, specific coach *(NAME was always available and very supportive. S/he is an excellent coach)*	5 5 4 / 14	13%
Negative, coach *(Feedback confusing, less off-task discussion)*	0 1 1 / 2	2%
Coach availability, more meetings, more time, meet away from school *(Difficult to find meeting times that worked for both of us. Would have liked more opportunities to meet together)*	4 4 3 / 11	10%
Coaching beyond requirements, more help *(Not just focusing on the requirements and instead discuss the problems I am facing as an administrator, different coaching focus)*	4 2 5 / 11	10%
Streamlined materials *(We would benefit from a consolidation of paperwork.)*	1 0 0 / 1	1%
Group Coaching *(Frequent monthly meeting to collaborate with others to gain strategies for improvement)*	2 0 2	4%

		4	
MyPLN issue *(The platform, MyPLN was a source of frustration)*		1 0 0 1	1%
Clearer expectations *(Not everything was clear right from the beginning, consistency among coaches)*		1 4 0 5	5%
Other		3 0 2 5	5%
Grand Total		**43 32 34** **109**	**100%**

9. If you have any additional comments about the CASC Year One program, please enter them here.
(Themes determined through thematic analysis and content coding)

Response theme	Count by cohort 1-2, 3-4, 5-6	Percent
Positive *(Thank you. I am definitely a better and more experienced administrator thanks to my work with CASC, none, N/A)*	12 18 18 48	49%
Positive, coaching *(I want to thank the coaches for their endless support and guidance)*	16 8 6 30	31%
Positive, job embedded *(I really found it helpful that all classes are held during my work day, I am grateful to this work embedded program that allows me to learn first-hand from people in my district.)*	6 3 2 11	11%
Applicability for non-school participants *(I would recommend hiring coaches from different disciplines (not just principals))*	1 0 0 1	1%
Clearer expectations *(Coach, wasn't able to always be clear about the expectations)*	1 0 0 1	1%
MyPLN *(My only concern was with the way in which documents were modified in the system)*	2 0 0 2	2%
Organizational Skills *(a balance between all activities and organizational skills needs to be emphasized to ensure that progress and documenting are taking place simultaneously)*	1 0 0 1	1%
Specific suggestion *(partner with administrators working on same problem of practice, sample year 1, year two work)*	0 0 3 3	3%
Grand Total	**39 29 29** **97**	**100%**

Appendix B

Mean CASC Coaching Competency Ratings by Component and Element
2017-2018 School Year (N=6)