

School District #64 (Gulf Islands, British Columbia)  
Leadership Coaching Initiative  
Evaluation Findings  
Executive Summary  
May 2010



**The Gulf Islands School District.**

Five islands.

Ten schools.

Prepared for: School District #64

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Based on feedback from participants, the leadership coaching initiative was an extremely valuable experience that resulted in significantly positive changes in the leadership of School District #64. The initiative provided the opportunity for educational leaders<sup>1</sup> to set and to focus on goals that were then translated into actions. This process empowered leaders and reaffirmed their overall commitment and motivation to the complexities of their work. Since the coaching initiative was very well-received, these leaders now seek the opportunity to engage in future coaching. This would continue to build and enhance the leadership within the district thereby translating into educational successes.**

During the period from August 2009 to January 2010, educational leaders in School District #64 (Gulf Islands), British Columbia were invited to participate in an educational leadership coaching initiative. In total, 14 leaders participated in bi-weekly coaching sessions over this five-month period. The overall goals of the coaching initiative were:

1. To provide educational leaders with an individualized coaching experience;

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<sup>1</sup> Educational leaders include: principals, vice principals and directors.

“The coaching initiative went beyond my expectations for the following reasons...

1. I was amazed at the depth at which people were willing to work in such a new initiative.
2. The clients were more open than I thought they might be at first, contributing to a culture of *overt change*.
3. Clients made personal shifts.
4. Much of what they worked on had to do with plugging into a bigger, district-wide picture – not just their own school or setting. I was “100% impressed with the quality of what people chose to work on.”
5. Sometimes I would hear about something from a teacher that told me the clients must be sharing their coaching goals with their staff.”

– *Jeff Hopkins, Superintendent*

2. To develop the leadership capacity of educational leaders through setting and achieving their educational goals;
3. To assist educational leaders to become more aligned as a team;
4. To further the district's initiative of a constructivist approach to learning.

Among all participants, there were 130 sessions conducted (75% face-to-face and 25% telephone). Sessions ranged from 30–90 minutes. Two cohort meetings also occurred, one at the beginning and one at the midpoint of the initiative. All participants met with the Superintendent to review their coaching goals. As part of this initiative, participants agreed to provide feedback via an online survey at two time points: prior to their first coaching session and after their last coaching session. 14 participants provided pre-coaching feedback and 13 of the 14 provided post-coaching feedback.

### **Pre-Coaching Feedback**

Overall, participants in the initiative had a great deal of experience in the field of education, both at the teacher level and at the school administration level. Only 2 of the 14 had previous experiences with a coach. Participants cited three key reasons for engaging in the initiative.

### **15 Characteristics of Strong Educational Leaders**

1. Ability to build a school vision among stakeholders.
2. Commitment to continuous professional learning
3. Creative thinker
4. A positive 'can do' attitude
5. Good organizational skills
6. A likeable personality
7. Strong track record that commands respect
8. A personal presence
9. Ability to tolerate ambiguity in times of change
10. Ability to create and sustain systemic change
11. Understanding the dynamics of systemic change
12. Experience in teaching at the administrator level
13. Ability to empower others to achieve school goals
14. Strong group facilitation skills
15. Strong interpersonal skills

1. To develop their skills;
2. For personal growth and learning;
3. To be able to contribute more to District initiatives.

They felt that the benefits from coaching would be greater self-reflection, goal attainment, skill improvement and personal growth.

Given that these individuals are leaders in education, they were asked to assess the importance of 15 characteristics and skills deemed critical for educational leaders in two ways: how important they feel these characteristics and skills are for leaders and how competent they feel that they are in relation to each of these characteristics and skills. All participants indicated that the skills were 'quite or very important' for educational leaders. When asked to rate their level of competence in the 15 areas, a vast range of self-perceived competence levels was evident.

Participants were asked to reflect on experiences that they felt have impacted their professional development in the past. Four main experiences emerged: having a mentor; completing post-graduate studies; engaging in professional development training; and working in positive environments.

Given that part of the coaching work involves setting goals and objectives, participants were asked if they had ever developed an educational leadership plan. 9 of the 14 indicated that they had done so in the past. Among the factors that had assisted them in achieving goals that they set for themselves were: having support from others; mapping out their plan and revisiting it on a regular basis; taking time for self-reflection; maintaining motivation and commitment to achieve goals; and factoring in personal needs and passions to the overall plan.

In thinking about expectations of the coaching experience, 13 of the 14 participants indicated that they felt coaching would be 'somewhat' or 'very' helpful. One individual had no preconceived expectations. Of note was the concern that over half of participants voiced around finding time in their schedules to engage with the coach.

*"These processes are vitally important when people are in positions where their actions and responses have such significance to others."*

*-Administrator*

## Post-Coaching Feedback

After having participated in the dynamic process of coaching, participants were asked to review the list of 15 leadership characteristics and skills and rate their self-perceived competence in these areas. Growth was reported in 12 areas of the 15 areas.

All participants indicated that that their expectations were 'fully met' or 'exceeded'. Almost all participants felt that they received 'quite a bit' or 'a great deal' of benefit from the experience. Specifically they noted the following key benefits:

- ✓ Increased level of confidence in their skills;
- ✓ Formulated goals and actions;
- ✓ Enhanced clarity of work priorities;
- ✓ Increased self-reflection;
- ✓ Increased awareness of communication;
- ✓ A greater sense of support.

In turn, these benefits impacted their professional life through increasing their overall engagement in professional development, helping them focus on topics of interest, increasing reflective practice and providing them with new skills.

Overall, participants noted that the three biggest aspects of coaching that made a difference were enhancing their communication skills, having the support of another person in order that they could discuss issues, and affirming their professional efforts. From their interactions with their coaches, participants acquired new or enhanced communication skills that they were implementing with their staff, such as asking questions in a more effective manner, setting goals and using more strategic thinking. In addition to changes in interaction style, individuals also noted that they were more focused on increased accountability, management and organizational skill development and actively identifying areas for professional growth.

*"Thanks to SD #64 for their support of this progressive and meaningful leadership initiative. I am excited to anticipate the future effects of this coaching experience."*

*- Administrator*

A key component of the success of this initiative was the relationships that the educational leaders had with their coaches. They reported a high level of satisfaction with the relationships they had formed with the coach, the coach's ability to adapt to changing needs, and the guidance offered by the coach. Overall, all participants rated the coaching experience as 'very good' or 'excellent.'

Participants were asked to reflect on the overall structure of the coaching. There was great diversity in the recommended number of sessions, frequency of sessions, cohort meeting schedule and period of time within the school year that the coaching would ideally take place. This highlights the individual nature of coaching based on each person's needs.

Based on survey results and feedback from coaches and District personnel, the following recommendations are proposed for the coaching initiative.

- 1. Continue to offer the opportunity for educational leaders to engage in coaching. The benefits of coaching in this School District, in which educational leaders are somewhat isolated from one another, have been significant. This structured process has enabled these leaders, despite time constraints, to grow in their respective roles.**
- 2. Consider allowing for greater flexibility among educational leaders as to frequency, timing and duration of coaching. It was clear from this evaluation that coaching is a highly individualized process, one that is collaboratively and continually refined within the relationship between the coach and the client.**
- 3. Continue to monitor gains and successes within School District #64 as a result of coaching. This monitoring may lead to insights as to optimal coaching levels needed to sustain continued movement toward growth and change over time.**
- 4. Offer educational leaders the opportunity to further learn coaching skills that they can, in turn, apply with their staff.**
- 5. Ensure the sponsor (Superintendent) receives coaching before a District initiative is undertaken. It is *essential* that the sponsor has experience being coached.**

6. Consider the value of the sponsor being part of each client's goal creation. This may not necessarily take place at the beginning of a client's coaching sessions, but could be scheduled at a pre-determined time point in the initiative. The meeting can be a 3-way meeting with coach, client and sponsor.
7. Manage attendance data (who is attending sessions, etc.) through an organization's Human Resource person.
8. Promote, whenever possible, that engaging in coaching is voluntary. Note that if clients volunteer to participate, it will contribute to fewer 'no shows'.
9. Consider an 'ongoing' entry intake process for people who 'hear' about the initiative and would like to participate at a given point in the year.
10. Hold scheduled meetings with coach(es) and sponsor. Have agenda items be created both by the coach and the sponsor. The value of these meetings is to:
  - a. Make sure project goals are integrated within other contexts;
  - b. Sustain drive and excitement;
  - c. Report on successes;
  - d. Give sponsor information if clusters of common themes emerge.
11. For each initiative, determine the value of having clients contribute financially (e.g., through Pro D funds, etc) and whether this would enhance commitment.
12. Ensure that all necessary logistical aspects (e.g., required level of commitment from participants, length of the initiative, role of the school board etc.) of a proposed coaching initiative have been decided upon and clearly articulated prior to the beginning of the process.

*"Thank you so much for the help and for this experience. It definitely exceeded my expectations and helped me to be much more effective as a leader. I hope that this initiative can continue."*

*- Administrator*