

# CHANGING *schools*

vol. 72 / Fall 2014

## Coaching that makes *a difference*

Linking PD  
and peer-to-peer  
learning

An  
integrated  
approach to  
leadership  
coaching

Why  
observations  
matter



Non-profit education research and development

# Message from the CEO



## Our best resource is each other

How do we develop—not just hire, manage, and evaluate, but truly *develop*—the next generation of great teachers and leaders in education? It's a combination of thoughtful and strategic recruitment, training, mentoring, and coaching designed to fully realize every educator's potential.

This issue of *Changing Schools* focuses on coaching for leadership and instruction. We share a new integrative approach to leadership coaching; thoughts on the importance of classroom observations; insights from research and the field on peer coaching; a story of how a focus on coaching helped one Tennessee district; and parting thoughts on altering our mindset about how teachers are evaluated.

During my 44-year career as an educator, I've believed that succession planning is also instrumental to organizational continuity. Now more than ever, we need leaders who are strategic and intentional about anticipating the future and preparing their organizations for transitions from one generation of leaders to the next.

McREL's research on leadership confirms that a stable, consistent organizational vision, a clear focus, and an actionable succession plan are keys to ensuring transitions through which professional staff can capitalize on an organization's strengths and begin laying the foundation for new successes. While a new leader can energize an organization and transcend old paradigms, their efforts are

optimized if they are building on a solid foundation.

As McREL studies succession planning in other organizations, we are applying what we are learning internally. For several years we have been encouraging and developing smart, capable leaders—one of whom I am proud to say has taken the helm of McREL.

After 20 rewarding years as McREL's president and CEO, I retired last month. Leading this organization has been a great honor. It is now, however, time for one generation of leadership to make way for the next. I'll still contribute to special projects for McREL, but I also look forward to spending much more time with family and friends.

Bryan Goodwin, our former chief operating officer, moved into the role of CEO on October 1. Bryan has been with McREL for more than 15 years, using his background



Bryan Goodwin,  
McREL's new CEO

as an educator and a journalist to help us think about education in new ways and translate our research into practical and engaging guidance, services, and products for educators. An author or co-author of several of our books and a frequent presenter, Bryan is passionate about high-quality education and continuing

# CONTENTS

## 04

### Elevate leadership coaching with an integrated approach

McREL's rigorous, systematic process improves coaching at all levels

By Matt Seebaum and Jim Eck

## 06

### The importance of informal observations in an era of rigorous teacher evaluation

Get clear about the feedback teachers need to truly improve

By Andrew Kerr and Lisa Maxfield

## 08

### Winning with coaching: Strengthening the links between professional learning, CCSS, and STEM

Peer-to-peer learning is the key to fortifying any improvement initiative

By Bruce Joyce, David Hopkins, and Emily Calhoun

## 11

### Coaching is the key to reducing variance for growing Tennessee district

The Clarksville-Montgomery County School System works to build the capacity of current and future leaders

By Heather Hein

## 14

### Altering our teacher-evaluation mindset

Rethinking what truly motivates teachers to change their practice

By Bryan Goodwin and Pete Hall



Tim's first column for *Changing Schools*, 1995

to provide the best service possible to teachers and leaders.

Nineteen years ago, in my first column for this publication, I encouraged readers to “share new approaches, best practices, and unsolved problems with McREL and each other, so that together we can learn from each other and widely disseminate best practices.” Through all the changes we’ve seen in education since then, that message stills holds true and will continue to be part of McREL’s foundation going forward: Our best resource in changing the odds of success for all students is each other. ●

# Elevate leadership coaching with an integrated approach

By Matt Seebaum and Jim Eck



When you hear the words “leadership coaching,” what comes to mind? The variety of answers to this question might surprise you. Although the concept of leadership coaching has been around for a while now in education, much variance in definition and approach persists.

Even districts that have a leadership coaching model or program in place lack consistency and effectiveness in structures and processes, and “coaching” can devolve into a situation where a veteran administrator is basically recounting stories to a novice “coachee” of how he or she used to do things.

Effective leadership coaching often requires a new mindset for leaders—both those coaching and those being coached—and it takes clear guidance on how to go about it. In recent work with school districts in Tennessee and Wyoming, we and our colleagues at McREL have developed and tested an approach to leadership coaching that provides a straightforward process to help improve leadership at all levels.

## From project to pilot to process

In the fall of 2013, we partnered with a large school district in Tennessee as part of a grant-funded project focused on supporting the district in moving to higher levels of performance and instructional quality while reducing variability in the quality of instruction (see article on p. 11). One of the key components of the project was implementation of three coaching strands: executive coaching for senior district leadership; a coaching of coaches model for principal supervisors and directors; and a leadership pipeline coaching model for high-potential assistant principals.

At the end of the year-long project, surveys and focus groups conducted with participants indicated positive responses about the level of intentionality and professional growth they had experienced.

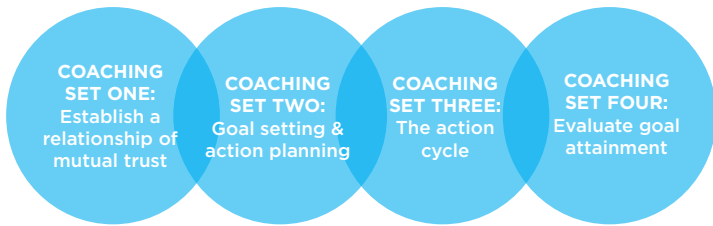
In addition, of the 11 high-potential assistant principals we worked with, five have already been hired into principal positions. Based on these and other promising results we observed in all three coaching strands, we conducted a prototype/field test of the approach in a 90-day research and development cycle with a school district in Wyoming and found similar positive results.

This integrative approach to leadership coaching is relationship-based and goal-driven, and provides a rigorous, systematic way to improve leadership at any level. It can be applied to instructional coaching for teachers or to “thought partnering” for superintendents. It can be adapted according to a district’s needs, for example, if a district wants to utilize outside coaches or develop their own cadre of coaches, or whether they want to align their goals and indicators to ISLLC standards, McREL’s Balanced Leadership® framework, or their state’s school leadership standards.

## Process encourages collaboration, action

Our integrative approach to leadership coaching is based on the idea that the purpose of coaching is for the coachee, working collaboratively with his or her coach, to generate creative, purposeful action toward his or her personal, team, and organizational goals. The approach includes a four-part process which guides coach and coachee in establishing trust, goal setting and action planning, taking action, and evaluating goal attainment. We refer to these parts as “Coaching Sets” (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Coaching Sets



**Coaching Set One** is focused on establishing a relationship of mutual trust. The coach meets with the coachee to connect and clarify the purpose of the coaching relationship. During this interaction, the coach gets acquainted with the coachee, explains the coaching approach and process (including Coaching Sets 2–4), and begins a discussion about goal setting. The coach and coachee also sign a coaching agreement during this interaction and set dates for future interactions, which may include face-to-face meetings, phone conversations, or virtual meetings.

**Coaching Set Two** begins the formal coaching process with the coach and coachee working collaboratively to pinpoint an appropriate goal or goals to address during the coaching relationship. This coaching set requires the coach to guide the coachee in selecting a goal or goals (no more than three) that will be challenging and attainable during the process, and then assisting the coachee in developing an action plan for addressing the goal(s). The action plan is supported by a form that allows a coachee to document specific actions that will be taken to achieve the goal(s).

**Coaching Set Three** can be described as a “cycle within a cycle,” meaning there is an iterative nature to its three steps, which include: 1) taking action, 2) monitoring/assessing/reflecting on progress, and, finally, deciding whether to 3) continue, adjust, or adapt actions and behaviors, depending on feedback and measurement indicators observed and collected. The coach assists the coachee in making decisions related to actions and goals during this set. The action cycle will often iterate several times during the coaching process, and the coach will guide the coachee back to the “taking action” step, where the process begins again, when needed.

**Coaching Set Four** addresses the evaluation of goal attainment. This coaching set requires the coach and coachee to assess the level of goal attainment that has taken place over a period of time and during the coaching engagement (usually during a school year). At this point, the coach and coachee will consider multiple data points to determine the level of goal attainment. Some possible data sources include: student assessment data, staff survey data, anecdotal notes, and formative and summative data indicators from various sources. In some instances, Coaching Set Four may move the coach and

coachee to re-enter the coaching process again for another cycle (perhaps a new school year) by returning to Coaching Set Two.

With this process in place, coaching can benefit all leaders, at any points in their careers, from the first-time administrator learning the ropes to a successful leader striving to improve one part of his or her practice. As an element of a comprehensive leadership development continuum, coaching not only benefits individual leaders but also helps districts ensure a pipeline of effective leaders for years to come. ●

### Coaching innovation: Principal supervisors

Of all the coaching strands we’ve implemented and tested, the coaching of principal supervisors model (referred to as coaching of coaches in our Tennessee work) stands out in its potential to positively change the behaviors of both principals and their supervisors.

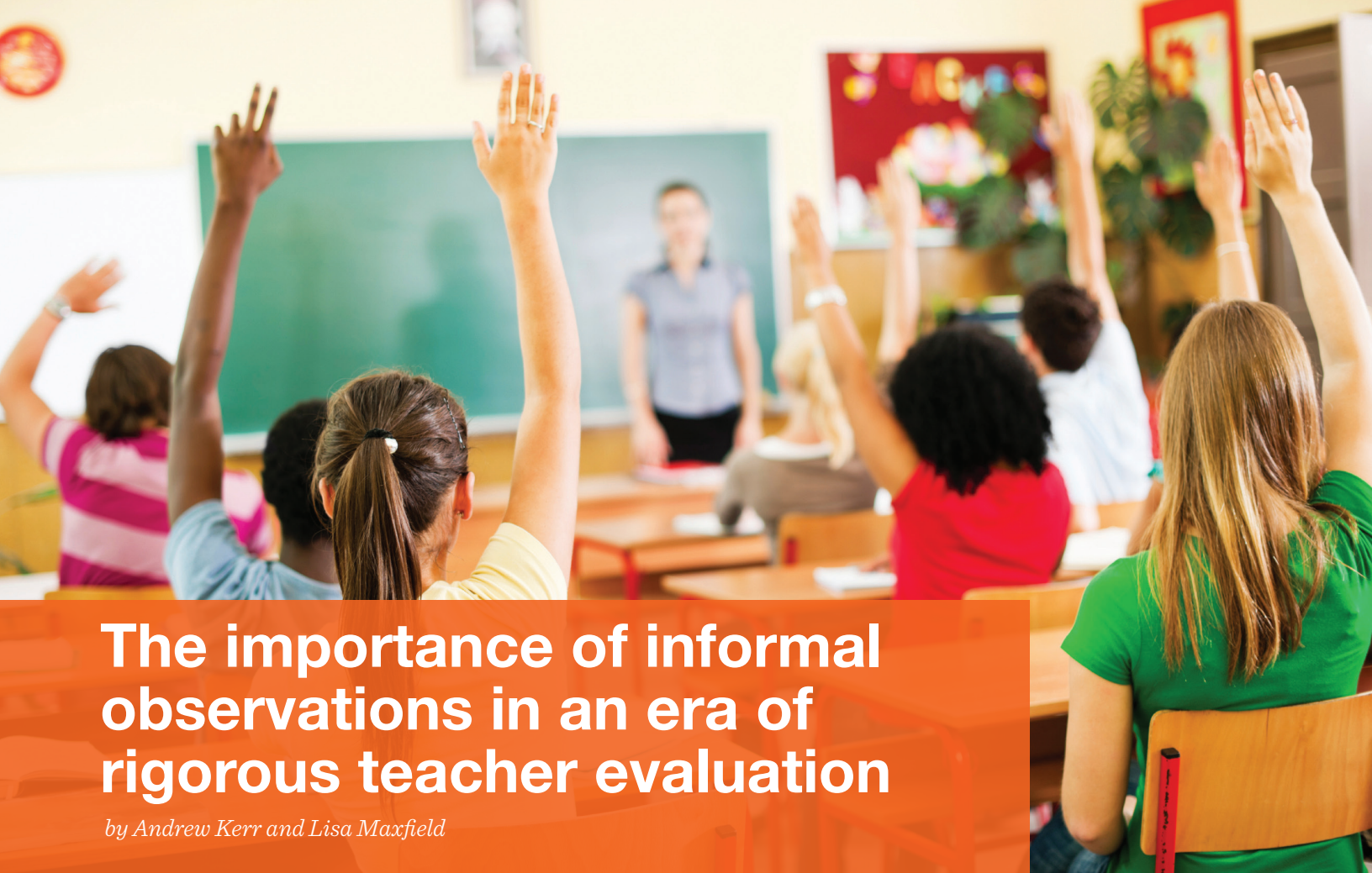
This model challenges traditional principal supervision, which tends to be mostly directive, with principal and supervisor meeting only a couple of times during the year to discuss performance and focusing primarily on that year’s goals. Effective principal coaching needs to focus on principals’ goals and development over time, asking questions rather than giving answers, and helping them solve their biggest challenges by allowing them autonomy to work effectively in their own unique contexts.

Working collaboratively with an expert external coach, a district-level principal supervisor (“coachee”) can incorporate coaching strategies and behaviors into his or her relationships with principals. Examples of coaching behaviors include effective questioning and wearing different coaching “caps,” depending on the situation and the coachee, such as:

- Declaring new possibilities
- Acting as a thinking partner
- Drawing others out
- Reframing
- Teaching and advising
- Forwarding action
- Giving honest feedback

Source: Hargrove, R. (2008). *Masterful coaching* (3rd ed.). San Francisco: Pfeiffer.

**Matt Seebaum** and **Jim Eck**, both former school administrators, are consultants in McREL’s Center for Educator Effectiveness. You can reach Dr. Seebaum, consulting director, at [mseebaum@mcrel.org](mailto:mseebaum@mcrel.org) or 303.632.5552. Jim Eck, managing consultant, can be reached at [jeck@mcrel.org](mailto:jeck@mcrel.org) or 303.632.5517.



# The importance of informal observations in an era of rigorous teacher evaluation

by Andrew Kerr and Lisa Maxfield

For almost a decade, classroom walkthroughs have been a valuable tool for school leaders, giving them a way to get a clear picture of the instruction going on in their schools, provide targeted feedback to teachers, and get data that helps guide faculty conversations and professional development efforts.

However, in more recent years, the observation landscape has shifted as districts and states adopt new, more rigorous evaluation systems (requiring more rigorous formal evaluations). Principals have less time to conduct both formal and informal observations, let alone act in a meaningful way on all the data they collect. At the same time, or perhaps as a result, an increasing number of support staff, such as coaches, curriculum directors, and teacher leaders, are providing informal feedback to staff.

In short, there are a lot of moving parts when it comes to observing teachers—and sometimes the distinctions between formal evaluations, informal evaluations, and instructional support observations are not so clear, especially when schools don't have effective structures and processes in place. But, in an era of more rigorous teacher evaluation, it's more important than ever for teachers to get feedback that truly helps them improve.

## It takes a team

Improving instruction is a team effort, with each person on the team playing a key role in the development, growth, and success of each individual teacher and the whole school.

- The *principal* is the instructional leader, evaluating, observing, and providing feedback and support to all teachers.
- The *assistant principal* plays a very similar role, but supports both teachers and the principal.
- *Instructional coaches* provide teachers with positive and constructive feedback, recognize their skills and abilities, and ensure a safe environment in which to mentor and build relationships with teachers.
- The *teachers* listen to and work to incorporate into their practice the feedback they receive from the principal, assistant principal, and instructional coach. They also work collaboratively through peer coaching, learning from each other and providing feedback on lessons—which is an invaluable process for sustained teacher growth.

Maintaining a consistent schedule of walkthroughs and instructional support observations is key to creating open communication and trust among all of these “players,” in order for each teacher and the school to succeed. It's important to note, however, that walkthroughs

and instructional support observations are *not* evaluative. The goal for both is teacher growth—walkthroughs should focus on the entire school and instructional support observations on individual teachers.

### Classroom walkthroughs: Focus on the school

Informal walkthroughs can be as short as 3–5 minutes, and they should occur frequently—up to 15–20 times a year. Coaching walkthroughs, on the other hand, are 10–29 minutes and occur as many times as the instructional coach and teacher agree they need to occur (McREL’s Power Walkthrough® software is designed to collect data for both informal and coaching walkthroughs). Either type of walkthrough can be conducted by a variety of staff—principals, assistant principals, curriculum developers, instructional coaches, or teacher leaders.

Walkthroughs are important for two reasons. First, they give school administrators the opportunity to see what is happening in classrooms and be more accessible and visible to all teachers and students. Second, they allow for meaningful data collection. Using a standard form for each walkthrough, the combined results help to provide a “snapshot” of what’s happening across the school.

A 3–5 minute classroom visit is not enough time to properly evaluate a teacher, but it is a great way to collect meaningful data to share with school staff. This data can show something as simple as use of instructional strategies, or something more complex, like the levels of student engagement and critical thinking. None of the data is teacher-specific but is, instead, aggregated for the entire staff to view. This helps determine the professional development needed and gives teachers the opportunity to come together as one team to focus on setting goals for increased student achievement.

### Instructional support observations: Focus on the teacher

While a classroom walkthrough is all about school-level data, a classroom instructional support observation is very much about the teacher. The process is based on the premise that every teacher can strive to be better, regardless of level of mastery and experience.

The instructional support observation process begins with an instructional coach and teacher looking at the school’s walkthrough data and, if appropriate, the specific teacher’s walkthrough data. Analyzing the data together gives the teacher a starting point for understanding the observed strengths and weaknesses. After the initial meeting, the teacher typically completes a self-reflection form based on the instructional strategies that the coach and teacher feel would be most helpful to improve. Next, they choose an area of focus, create a goal, and determine the necessary actions needed to accomplish the goal.

Examples of actions might include watching a professional development video on YouTube, observing a peer’s classroom, or adjusting pieces in the lesson plan to change a current practice. A teacher may also elect to record a class period in order to view his or her own teaching style and get additional feedback from the coach. Once the teacher has made adjustments, the coach should observe



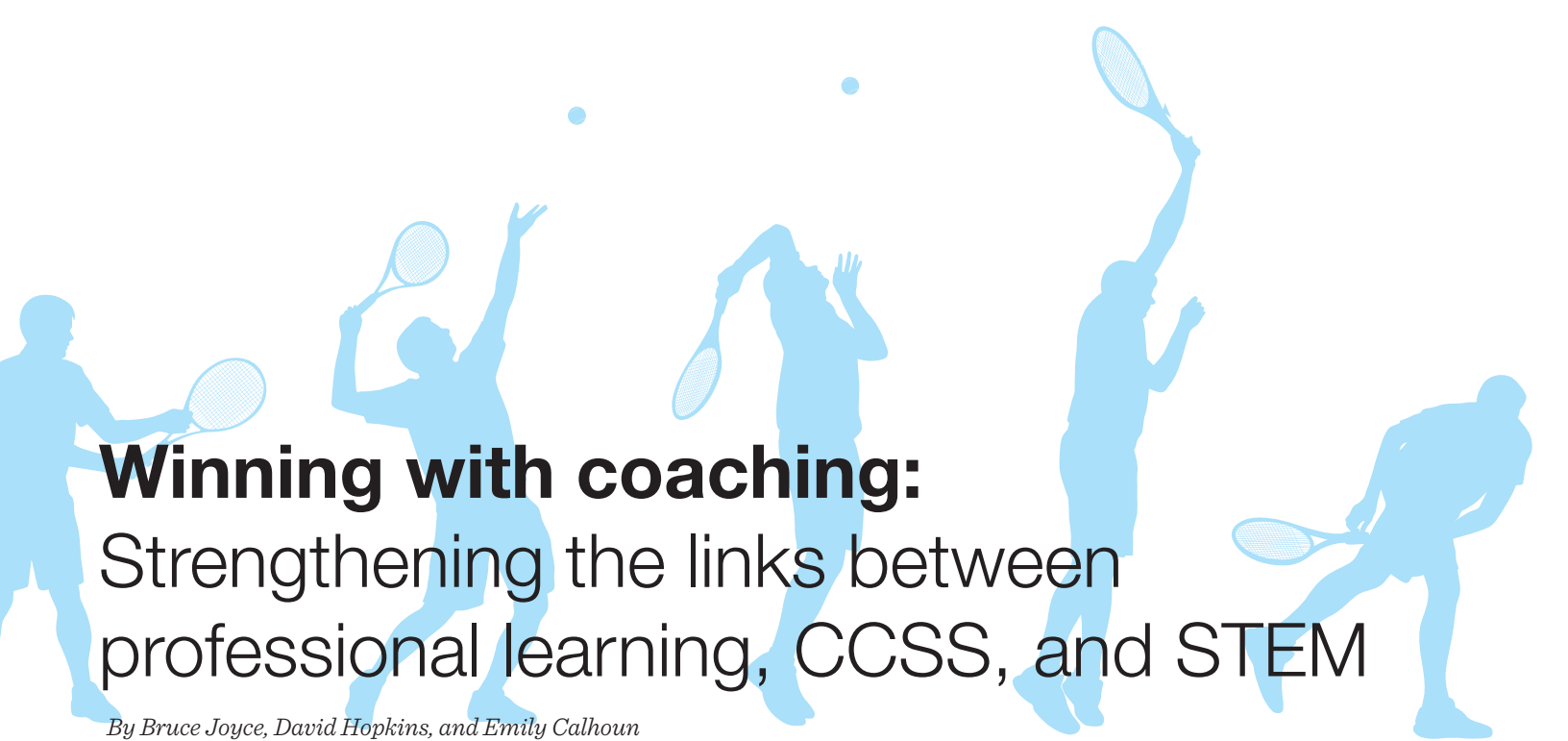
the lesson and take notes in order to provide detailed feedback to the teacher. Coaches must be mindful of the trust that is required and expected of them: Knowing that the conversation is between only the two of them, and that it is in no way a formal evaluation, makes a teacher more comfortable about speaking openly. The coach’s job is to use this two-way conversation to help the teacher build on his or her knowledge and develop into a higher-level teacher.

After a lesson observation, the teacher and coach should meet to discuss it and review the notes taken during the lesson. The goal is for the coach to provide constructive feedback and for the teacher to listen with an open mind. Then, they will determine if the goal was met. If not, the actions need to be revised based on the feedback, and the cycle will start again. If the goal was met, the two should go back to the walkthrough data and self-reflection form to begin the process over to focus on a new goal.

### Better learning for all

While formal observations are of the highest priority for many school leaders, informal observations are equally important—if not more so—in giving teachers the feedback they need to improve their practice. When conducted effectively, with the right processes and a growth mindset, walkthroughs and instructional support observations are some of the most important tools we have for ensuring everyone in a school is focused on instructional improvement, and that not only teaching but also learning truly improve. ●

**Andrew Kerr** and **Lisa Maxfield** are managing consultants in McREL’s Center for Educator Effectiveness. You can contact Andrew Kerr at [akerr@mcrel.org](mailto:akerr@mcrel.org) or 303.632.5056. Lisa Maxfield can be reached at [imaxfield@mcrel.org](mailto:imaxfield@mcrel.org) or 303.632.5561.



# Winning with coaching: Strengthening the links between professional learning, CCSS, and STEM

By Bruce Joyce, David Hopkins, and Emily Calhoun

In the 1980s, when we and our colleagues were investigating the characteristics of professional development practices that generated changes in teaching and curricular repertoires, some of us found our way to the Vic Braden Tennis College in Coto de Caza, Trabuco Canyon, California.

Braden, who sadly passed away in October, was very funny and very precise. He announced that he could not teach us to play tennis, but he *could* improve our strokes, starting with the backhand.

## The first surprise: Rationale

At this point, we had our first surprise. The course on the backhand (and later, the other strokes) began with the rationale for the new stroke. Essentially, you studied your body mechanics, ergonomics, and how to impart serious topspin to the ball. We had expected a very physical course, and that was the case, but we now found that the introduction to a stroke was very conceptual, and the concepts were continually emphasized throughout the instruction.

Then, there were demonstrations—dozens of them, some live, some taped—all connected to the rationales. And then, practice—each of us got a ball machine that delivered about 300 balls an hour. As we practiced, coaches danced around us and continued to demonstrate elements of the stroke, and repeated the rationale, politely but directly. And then back to the classroom, and then again to the courts—practice, think, practice.

We were videotaped while trying to execute our new strokes, and a coach behind us picked up our rhythm. In playback, we could see our form superimposed on that of the expert. Again, while analyzing the videos, the rationale was repeated continuously.

By the end of Braden's sequence—rationale, demonstration, practice, video, more rationale, demonstration, and practice—could we execute our new topspin backhand stroke? You bet we could, *while practicing*.

## The second surprise: Practice with peers

Then Braden preached, again and again, that when we got home, we were not to play matches. His rationale was: "As soon as you do, you will revert to your old strokes because they will feel more comfortable than the new ones. The reason we want you to come here as pairs is so you can practice together for a few weeks until your new strokes are grooved."

And, sure enough, if we played someone else, we reverted. If we practiced together, the new strokes became embedded.

## Congruence with research on professional development

Fascinatingly, Braden's approach conformed to what we were learning about how to design workshops to help teachers learn new curricular and instructional models and how to create their own training for their colleagues. In both the tennis and professional development (PD) experiences, *rationale* mixed with *demonstrations* mixed with *practice* makes the difference in building knowledge and skill.

However, gradually, we saw teachers losing the new practices, unless they worked together with a partner, planning lessons, trying them out, and studying student responses—which *is* cooperative learning, or what we also call peer practice or peer coaching. Just like with the





tennis strokes, peer coaching allows for the new teaching practices to become “grooved.”

Importantly, Braden’s coaches do not have to follow their students and move into their homes for them to achieve transfer—and the same applies in staff development. Teachers themselves can work together to get the job done, provided they have experienced well-designed training with high-quality, new content, and are further supported in follow-up workshops.

The implications for educators are clear: The design of PD and the follow-up with peer coaching are part and parcel of the same thing. Without well-designed training on precise, well-specified new practices, there is not much to practice, either as peers or with any other coach!

This knowledge and experience enables us to generate professional development initiatives with content from tested models of teaching and curriculum that:

- increase the repertoire of teachers in curriculum and teaching,
- have a design that they will both enjoy and learn from,
- can be used immediately in their classrooms,
- result in enhanced student learning, and
- are conducted from an action-research perspective so that everyone concerned collects and uses formative information throughout the process. Thus, success can be celebrated.

The good news is that the knowledge and evidence needed to do this are now widely available.

### **Linking intent to action to success**

This section describes a simple formula for linking the intent to develop a strong PD initiative to the selection of content and

the use of effective designs for adult learning, resulting in effective implementation in classrooms, and consequently, enhanced student learning. The linked procedures are shaped from research on curriculum and teaching and teachers as learners, and experience in a wide range of school improvement programs in the U.S. and globally.

### **Begin with resolve**

Resolve and the development of narrative are important regardless of who is leading the PD initiative. This can be teachers in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) making decisions about effective PD, school leadership teams developing a whole school initiative in teaching or curriculum, or school districts or colleges developing a systemic approach.

The journey begins with the determination to create productive learning experiences—productive in the sense that participants have the satisfaction of adding to their repertoire practices that they know will enhance their students’ learning. We will use just two examples of initiators: PLCs planning PD for themselves and a school leadership team planning PD for a school faculty. The PLCs employ action research processes to study their students and select a teaching strategy or aspect of curriculum that they will try to add to their repertoire. The school leadership team similarly selects the content of the school-wide workshops because the team also employs the action research framework and select teaching strategies or dimensions of the curriculum that the faculty agreed might be improved—again leading to PD.

Resolve is enormously important—initiators who simply adopt something because it is fashionable at the moment generate the blizzards of paper initiatives that are virtually empty of meaning and have no impact on teaching or learning. Selecting content (curricular or teaching models) requires significant study.

### Ensure that the PD content is actually a change

The leadership team and the PLCs need to ensure that the content of the PD is a teaching strategy and/or curriculum that is actually a change in the classroom. This may sound obvious, but as we have studied the content of many initiatives generated by both learning communities and leadership teams, as well as state and national policymakers, it turns out, on examination, that the content is often—too often—just iterations of current practice or very minor variations on existing practice.

### Use a PD design that conforms to how educators learn best

Essentially, to add new practice to their repertoire, people need to know the rationale of a new curricular or instructional practice, see demonstrations (video is a godsend), prepare to practice (make lessons and units to implement), practice, and study student reactions. Whether PLCs, schools, colleges, or districts organize PD events, components that include these opportunities to learn need to be included. Governance does not vary these needs; a PLC cannot have successful instructional initiatives without observing them any more than a district office can.

### Link PD to cooperative learning, including peer coaching

For long-term impact and sustainability, peer coaching duos or triads need to plan implementation, including studying what students are learning. The teams may request more demonstrations, help with planning, and more ways of studying the responses of the students. Organizers must respond to those requests. Regular support needs to include help with planning—sequences of workshops should occur at intervals (every two or three weeks in the early stages and once a month until full implementation is achieved). Above all, participants need to study student response and learning—again, cooperatively and collectively. Everybody, from the leaders to paraprofessionals, needs to engage in continuous action research that links PD content to the study of implementation, engagement in problem-solving, and the study of student response (learning) in the short and long term.

It's important to note that the guidelines must be followed completely. If the content of PD does not represent a positive change in curriculum and instruction, student learning will not change, either. Skimp on demonstrations, and practice will not occur. Failure to support planning of practice will inevitably depress implementation. And, without cooperative groups and long-term support, the initiative will dissipate; a small number of teachers will work their way to success, but most won't.

### Supporting school faculties and PLCs as they implement CCSS and STEM

School district boards and staffs are responsible for promoting the general educational health of the district and for supporting the learning of school administrators, faculties, and PLCs. Currently, professional learning is largely focused on implementing the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the integration of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), as well as on organizing PLCs and utilizing coaches. These initiatives can all

be enhanced by the research on how teachers learn.

- **School Faculties and Professional Learning Communities** – Simply put, if a faculty or a PLC decides to improve student learning, the members need to select a curricular or instructional model that is not in their present repertoire, set about to learn it, implement it and study the effects on student learning. *Models of Teaching* is an example of a basic source for faculties and PLCs intent on expanding teacher repertoire to enhance student achievement and capacity to learn.
- **Literacy and School Coaches** – Now important agents for school improvement, coaches need to study the repertoire of their teachers, decide whether there is a curricular or instructional model that will enhance that repertoire, and proceed to provide the opportunity for teachers to learn it and study the effects on student learning. To accomplish this, coaches need to demonstrate many times and help teachers study the rationale of what they are teaching. *Coaches cannot teach something that they are not well-versed and practiced in.*
- **The New Core Curriculum Standards** – The implementation of these standards requires most teachers to expand their repertoire of curriculum and instruction models. As school districts and states develop the resolve to implement the standards, they need to generate professional development offerings that will follow the pattern described earlier—rationale, demonstrations, opportunities for practice, and peer coaching. If consultants, coaches, or principals are to provide real help, they need to have implemented the new practices and reached a high level of skill in them.
- **Technology** – The need here is so great and so multidimensional that we will not try to cover its waterfront. Hybrid courses and distance offerings, including online courses, are needed in almost every content area.

The processes we describe are easy to list, a little more difficult to implement, but altogether necessary to improve student learning.

This is the best we can offer until something better comes along. ●

[Bruce Joyce](#) engages in the research and development of teaching, professional development, and school improvement in the U.S. and around the world. [David Hopkins](#) is a U.K.-based school improvement activist, professor, and author. [Emily Calhoun](#) is the director of The Phoenix Alliance and works with school districts and provinces in the U.S. and Canada to design, implement, and assess professional development and school improvement programs.



# Coaching is the key to reducing variance for growing Tennessee district

By Heather Hein

“Metropolitan mixed with a healthy dose of small town charm,” is how the local visitors bureau describes Clarksville, Tennessee, a city of about 260,000 that sits along the Cumberland River in the northwest part of the state. Founded in 1785 as an agricultural center and tobacco port, the area is now known for Austin Peay State University, nearby Fort Campbell, plentiful nature areas, and, in recent years, its booming population.

Clarksville is one of the fastest-growing midsize cities in the nation, and nowhere has that growth been felt more than in the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System (CMCSS). In the past several years, the city’s sole district has averaged about 700 new students a year and opened six new schools. With high rates of student mobility and principal turnover, greater numbers of economically disadvantaged and special education students, and the advent of the Common Core, CMCSS has had a hard time keeping up with its growing achievement gaps.

Designated by the state as a district “in need of subgroup improvement,” specifically for students with disabilities, district leaders began digging deeper into the root cause of test score variance within and among schools. With an existing knowledge and background in McREL’s Balanced Leadership® training and guaranteed and viable curriculum, CMCSS leaders knew that the best way to reduce variance in the quality of instruction was to increase the quality of their instructional leadership.

So, the district was quick to throw its hat in the ring when the Tennessee Department of Education put out a call for applications for its \$4 million Tennessee Lead (TNLEAD) program. Funded by Race to the Top, TNLEAD offered grants to organizations that partner with one or more school systems to develop or replicate programs that increase leader effectiveness and improve student outcomes.

The district partnered with McREL to propose an ambitious project which would improve the effectiveness of nearly 200 current and aspiring leaders, including instructional supervisors, principals, assistant principals, and teacher leaders. The goal of the project was to build the capacity not only of current and aspiring leaders but also of the district in developing and supporting a pipeline of skilled future leaders.

## Leadership coaching “brings it all to life”

CMCSS and McREL were awarded a \$784,280 grant in the spring of 2013 and work began in June of that year. The project design focused on establishing frameworks and structures in three key areas: shared leadership, coaching, and collaborative planning. Underlying all three areas was an emphasis on improvement and innovation through 90-day test cycles and the principles of high reliability organizations.

The grant gave the district an opportunity to connect the leadership, curriculum, and instruction initiatives they were already working on, but the coaching, said Director of Schools B.J. Worthington, is what “brought it all to life.” The district already had an extensive leadership development program in place but not an intentional focus on coaching.

Dr. Susan Jones, CMCSS’ professional development coordinator, explained, “We coached when we needed to coach, but we weren’t deliberate about whether or not we were doing it effectively or whether we had the necessary interpersonal skills to coach well.”

Above: Members of the CMCSS senior leadership team meet with McREL consultant Matt Seebaum, second from right.

The project's multi-level coaching model ensures all leaders—from Dr. Worthington and central office staff to teacher leaders in every school—understand the district's goals, how to talk about them, and what to do to reach them. The three coaching levels included:

- *Executive coaching.* McREL consultants worked with members of CMCSS' Senior Leadership Team and key staff (15 people) to guide the project and give strategic advice on supporting and maintaining improvement and innovation.
- *Coaching of coaches.* Consultants worked with four principal supervisors (who are also part of the Senior Leadership Team) on how to develop expertise among their principals and coach them to higher levels of performance.
- *Coaching of individual participants.* Consultants worked with 37 principals, 58 assistant principals (including 11 assistant principals who received separate training), and 76 teacher leaders on sharing leadership, leading improvement and innovation, and instructional leadership.

One of the most unique aspects of the coaching work, said Jones and Worthington, was the High-Potential Assistant Principal (HPAP) program, which included a group of 11 assistant principals selected by the district. In addition to the group training sessions, these participants worked one on one with an assigned coach from McREL. It gave them the opportunity, said Jones, to “connect with someone outside of the district and be able to talk about new ideas and new approaches to old questions” in the early stages of their leadership careers.

This was the case for Jessica Harris, an HPAP participant who has since moved into her first principal position at Hazelwood Elementary School. For Harris, who describes herself as very organized and action-oriented, the biggest benefit of coaching was having someone who questioned her decisions and made her reflect on why she was doing what she doing. For example, she said, the school assesses its students extensively—something that she firmly believes helps kids by giving teachers the data they need to remediate or enrich students' learning as needed.

“My coach said, ‘Is it possible that you're spending too much time assessing and not enough time instructing?’ No one had ever said that to me before,” she said. “That was the number one takeaway from the coaching—learning to ask, ‘How do I know I'm right?’”

Having an outside perspective is beneficial at every level, said Worthington. He met with McREL's former President and CEO Tim Waters to “thought partner” throughout the year, discussing gaps in leadership and putting together processes to check them. In addition, said Worthington, the senior instructional team became more of a resource, working with him “shoulder to shoulder” in going into schools and talking about variance with principals. “It became more of a checks-and-balance system, where someone else was listening to what was being said and helping to make sure expectations were clear on both sides.”

“Ultimately, what we really want, is for staff to work collaboratively to reduce the variability of curriculum delivery so that all students receive a high-quality education and reach their potential.”

—B.J. Worthington, Director of Schools

### Bright spots and next steps

The district has already seen some great success as a result of the new coaching model. At Montgomery Central High School, for example, students went from being the lowest performing in the district in one content area to the highest in just one year (on the end-of-course test). The school did this by focusing on a “slice” of their action plan, said Worthington, giving three teachers in a particular content area access to resources to use in collaborative planning.

The district expects to see more such stories of success with the extension of the HPAP program to the 2014–2015 school year and their focus turning to integration. After 14 months of intensive learning, Jones said, “Our next step is to make what we've learned part of our culture.”

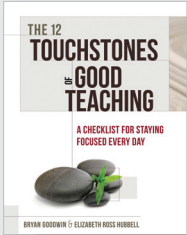
That includes embedding shared leadership, collaboration, and coaching into future professional learning and professional learning communities for schools and staff, into the action planning and monitoring process for principals, and into strategic planning at the district level—all with the goal of increasing student achievement at the center.

“Ultimately, what we really want,” Worthington said, “is for staff to work collaboratively to reduce the variability of curriculum delivery so that all students receive a high-quality education and reach their potential.” ●

Heather Hein is a communications consultant at McREL and managing editor of *Changing Schools*. You can reach her at [hhein@mcrel.org](mailto:hhein@mcrel.org) or 303.632.5520.

# McREL's 2015 Summer of Learning

Plan what you're going to learn next summer today! Register now for these research-based, practice-proven professional development sessions to increase your knowledge and skills and apply what you learn next fall. All events shown here will be held at McREL's headquarters in Denver, Colorado.

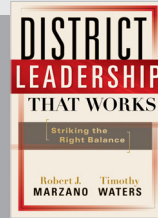


## June 22–23: The 12 Touchstones of Good Teaching

Learn 12 things research says teachers can do every day to ensure high expectations, intentional instruction, and a supportive learning environment in their classrooms.

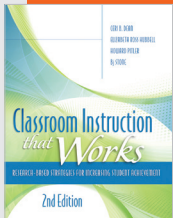
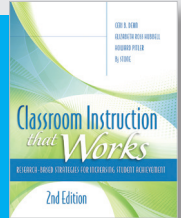
## June 24–26: Balanced Leadership for District-Level Leaders

Take your leadership to the next level and make a greater impact on the success of your students and staff by exploring the latest research and strategies for managing short-term and long-term improvement and innovation initiatives in your system.



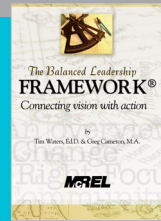
## July 13–15: Classroom Instruction That Works—Workshop

Learn the nine powerful categories of instructional strategies that research says are generally effective with any student, at any grade level, and in any subject area, and get an instructional planning framework that maximizes the impact of the strategies.



## July 13–17: Classroom Instruction That Works—Facilitator Training

Attend the three-day CITW workshop and then stay another two days to learn how to effectively deliver this workshop yourself. Completion of this training will allow you to deliver unlimited CITW workshops to educators in your district or service area for the following year (renewable).

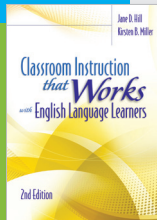


## July 20–25: Balanced Leadership for School-Level Leaders

Discover the leadership responsibilities that are most strongly connected to student achievement, and learn to develop a purposeful, positive school community; initiate and manage change within your school; and choose the right focus for your school's improvement initiatives.

## July 27–28: Classroom Instruction That Works with English Language Learners

Learn to apply the nine categories of research-based instructional strategies to the process of language acquisition. Gain practical knowledge of the five stages of second-language acquisition and their instructional implications, as well as strategies for engaging English language learners in mainstream classrooms.



## July 27–28: Classroom Observations to Improve Teacher Coaching and PD

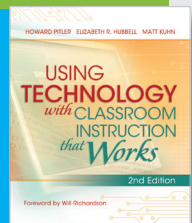
Explore tried-and-true principles and procedures for conducting non-evaluative classroom walkthroughs and observations that inform effective coaching conversations and professional development planning for teachers. You'll also get an introduction to McREL's Power Walkthrough system.

## July 29–30: Helping All Students Achieve with a Multi-Tiered System of Support

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, the next generation of the Response to Intervention/Instruction model, can be used to ensure that every student receives a high-quality education. This two-day workshop gives you an overview of MTSS and practical strategies for implementing it in your school or district.

## July 29–30: Using Technology with Classroom Instruction That Works

Learn to combine research-based instructional strategies with the latest tech apps, tools, and programs. You'll leave this workshop with technology-infused lesson plans you can use right away in your classroom.



Learn more and register at [www.mcrel.org/events](http://www.mcrel.org/events)

# Altering our teacher-evaluation mindset

By Bryan Goodwin and Pete Hall



Lisa and Ryan, two veteran teachers in two different schools, are welcoming students into their classes when their principals follow them in and announce they're conducting formal observations. They sit down in the back of the room, and both Lisa and Ryan proceed to carefully clarify their lesson objectives and use appropriate instructional techniques—one for a class discussion of Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and the other for an investigation of mathematical arrays. About halfway through the lessons, the principals leave. The next morning, eager for feedback, Lisa and Ryan go to talk to their respective principals.

Lisa's principal is in a meeting but has left a form in her mailbox with all high marks and the comments, "Nice lesson. Well planned and thoroughly delivered. It's a pleasure to have you here!" Dejected, Lisa returns to her classroom.

Ryan's principal sits down with him and explains the low marks he's earned on the district's evaluation system. "I didn't observe many of these in your lesson," he says matter-of-factly. "So I had to mark them Unsatisfactory." Dejected, Ryan returns to his classroom.

The two scenarios presented above are all-too-common in today's schools. Hard-working teachers intersect with well-meaning administrators in what's become an overly complex and often unproductive teacher evaluation processes, which itself is the result of well-meaning policymakers trying to raise student performance by improving teacher performance. Where have we gone wrong?

## How we got here

Few would argue that the old way of evaluating teachers—what we might call Evaluation 1.0—was either productive or meaningful. In many places, it was largely a paper process with principals going through the motions, hurriedly completing evaluations at the end of the year, and in the process, granting nearly every teacher above-average ratings (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009).

However, in recent years, nearly every state and district across the nation (with a strong push from the federal Race to the Top program) has moved to create what The New Teacher Project (TNTP) (2010) labelled in an influential paper as "Teacher Evaluation 2.0"—an upgraded approach to evaluating teachers which consists of the following six "design principles":

1. annual reviews for all teachers,
2. clear expectations (i.e., a commonly accepted framework for good teaching),

3. multiple measures (combining classroom observations with student achievement data),
4. multiple observations/ratings over the course of the year,
5. regular feedback, and
6. accountability (i.e., removing low-performers, if necessary).

It all sounds good in theory, of course. The problem, however, seems to lie in how these seemingly sensible design principles have played out in practice. First, evaluating every teacher in a school with multiple observations, followed with formal, written feedback has placed an enormous administrative burden on principals. At the same time, in an effort to cover every aspect of teaching that research, professional wisdom, or a committee somewhere has deemed to be important, many instruments themselves have become hopelessly complicated. Then there are cases like Ryan's, in which a principal's attempt to follow strict process guidelines leads to less-than-whole-picture evaluations.

## Shifting our mindset

These unintended consequences, we believe, are not just distortions of the Evaluation 2.0 approach but actually a natural extension of the paradigm that underlies it. Evaluation 2.0 reflects, in many ways, what author Daniel Pink (2009), labels, coincidentally, as "Motivation 2.0"—namely, the system of external "carrots and sticks" that companies perfected during the 20th century to use salaries, benefits, bonuses, and performance measures to drive compliance and performance improvements. One of the things that makes Motivation 2.0-type rewards and punishments so compelling is that they can improve performance in certain circumstances, primarily simple tasks, like increasing productivity on an assembly line.

Motivation 2.0 begins to fall apart, however, when we ask people to engage in more difficult, complex tasks—like figuring out how to differentiate teaching practices and raise student performance.

In fact, as Pink notes, there's little or no evidence that traditional pay-for-performance systems actually raise performance in most companies. That's likely because, as psychologists have long known, financial incentives actually diminish performance on complex tasks where creative thinking and ingenuity is required.

Many top-performing companies, Pink notes, have begun to move away from traditional pay-for-performance plans in favor of programs that give employees freedom from oversight and the ability to “fail forward.” The core principles of this new approach, which Pink labels “Motivation 3.0” are *autonomy* (giving people some latitude in how they tackle problems), *mastery* (supporting people in being successful at what they do), and *purpose* (helping people find meaning and the deeper “why” behind what they do).

So what if we were to create a new approach to teacher evaluation, one that would reflect the principles of Motivation 3.0—one that we might call Evaluation 3.0? What would such an approach look like in practice? For starters, it might follow a very different set of guiding principles, as shown in the table below.

THE OLD PARADIGM	THE NEW PARADIGM
Fear, facts, and force drive behavior	Autonomy, mastery, and purpose drive behavior
Focus on sorting and selecting, isolating and removing bad teachers	Focus on growing and nurturing teachers' professionalism, helping everyone get better
Drive behavior with top-down, hierarchical, interactions that whip lazy teachers into shape	Support and encourage self-actualization by relating, repeating, and reframing within a professional learning community
Push the process up, using checklists and check boxes to show higher-ups who's doing the work and who's not	Push the process down, providing individualized feedback to help teachers find their own opportunities for improvement
Ensure compliance	Encourage self-reflection

If this sounds hopelessly naïve—a “rainbows and unicorns” approach to teacher evaluations—consider Pete’s own experiences as a principal. Pete served as a principal in three different schools and in two different school districts, where teacher evaluation was handled similarly: It was looked at as a task that needed to be completed; the organizational structure surrounding it was quite hierarchical; and a formal process for developing teachers’ skills, knowledge, and effectiveness was lacking. Sound familiar?

As Pete approached every new school year, his message to staff was clear and consistent: His job was to help teachers to become more effective, more impactful, and more successful in their roles as facilitators of student learning. He took a strengths-based approach to teacher development, guided by his own personal belief that teachers themselves held the keys to improving student achievement. Working together, he impressed upon them, they could make dramatic, positive changes that would benefit their students and, along the way, leave

them feeling fulfilled as professionals.

The teacher evaluation processes in place represented both Teacher Evaluation 1.0 and 2.0 philosophies, but while the system started off too “cold”—indifferent to actual teacher performance, it eventually became too “hot”—heavily focused on turning up the pressure on teachers (and principals) through top-down compliance. Evaluation 2.0 provided clear targets for effective teaching practices, and the high-stakes nature of the process provided plenty of sticks and carrots—but, in isolation, neither deeply impacted professional practice. Not by a long shot.

### Not easy, but worth it

Pete found himself laboring to reframe teachers’ own perceptions of the performance evaluation process. Many of them had become so steeped in the Motivation 2.0 approach to performance appraisals themselves that they assumed he was in their classrooms looking to catch them doing something wrong. So he had to reassure them that he was trying to help them build on their strengths and work through the difficult process of changing their teaching practices.

We’re not saying that Evaluation 3.0 is easy; in fact, it’s every bit as time-consuming as even the most complex Evaluation 2.0 approach. Pete often went well beyond the simple compliance approaches of his district’s teacher evaluation systems, frequently visiting classrooms, regularly meeting with teachers, providing differentiated but straightforward feedback, analyzing student data, and offering ongoing coaching support. But the extra effort was worth it. Professionally speaking, it was, in a word, fulfilling. Pete was able to partner with teachers in meaningful way to help them keep their focus on improving their classroom environments for students.

The only way to strengthen teaching is for teachers to build their collective and individual capacity by developing together as a professional learning community, and for school leaders to provide every teacher with individualized feedback, coaching, and support. As instructional leaders, we need to find ways to motivate and encourage improvement by providing teachers with autonomy, mastery, and purpose—always bearing in mind that our actions are done *with*, not *to*, teachers. If we want to improve the outcome, we must improve our inputs as school and instructional leaders. ●

Bryan Goodwin is McREL's new CEO. You can contact him at [bgoodwin@mcrel.org](mailto:bgoodwin@mcrel.org) or follow him on Twitter at [@bryangoodwin](https://twitter.com/bryangoodwin). Pete Hall is an award-winning educator, author, and consultant based in Washington state and author of the forthcoming ASCD publication, *Building Teachers' Capacity for Success*.

#### References

- Pink, D. (2010). *Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates us*. New York: Penguin Books.
- The New Teacher Project. (2010, October). *Teacher Evaluation 2.0*. Retrieved from <http://tntp.org/publications/issue-analysis/teacher-evaluation-2.0/>
- Weisberg, D., Sexton, S., Mulhern, J., & Keeling, D. (2009). *The widget effect: Our national failure to acknowledge and act on differences in teacher effectiveness*. Brooklyn, NY: The New Teacher Project.

## Featured Experts

**BRUCE  
JOYCE**



An internationally recognized education researcher and author, Joyce has worked with districts, states, and agencies around the world on teaching, professional development, and school improvement.

**DAVID  
HOPKINS**



A school improvement expert, advisor, professor, and consultant based in the United Kingdom, Hopkins is the author of several books, including *Exploding the Myths of School Reform*. He is an honorary senior fellow at McREL.

**EMILY  
CALHOUN**



A researcher and developer of curricula on teaching reading, writing, and literature, Calhoun designs, implements, and assesses PD and school improvement programs for districts and provinces in the U.S. and Canada.

**PETE  
HALL**



An award-winning former educator and principal, Hall now coaches principals nationwide. He is an NAESP National Principal Mentor, and has written three books and numerous articles on school leadership.



ISSN 2150-1106 (print)  
ISSN 2150-1114 (online)

© 2014 McREL  
20141010

### Changing Schools

#### Editorial Staff

Heather Hein, managing editor  
Roger Fiedler  
Christine Handel  
Carol Kaness

#### Graphic Design/Layout

Colleen Ingham

[info@mcrel.org](mailto:info@mcrel.org) • [www.mcrel.org](http://www.mcrel.org)

### Tell us what you think

We want to hear from you! Use #ChangingSchoolsMag to let us know how you feel about this issue or coaching.

Not on Twitter? E-mail your thoughts to: [info@mcrel.org](mailto:info@mcrel.org)



Sign up to receive **Changing Schools** free in your mailbox: <http://www.mcrel.org/contact-us>



View a digital version online:  
<http://www.mcrel.org/changingschools>