



INTEGRATING CAREER PATHWAYS
IN HIGH SCHOOLS

The Role of Coaching in School-Workforce Partnerships

LEARNING BRIEF #10



INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, coaching has grown as a form of professional development in education and is a central element of New Visions' school support strategy. Coaching entails facilitated self-directed learning in which the coach acts as the facilitator through questioning, active listening, and appropriate challenge in a supportive and encouraging climate.¹ The ultimate goal of the coach is for individuals or teams to take charge of managing their own learning and processes for ongoing improvement.

It was always understood that the coaching role would be an integral part of the Transfer 2 Career Collaborative (T2C). T2C coaching began in the implementation phase of the pilot, with the primary goal of facilitating the formation of the twelve School Design Teams,² composed of school leadership, workforce development organizations, and community-based organization partner staff. Coaches supported these teams in developing, executing, and monitoring their respective T2C implementation plans.

Over the course of each school year, teams were supported individually and collectively in addressing a variety of challenges, including goal setting, scheduling, funding, and organizational mindset shifts. School leaders also needed support in improving and expanding their existing postsecondary processes, including building staff capacity and strengthening school structures in order to offer more comprehensive career and college readiness programming and experiences. Today, four dedicated staff at JobsFirstNYC and New Visions facilitate and guide the School Design Teams' work to build career, training, and education pathways at T2C's twelve participating schools.

THE T2C COACH'S TOOLKIT

The main function of a coach is to develop, grow, and nurture the systems, structures, and routines that live in schools and workforce partners. These systems provide the foundation for students' exposure to career pathways and career development opportunities, and they allow for an integrated postsecondary readiness approach that connects the classroom to future employment. The primary work of T2C coaches is to support School Design Teams in creating and executing well-designed implementation plans, working with teams on a biweekly or monthly basis to drive progress. These plans serve as in-depth playbooks for how the teams will achieve their goals for the year.

Implementation plans address the following components:

- School Design Team members and roles
- cadence of team meetings
- program considerations and approaches
- responsibilities and expectations of each partner and of school staff
- annual goals and plan for documenting and monitoring progress
- focus areas that align to school priorities
- annual activities for implementing each part of the T2C career development continuum

Each aspect above benefits from the support of a coach, who may toggle between serving as a neutral facilitator who helps the team create space for productive dialogue and serving as a content expert who has knowledge of a specific element of the plan. When discussing program considerations and approaches, for example, a team may need support as it determines which employment sectors to prioritize, which students to target with each intervention, and how to embed career development activities into the school day and culture. It is likely that a team will have as many perspectives on each of these topics as there are people in the room, and coaches use tried and true group facilitation techniques to help the group move to consensus and action.

Coaches also support teams in creating specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-based goals, or SMART goals. Coaches ask challenging but critical questions, such as the following:

- How will students be engaged in selecting and designing career development activities?
- How will rigorous yet flexible work readiness curricula be selected, and how will staff be prepared to implement them?
- How will the team build and utilize employer relationships to drive work-based learning opportunities?
- How will T2C goals align with broader school and organizational goals?
- How will each T2C partnership track students' selection for, participation in, and completion of opportunities?
- How will each team make data-driven decisions in real time?

To support teams in making progress, coaches use a variety of tools, such as warm-up activities, action plans, data reviews, and accountability checks. Each T2C meeting follows a results-oriented agenda template.

One example of the T2C coaching role includes supporting schools with Xello implementation and integrating a student-interest-focused philosophy around career learning and development into school cultures and processes. Another example involves supporting schools with student selection for career pathway programs by utilizing real-time data to identify students for specific career development opportunities based on student interests and milestones to date and the expectations and requirements of various programs.

The T2C-specific support described above is in addition to New Visions' school-wide continuous improvement (CI) coaching, offered to all twelve transfer schools by way of their participation in the New Visions school network. CI is an iterative and evidence-based process to ensure that the areas identified as needing improvement show progress each year. CI also keeps teams from unintentionally relying on the most comfortable or familiar solutions, pushing them instead to use root-cause analysis to create effective solutions and focus on equity.

This in-depth support from New Visions coaches includes access to the Portal by New Visions, instructional and leadership capacity building, and curriculum development support.

THE COACHES' PERSPECTIVE

COACHES HAVE A LASER FOCUS ON HELPING TEAMS ACHIEVE RESULTS. T2C COACHES SEE THEMSELVES IN A VARIETY OF WAYS, FROM BRIDGE BUILDERS TO NEUTRAL FACILITATORS TO TRANSLATORS.

At times, they are there to serve as a guide when partnerships are strong, perhaps by accelerating the work and supporting partnership sustainability. At other times, they need to exert more influence, providing structure to meetings or goal setting, naming the roadblocks that need to be worked through, shifting the direction of a conversation to a productive set of questions, or transitioning into a content-expertise role. At yet other times, coaches might need to make new connections between schools and workforce partners in order to facilitate learning and resource sharing, as they have a bird's eye view of T2C and the New York City school system.

As a coach, your main responsibility is to identify the goals of the project and help ensure whoever is involved is working toward these goals. We coach the teams through connecting with the individuals to make sure the work is moving forward.

—Julia Forman, deputy director of career readiness and former continuous improvement coach, New Visions

T2C coaches achieve their mandate to drive progress by helping build systems that enable change. They do this through a number of tactics:

- **Access:** Coaches use their access to resources to help School Design Teams learn, solve problems, and achieve progress. They guide partners in setting and reaching definable targets.

- **Insight and sharing:** By working across multiple schools, coaches bring what they learn from each site to subsequent discussions, helping spread ideas across teams. Additionally, coaches scan for new research and practices across the country that can be shared with each School Design Team.
- **Customization:** Coaches work with teams to identify school-level problems of practice. Even though T2C has a high-level goal of supporting postsecondary success, coaches help identify the root causes of challenges in each school and support solutions that fit the culture of each community.

- **Strategy:** Based on their experience, coaches are able to suggest and support goals that may be loftier than what a team might have otherwise felt was feasible. Coaches can also push each partner to ask the other for what they need, moving past politeness that sometimes holds partnerships back from being as effective as possible.
- **Accountability:** With an external coach supporting the School Design Team's efforts, sending deadline reminders, and supporting data analysis, partners are more likely to see the work through and uphold T2C commitments.

Coaches' concrete impact on T2C's success has been documented in a number of ways. For example, one team worked with its coach to conduct a root-cause analysis that helped it shift some classroom practices and better

utilize career planning tools in counseling to create a vision for success prior to graduation. At another school, a coach helped the team align its skills rubric with New York State's career development and occupational studies (CDOS) learning standards, a state framework for career readiness that supports an alternative pathway to high school graduation. CDOS is a big value-add for workforce partners learning how to adapt their training and make it fit a school environment. Coaching around CDOS has been compelling for T2C schools and partners and one of the most frequently requested coaching supports. And in yet another example, one coach helped a school troubleshoot poor attendance at a career exploration field trip, exploring ways to use interest assessments to drive the design of learning experiences and remove barriers to participation.



LOOKING AHEAD

T2C's coaching experience to date has sparked several preliminary insights about the coaching role and its benefit to partnerships:



Coaching protocols need continual refinement. Both JobsFirstNYC and New Visions have developed new coaching practices and approaches as a result of T2C, expanding their institutional capacities for career development, postsecondary, and partnership coaching. As the initiative evolves over time, it will be important to ensure that partnership memorandums of understanding, strategic implementation plans, meeting agenda templates, and other tools and protocols are maximized for impact. This requires that coaches: fully engage in the work with each team; document what is effective, what isn't and why, and; recommend possible changes needed to evolve coaching tools. This will help institutionalize learnings and allow for T2C protocols to be used beyond the current initiative and coaching team.



Teams should be supported while they build their capacity. As described by one T2C coach, *"You have to be very careful with how much you're doing. Success is when teams do the work and you just check in."* Informed by results-based facilitation, T2C coaches try to "give the work back" to the teams to ensure that they own their respective partnerships. Understanding and creating protocols to achieve this balance—being genuinely helpful to the teams without taking on too much of the work—will be an important area of learning moving forward.



Practices should be sustained and codified over time. Coaches should seek to identify patterns that illuminate how coaching should change over time in the spirit of the "I do, we do, you do" model of capacity building.³ They should also ensure that promising career development practices continue when coaching is reduced or even eliminated through the institutionalization of practices and policies. Building buy-in for T2C broadly across school and workforce partner staff can support the continuation of strong practices. Defining the boundaries of coaches' role over time is necessary for partners' clarity and expectations.

ABOUT THIS SERIES

JobsFirstNYC and New Visions for Public Schools are spearheading the Transfer 2 Career Collaborative (T2C), an innovative career development strategy for New York City transfer high schools aimed at improving the postsecondary and workforce outcomes of students most at risk of becoming part of the out-of-school, out-of-work population. Working across twelve transfer schools in the New Visions network, T2C integrates sectoral workforce development partners and postsecondary programs to provide sector-specific career pathways for over-age, under-credited students. This learning brief is part of a series describing emergent practices in the T2C initiative that support progress toward student, partnership, institution, and system-level goals.



ABOUT JOBSFIRSTNYC

JobsFirstNYC creates and advances solutions that break down barriers and transform the systems supporting young adults and their communities in the pursuit of economic opportunities. Our innovative approach to developing new partnership models has helped shape public policy, private philanthropic investments, and the best practices of employers, colleges, service providers, high schools, and others. Over the last 14 years, JobsFirstNYC has worked with more than 150 organizations in communities across New York City to build innovative solutions that connect young adults to economic opportunities.



ABOUT NEW VISIONS FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

New Visions for Public Schools is a nonprofit organization that has worked to strengthen New York City public schools for more than 30 years. Since 1989, New Visions has designed, created, and sustained great public schools for all New Yorkers, driven by the belief that all of New York City's students deserve public schools that make successful futures possible. It has empowered and equipped everyday visionaries—New York City's educators, students, and families—with the tools and support needed to achieve the future they imagine for themselves. Today, New Visions helps nearly 1,600 public schools plan for the success of nearly a million students citywide.

DEDICATION

We dedicate this report to Julia Forman, Principal Dez-Ann Romain, and all the educators we lost too young and too early in 2020. They dedicated their energy, creativity, and intelligence to building a more equitable, more supportive public school system for all students, but particularly students who have too often been excluded from educational opportunity. We honor their memory by building on their lives' work.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Christian van Nieuwerburgh, "Coaching in Education: An Overview," in Christian van Nieuwerburgh (ed.), *Coaching in Education: Getting Better Results for Students, Educators, and Parents* (London: Karnac Books, 2012).
- 2 School Design Teams are multi-stakeholder groups that drive T2C's strategy, decision-making, and implementation at the school level. Their members consist of transfer high school leaders, representatives of community-based organizations, representatives of workforce development organizations, and administrators from community colleges.
- 3 Shaun Killian, "The I Do WE do YOU Do Model Explained," Evidence-Based Teaching (August 16, 2015), <https://www.evidencebasedteaching.org.au/the-i-do-we-do-you-do-model-explained/>.

