



## Reading and Literacy Coaches Report on Hiring Requirements and Duties Survey

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“Reading coaching is a powerful intervention with great potential; however, that potential will be unfulfilled if reading coaches do not have sufficient depth of knowledge and range of skills to perform adequately in the coaching role...The Association appeals to the stakeholders involved in implementing reading coaching interventions to pay close attention to the hiring of reading coaches and commit themselves (a) to hiring only those individuals who have the knowledge and skills required and (b) to assuring that within three years these reading coaches meet the Association’s standards and obtain reading specialist certification.”

*The Role and Qualifications of a Reading Coach*  
International Reading Association, 2004

The International Reading Association continues to promote the reading coach model as a professional development approach with vast potential to improve student reading proficiency in elementary, middle, and high school. In 2005, IRA surveyed reading/literacy coaches to determine what qualifications they were required to have for their positions and their duties and responsibilities. The survey was conducted on Zoomerang using a list of reading coaches and other reading professionals obtained from Market Data Retrieval. The survey went to 1053 individuals and 140 completed surveys were returned for a 13.2% return rate.

### Findings and Discussion

#### *Hiring Qualifications and Preparedness*

A BA and a teaching certificate (99% and 97% respectively) are the only clear requirements that the coaches must have. Fewer than half (37%) report that an MA was required and only 19% indicate that an MA in literacy or a related area was required. In addition, 77% report that 1–3 years of successful classroom experience were required. Among other significant qualifications, 62% report a requirement for excellent written and oral communication 43% report that excellent presentation and group facilitation skills were required.

Coaches overwhelmingly report feeling prepared to conduct the activities required for their positions. And this was despite the fact that they were required to have only a BA and teaching certificate for the position. However, they also report mandatory participation in district and state level professional development to improve coaching skills. Seventy-one percent were required to participate in district level professional development and 47% report that they were required to participate in statewide professional development. In contrast, only 21% and 25% report being required to complete a MA in literacy or a related field or to demonstrate substantial

graduate hours in reading/literacy. This may signal a change in professional training, given the small percentage of reading coaches being required to complete an MA in reading/literacy or even to complete substantial graduate hours in reading/literacy.

### *Titles*

When asked to report their titles, responses range from simply “reading coach” or “literacy coach” to “collaborative professional development teacher.” Reported titles were about evenly split between literacy and reading and over 89% of the responses included the word “coach” in the title. Alternatives to literacy/reading included language arts, curriculum, instructional, academic or learning, reference to a place (building, campus, school) and two that referred to a specific commercial program. Alternatives to “coach” included specialist, facilitator, coordinator, teacher, consultant, implementer, and leader.

### *Funding for coaching positions*

Respondents indicate that, in general, the reading/literacy coach position receives support through locally developed curriculum initiatives (69%), were part of typical district level professional support (65%), and part of state- or federally-funded initiatives (66%). Nearly as many respondents (35%) indicate their positions were supported by local funding as those who reported Reading First grant funding (37%).

### *Duties*

One finding that comes through strongly is that Reading/Literacy Coaches work primarily with teachers. Sixty-seven percent of respondents indicate that they focused solely on teachers. Another 25% indicate that they worked with both teachers and students. Six percent of the respondents report that they focused on implementing a core reading program. Less than two percent of respondents indicate that they focused solely on students in their coaching position.

Of 182 responses (respondents could choose all relevant levels), 86% report working at the primary level, 41% at the intermediate level, 17% at middle school level, and only 5% and 7% respectively at preschool or high school levels.

Coaches spend the most time in assessment and instructional planning activities (close to 5 hours per week) and between 2–4 hours planning and conducting professional development sessions. They report spending approximately an hour or less a week in developing curriculum, facilitating teacher study or inquiry groups, and conducting professional development for administrators.

When asked about working with individual teachers, respondents report that they spent from 2–4 hours observing, in demonstration teaching, and in discussing lessons taught. They report spending less than an hour per week in planning lessons with teachers. When asked about time spent reporting or documenting their activities, they indicate that they spend less than an hour a week reporting on professional development activities such as teacher inquiry or study groups and in ordering and accounting for materials. They report spending nearly 2 hours in documenting activities around observation and demonstration teaching and 2–4 hours reporting on student assessment and achievement data. When asked about evaluation activities, 78% of respondents report spending no time or less than an hour evaluating teachers. They spend

considerably more time evaluating the school reading program and children in groups or individually.

When asked about time spent in contact with children respondents indicate that they spent 2–4 hours a week in demonstration teaching and nearly the same amount of time administering assessments to children. They report spending less than one hour per week or no time in teaching children either as a whole class or in small groups either inside or outside the classroom.

### How Reading/Literacy Coaches Spend Each Week

Activities requiring less than two hours weekly/percentage of respondents	Activities requiring two to four hours weekly/percentage of respondents	Activities requiring five or more hours weekly/percentage of respondents
evaluating teachers, 77	reporting student assessment data and reading achievement scores, 51	assessment and instructional planning, 49
teaching whole classes with instructor of record, 73	planning/conducting professional development sessions, 50	evaluating children (groups or individual), 36
providing instruction for individual children in classroom, 69	sessions focused on student work and assessment, 50	reporting student assessment data and reading achievement scores, 28
teaching whole classes as instructor of record, 69	administering assessments to individual or groups, 47	planning/conducting professional development sessions, 24
professional development sessions with administrators and other school personnel, 67	demonstration teaching, 45	sessions focused on student work and assessment, 24
providing instruction for individual children outside classroom, 66	planning lesson with teacher, 43	observing the lesson, 24
reporting professional development, such as teacher study groups, 65	evaluating children (groups or individual), 43	teaching lesson as demonstration, 23
teaching small groups outside classroom, 62	observing the lesson, 42 discussing lesson when over, 42	demonstration teaching, 22

### Conclusion

The survey provides a description of reading/literacy coaches as teachers who work primarily with teachers and spend a significant portion of their time in assessment and instructional planning activities. They work primarily at the elementary level with only 17% reporting working at middle school and 7% reporting working at the high school level. They spend very little time evaluating teachers and working directly with students. When they are working with individual teachers, they spend approximately 2–4 hours a week each in observation, demonstration teaching, and discussions after such lessons. They report spending less than an hour a week in planning specific lessons with teachers. The reported job requirements are a BA and 1–3 years of teaching experience with some emphasis on communications skills, presentations, and group facilitation.

Perhaps the most interesting finding is that coaches overwhelmingly reported feeling prepared to conduct the activities required for their positions. And this was despite the fact that they were required to have only a BA and teaching certificate for the position. However they also report being required to participate in district and state level professional development to improve coaching skills. This may signal a change in professional training since few of the respondents reported being required to complete an MA in reading/literacy or even to complete substantial graduate hours in reading/literacy. It may also suggest that coaches are receiving specific training in the teaching activities required for particular programs and hence feel prepared to coach those activities. One concern this raises is that while coaches are prepared to coach specific activities, they may not have the depth of knowledge about reading and reading acquisition necessary for fine-tuning programs to meet the needs of specific children. Their confidence in their preparation may in fact mean that not all children are receiving appropriate instruction and that some may be left behind because no particular program can adequately meet the needs of all children.