# Nurturing a Community of Literacy Coaches: A Comprehensive Approach to Improved Literacy Instruction

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## Recommended Citation

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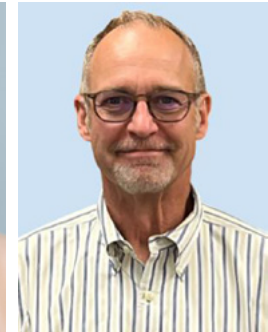


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## Foreword

The act of coaching is a practice intended to support the professional development and personal growth of a teacher (Brown, 2016). Since coaching is connected to a teacher's work in the classroom, coaches will use various strategies to support a teacher's growth (Brown, 2016); "a school-based literacy coach provides support for teachers' learning, [which] is currently viewed as a promising means of improving the quality of reading instruction and thus students' acquisition of reading skill, particularly for high poverty schools with chronic underachievement in reading" (Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2011).

Equitable literacy practices ensure that all students have access to opportunities for learning. To achieve this, it is crucial to build strong, supportive communities for literacy educators. At the center of these communities are literacy coaches who work extensively to cultivate trusting relationships to disrupt the status quo, thereby improving literacy instruction and student success. Literacy coaches build coaching structures and learning cultures that equitably expand educators' knowledge,

skills, and capacity to increase student literacy within and beyond classrooms.

To be effective, coaches also rely upon a community of support that offers intentionally designed opportunities to engage in deep study and discussion around the work as well as the use of data to improve language and literacy instruction. In the model detailed below, the use of a "communities of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991) model was designed to foster authentic opportunities for literacy coaches to engage in deep study, discussion, and personal reflection on practice. A coaching community of practice requires deep disciplinary knowledge, coaching pedagogies, and trust to support the coaching role. As Ippolito et al. (2021) note,

> Ongoing professional learning opportunities should be sought and supported by school leaders for their coaches, including participation in informal coaching networks within and beyond the school district. This is particularly important as coaches are asked to learn and do more than ever before related to areas beyond the foundations of literacy teaching and learning (e.g., SEL work;

equity and social justice work; virtual teaching, learning, and coaching; etc.). (p. 185)

This collaborative model is often replicated at the district level where coaches nurture a community of educators connected by a common goal: literacy equity.

Investing in coaching means that structures and systems can be developed or exist within a school or district to ensure that coaching can be sustained and scaled up over time (Ippolito et al., 2021). Thus, coaching should not be a one-year initiative; it must be a multi-year endeavor if the goal is to improve teacher practice (Corcoran et al., 2001). Research indicates that large-scale initiatives, including those that involve a literacy coaching component, may require three to five years to show an impact on student learning (Corcoran et al., 2001).

The following examines a multi-year coaching initiative within Wayne County. It explores the value of building and sustaining an inclusive coaching community with ongoing support from an interdisciplinary ISD/RESA (Intermediate School District/Regional Educational Service Agency) team and the promising impact data that reveals the success of this model.

# Year One

Because literacy is foundational to academic success, recent professional learning efforts in Michigan have focused on improving instructional practices in literacy and increasing students' proficiency. These efforts were developed in response to Michigan's consistently low performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Long-term data indicates that Michigan has been stagnant in terms of achievement in literacy for over 20 years compared to other states.

In response, Governor Snyder created what became the Early Literacy Task Force to "provide instructional, coaching, and school level guidance" (Michigan Department of Education [MDE], 2018).

To ensure that all students have access to high-quality instruction, the Early Literacy Task Force developed a four-stage plan (MDE, 2018). This led to the development of a suite of documents, such as the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators/ General Education Leadership Network Early Literacy Task Force [MAISA GELN ELTF] *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy*, *Essential Coaching Practices for Elementary Literacy*, and *Essential School-Wide and Center-Wide Practices in Literacy and Mathematics, Prekindergarten and Elementary Grades*. Collectively, these documents contain research-based instructional practices agnostic of any curricular resource and are considered "the minimum standard of care." As additional support, Governor Whitmer and state legislators provided funding through Section 35a(4) to increase the number of K-3 literacy coaches in Michigan for three consecutive years.

### One County's Intentional Plan: A Data-Driven Model

Data was at the forefront of planning to enact the Wayne Regional Educational Service Agency [RESA] coaching model. Our team analyzed several years of data to determine long-term trends in literacy achievement. For example, two out of every three Wayne County students taking the 2019 Grade 3 ELA M-STEP were not proficient. Had the Read by Grade 3 (RBG3) legislation been enacted at this time, 67% of Wayne County third graders would have been eligible for retention. Trend data from previous years revealed similar results. To disrupt this trend, we knew that a viable and sustainable model must include opportunities and outcomes for early literacy coaches to impact the teaching practices of K-3 educators. We were committed to providing a coach or ISD coaching support to all districts and PSAs in Wayne County, but we strongly encouraged districts and PSAs to consider internal candidates who had already built collegial and relational trust. Additionally, we were committed to providing ongoing professional development and support to literacy coaches working directly with K-3 educators using a network approach to build capacity and sustainability.

### Enacting Our Model

We called our new literacy coaches COSAs, or Coaches on Special Assignment. As district employees, the COSAs were valued stakeholders. In addition, we identified ourselves as the Wayne RESA Cross-Content

Coaching Team; for clarity, we will refer to this group as "our team." Next, we designed a comprehensive professional learning and communication plan to onboard the new (and, in some cases, veteran) literacy coaches, and we began to build an intentional method for data collection and analysis. Professional learning included literacy and assessment consulting, embedded networking opportunities, and regular touchpoint meetings. To measure the impact of the coaches' work, we created a detailed logic model and evaluation framework to formally determine how activities and actions would connect to and shape outcomes. Furthermore, we provided guidance and tools to support the understanding and use of multiple data points within their coaching roles to align with the MDE's research-based *Early Literacy Coaching Model* and *Wayne RESAs Key Considerations for Coaching Systems*.

Our plan helped us identify three priority areas:
- Communication and ongoing support
- Professional learning
- Comprehensive data collection and analysis

### COSAs (Coaches on Special Assignment)

Carlisle and Berebitsky (2011) found "that there are benefits to having a school-based literacy coach to support and guide teachers' application of their new understanding of high-quality reading instruction." Therefore, we advocated that district leaders hire literacy coaches who remained district employees. Wayne RESA also outlined its commitment to build literacy capacity and sustainability, coordinate with district and building-level leadership, strengthen county-wide capacity by providing comprehensive professional learning to the COSAs, and leverage our team's expertise and resources to strengthen county-wide networking opportunities for all stakeholders. Concurrently, COSAs committed to working directly with K-3 educators in their home district and serving as literacy leaders, engaging in deep and sustained professional learning, and functioning collaboratively as part of an ongoing coaching network.

### Communication and Ongoing Support.

It has been said that communication is the key to success. As part of Wayne RESA's support of the COSA's district and its Literacy Leadership team, a one-page professional learning document was developed. This document outlined the parameters of the grant as it pertained to the professional learning expectations. Email, websites, and flyers were also instrumental as we developed and implemented our professional learning and data collection system. The COSAs continue to be members of multiple networks that provide connections with fellow coaches throughout Wayne County and the state. Finally, our team met virtually with each COSA on four different occasions for informal conversations called COSA Touchpoints. Ultimately, members of our team were consistently available via email, Zoom, or other virtual platforms for any questions or concerns.

### Professional Learning.

Heavy adherence to the *Essential Coaching Practices for Elementary Literacy*, *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K-3*, and the *Essential School-Wide and Center-Wide Practices in Literacy and Mathematics, Prekindergarten and Elementary Grades* were foundational to ongoing professional learning. These research-supported practices allowed our team to identify the critical qualifications, dispositions, activities, and roles of effective early literacy coaches.

The COSA Summer Coaching Institute, a combination of asynchronous and synchronous learning, occurred in July and August 2020. The course outcomes were designed to build relationships among the COSAs and our team while developing an understanding of the parameters of the grant, the MDE Early Literacy Coaching Model, and individual coaching beliefs. Three networking structures were also provided to support the COSAs: the COSA Collaborative, the Wayne County Coaching Network, and the ISD Early Literacy Coaching Network. The COSA Collaborative, a bimonthly meeting where our COSAs and our team came together, served as a space for co-learning and networking. Through the Wayne County Coaching Network, our team provided opportunities for the COSAs and other Wayne County literacy coaches to engage in deep study of research-based practices using collaborative inquiry, common texts, and discussion of

the *Essential Coaching Practices for Elementary Literacy* and the *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K-3*. Finally, the ISD Early Literacy Coaching Network allowed the coaches to participate in extensive learning around the *Essential Coaching Practices for Elementary Literacy* and the *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K-3* while having access to leading early literacy researchers.

***Comprehensive Data Collection and Analysis.*** As part of the intentional design of the COSA initiative, data collection tools were developed to support coaches and coachees and to strengthen the district coaching model. Our team created data tools to measure the growth and self-perceptions of the COSAs as they acclimated to their roles. These tools included COSA Coaching Logs, the COSA Self-Efficacy Scale, and biannual COSA Focus Groups.

According to the data, the *COSA Coaching Logs* revealed that COSAs spent 31.5% of their time engaged in literacy leadership work, 25% of their time dedicated to personal professional learning, and 43.4% of their time immersed in research-supported direct coaching activities. This indicates that the majority of the COSAs time was spent on direct coaching activities which is in alignment with the MDE *Early Literacy Coaching Model*. In addition, the COSA Self-Efficacy Scale was administered to the COSAs. According to the data, all 16 items showed improvement in percent change. Additionally, using a paired-samples *t*-test, the mean differences were compared between the pretest and posttest scores. The paired *t*-test is ideal for a repeated-measures design (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2000). Based on this analysis, two items were statistically

significant (Q3 and Q8) at alpha < 0.05, two-tailed, with an effect size of 0.37 and 0.40, respectively. Although these effect sizes were *small* (Cohen, 1969), results of the COSA Self-Efficacy Scale revealed that, over time, COSAs became more confident in supporting teachers (see Table 1). In addition, analysis of the COSA Focus Group transcripts revealed an increase in COSAs' specialized literacy knowledge and skills. Evidence also suggests that COSAs moved from an awareness of the *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K-3* to implementation, and comparison data shows that COSAs became more focused on the specific needs of teachers.

### Teachers and Building Leaders
Across Wayne County, COSAs directly coached 464 K-3 teachers and 125 building leaders. Building leaders included building administrators, but depending upon the size of the district or PSA, a building leader could have been a central office administrator.

***Communication and Ongoing Support.*** Communication with the teachers and building leaders was two-pronged. First, professional learning was provided to help COSAs successfully facilitate conversations with teachers and administrators. Secondly, our team created and sustained a communication system around the data collection tools. These included comprehensive emails to COSAs, teachers, and building leaders regarding the reason for collecting data, links to the data collection tools, and contact information for any potential questions or concerns. Focus group sessions found that both COSAs and teachers appreciated the comprehensive support and communication received throughout the school year.

**Table 1**
*Self-Efficacy Scale Questions and Effect Sizes*

| Question | Effect Size |
|---|---|
| Q3: *I can clearly articulate my instructional moves to a coachee while modeling a lesson.* | 0.37 (small) |
| Q8: *I can design professional learning opportunities that are specific to the needs of the school.* | 0.40 (small) |

*Professional Learning.* The COSAs provided a total of 6,928 hours to their districts as literacy leaders for their districts and buildings, which accounted for 32% of their time. During that time, COSAs took on multiple roles, including presenting professional learning or working as facilitators in PLCs or data meetings. Some of the professional learning that COSAs presented to their districts or PSAs included, but were not limited to, the study and application of *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K-3*, small group instruction, guided reading, and curriculum support. In addition, our team offered regular professional learning sessions for Wayne County educators grounded in the *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K-3.*

*Comprehensive Data Collection and Analysis.* The Wayne RESA team also created data tools to measure the growth and self-perceptions of teachers and building leaders. These tools included K-3 Teacher Focus Groups, the COSA Supervisor/Building Leader Survey, and the K-3 Teachers/Building Leaders Collective Efficacy Scale.

During the K-3 Teachers Focus Group sessions, teachers were asked to share their beliefs about assessment. Specifically, teachers indicated a reliance on district assessment benchmark systems as well as informal, classroom-level assessments; they also relied on their locally administered assessments and formative practices to make informed decisions around shifts and adjustments to literacy instruction. Data from the COSA Supervisor/Building Leader Survey showed increases in several areas. According to the data, 8 items showed improvement. Specifically, building leaders reported increases in student reading proficiency, decreases in the number of students being referred to MTSS interventions, and a sustained positive mindset around literacy, respectively. In addition, building leaders reported positive growth in the COSA-teacher relationship that included intentional coaching cycles where teachers were given specific feedback and used that feedback to implement research-based instructional strategies. This was further reinforced by the K-3 Teacher/Building Leader Collective Efficacy Scale. According to the data,

3 items showed improvement in percent change from 0.25 to 0.82%. This revealed teachers' and building leaders' self-beliefs around implementing research-based instructional practices as well as their intentional use of assessment data to make instructional decisions.

### Students
It was our goal to assess students' motivation and interest in reading in the fall and spring. Due to issues with access, assistance, and testing sites (i.e., classrooms or homes), there was a discrepancy in pretest/posttest numbers. Approximately 6,000 students completed the pretest and nearly 5,000 students completed the posttest. The student motivation and interest surveys targeted K-1 and Grades 2-3 students, respectively.

*Communication and Ongoing Support.* Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, administration of the student motivation and interest surveys was adjusted. To better prepare our COSAs for different administration platforms, we scaffolded their understanding of the surveys through tutorial videos, an instructional document, and information about pre-populating data (i.e., district and teacher names). Some COSAs were able to administer the student surveys face-to-face, others had students access the surveys via Learning Management Systems, and the remainder made the decision based on the needs of the individual classroom (i.e., home administration).

*Professional Learning.* As previously mentioned, through a variety of networks, COSAs were continually exposed to professional learning focused on the *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K-3*. Essential Practice #1 (*Deliberate, research-informed efforts to foster literacy motivation and engagement within and across lessons*) is considered to be foundational to the other nine practices and directly addresses the importance of student motivation and engagement. Another important layer of COSAs' professional learning focused on the deliberate collection and use of data to initiate important COSA-teacher conversations. COSAs have specific literacy knowledge, and the survey data was used to help teachers set goals, tailor their content and instruction based on student responses,

and collect abundant reading topics and titles aligned with student interests.

***Comprehensive Data Collection and Analysis.*** Two questions drove our student data collection process. First, we anticipated increases in student proficiency on locally administered reading assessments. As reported by building leaders on the COSA Supervisor/Building Leader Survey, results showed a positive change from pretest to posttest when asked about students' proficiency on local reading assessments. Our second question addressed changes in students' self-beliefs about literacy. K-1 and Grades 2-3 survey responses reported growth in students' self-beliefs about their reading ability; the importance of reading; self-perceived comprehension, prosody, and fluency skills; their interest and motivation to read; and their pride in their reading abilities amongst peers.

## Year Two

The foundational frameworks for Year Two of this initiative continued to be centered on the research-supported practices in the *Essential Coaching Practices for Elementary Literacy*, *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K-3*, and the *Essential School-Wide and Center-Wide Practices in Literacy and Mathematics, Prekindergarten and Elementary Grades*.
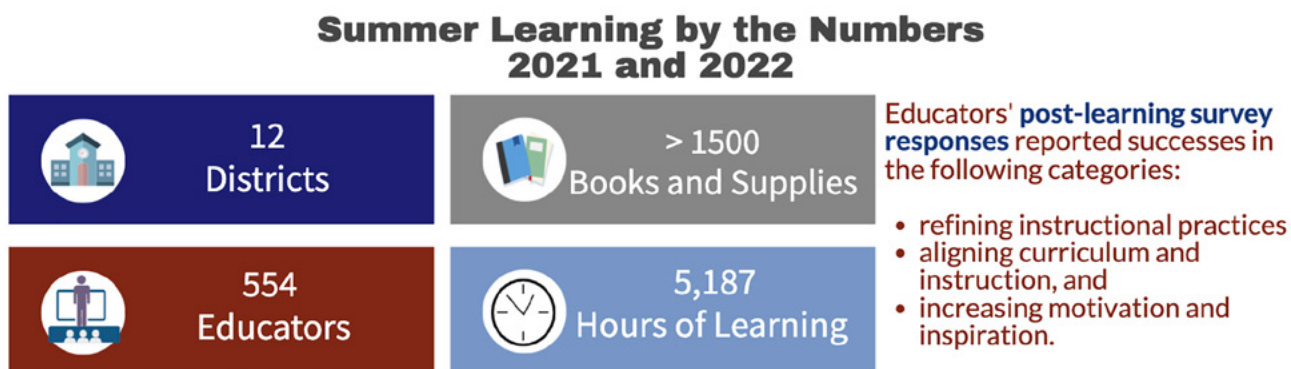
***Continued Support of COSAs***
In Year Two, we expanded our summer learning offerings for COSAs. The summer of 2021 provided multiple opportunities for COSAs to participate in guided learning sessions utilizing the *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K-3* online modules offered through the Michigan Virtual Professional Learning Portal. 21 COSAs were involved in viewing, studying, and debriefing these literacy essentials with fellow literacy coaches to gain further clarity and expertise in particular areas. The summer months also provided opportunities for districts to engage in an array of summer learning options for teachers and administrators to build educator capacity. Feedback from the educators who participated in this targeted learning around the *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K-3* indicated that their time was well spent. These summer learning opportunities were developed and facilitated by COSAs, and professional learning topics included book studies, literacy curriculum support and extensions, aligning curriculum and instruction with the *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K-3*, and building the expertise of other stakeholders, such as new teachers, paraprofessionals, and interventionists (see Figure 1).

Throughout the school year, COSAs also had the opportunity to attend
- a four-part series with Dr. Diane Jackson titled Building Coaching Strategies,
- our second annual Equity Leaders Series, co-sponsored by Washtenaw ISD and Oakland Schools,

**Figure 1**
*COSA-Led Summer Learning Opportunities, 2021-2022*



Summer Learning by the Numbers 2021 and 2022

12 Districts

> 1500 Books and Supplies

554 Educators

5,187 Hours of Learning

Educators' **post-learning survey responses** reported successes in the following categories:
- refining instructional practices
- aligning curriculum and instruction, and
- increasing motivation and inspiration.

- Cognitive Coaching Foundation Seminar through Thinking Collaborative™,
- COSA touchpoint meetings,
- the Wayne County Coaching Network,
- the quarterly ISD Early Literacy Coaching Network, and
- the quarterly COSA Collaborative.

Consistent attendance and participation in these experiences dramatically impact the development of "specialized literacy knowledge and skills beyond that of initial teacher preparation" (MAISA GELN ELTF, *Essential Coaching Practices*, 2016).

"Effective literacy coaches are integral members of literacy leadership teams at the school and/or district level" (MAISA GELN ELTF, *Essential Coaching Practices*, 2016). To that end, COSAs were vital in promoting the Talking Science through Texts initiative. A team of science, literacy, and assessment educators curated text sets, created interactive read-aloud guides, and suggested formative probes, designed to uncover student thinking, aligned to grade-level topic bundles of the Michigan Science Standards.

***Comprehensive Data Collection and Analysis COSAs.*** Similar to Year One, data was collected from the COSA Coaching Logs, pretest and posttest self-efficacy scales, and focus groups. The 2021-2022 COSA Coaching Logs revealed that COSAs spent 23.80% of their time engaged in literacy leadership work, 22.50% of their time dedicated to personal professional learning, and 53.70% of their time immersed in research-supported direct coaching activities, which is in alignment with the MDE Early Literacy Coaching Model. The 2021-2022 COSA Coaching Logs

also measured reliance upon the *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K-3* in all three areas of coaching: literacy leadership, personal professional learning, and direct coaching, respectively. The COSAs universally reported relying upon all ten Essential Practices in all three areas, with increased attention to Essential Instructional Practices #1, #3, #4, and #9 (motivation/engagement, small-group instruction, phonological awareness, and ongoing observation/assessment).

Identical to Year One, the COSA Self-Efficacy Scale collected data about the COSA's self-beliefs as related to their roles. According to the data, fourteen of the sixteen items showed an increase in percent change from pretest to posttest. Using a paired-samples *t*-test, the mean differences were also compared between the pretest and posttest scores, and one item was statistically significant (Q13) at alpha < 0.05, two-tailed, with an effect size of 0.44, which is considered small (Cohen, 1969). Over the past two years, COSAs had become increasingly confident in their coaching roles and their ability to guide teachers' use of data to choose appropriate, evidence-based instructional practices designed to promote student growth (see Table 2).

Finally, analysis of the COSA Focus Group transcripts affirmed their self-perceptions of coaches as a conduit in their buildings and classrooms. COSAs expressed the increased need to lead with compassion and empathy to empower teachers. Evidence also suggested that COSAs used the *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K-3* as a "road map" through which they can aid teachers in considering which instructional shifts would foster student growth; in essence, they are instrumental in moving teachers away from viewing data at

**Table 2**
*Self-Efficacy Scale Question and Effect Size*

| Question | Effect Size |
|---|---|
| Q13: *When a coachee is having adaptive challenges with a particular instructional design, I can adjust my coaching stance.* | 0.44 (small) |

the "surface level" by serving as data "thought partners" (personal communication, May 23, 2022).

***COSA Coordinators.*** As administrative leaders, the COSA Coordinators serve as the district/public school academy (PSA) point person between Wayne RESA and the COSAs. To better understand the impact of the initiative within their districts, we conducted semi-structured interviews with a small sample of our COSA Coordinators. When asked about the benefits of the initiative, responses varied according to the district's coaching model. For example, in some districts, the COSA serves as an instructional leader who consistently provides the "what" for teachers through modeling and co-teaching. In other districts, the COSA is a leader in the coaching community who shares professional learning and resources with the other district coaches. In either case, literacy coaches have "supported curriculum alignment" as well as the development of a "common language" across literacy educators (personal communication, August 1, 2022). Since one intended outcome of the initiative has been to develop and sustain a district-articulated coaching model, we also explored the district's progress. In almost all cases, the number of district coaches had increased over the past two years, and where there had been hybrid models (coach/interventionist), districts had collected data that supports prioritizing literacy coaching. When asked how they envision literacy coaching in the next five years, the COSA Coordinators expressed a desire to not only increase the number of literacy coaches at all grade levels but to also increase the number of teachers voluntarily engaging in coaching cycles as a solid pathway to more effective Tier 1 instruction, thus "minimizing the need for more interventions" (personal communication, July 21, 2022). Ideally, this would lead to an "increase in motivation and engagement with literacy" (personal communication, August 1, 2022). In addition, COSA Coordinators vocalized the need to "increase the capacity of building principals [...] to take ownership of the instructional coach they support at the building level" (personal communication, July 21, 2022). Finally, we asked each COSA Coordinator to rate the effectiveness of the initiative from *Highly Effective* to *Highly Ineffective*. Their responses ranged from *Effective* to *Highly Effective*. Overall, the initiative has been very successful, and continued grant funding to support literacy coaches was a main priority amongst the COSA Coordinators.

***Teachers and Building Leaders.*** Consistent with Year One, three data tools were used to measure the growth and self-perceptions of teachers and building leaders: the K-3 Teachers/Building Leaders Collective Efficacy Scale, the COSA Building Leader/Administrator Survey, and semi-structured interviews that we referred to as K-3 Teacher Focus Groups. Using a pretest-posttest design, we measured growth over time.

The Year Two Collective Efficacy Scale showed a positive percent change on 9 of the 20 questions. In Year One, only 3 of the 20 questions showed a positive percent change. Additionally, in both Year One and Year Two, responses to 11 questions remained consistently high with responses at or above 4.0 (*Agree*), indicating positive agreement or belief with the corresponding statement. In other words, the consistency in responses from Year One to Year Two revealed a relatively high level of collective efficacy. As Donohoo et al. (2018) noted, "When a team of individuals share the belief that through their unified efforts, they can overcome challenges and produce intended results, groups *are* more effective."

Supervisors and/or building leaders who had direct contact with COSAs were also asked to complete a survey to gather information about the implementation of coaching practices; teacher level of understanding, use, and implementation of literacy practices; teacher satisfaction; and the development of a district or building coaching model. In Year One, respondents indicated that teacher vacancies and attendance had not stabilized (Q20 and Q21). However, respondents on the Year Two survey indicated a small, but positive percent change that teacher vacancies and attendance had stabilized. This could be attributed to new laws or allowances that had recently been passed in Michigan to help curb the teacher and substitute shortage, along with a strong focus on the social-emotional well-being of staff. Additionally, in the Year Two survey, 12 questions showed

a small positive percent change. Of those questions, a highlight to note is the positive role the COSA has played in supporting teacher practice through feedback (Q2), modeling literacy practices (Q5), and assisting in planning lessons with teachers (Q4).

Finally, analysis of the K-3 Teacher Focus Group transcripts revealed positive beliefs about literacy coaching as supportive, compassionate, and inspirational. Teachers saw COSAs as instructional leaders that foster resilience. Evidence also suggested the *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K-3* have been foundational in COSA-teacher collaborations. Since the *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K-3* are curriculum agnostic, teachers see the alignment with their current resources, and some have engaged in deeper learning through LETRS training. Finally, teachers communicated the value of collecting a wide variety of data points to assess the whole child, both formative and summative (i.e., anecdotal notes, observations, DRA, NWEA, iReady), and with COSA guidance, they have used that data to shift instruction according to small- and whole-group needs.

*Students.* Once again, it was our goal to assess building leaders' perceptions of student growth and students' motivation and interest in reading using the pretest-posttest design. Building leaders received the Building Leader/Administrator Survey via email in Quarters 2 and 4. In Year One, COSAs similarly administered the student surveys in Quarters 2 and 4. However, in response to their feedback from Year One, we provided them with more autonomy over the timing of the pretest and posttest in Year Two. For example, a COSA might have chosen to administer the surveys before and after engaging in a coaching cycle with a particular teacher. In addition, we encouraged COSAs to administer the surveys to students whose teachers they were directly coaching as opposed to, for example, the entire third grade. To that end, approximately 120 building leaders and 3,550 students completed the surveys, respectively.

As noted above, Q17 on the COSA Building Leader/Administrator Survey asked respondents to rate from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree* the following statement: *In general, students have shown an increase in proficiency on local reading assessments*. Q17 showed a stable positive change from pretest to posttest in Years One and Two.

When examining students' self-beliefs about literacy, K-1 and Grades 2-3 survey responses reported consistency from Year One to Year Two in the following areas: students' self-beliefs about their reading ability, including fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary; the importance of reading, including the value of books, libraries, and time spent reading in general; their feelings about reading, including their interest, motivation, and enjoyment; and their pride in their reading abilities amongst peers. Both K-1 and Grades 2-3 students also expressed a universal enjoyment of read-alouds.

*Families.* While we did not directly measure the impact of the school-home literacy connection, we were encouraged by the myriad ways districts worked to nurture home literacy. Through focus group sessions, teachers and COSAs reported providing a variety of opportunities in multiple modalities to extend literacy learning beyond the school day. These included literacy nights, access to library cards, cultivating local library connections, literacy newsletters, book vending machines, and resources for home, such as videos and modeling for families. Additionally, COSAs supported teachers in talking to parents at parent-teacher conferences, developing summer resources and programming, and creating pathways for preschoolers through the Talking Is Teaching campaign.

## Year Three

For the 2022-2023 school year, we targeted a few key elements of this initiative that have been previously identified as areas in need of improvement: the COSA-Principal relationship, data-driven instruction, outside-of-school literacy opportunities, and the development of sustainable coaching models in individual districts or PSAs. While most of the information below will focus on those areas, we continued to monitor the growth of our COSA's coaching skills and dispositions. This has been a consistent part of the training offered

to our COSAs by the ISD Early Literacy Coaching Network, Wayne RESA-supported professional learning, and other national, regional, and local opportunities (i.e., professional conferences). The continued growth of our COSAs and those they serve, including teachers, students, and families, has been measured by the intentional data collection and analysis that we established in Year One (2020-2021). As noted above, despite a global pandemic and its trailing aftereffects, this initiative has continued to yield positive results and areas that need attention.

### COSAs

Like Years One and Two, data were collected from the pretest and posttest self-efficacy scales, COSA Coaching Logs, and focus groups. Identical to Years One and Two, the COSA Self-Efficacy Scale collected data about the COSA's self-beliefs as related to their roles. Year Three showed marked growth. According to the data, all sixteen items showed an increase in percent change from pretest to posttest while four of the sixteen items were statistically significant at alpha <0.05. These items, which asked COSAs to select from a range of responses (*Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree*), and their corresponding effect sizes can be found below:

Thus, over the past three years, our COSAs have continued to confidently and enthusiastically embrace their roles as coaches and literacy leaders' intent on guiding teachers in using evidence-based instructional practices to promote student growth.

The 2022-2023 COSA Coaching Logs revealed that COSAs spent 26% of their time engaged in literacy leadership work, 24% of their time dedicated to personal professional learning, and 50% of their time immersed in research-supported direct coaching activities. This data indicates that the majority of our COSAs' time was spent on direct coaching activities, which is in alignment with the MDE Coaching Model. The 2022-2023 COSA Coaching Logs also measured reliance upon the *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K-3* in all three areas of coaching: literacy leadership, personal professional learning, and direct coaching, respectively. The COSAs universally reported relying upon all ten Essential Practices in all three areas. However, since two focus areas of this year's report were data-driven instruction (Essential Instructional Practice #9) and outside-of-school literacy practices (Essential Instructional Practice #10), we looked at the prevalence of those two Essential Instructional

**Table 3**
*Self-Efficacy Scale Questions and Effect Sizes*

| Question | Effect Size |
|---|---|
| Q1: *I can confidently go into classrooms in my school because of the relationships I have with my colleagues.* | 0.41 (small) |
| Q3: *I can clearly articulate my instructional moves to a coachee while modeling a lesson.* | 0.49 (small) |
| Q6: *As I observe a coachee teaching a literacy lesson, I can quickly decide how to provide a response when debriefing the lesson.* | 0.68 (medium) |
| Q11: *I can plan and design a lesson tailored to the specific needs of a coachee.* | 0.41 (small) |

Practices in the coaching logs (see Table 4); the second data point reinforces the critical need to bolster home literacy practices to increase student success.

Finally, an analysis of the COSA Focus Group transcripts, more of which will be found in the subsections below, depicted responsiveness in their work with teachers. As one COSA noted, "[I] think deeply about how to reach different people [... knowing] that change comes through the numerous conversations" (personal communication, January 27, 2023). COSAs see coaching as a partnership that requires nurturing, trust, patience, and time, and this is based on their foundational belief that "coaching is [...] an impactful and powerful way to build capacity" (personal communication, January 27, 2023).

### COSA-Principal Relationship

In our touchpoint meetings with COSAs, we informally observed that smaller workloads tended to promote greater cohesion between the COSA and the building leader. In other words, if a COSA was working in one or two buildings, the COSA and principal worked together on setting a plan for the year, including goals, scheduling, professional development, data collection, reporting, and so on. In most cases, these COSAs met regularly with their principals to assess progress and redirect when necessary. A strong COSA-principal relationship also allowed COSAs to set necessary boundaries around coaching roles and responsibilities and prevented the COSA from being

pulled into non-coaching activities, such as substitute teaching and test proctoring. Finally, "[a] healthy coach-principal relationship is essential to successful implementation at the building level. Achieving positive change should drive the coach-principal relationship while honoring the role of the coach as a non-evaluative partner" (Wayne RESA, 2019).

### Data-Driven Instruction

As in previous years, data was collected using focus groups and perception surveys. Both teachers and COSAs were asked to "*[d]escribe the data/evidence you collect around your students' language and literacy development and how you use it to make instructional decisions. Please provide specific examples.*" In the teacher focus group, respondents reported that they use a mix of district-adopted benchmark assessments (such as NWEA or i-Ready), common assessments, and "in the moment" or informal classroom data to support instructional decisions. Teachers shared that they value and use the day-to-day information from student work and their own observations. Other data points related to specific literacy skills, such as letters and sounds, were particularly helpful to teachers when planning for small-group instruction. COSAs reported the use of district-adopted benchmark assessments and student-friendly rubrics as well as engaging in observational practices. One COSA shared that she supported teachers with how to observe her students and take notes during small group instruction. Additionally, COSAs shared that their districts recognized the need

**Table 4**

*Coaching Logs and Emphasis on Essential Instructional Practices*

| Essential Instructional Practice | Average Number of Times Noted |
|---|---|
| *#9: Ongoing observation and other forms of assessment of children's language and literacy development that informs their education.* | 60 |
| *#10: Collaboration with families, caregivers, and the community in promoting literacy.* | 19 |

to build data literacy and have supported teachers through professional learning connected to the understanding, analysis, and use of data. When surveyed, building leaders and teachers affirmed with a 4.2 out of 5 rating, indicating that they agree or strongly agree that teachers are using data to drive instruction. Finally, in the Building Leader/Administrator survey, questions 13 and 14 specifically refer to data use and application. From pretest to posttest, Q13 revealed a positive 3.7% change, indicating that teachers increasingly used assessment data to adjust their instructional practices.

Similarly, Q14 showed a 2.5% increase, affirming that teachers continue to apply assessment data when making instructional decisions.

### Outside -of-School Literacy

According to current research, outside-of-school literacy continues to be a significant factor in early literacy success for students (Ishimaru, 2014, 2019; Warren, 2005). The *Essential School-Wide and Center-Wide Practices in Literacy and Mathematics, Prekindergarten and Elementary Grades* include three practices that support

**Figure 2**

*Out-of-School Literacy and Language Opportunities*
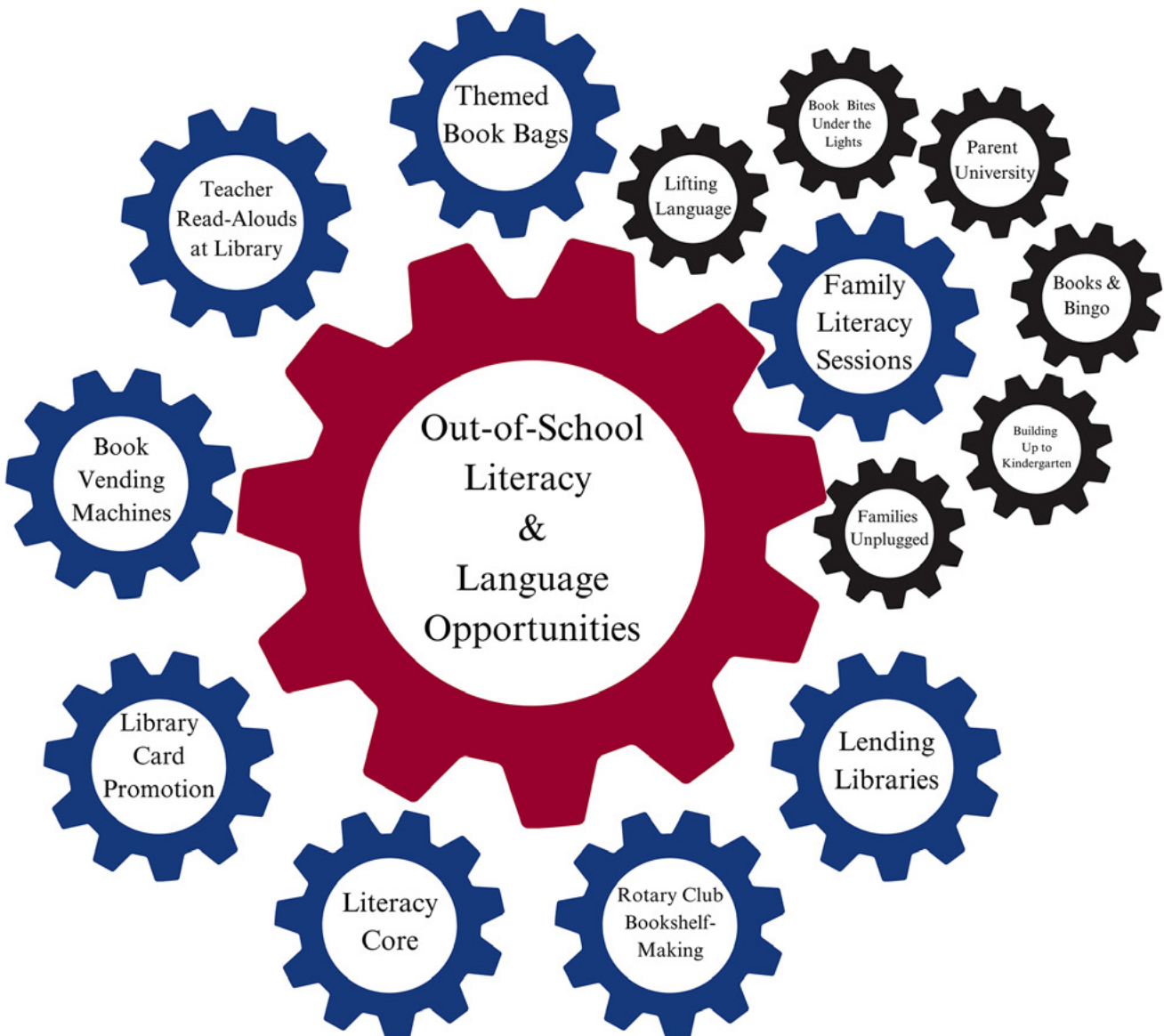
early literacy growth and development that might happen beyond traditional school-day instruction. Consistent collaboration with families, the integration of summer learning, and community connections should foster attention and engagement with literacy while providing authentic opportunities for children to discover and learn about the world around them.

In the 2022-2023 school year, Wayne County educators, including COSAs and teachers working with literacy coaches, highlighted various literacy learning experiences. The overarching purpose centered on increased levels of family and community literacy involvement.

Additionally, communication with families continued to be valued, specifically when the information and data shared were individualized. Reading logs and reflections showed literacy accomplishments and areas for growth. References to specific lessons supported families in helping their children on their literacy journey. An Individual Reading Improvement Plan (IRIP), an extension of the Read By Grade Three Law, also provided a detailed intervention plan to support students who may be performing below grade-level standards. Using multi-media forms of communication allowed for accessibility for families; Schoology and other education online platforms, teacher-made videos, and newsletters translated into several languages supported clear correspondence.

As we considered students' perceptions of themselves as readers, we acknowledge three questions that pertain to outside-of-school literacy in the K-1 Student Survey results that showed a positive increase from pretest to posttest.

Similarly, there was marked growth (2.8% increase) in how 2nd and 3rd grade students reported spending time reading.

### *Coaching Model*
Since the first year of our initiative, we have sought to guide districts in implementing and supporting a coaching model within their contexts. According to MDE, a "literacy coaching model is a research-supported approach that sets forth the essentials of high-quality coaching for Michigan educators. The model is designed to build both teacher and coach capacity and sustainability around effective literacy instruction" (2018). In essence, a strong coaching model impacts high-quality instruction, leading to positive student outcomes.

To help our COSA Coordinators and COSAs not only establish but maintain a strong district-wide coaching model, we have continued to rely on three guidance documents: the MDE Early Literacy Coaching Model, the Essential Coaching Practices for Elementary Literacy, and the Wayne RESA Key Considerations for Coaching Systems. Both the *MDE Early Literacy Coaching Model* and the *Essential Coaching Practices for Elementary Literacy* prioritize a coach's work with teachers. As noted above, our coaches spend 50% or more of their time working with teachers, and when asked whether their COSAs engaged in intentional coaching cycles with teachers, building leaders affirmed with a 4.6 out of 5 rating, indicating that they agree or strongly

**Table 5**
*K-1 Student Surveys and Percent Increases from Pretest to Posttest*

| Question | Percent Increase |
|---|---|
| I think libraries are (great, okay, boring). | 1.64% |
| I spend (a lot, some, none) of my time reading books. | 5.85% |
| Do you like to read when you have free time? (Yes, it's okay, no) | 3.22% |

agree that COSAs are engaged in coaching cycles. In our Wayne RESA *Key Considerations for Coaching Systems* document, we used the transtheoretical model (Straub, 2002) to outline a district's implementation phase in its coaching model development (see below). Approximately 70% of the building leaders responded that they are currently in the Action phase, which indicates that

- Coaching is becoming part of the school culture by creating conditions, behaviors, and practices that embed instructional change within broader efforts to improve school culture and climate.
- Shifts in classroom practice are occurring and providing greater access and opportunity for all students.
- Coherence is developing between school practice and district initiatives, as coaches become conduits for professional learning.

- Relationships are forming as administrators, coaches, and teachers develop a clear understanding of individual roles and the way each fits within the system-wide vision, goals, and outcomes. (2019)

Finally, both COSA and teacher focus groups reported that coaching is a powerful tool for growing teacher practice and capacity. In this partnership built upon relational trust, teachers felt supported by their coaches, and they universally appreciated the opportunity to receive constructive feedback. Our COSAs continually relied upon a core set of coaching activities, particularly conferencing, to aid teachers in making instructional shifts. As one COSA said, "[O]ne of the most powerful things about coaching is that you can really meet them where they're at and give them what they need" (personal communication, February 6, 2023).

**Figure 3**

*Implementing a Coaching Model: Stages of Implementation*
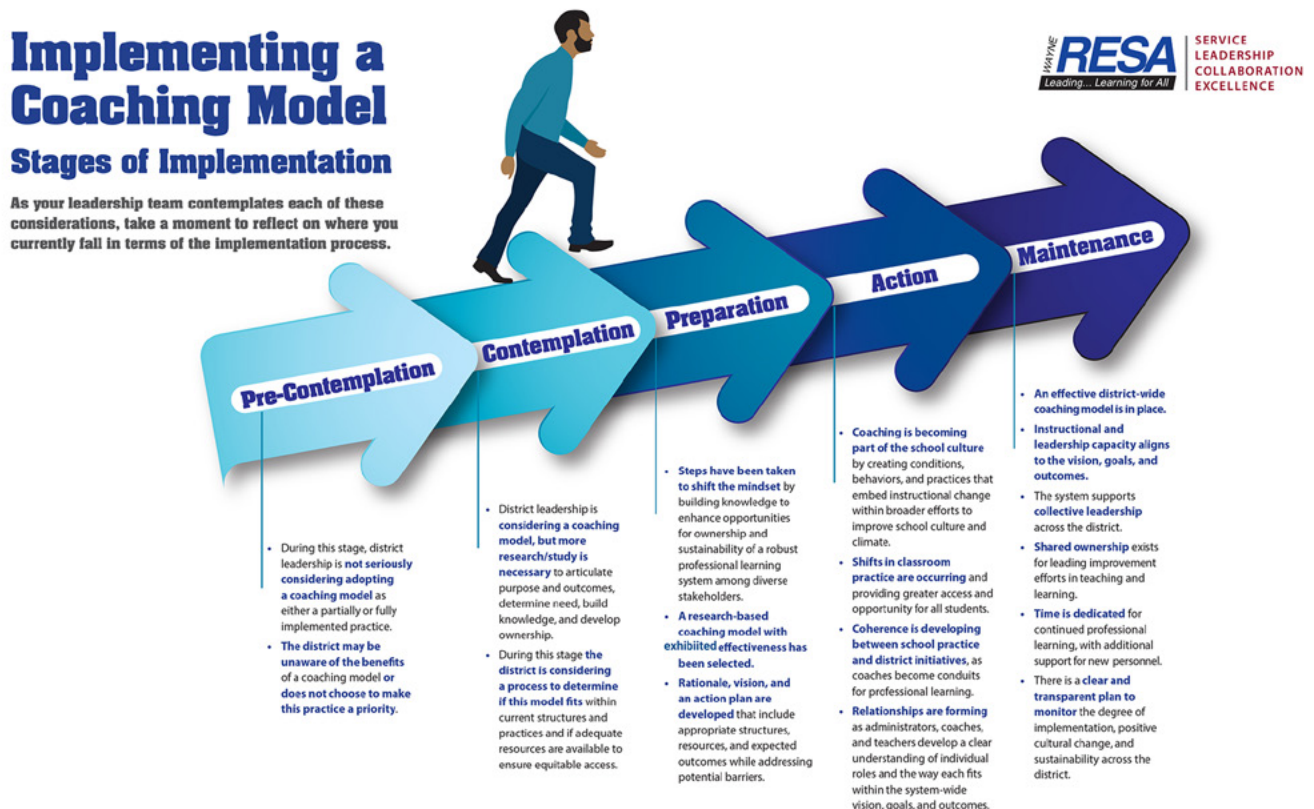
**Limitations**

Since the pronounced disruption in March 2020, each new school year has held the promise of renewed normalcy. Yet between 2020 and 2021, students across the county regularly missed important opportunities for cognitive and emotional development, and schools had to adjust and readjust amid a profound teacher and substitute shortage. The current teacher shortage has undoubtedly exacerbated the difficulty COSAs encounter when directly coaching teachers, and this has been compounded by continual turnovers in teaching positions. Such issues have challenged collective efficacy, self-efficacy, motivation, and interest, contributing to the pervasive fatigue felt by educators and students alike. Additionally, due to shifts in district personnel, we have welcomed new COSAs into our group each year. In the 2022-2023 school year, more than ten new coaches were hired to support their districts in promoting research-based literacy instruction in K-3 classrooms. Because of this, we have varying levels of coaching experience within our group, and this influences their ongoing work with teachers. Finally, staffing changes (building leaders and teachers) can make it difficult to build relational trust and sustain a strong coaching model. To these ends, we have continued to fine-tune our professional learning for our COSAs, being especially cognizant of their coaching experience and their district's readiness to implement a school- or district-wide coaching model. Despite these strains, our COSAs have persisted in supporting their schools. As one teacher expressed, "[Our COSA] really is a voice in the district for the teachers; she has been super helpful in many different ways" (personal communication, May 23, 2022). This echoes Jim Knight's constant refrain: "Every teacher deserves a coach" (2018).

**Cultivating a Community of Coaches: Effective Practices**

To build a comprehensive community of literacy coaches, we recommend the following practices:
- Review historical data to assess the current needs of the school/district.
- Develop a logic model and evaluation framework to create feedback loops for continuous improvement and assess the impact of implementation.
- Design data collection tools that align with the evaluation framework (see Appendix).
- Create multiple and varied pathways of communication with all stakeholders (email, website, etc.).
- Schedule regular networking meetings for the whole group, small group, or individuals that include updates and customized support.
- Develop ongoing opportunities for shared learning and networking as a coaching community.
- Collaborate with district leaders to develop a coaching model that emphasizes a strong coach-principal relationship.
- Leverage the coach community to support family and community literacy.
- To ensure transparency, provide an annual report which includes findings, insights, and recommendations.

These practices can be replicated across an ISD/RESA or within a school district to support the building of a coaching community. While these listed practices are not exhaustive, they have supported the development and nurturing of an authentic community of learners over time.

## Preparing for Year Four and Beyond

We have continued to learn from our interactions with our COSAs, COSA Coordinators, teachers, building leaders, and students as well as through an iterative analysis of our data; these triangulated data points have helped us identify areas of need for the coming years. One goal is to provide targeted professional learning around data collection and analysis to improve instruction and achievement. Additionally, through our COSA touchpoint meetings, it has become evident that consistent messaging about the purpose and value of coaching must be established within districts and PSAs; thus, another goal is to offer regular opportunities for COSAs and administrators to meet with WRESA consultants. We hope such changes will further promote powerful district coaching models. Furthermore, to improve outside-of-school literacy, we will lean into the collective efficacy of teachers and building leaders. We know that when efficacy is present in a school culture,

beliefs that reflect high expectations for student success are evident (Donohoo et al., 2018). This elevates student self-efficacy and promotes a commitment to learning outside of the classroom, beyond the school day, and throughout the community. As we've learned over the past three years, our goals drive the continued success of this initiative and reinforce the potency of our ISD-supported literacy coaching model.

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# Appendix

Our Data Collection Timelines provide links to the data collection tools listed above. While the tools have remained fairly consistent over time, our team reevaluates them each year and makes necessary changes.

2020-2021 Data Collection Timeline
2021-2022 Data Collection Timeline
2022-2023 Data Collection Timeline

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