

GUIDANCE FOR STRUCTURING STRENGTHS-BASED COACHING

Having a strengths-based conversation with an educator requires a deep level of listening and observing, and it centers around the goal of maximizing an educator's strengths to further their own instructional practice. It also helps the educator to be more conscious about what is working and facilitates a conversation around improvement that is rooted in their talents and strengths.

When leaders have an intentional focus on fostering a positive environment, they can still drive productive conversations about good teaching and learning. At NIET, we use strengths-based conversations with educators to support [student engagement and ownership](#) of their learning – the outcome of effective instruction. While there is no exact formula for strengths-based coaching, this document provides some guidance on how to structure and explore strengths-based coaching with an educator following a walkthrough or observation of their instruction.

IDENTIFY SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF THEIR STRENGTHS IN ACTION

Talk about what you saw in the classroom that was powerful and label effective instructional practices. Provide as many examples as you can of how the teacher took specific steps to increase student ownership and how you saw students respond and engage. Be as clear and exact as possible. For example, talk about a specific moment, what the educator said, and what specific students said or did in response.

As you share, teachers may want to focus on what they want to fix or what is going wrong. Remind them that doing something well does not happen by accident and that this is a conversation to talk about strengths. Be sure to help the teacher trace the impact of his or her actions to student actions, engagement, and ownership.

Share that understanding our strengths can help to not only strengthen a teacher's own teaching but can help us identify which strategies to try across the school, and that is important for helping to improve student achievement more broadly.

CELEBRATE PROGRESS

Acknowledge something the teacher has been working on from previous coaching sessions (e.g., a specific instructional technique, an aspect of behavior management) and how you saw them continuing to work on that skill or strategy in practice. Noting milestones and ways that teachers are leveraging their strengths builds their confidence in applying their strengths to improve.

Are you an NIET partner? View examples of strengths-based coaching and additional resources in EE PASS.

ACKNOWLEDGE PERSEVERANCE AND RESILIENCE

Acknowledge the challenges that the teacher may face, such as learning gaps or specific student needs, and the evidence you saw that students are progressing despite those challenges – thanks to the hard work of the educator. Particularly as we recover from the pandemic, acknowledging and taking note of the obstacles that teachers and students face is key to helping them feel seen and understood – and to identifying the support the educator may need.

REFLECT

Ask the teacher to reflect on what is working. Some potential questions to talk through:

- What are you doing in your teaching that is having an impact on student learning? What evidence are you noticing?
- How have you overcome challenges this year with your students?
- How did you get students to take ownership of their learning? (Cite a specific example; e.g., How did you get students to ask higher-level questions about the text they were reading?)
- How can you leverage the skill/strategy/ownership that you've taught students in your next lesson or unit? How do you think they'll respond?
- What have I said today that is powerful about your teaching? What have I said that is going to impact the way you teach moving forward?
- If you were talking with another teacher who was struggling with an area where you are strong (cite a specific example; e.g., setting high expectations), how would you coach them on where to start?
- Would you be willing to talk about this in PLC or cluster meetings?

LOOK AHEAD

Based on what you heard, share what you see as some next steps. Perhaps they could bring their strength into a collaborative meeting with other educators. You could discuss other areas of their practice that could be enhanced by strengths.

Additionally, consider how and when you can publicly acknowledge an educator's strengths with their peers or with students. That can help to further cultivate a school and staff culture that reflects the values you may want to reinforce.

