MOVES FOR VIRTUAL COACHING

STUDENT-CENTERED COACHING FOR TODAY'S SCHOOLS

DIANE SWEENEY CONSULTING

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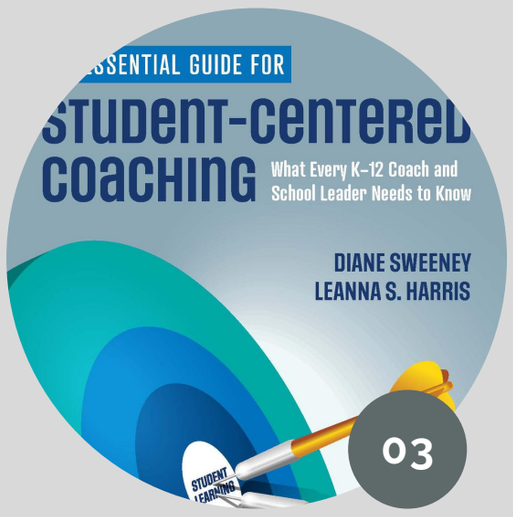

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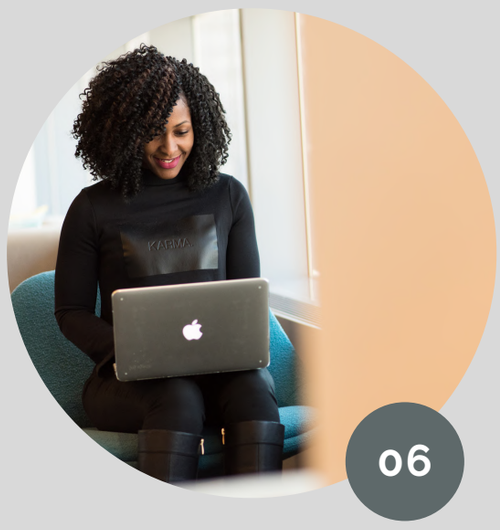

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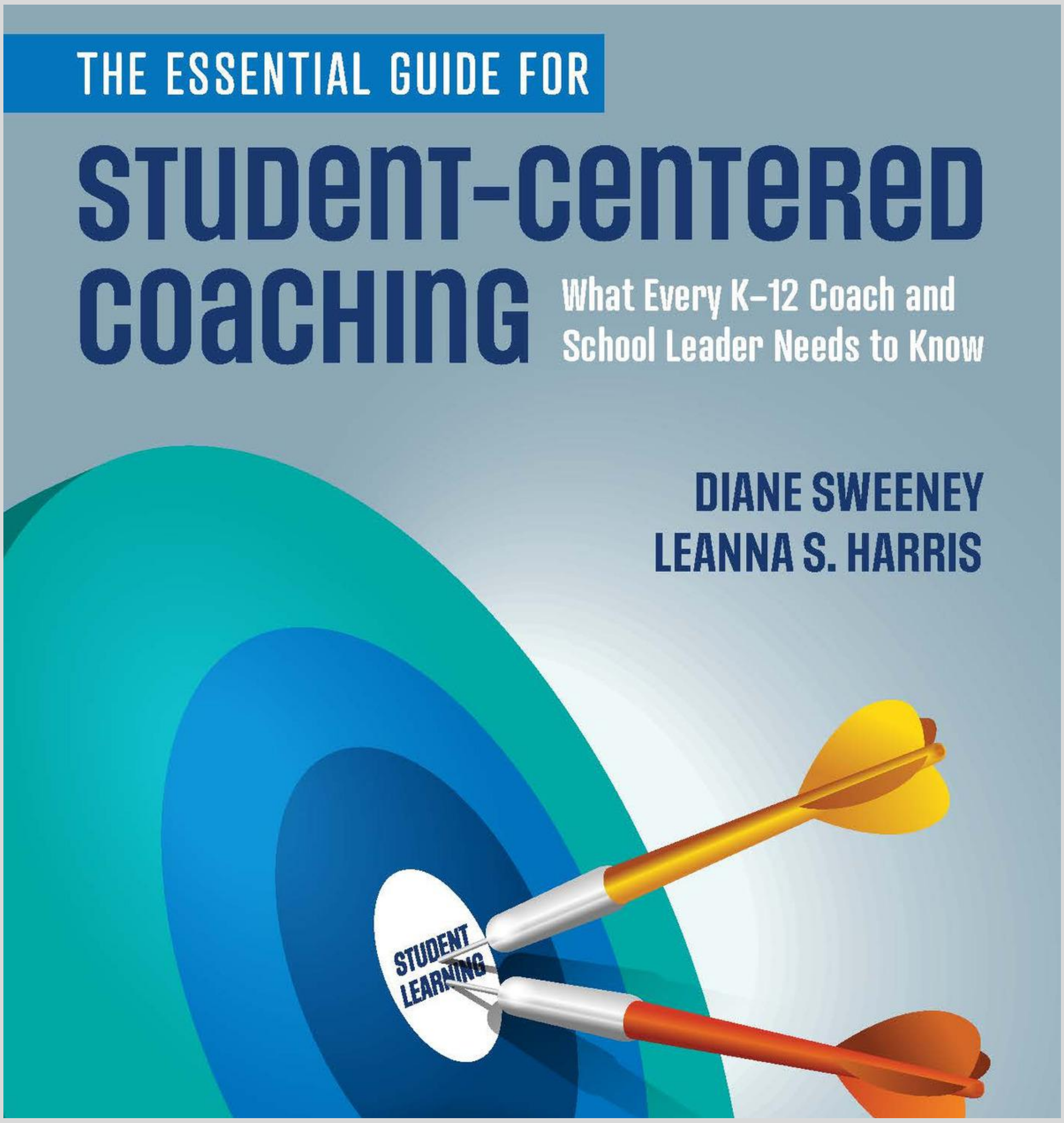


KEEPING THE FOCUS ON STUDENT LEARNING WHEN COACHING VIRTUALLY

There is no question that teachers are facing unprecedented challenges as they adjust to hybrid and/or virtual instruction. Many proven pedagogical practices are no longer applicable which means we are in a constant state of innovation around teaching and learning. Lack of connection with students is also creating a sense of loss and disorientation for many teachers.

Shifting to online or hybrid instruction means teachers need a thinking partner today more than ever. For coaches this demands we shift our practices so we can continue to support student and teacher learning through Student-Centered Coaching. We wrote this ebook to help coaches navigate their way through these uncharted waters.

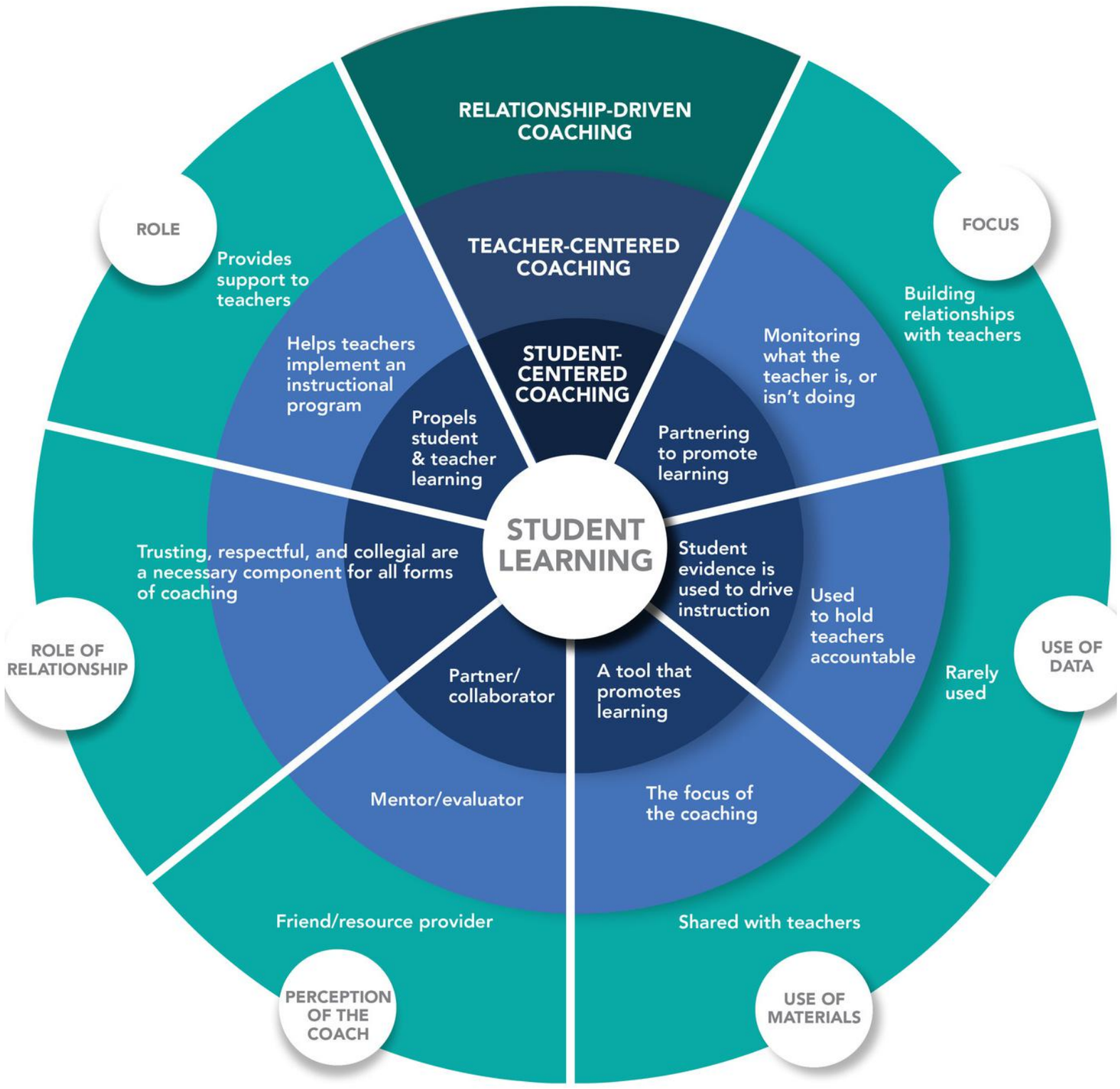
What Is Student-Centered Coaching?

Student-Centered Coaching is an evidence-based coaching model. Rather than hoping that coaching will impact student learning, coaching is designed to do just that.

We ask teachers what they would like their students to learn, and then we co-plan and co-teach to get them there. This allows us to impact student learning and support teachers to implement effective instructional practices. In today's environment, this will likely include co-planning lessons with teachers that integrate technology-based instructional practices and engagement strategies.

As we adjust to a virtual coaching environment, the core practices for Student-Centered Coaching still remain front and center, though we acknowledge that adjustments must be made in the delivery of these practices for today's virtual classrooms.

Figure 1: Student-Centered Coaching Compared with Other Approaches



What Makes Student-Centered Coaching Unique?

Figure 1 compares Student-Centered Coaching with other approaches to instructional coaching. We use the language of relationship-driven, teacher-centered, and student-centered coaching to describe what we've seen in schools as we've supported coaching over the past few decades. This figure details the role, focus, use of data, and other common coaching behaviors in each type of coaching.

We like to think of this figure as a dartboard. We continually aim for the center, which is student learning. This approach doesn't mean that we won't hit the outer rings at certain times, it just surfaces the importance of keeping the focus where it belongs.

Coach as Resource Provider

With the sudden shift to remote learning this past spring, many coaches spent their time serving as resource providers. This included helping teachers set up online libraries, figuring out the learning management system, and making sure that students had access to the necessary technology.

At the time, this made sense given what teachers were facing, and it still may be necessary to play this role with a new set of challenges as the school year begins. The issue arises when this is the *only* role that a coach plays because it will ultimately diminish the impact of the coaching program as a whole.

A strategy to help us avoid getting stuck as resource providers is to allow ourselves a few weeks to serve in this role and then put a date on the calendar for when to shift to more student-centered work. This creates some accountability without too much pressure.

We also recommend for coaches to closely analyze how they are spending their time. This can be achieved through time audits and calendar reviews. If a coach isn't doing work that directly impacts student and teacher learning, then it's time to make some adjustments in their coaching practice.

HOW DO WE ADJUST FOR VIRTUAL COACHING?

What are the Guiding Principles for Student-Centered Coaching?

Whenever we are working with others to implement Student-Centered Coaching, we continually come back to a set of guiding principles that serve as the philosophical underpinning for this work. These principles are at the heart of our beliefs about coaching and hold true in a virtual coaching environment. They include:

- Coaching is not about 'fixing' teachers
- Coaching is a partnership focused on student learning
- Coaching is about continual professional growth
- Coaching is part of a robust ecosystem of professional learning

What Do the Core Practices for Student-Centered Coaching Look Like in a Virtual Coaching Environment?

Student-Centered Coaching is driven by a set of core practices that are all about keeping student learning at the center of every coaching conversation.

The first core practice is to utilize **coaching cycles**. Coaching cycles are how we ensure that coaching makes a lasting impact. If coaches only work with teachers in an informal, or one-shot, basis, then the results of the coaching will be minimal. We recognize that this year, it may take a bit longer to get coaching cycles up and running, but they remain as important as ever.

Coaching cycles begin with a **standards-based goal** for student learning. This practice keeps us at the center of the bullseye because it ensures that we are focused on teaching and learning. This is no different in a virtual coaching environment. Whether inside or outside of a school building, students are there to learn and this is where we must keep our focus.

Virtual learning requires that students are expected to be more independent in their learning. The core practice of **using learning targets** supports students to navigate these new demands. By developing a set of student-friendly learning targets, we provide a success criteria that students can use to move through their learning with a clear sense of what they're expected to accomplish. To make this happen, the learning targets must be student-friendly so that student goal setting and self-assessment can take place.

Each and every coaching conversation is anchored in the learning targets because they provide a clear path toward the expected student outcomes. With this information at hand, the teacher(s) and coach are in better position to co-plan and co-teach lessons across the coaching cycle.

Co-planning with student evidence is the hallmark of student-centered coaching. While the student evidence may look different than it does in an in-person classroom setting, it is still a vital part of the process.

We recommend for coaches to work with teachers to identify tech tools for open-ended learning tasks. This includes applications like Padlet, Jamboard, Flipgrid, Google Forms, Seesaw, etc. When these tools are used in a formative manner, they can inform instructional planning just like the assessments that we have used in the past.

Another recommended practice that leads to effective co-planning sessions is Noticing and Naming. In a traditional classroom this involves a coach and teacher observing and listening to students to understand how they are performing in relation to the learning targets. In a virtual setting, this practice can be used by adding the coach to the online classroom with the expectation that observations are still made related to student performance toward the targets. This information is then used in co-planning conversations.

Co-teaching looks different in a virtual setting. No longer can a coach walk up the hallway to join a lesson. Rather, the coach and teacher must plan how content will be delivered, what students will be asked to do, and how they will be assessed in a virtual or hybrid setting. There are rich opportunities for coaches to join lessons and contribute based on the teachers' needs. Figure 2 provides several examples of practices coaches can use when joining the virtual classroom.

One of the reasons we advocate for utilizing coaching cycles is so that we can **measure the impact** of coaching on teaching and learning. This core practice involves using the Results-Based Coaching Tool to collect data across a coaching cycle. While the assessment we use may need to be adjusted, this core practice still applies in a virtual setting. In Figure 6, we share a tool we use for measuring the impact across a coaching cycle.

The last core practice is to **partner with the school leader**. Without a solid principal and coach partnership, the coach will not be able to make the desired impact. Clearly defining roles and creating systems for coaching in a virtual context are more important than ever.

Figure 2: Co-Teaching Moves: In Person and Virtual

	In Person	Virtual
NOTICING & NAMING	Teacher and coach observe students and record evidence using a note catcher.	Teacher and coach plan the student evidence that will be generated and analyzed after the lesson.
THINKING ALOUD	Teacher and coach share their thinking throughout the lesson.	Teacher and coach decide how to reflect on the student evidence that was collected.
TEACHING IN TANDEM	Teacher and coach work together to co-deliver the lesson.	Teacher and coach join video lessons or collaborate to moderate students' comments so that more students receive feedback.
YOU PICK FOUR	Teacher identifies four students for the coach to monitor and collect student evidence during the lesson.	Teacher identifies four students for the coach to monitor and collect student evidence during or after the lesson.
MICRO MODELING	At the teacher's request, a portion of the lesson is modeled by the coach.	At the teacher's request, the coach teaches a video-based lesson so the teacher can learn new strategies for teaching online.

Adapted from *Student-Centered Coaching: The Moves* (Sweeney and Harris)

VIRTUAL SORTING SESSIONS

Student-Centered Coaching depends on using student evidence to co-plan instruction. One of our favorite coaching moves is to sort student work with teachers because it is a productive way to help teachers see - and act upon - the different needs of students in their classroom.

Virtual coaching sessions also depend on this strategy. What's different are the types of student evidence we use and how we sort it. Typically, a teacher or team of teachers sits down with the coach and a pile of student work and sorts that work against the learning target or success criteria. When coaching virtually, teachers and coaches find themselves analyzing evidence such as videos or work that is submitted on Seesaw, Jamboard, Padlet, Flipgrid, or Google Docs. Much like in person, when coaching virtually, the work is examined in relation to the learning target and then next steps are created. Figure 3 provides an example of an assignment in Seesaw that would lend itself to a sorting session.

As discussed previously, another practice we recommend is for the coach and teacher to collect student evidence through Noticing and Naming. Figure 4 provides an example of notes a coach took that were used in a planning conversation that followed the lesson.

A final caution relates to assigning quality work that is open ended and provides evidence of student learning. Without quality work, sorting sessions, and the desired learning, will fall short.

Figure 3: An Example of an Assignment in Seesaw

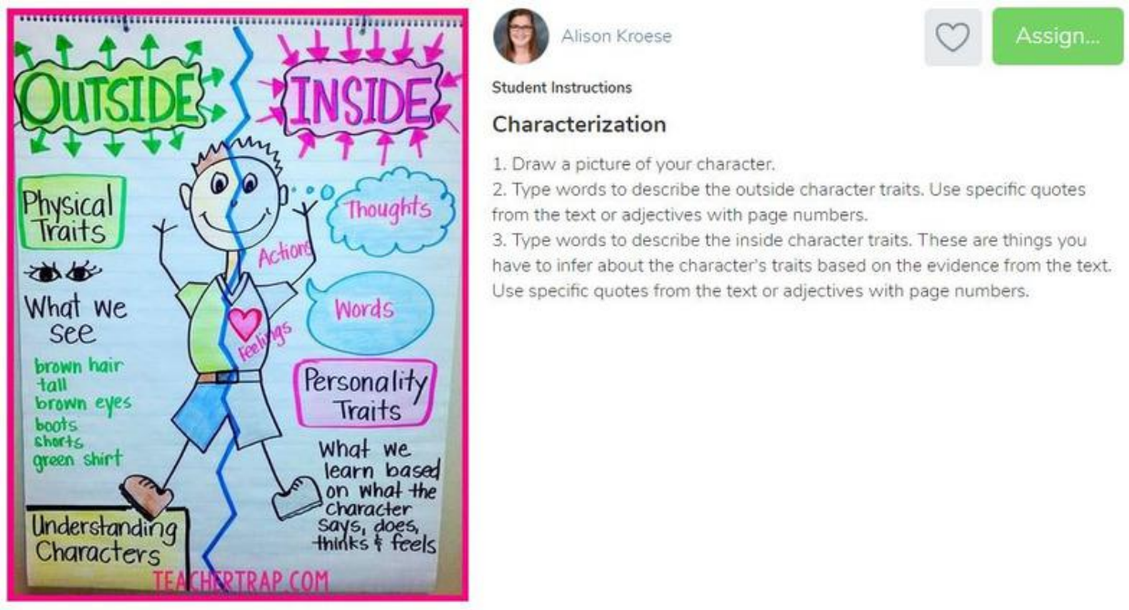
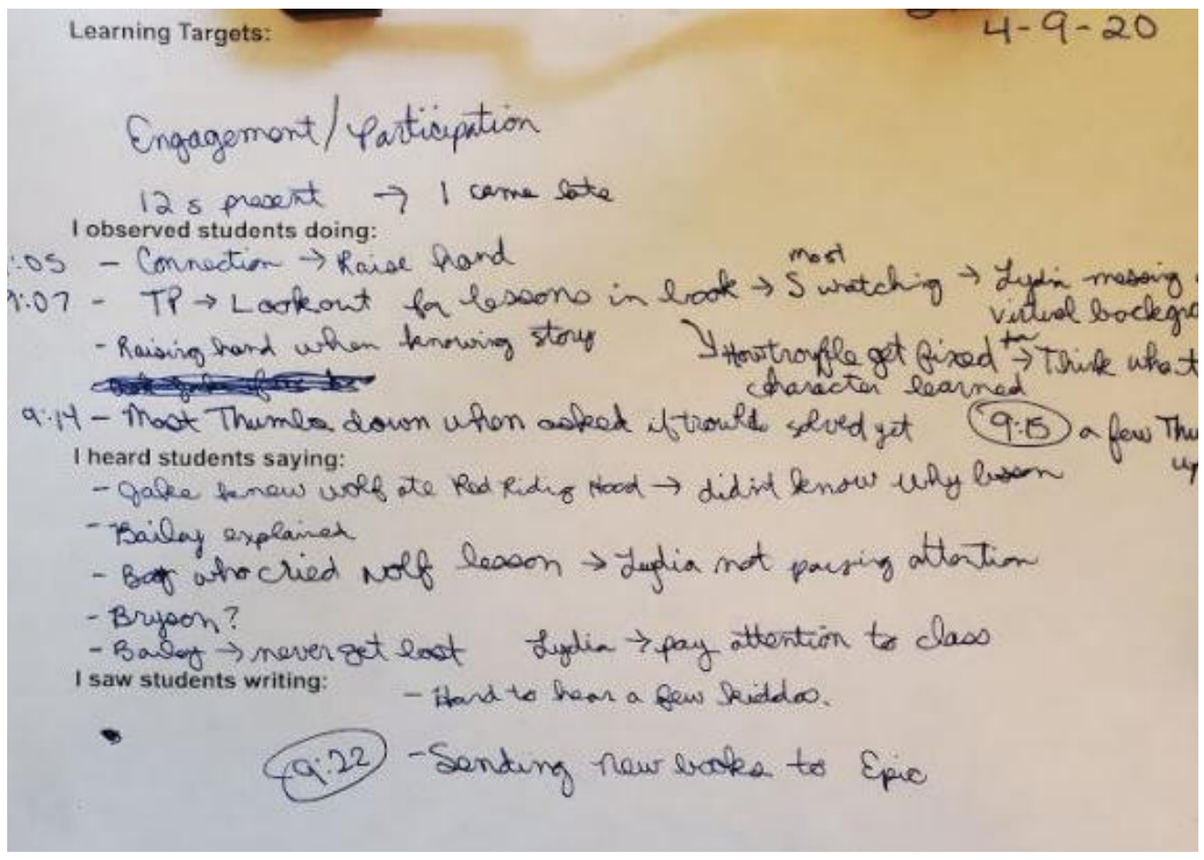


Figure 4: Notes from Noticing and Naming



Coaches and teachers can use the following list of the qualities of open ended learning tasks to assess the work they are asking students to do, leading to rich conversations about teaching an learning.

- Students can think and solve problems in more than one way
- Students are asked to share the strategies they used as learners
- Information is applied in some way
- Students are asked to think first
- Students are able to decide how to approach the learning

Adapted from: *The Distance Learning Playbook* (Fisher, Frey, and Hattie, 2020)

MEASURING THE IMPACT OF VIRTUAL COACHING

Coaches often measure their impact based on factors such as teacher perceptions, how they spend their time, or if they get 'repeat customers'. Measuring our impact in this way puts coaching squarely in a resource providing and relationship-driven place. If we hope to take our coaching deeper, then we believe the following commitments are paramount when it comes to measuring our impact.

- Our coaching work must impact student learning.
- Relationships are a critical component but not the end goal of our work.
- We need a tangible system for measuring our impact.

This means coaches need a plan for how they will organize their coaching to make the most impact.

Using the Results-Based Coaching Tool

When we work with teachers over time, or in coaching cycles (Figure 5), we have something tangible to measure. It's important to note that in coaching cycles, steps 3 and 5 involve gathering pre and post assessments. The assessments that we use are efficient, provide descriptive insight into student thinking and understanding, and are aligned with the learning targets.

Rather than using comprehensive end-of-unit summative assessments, we think of the pre and post as the first and last formative assessments that provide a holistic understanding of where students were at the beginning and where they ended up as the cycle wrapped up.

Figure 6 illustrates how we gather evidence of impact across a coaching cycle using the Results-Based Coaching Tool. In a virtual coaching environment the instructional practices that are assessed will likely involve tech tools and engagement strategies. This provides the opportunity to address the real challenges that teachers are facing and support them to implement these practices in a way that will carry forward into future teaching.

Figure 5: The Process for a Coaching Cycle

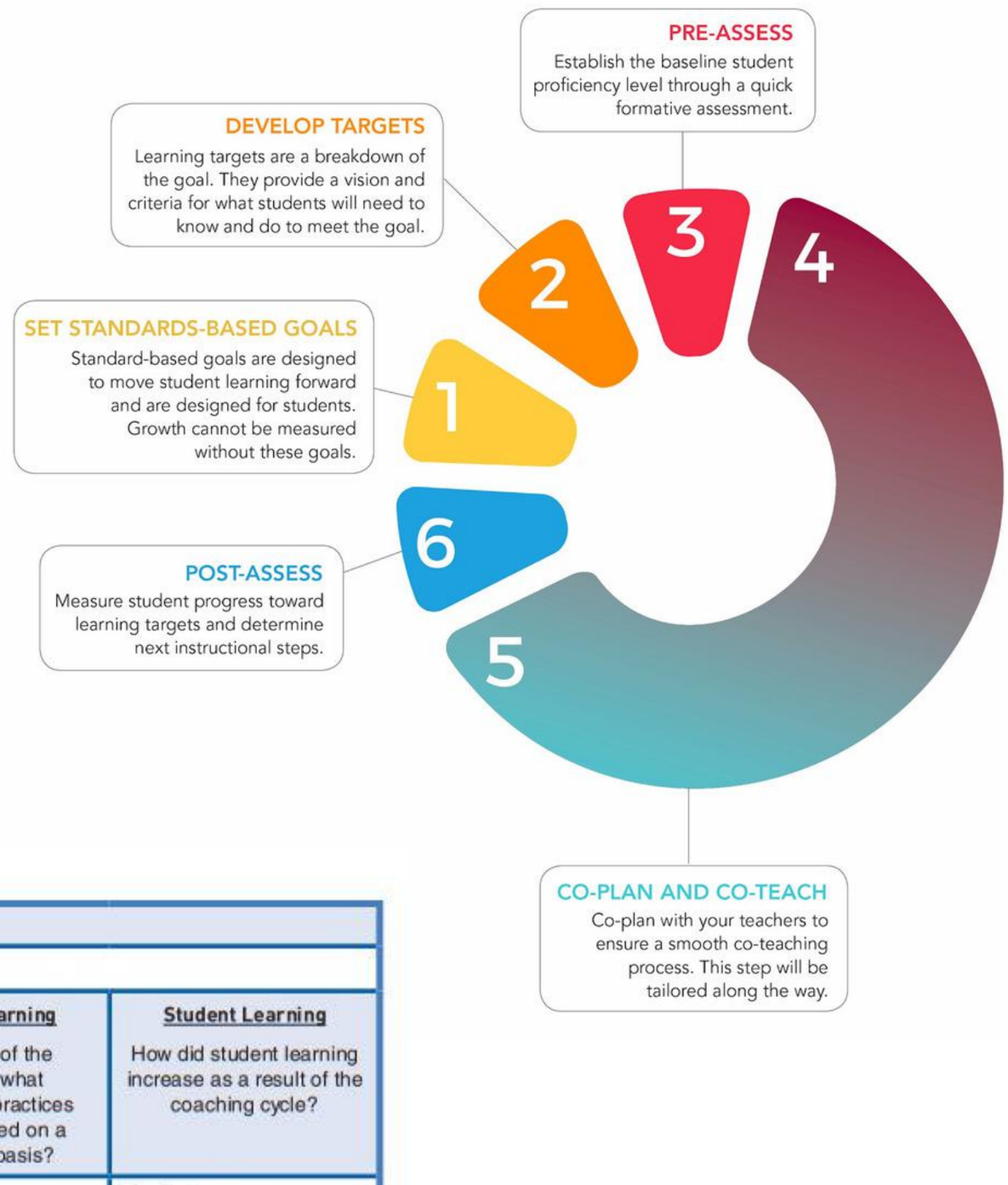


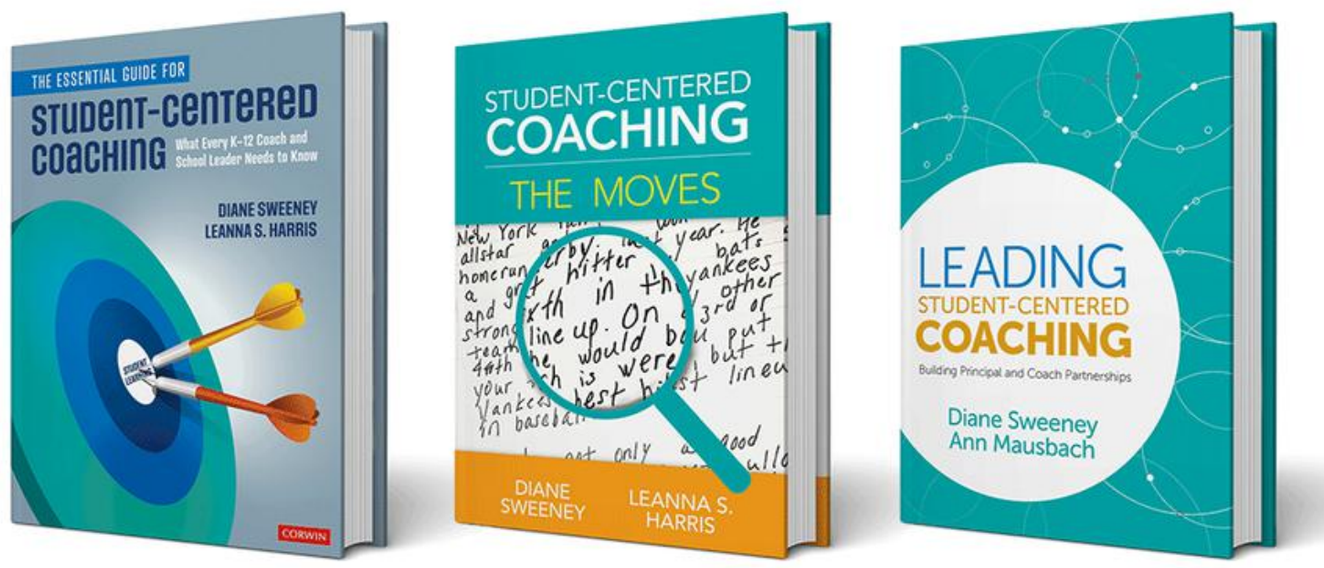
Figure 6: The Results-Based Coaching Tool

Coach Name:		Teacher Name(s):		
Dates of Coaching Cycle:		**Coaching Focus (Grade/Subject/Content):**		
Standards-Based Goal What is the goal for student learning?	**Instructional Practice** What instructional practices will help students reach the goal?	**Instructional Coaching** What coaching practices were implemented during this coaching cycle?	**Teacher Learning** As a result of the coaching, what instructional practices are being used on a consistent basis?	**Student Learning** How did student learning increase as a result of the coaching cycle?
Students will . . . **Standard(s):** **Learning Targets:** I can:	**Teacher will . . .**	**Coach and teacher did . . .** (check all that apply) ☐ Goal setting ☐ Creating learning targets ☐ Analysis of student work ☐ Co-teaching ☐ Collecting student evidence during the class period ☐ Collaborative planning ☐ Shared learning to build knowledge of content and pedagogy	**Teacher is . . .**	**Students are . . .** **Student Learning** How did student learning increase as a result of the coaching cycle? **Post-Assessment Data:** ___ Emerging ___ Developing ___ Meeting ___ Exceeding ___ % of students were able to demonstrate proficiency of the learning targets

IN CLOSING

There is no question that this year is going to be challenging. Families will be adjusting to new routines, the master schedule will likely change to accommodate new guidelines, and teachers will be encountering the unknown (again). Embracing these challenges means that we must walk alongside teachers and serve as their thinking partners to design virtual, hybrid, and in person classrooms where all students will thrive. What better reason is there to support coaches to engage in meaningful work with the teachers they serve.

If you are interested in implementing Student-Centered Coaching in your school or district, our team of consultants are here to help. Through virtual, blended, or onsite professional learning, we can help your coaches make the greatest impact possible. We are also available on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. On Twitter, you can find us at @SweeneyDiane and @LeannaHarris22. Our Facebook group, A Community for Student-Centered Coaching, is also a great place to get resources. Search for our YouTube channel at Diane Sweeney. Lastly, reach out by email at info@dianesweeney.com or through our website at www.dianesweeney.com.

Thank you!
Diane Sweeney and Leanna Harris, authors of *The Essential Guide for Student-Centered Coaching* (Corwin, 2020) and *Student-Centered Coaching: The Moves* (Corwin, 2017)

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