

Findings from the SY 2017-18 Early Literacy Specialist Coach Survey: Caseload, Confidence, and Challenges

Katie Mosher, Research Specialist

Summary of Key Findings:

- Most ELS coaches work with 4-16 teachers and identify 9-12 teachers as the ideal caseload.
- Most coaches reported feeling most confident in their ability to support teachers, particularly in guided reading, developing a literacy environment, writing workshop, and word wall.
- Coaches reported feeling least confident supporting teachers in meeting the needs of ELL students and students with IEPs.
- Coaches reported that teacher availability, school culture, and conflicting policies posed the greatest challenge to their work.

As part of the School District of Philadelphia's (SDP) early literacy initiative, 109 elementary schools received a full-time Early Literacy Specialist (ELS) coach in the 2017-18 school year.¹

In each school, ELS coaches are responsible for:

- Promoting research-based practices for teaching reading and writing;
- Supporting the implementation of best literacy practices within the 120-minute literacy block;
- Improving teacher content knowledge, instructional practices, classroom environments, and classroom structure;
- Providing content focused coaching and resources; and
- Developing teachers' abilities to think and reflect about student learning and use this knowledge and data to plan for future instruction.

This brief includes responses from the 99 ELS coaches who responded to the ELS coach Survey in January 2018 (91% response rate). Responses are provided on three main topics: caseload, confidence, and challenges.

¹ For more information and reports about SDP's early literacy approach, see <https://www.philasd.org/research/programsservices/projects/els-evaluation>

Caseload: Most ELS coaches work with 4-16 teachers and identify 9-12 teachers as an ideal caseload.

The majority (94%) of ELS coaches reported working with between 4 and 16 teachers (Table 1), with 29% reporting a caseload of 4-8 teachers, 41% reporting a caseload of 9-12 teachers and 24% reporting a caseload of 13-16 teachers. A small percentage (4%) of ELS coaches reported a high caseload of between 17-20 teachers.

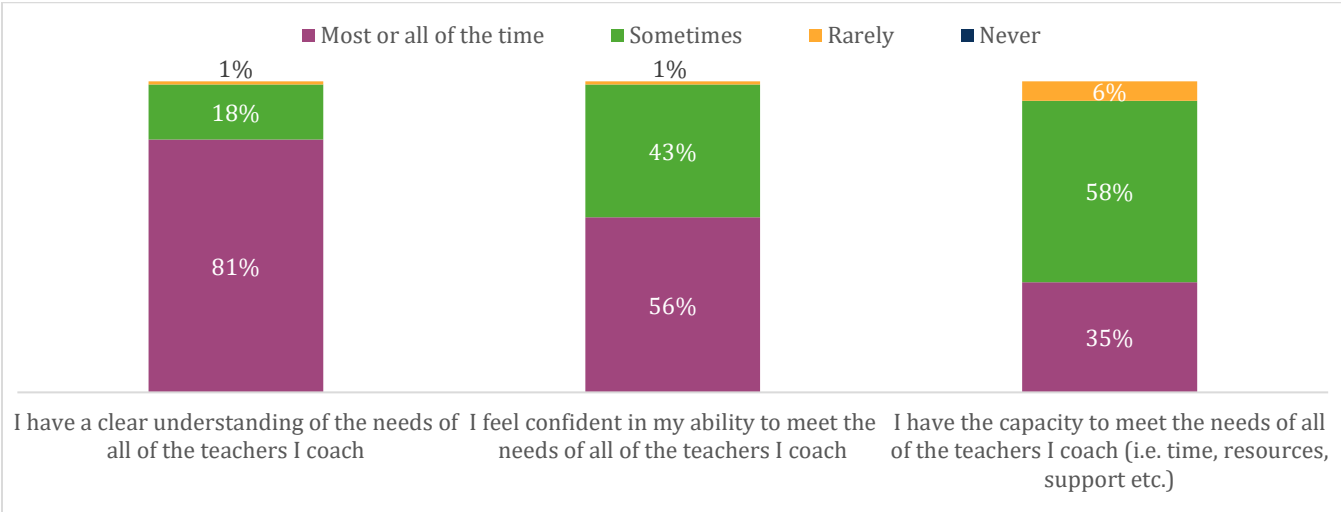
Nearly two-thirds (57%) of ELS coaches reported that they have the capacity to support a maximum of 9-12 teachers, and another quarter (26%) reported that they could support a maximum of 4-8 teachers (Figure 2). Only 13% of ELS coaches reported that they have the capacity to support 13-16 teachers, despite 24% reporting that they currently work with that number of teachers (Table 1).

Table 1. Most ELS coaches work with 4-16 teachers and identify 9-12 teachers as an ideal caseload

Number of Teachers	1-3	4-8	9-12	13-16	17-20
How many teachers/classrooms do you work with at your school?	1%	29%	41%	24%	4%
What is the maximum number of teachers/classrooms you feel you have the capacity to effectively support?	1%	26%	57%	13%	3%

About one-third of ELS coaches reported that they have the capacity to meet the needs of the teachers they coach most or all of the time (Figure 1). An additional 58% of ELS coaches reported that they have the capacity to meet the needs of their teachers some of the time. Only 6% of ELS coaches reported that they never have the capacity to meet the needs of the teachers they coach.

Figure 1. Most ELS coaches reported understanding the needs of their teachers, but fewer coaches reported feeling confident in their ability to or their capacity to meet the needs their teachers

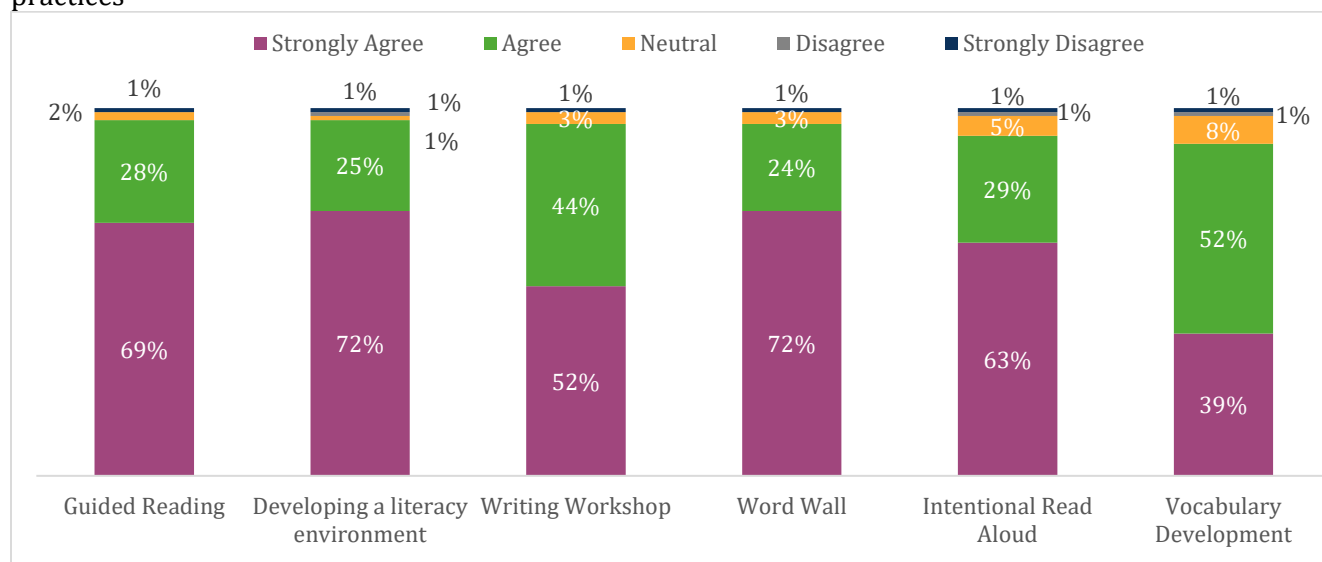


Although 35% of ELS coaches reported having the capacity to meet the needs of the teachers they coach most or all of the time, 56% of coaches reported that they feel confident in their ability to meet the needs of their teachers most or all of the time (Figure 1). An even greater percentage of ELS coaches (81%) reported that they have a clear understanding of the needs of their teachers most or all of the time.

Confidence: Most ELS coaches report feeling confident in their ability to support teachers, particularly in guided reading, developing a literacy environment, writing workshop, and word wall.

Over 90% of ELS coaches agreed or strongly agreed that they feel confident in their own abilities to support teachers in a number of instructional practices (Figure 2), including guided reading (97%), developing a literacy environment (97%), writing workshop (96%), and word wall (96%). The majority of ELS coaches also agreed or strongly agreed they were confident in supporting teachers with intentional read alouds and vocabulary development (92% and 90%, respectively).

Figure 2. ELS coaches reported feeling most confident supporting teachers with six instructional practices

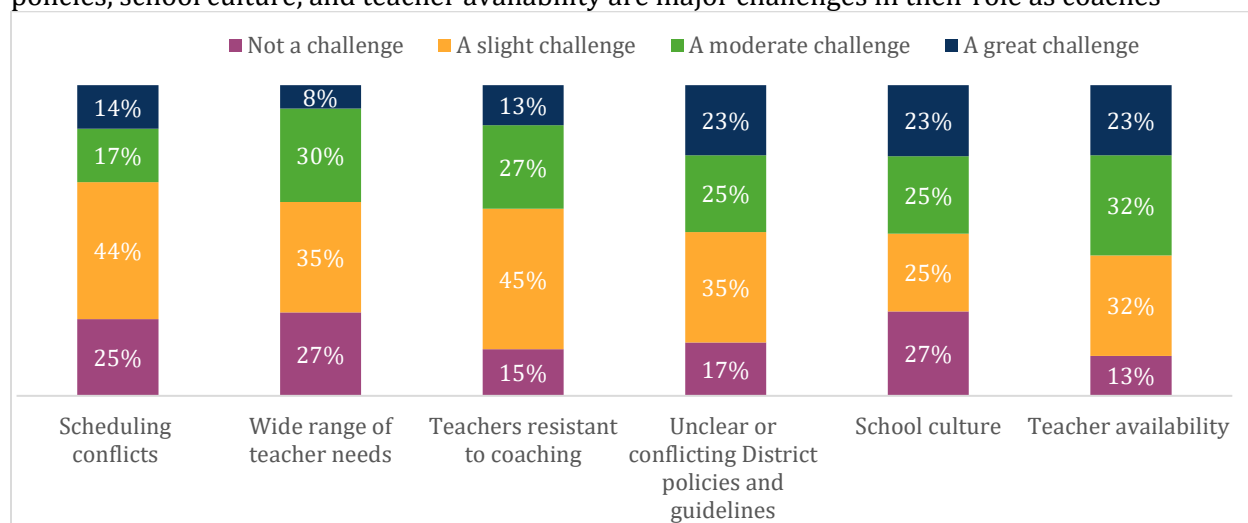


ELS coaches also reported on instructional practices in which they were less confident. Between 75%-88% of coaches reported that they felt confident they could support teachers in phonics, phonemic awareness, using assessments to drive instruction, developing a positive classroom culture, and reading workshop. ELS coaches reported the least confidence in meeting the needs of students with IEPs and ELL students, with 52% and 45% agreeing or strongly agreeing they feel confident supporting teachers in those areas, respectively.

Challenges: Most coaches reported that teacher availability, school culture, and conflicting policies pose the biggest challenge to their work as coaches.

ELS coaches identified some aspects of their work that posed a challenge to their coaching (Figure 6). About one-third of ELS coaches (31%) felt that scheduling – for example, finding available time to meet with teachers – was a moderate or great challenge to their work. About 40% of ELS coaches reported that resistance to coaching was a challenge, and about half of coaches reported that unclear or conflicting District policies and school culture were either a moderate or a great challenge to their work (48% each). Finally, over half (55%) of ELS coaches reported that teacher availability – that is, teachers having the time or making the time for coaching with their ELS coach – was either a moderate or great challenge.

Figure 3. ELS coaches reported that a wide range of teacher needs, unclear or conflicting District policies, school culture, and teacher availability are major challenges in their role as coaches



ELS coaches also identified aspects of their role that were less challenging (Figure 8). Most (88%) coaches classified a lack of useful PD and unclear expectations as either not a challenge to their work or a slight challenge to their work. Most ELS coaches also did not find a lack of materials or resources or teacher absences challenging in their role as coaches (83% and 74% reported that it was either not a challenge or a slight challenge, respectively). About three-quarters (73%) of ELS coaches reported that lack of support from school administration was either not a challenge or was only a slight challenge to their work.

For more information about ELS coaches and the early literacy initiative, including K-3 teacher retention trends for schools with ELS coaches and literacy summer institute, please visit <https://www.philasd.org/research/programsservices/reports/>.