

## **An Interview with David Ginsburg about the Value of Coaching Teachers**

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- 2-9-09
- Categorized in: [EducationNews Commentaries](#)

### An Interview with David Ginsburg about the Value of Coaching Teachers

Delia Stafford. President - 9.2.09

Haberman Foundation

David Ginsburg brings three decades of experience in business and education to Ginsburg Educational Consulting and Coaching, including 16 years in urban education-- as an award-winning math teacher and instructional coach in the Chicago Public Schools, and as an administrator in Philadelphia with Mastery Charter Schools and Community Education Alliance. His business experience includes seven years with McMaster-Carr Supply Company. David holds M.B.A. and M.Ed. degrees, and is trained on Professional Learning Communities, Restorative Practices, Content-Focused Coaching, and The Haberman Star Teacher Selection Interview. Ginsburg Educational Consulting and Coaching is home based in Philadelphia, and available nationally.

### **Why did you leave school administration for consulting?**

It's hard to wear both hats—boss and coach. As a consultant I can earn the trust needed from teachers in order to effectively coach them. Further, because I also advise administrators, I'm still involved in the school leadership and decision-making processes. This opportunity offers a new approach to ensure students have more opportunities to learn from good teachers who have their best interest at the forefront.

### **What services do you provide at Ginsburg Coaching?**

We support K-12 schools around both leadership and instruction. Leadership support includes strategic planning, management coaching, data analysis, instructional coach training, and staff selection. Instructional support includes general classroom coaching, math-focused coaching, data analysis, and curriculum planning.

### **How is your approach different?**

It's highly practical. Clients can count on us for advice that comes from experience. And not just successful experience. I openly share with schools that my success as an educator came after intense struggle. It's hard to help others overcome their challenges if you can't identify with those challenges yourself. Making our work even more practical is the emphasis on coaching, and willingness to roll up our sleeves and model best practices rather than simply talk about them.

### **Why the coaching bias?**

Simple: it works. Ideas learned through coaching are six times as likely to stick as those learned through other training. Principals often mention how hard it is getting teachers to change. And yet as hard as it is to teach old dogs new tricks, it's absurd to expect them to learn new tricks on their own. A skillful coach facilitates a process where you meet teachers where they are, and provide the right amount of hand-holding through observation and feedback, collaborative planning, team teaching, and modeling. As gratifying as it has been for me to help dozens of new teachers successfully navigate their classrooms, it has been downright inspiring to see so-called set-in-their-ways veterans reinvent themselves in response to coaching.

## **How does high-stakes testing affect your work?**

The reality of high-stakes testing is that you can improve scores without improving education—what else would explain that even as scores have risen, there's been no change in the number of college freshman taking remedial courses? A lot of schools are getting test score bumps by teaching the test—i.e. assigning and reviewing practice problems ad nauseum. Sure the test should influence what we teach, but we need to push students beyond the test in terms of how we teach. That's a huge value-added piece of our work—facilitating instruction that promotes skill proficiency but also conceptual understanding and critical thinking. In other words, raising test scores as a by-product of quality education rather than as a roadblock to it.

## **But is it really possible to facilitate such a huge paradigm shift among teachers, especially with all the pressure to raise scores?**

Absolutely, provided you have the right teachers.

## **So how do you find the right teachers?**

More and more schools these days are hiring teachers based largely on demo lessons. And yet I've seen many examples of teachers who did bang-up demos but were a bust on the job. The problem: schools failed to assess whether teachers were a fit for their schools ideologically. I worked with a school where we adopted The Haberman Star Teacher Selection Interview for this purpose, and saw turnover drop from around 50% to 10% in less than two years. We still used the demo lesson, but only after candidates made it past Haberman, and mainly for the purpose of ensuring a minimum skill level. As long as a candidate had the right ideology and was reasonably competent, we felt we could coach them to be strong teachers. And sure enough, we routinely saw teachers hired using Haberman outperform those hired pre-Haberman.