

# Making virtual coaching work for teachers

Since 2014, MQI Coaching has supported math teachers through virtual coaching and reflecting on videos of instruction. As teachers across the U.S. prepare for remote teaching this school year, we're sharing our best practices and practical advice for approaching remote teaching as an opportunity for—rather than a barrier to—instructional growth. This shift in perspective is crucial as the pandemic exacerbates existing educational inequities and threatens the long-term success of already at-risk students.

## Building and maintaining strong relationships

We've learned that instructional coaches can build relationships and foster connection with and among teachers even while working remotely. First and foremost, position yourself as a colleague to support and help rather than forcing coaching on teachers.

- ▼ **Take the time to catch up and connect before diving into the substance of a coaching conversation**—especially since you are no longer passing each other in the hallway or making small talk in the teachers' lounge.
- ▼ **Turn video cameras on when meeting virtually.** Reading facial expressions and body language is an important part of effective communication and establishing a connection.
- ▼ **Survey your teachers and ask them about their current challenges and needs.** Hearing from them directly and aligning your coaching plan to their needs will increase buy-in, receptiveness, and engagement.
- ▼ **Be open and willing to do things differently this year.** Teaching virtually is new for many teachers and coaching virtually may be new for you. Reassure your teachers that you are learning together. Model the same vulnerability you are asking and expecting of your teachers.
- ▼ **Differentiate and individualize support.** Teachers have varying levels of comfort with remote teaching. Meet them where they are.
- ▼ **Consider different formats for meeting with teachers.** One-on-one conversations are important and impactful, but group meetings or professional learning communities (PLCs) are also a great option for creating community among colleagues and sharing best practices.
- ▼ **Create shared ownership for notetaking.** Consider using Google Docs or other features of your online meeting platform to collaboratively document notes. Doing so will encourage teacher ownership and agency.

## Using video for reflection

Video is a powerful tool for instructional learning and growth—and it's never been easier for teachers and coaches to capture, share, and reflect on it together. Follow these tips to make video reflection approachable and effective for all.

- ▼ **Let the teacher choose when to record.** Video of their own instruction can be a powerful learning tool for teachers, but can also be an added source of stress for someone who isn't ready. Give them the time and flexibility to choose when to record themselves and when to share it. Online instruction is new to many educators, which could make teachers even more hesitant than usual to record and share their teaching.
- ▼ **Consider the use of stock video.** If a teacher isn't ready to share their own instruction yet, use stock video of other teachers' classroom instruction to generate ideas and foster discussion of instructional moves. For examples of mathematics instruction, you can request access to the MQI Video Library [here](#). You might also model vulnerability by recording yourself first.
- ▼ **Focus on short clips rather than full class periods of instruction.** Choose a three- to five-minute clip to discuss together. Further narrow the focus by choosing one aspect of instruction to focus on (such as student mathematical talk or drawing connections among different representations).
- ▼ **Transcribe the clip of instruction so that, when referencing it later in the coaching conversation, there is a very clear record of what happened.** Looking at evidence together can be a very powerful tool for learning and enables coaches and teachers to more objectively discuss classroom instruction. Zoom and other web platforms make the use of transcription easier than ever before by allowing users to generate them automatically.
- ▼ **Don't just highlight opportunities for improvement.** Use video to discuss what is working well! We can mitigate the discomfort many of us feel about remote teaching by celebrating and sharing the instructional practices that are working well. Be prepared, teachers are their own toughest critics and will find areas for growth even when highlighting strengths.
- ▼ **Check your school or district's privacy policies before hitting record.** In many areas, it is ok to capture video recordings of instruction for the purpose of teachers' professional learning without going through a full parent/guardian consent process—as long as they are only shared between the teacher and a limited number of colleagues. Of course, don't post video of students publicly without explicit permission to do so.

## Need more support? We're here to help.

MQI Coaching offers evidence-based professional development to help teachers, schools, and districts deliver high-quality mathematics instruction to students. All our services, including coach training and e-coaching for teachers, are available virtually so that professional development can continue even during uncertain times.

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