

Case Study: The Top of the Class

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Since the 1990s, coaching has been a key component of many schools' faculty-development plans. In addition to contracting Leadership Coaches and Executive Coaches to support the growth and development of administrators, a growing number of schools are using coaching and coach-skills training to enhance teachers' abilities to implement curriculum; manage their classrooms; and communicate effectively with students, parents and one another. A substantial body of research on Educational Coaching shows that coaching empowers teachers to understand and implement new instructional practices and strategies, resulting in heightened student engagement.

Turkey's Isikkent Schools have taken the use of coaching one step further by developing and implementing a high-impact program designed to directly touch the lives of every member of the school community, from teachers and administrators to parents and students. The success of Isikkent's coaching program has shown that coaching isn't only for adults: When adapted properly, it can benefit individuals as young as three years of age.

In recognition of Isikkent's exceptional use of coaching, the International Coach Federation (ICF) awarded the school the 2013 ICF International Prism Award. The Prism Award honors organizations that have achieved the highest standard of excellence in the implementation of coaching programs fulfilling rigorous professional standards, addressing key strategic goals, shaping organizational culture, and yielding discernible and measurable positive impacts. (Learn more about the award at Coachfederation.org/prism.)

The Cutting Edge

The administrators, teachers, students and parents affiliated with Isikkent Schools have always taken pride in being part of a learning community that stands out from the crowd.

Established in 1998 within a nonprofit foundation, Isikkent provides a unique learning environment that brings students ranging from preschool through grade 12 together on one campus—an organizational model seen infrequently in Turkey. The school is also set apart by its educational vision: In a nation where most students are taught to measure success and learning by exam scores, Isikkent focuses on holistic education. With a creative, inquiry-based approach to teaching; a high premium on global citizenship; and a commitment to ethical speech and behavior, Isikkent Schools strive to develop young people into highly motivated, self-aware and thoughtful adults passionate about lifelong learning.

Given the willingness of Isikkent's leaders to innovate in service of student development, it's no surprise that the school joined Turkey's coaching movement in its earliest stage, adopting coaching at a time when ICF-approved training curricula had not yet been translated from English into Turkish and collaborating with the coaches who led the charge to create the first Turkish-language coach-training program.

A Foundation for Success

Isikkent has made a significant investment of time and money in coaching with the full support of leading school administrators, allocating 24 percent of the school's professional development budget for coach training for teachers. Since the school implemented coaching in 2009, more than 40 teachers have voluntarily completed an ICF Accredited Coach Training Program. All of Isikkent's teachers and support staff have completed several hours of coach-specific training in order to better understand and support the school's coaching culture, and coach training is integrated into Isikkent's new-teacher orientation. Faculty members are encouraged to apply their coaching skills to interactions with students, parents and colleagues. Isikkent's coaching committee, established by coach-teachers in the school's first graduating coach-training class, helped develop an infrastructure for the program. In addition to adapting the ICF Code of Ethics to form a cornerstone of the school's culture, committee members revised commonly used coaching questions to suit different age groups. The coach-teachers collaborated with members of Isikkent's information technology department to develop an electronic coaching log that they could use to document their coaching sessions while ensuring 100-percent confidentiality, and they also developed an initiative to market coaching to Isikkent students, teachers and parents, ensuring that it would be perceived as a positive—not remedial—intervention from the outset. As a result, when Isikkent's corps of coach-teachers began providing services, they did so with the full buy-in of the school community.

Unlocking New Approaches

Coaching is available to anyone in the Isikkent community who wants it. The program is closely aligned with Isikkent's guidance services, and with a parent's permission, students may schedule sessions with coach-teachers. Topics covered during coaching engagements have included goal-setting, planning for the future, interpersonal communication and conflict resolution. The coach-teachers also coach Isikkent teachers and parents on a voluntary basis, and parents have the opportunity to learn coaching skills through school-provided Parent Effectiveness Training courses.

Isikkent's coaching culture has brought the school closer to its goal of achieving International Baccalaureate accreditation by fostering traits aligned with the IB Learner Profile, such as curiosity, open-mindedness and compassion. A video released by Isikkent Schools shows these traits at work, as a group of young students work together—with coach-like support from their teacher—to find out why a conch shell makes a sound when held up to the ear. (Watch the video [here](#).)

School leaders have found that coaching skills can even be applied to Isikkent's youngest citizens, the three- and four-year-old students enrolled in the school's Early Learning Center. During Isikkent's Prism Award interview, school officials told the story of an ELC student who would wander out of the classroom without permission during the school day. Using skills acquired in coach-specific training, including powerful questioning, the teacher was able to find out the cause of this behavior (simply, the student said he'd forget that he needed to stay put), articulate her own feelings about the behavior ("When you leave the classroom and I can't find you, I feel sad and scared"), and provide support for a

student-driven solution (the student drew a picture of a door with a sad-looking teacher next to it and hung it by the classroom door as a reminder to himself).

Proof in Numbers

Isikkent's leaders say their investment in coaching has paid off. Students who have received coaching report improvements in their ability to resolve conflict, set and achieve goals, and cooperate and communicate with peers. Teachers who have sought coaching provide similarly positive feedback about the experience, citing enhanced communication with students and parents and improved goal-setting abilities as benefits. Meanwhile, parents who have learned coaching skills through Parent Effectiveness Training report that, as a result of the program, they're more able to articulate their needs to their children, more inclined to resolve conflicts with their children through compromise and more likely to approach conflict with an eye toward protecting the relationship (versus "resolving problems the way I like").

Disciplinary problems in Isikkent's middle and high schools have declined sharply since the introduction of coaching. In the 2008-'09 academic year, the middle school reported carrying out disciplinary actions against approximately 16 percent of the student population. In the high school, administrators reported disciplinary action against 26.5 percent of the student population. By the close of the 2012-'13 school year, however, these averages had fallen to 2.08 percent and 4.74 percent, respectively.

Coaching has also empowered students to achieve their goals for the future, with a whopping 94.1 percent of students in Isikkent's 2013 graduating class earning admission to one of their top five university choices and 70.6 percent of students gaining acceptance to their first-choice school.

As a result of Isikkent's success in implementing a coaching program that benefits not only teachers and administrators but the school community at large, its program today provides the benchmark by which many organizations in Turkey measure their own progress toward constructing high-impact, standards-based programs that are sustainable over time.

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Author Bio: The [International Coach Federation](#) is the leading global organization for coaches, with more than 19,000 members and 13,000 credentialed coaches in more than 100 countries worldwide. ICF is dedicated to advancing the coaching profession by setting high ethical standards, providing independent certification and building a worldwide network of credentialed coaches.

In 2005, ICF Global adopted the Prism Award, a concept developed by ICF Toronto that recognizes businesses and organizations that demonstrate how professional coaching pays off on many fronts. This award represents the epitome of what professional coaching can accomplish within organizations of all sizes and in all sectors.

To learn more about the International Prism Award, visit Coachfederation.org/prism.