



Coaching Teams for Quality Improvement in Early Care and Education Programs

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Introduction

Over the past 50 years, research has consistently shown that high-quality early care and education (ECE) experiences are foundational to children’s long-term health, academic, and economic outcomes.^{1,2} When ECE programs prioritize evidence-based practices and relationships with a skilled, supported, and well-compensated ECE workforce, young children and their families benefit.^{3,4} States use public funds to support and enhance the quality of ECE programs through a range of strategies, including providing free or reduced price curricula and assessment materials, financial awards to recognize quality, grants to make facility improvements, coaching to support early educators’^a skills and competencies, and training on business practices.⁵ A review of state quality improvement (QI) efforts indicates that professional development (PD) for early educators—delivered as training and technical assistance across a variety of topics and approaches—is a core QI activity.^b The menu of PD services available to early educators varies widely across and within states depending on state priorities, the PD service delivery system (including the contractors selected to deliver services), and educators’ characteristics (including their role, program type, and geographic location).

With considerable flexibility in how funds can be used to support PD, state early childhood leaders are seeking research-based guidance on how to design a menu of accessible and effective PD opportunities for early educators.⁶ This brief is intended for state early childhood leaders to provide an introduction to team coaching as a PD approach, presenting initial data on the prevalence, level of investment, and reach of team

^a We use the term “early educators” in this brief to broadly refer to teaching staff and administrators who work in ECE centers.

^b Early educators working in licensed or regulated programs must also meet annual requirements for PD. Professional development delivered in the context of state QI efforts may be separate from other PD efforts, and in some cases, participation may not be counted toward annual requirements. Visit this webpage for more information: <https://licensingregulations.acf.hhs.gov/>.

coaching. Although not yet widely used in state PD and QI systems, team coaching shows promising evidence for improving educator practices and outcomes for educators, children, and families.

This brief is organized into three parts. First, we provide background on the PD of early childhood educators and review literature on team coaching strategies. Next, we examine how team coaching strategies are currently implemented. Finally, we describe three examples of team coaching in QI systems. We focus on two types of ECE programs that may receive services in state PD and QI systems: licensed child care centers eligible to receive Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) subsidies and Head Start centers.^c Because Head Start Collaboration Offices are encouraged to coordinate with state-level PD offerings, the content in this brief applies to them as well as Head Start grantees and Regional Program administrators.^d

Throughout, we summarize data gathered through the Culture of Continuous Learning (CCL) Project Landscape Study.^e For this study, we examined publicly available data about PD and QI delivery systems from all 50 states, all U.S. territories, the District of Columbia, and Head Start Regions. We also conducted surveys and interviews with leaders of PD and QI delivery systems to gather additional insights. Because the surveys and interviews were collected from only a subset of states and territories, the findings should be interpreted as preliminary trends rather than as representative of all systems nationwide. For more information, see the Research Methods & Limitations section (page 11).

Here are some of the key insights presented in this brief:

- Promising features of team coaching include delivery to cross-role teams and building collaborative learning.
- While individual coaching is associated with improved outcomes for educators, initial theory and research findings suggest that team coaching has even greater potential to support outcomes that are sustained over time. The inclusion of both shared learning and peer reinforcement provides additional structures for sustaining practices.
- Team coaching is less likely than other types of PD to be offered in a state or Head Start Region. Likewise, states report investing less in team coaching than other types of PD, suggesting that implementation or logistical challenges may make it difficult to offer team coaching at a state level.
- Data limitations in existing systems make it challenging to draw conclusions about the reach of team coaching initiatives.

Background on the Culture of Continuous Learning (CCL) Project

The CCL project aims to explore how child care and Head Start programs can improve the quality of early learning services they provide to children and families to sustain a culture of ongoing QI. As part of the project, the CCL project team is working to offer one method of QI, the Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC), within a sample of ECE centers across three states. BSCs are a type of PD delivered through team coaching that aim to improve ECE educators' practice in a specified content area and bridge the gap between knowledge and practice. The project team chose implementation of the Pyramid Model framework focused on social-emotional learning, as the focus of the BSC. This work is led by Child Trends and their partners at the University of Massachusetts-Boston, JRA Consulting, Ltd., and Mathematica Policy Research. Visit this website for more information:

<https://www.childtrends.org/project/culture-of-continuous-learning-project>

^c We use the terms ECE centers, center-based programs, and ECE programs in this brief. "ECE centers" is used to refer to the participants in the CCL project; "center-based programs" is used as a more general term; "ECE programs" is used when we are referring more broadly to centers and other types of ECE settings.

^d Visit this webpage for more information: <https://headstart.gov/state-collaboration/article/head-start-collaboration-offices-national-priorities>

^e Data for this study was collected in 2023-2024. Since then, updates were made to Office of Head Start (OHS) references regarding regions and certain positions. The information presented in this brief reflects the time period during which the data was collected.

Professional Development for Early Educators

Offering a varied menu of PD options is important to meet the needs of early educators and to advance the goals that states have for improving program quality and young children's development. For example, a state may have a specific focus on supporting children's social and emotional development. In response, its menu of PD opportunities may include a focus on the full set of competencies to support young children's care and learning while also including special initiatives to promote social and emotional development (e.g., Pyramid model training and program support). State ECE leaders report that menus with multiple options for content and format move them away from a one-size-fits-all approach to PD.⁷ State ECE leaders also report, however, that their data systems and evaluation strategies are insufficient for helping them know which PD options are most effective in moving them toward their goals.

The *Professional Development Matrix* provides a framework to describe the variety of PD structures and purposes for early educators across multiple content areas.^f It organizes PD strategies along two dimensions: (1) whether it is directed at individuals or teams/groups; and (2) whether the focus is knowledge gain or applying knowledge to practice. These dimensions intersect to create four quadrants (Q1 – Q4). The arrows next to the quadrants illustrate that these approaches exist along a continuum. *Individual* PD strategies are offered to early educators across various ECE programs, for example state or agency trainings that individuals register for and attend on their own. In contrast, *organization/system* PD is delivered to groups of early educators who work together within the same program. Strategies in the left column (Q1 and Q2) target individual early educators, while those in the right column (Q3 and Q4) engage entire organizations, programs, or teams from networks or groups of ECE programs. In practice, PD initiatives may include more than one strategy and integrate strategies from multiple quadrants. *The matrix elevates an important element of PD that is not often included in discussions about PD and quality improvement: the benefits of directing PD at groups or teams to achieve changes in practice at a larger scale.*



Source: Updated version from Douglass, Tout, & Doyle, 2021

Research demonstrates that different types of PD yield different outcomes. Training delivered in single sessions or in a series (Q1) can be effective in supporting short-term knowledge gains (e.g., for health and safety practices and regulations), though it falls short in producing lasting changes in practice.⁸ Relationship-based technical assistance, including coaching (Q2), has a growing evidence base for its effectiveness in supporting the application of evidence-based practices.^{9, 10} Indeed, PD may have greater potential for improving and sustaining program quality when it not only leads to *knowledge gains* but also supports the *application of that knowledge* into practice.¹¹

Additionally, studies suggest that PD approaches that engage groups of early educators who work together and/or work in similar roles may be more effective in driving meaningful and lasting improvements.^{12, 13}

^f The PD matrix doesn't include college-level coursework for early educators.

These collective approaches support shared learning, peer reinforcement, and stronger alignment between professional growth and their everyday work environment.^{14, 15} Group training (Q4) that includes multiple individuals from the same ECE program or network is an efficient way to provide information to staff. While this PD strategy may increase their collective knowledge, training alone may not be enough to change practice (as noted for Q1).

The PD strategies bundled under team coaching (Q3) offer unique potential to support and sustain quality improvement within ECE programs and networks. These initiatives involve the provision of coaching to groups of individuals. They may be working together at the same ECE program, or they may be in similar roles working in different programs. A variety of approaches fall under the umbrella of team coaching, including communities of practice, cohort learning, and professional learning communities. According to initial evidence, team coaching strategies are poised to be most effective in supporting quality improvement when they have specific features.¹⁶

Promising features of team coaching:

- Delivered to *cross-role teams*, including both administrators and teaching staff
- Led by coaches who are *content experts* in the focus area and group facilitation
- Centered on building a *collaborative learning environment* that fosters shared learning
- Grounded in a clear *guiding framework* or theory of change that explains how and why strategies will lead to improvements
- Incorporates *continuous improvement* by testing new strategies and engaging in joint reflection

While team coaching is an emerging strategy in ECE programs, early evidence suggests it holds promise for improving both individual and program-level quality outcomes, particularly when it incorporates the features described above.^{17, 18, 19, 20, 21}

An Exploration of Professional Development Strategies

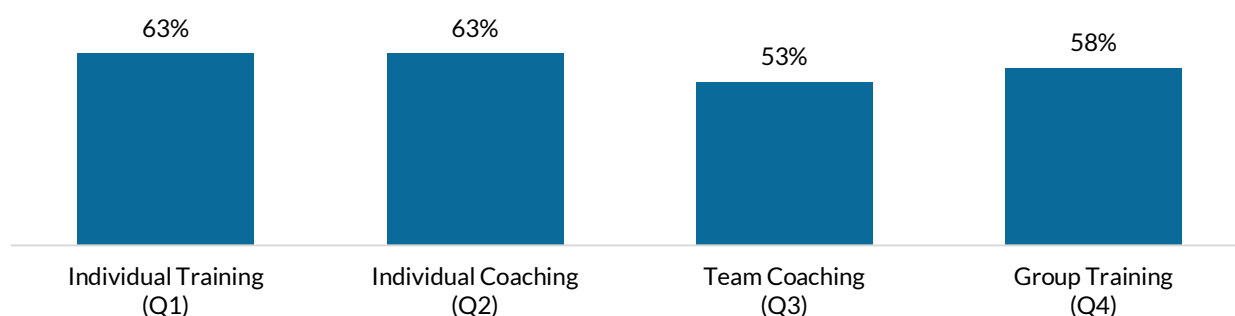
What is the prevalence of team coaching?

Team coaching and group training are less frequently offered PD strategies than individual coaching or training. Analysis of publicly available data and survey data indicates that most states implement PD strategies from all four quadrants of the PD Matrix. Specifically, Q1 systems serving CCDF-funded child care programs and Head Start programs offer both training and coaching to individuals and groups or teams within organizations. In a 2024 survey, respondents from 43 states reported on the strategies used in their state in the last 12 months. Individual PD strategies—individual training (Q1) and individual coaching (Q2)—were the most commonly offered strategies, each reported by 91 percent of respondents. However, more than three-quarters (79%) of respondents reported offering team coaching (Q3) to child care programs in their states, and 84 percent reported offering group training (Q4).

Different QI systems deliver different PD strategies, but team coaching is the least prevalent. For example, according to survey data, Q1 systems focused on CCDF-funded child care more often deliver individual-level activities, such as training and coaching (Q1 and Q2) than team-based strategies within organizations (Q3 and Q4). In contrast, Q1 systems focused on Head Start programs tend to emphasize training over coaching, with group training within organizations (Q4) identified as the most commonly offered QI strategy. Specifically, less than half (49%) of respondents reported offering team coaching (Q3) to Head Start programs, compared with 88 percent offering group training (Quadrant 4) and 76 percent offering individual training (Q1) to Head Start programs.

As an example of this general pattern, survey respondents answered questions about the PD strategies used by states and regions to deliver the Pyramid Model, a particular social and emotional learning model. For child care settings, individual training and coaching (Q1 and Q2) were most frequently reported (see Figure 1). For Head Start programs, the most commonly reported strategies were training for both individuals and groups (Q1 and Q4; see Figure 2). Team coaching (Q3) was the least frequently mentioned strategy for delivering the Pyramid Model in either child care or Head Start programs (see Figures 1 and 2).

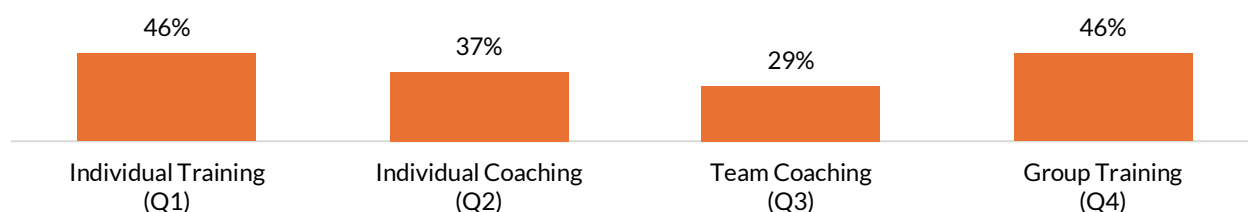
Figure 1. Method of delivering Pyramid Model content among states with child care respondents (n=43)



Source: CCDF survey, QRIS survey, Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) survey, Pyramid Model Lead survey (2024)

Note: Child care respondents represented 43 states/territories and included 30 CCDF Administrators, 21 QRIS Administrators, 11 Pyramid Model Leads, and 14 CCR&R contractors.

Figure 2. Method of delivering Pyramid Model content among states with Head Start respondents (n=41)



Source: Head Start Collaboration Office (HSCO) Survey, Head Start Education Manager Survey (2024)

Note: Head Start respondents represented 41 states/ territories and included 31 Head Start Education Managers and 23 Head Start Collaboration Office Directors.

What is the level of investment in team coaching?

QI systems generally tend to invest more in individual training than other forms of PD. Survey respondents were asked to indicate the “top two” QI supports in which their state (or organization, for Head Start respondents) invests the most funding. Among 33 child care respondents, 30 states indicated that individual training (Q1) was a top-funded support, and overall, individual training and coaching (Q1 and Q2) were more frequently selected as top funding priorities compared to team coaching or group training (Q3 and Q4; see Table 1). Additionally, among 12 states with Head Start respondents, group training (Q4) and individual training (Q1) were identified as the most heavily funded QI supports; individual coaching and team coaching were rarely selected as top-funded strategies (see Table 2). This information confirms what is commonly known about QI systems among participants, system leaders, and researchers: QI systems place

a heavy emphasis on training individuals that is reflected in the proportion of funding devoted to it compared to other PD strategies.

States invest less in team coaching compared to other PD strategies, suggesting challenges with the implementation of these approaches. As shown in Tables 1 and 2, both child care and Head Start respondents were least likely to identify team coaching as one of the top-funded strategies in their states. This may suggest that team coaching strategies are viewed as less feasible due to the logistical complexity involved in coordinating team-based supports. Given funding constraints, state administrators may prioritize strategies that can reach more individuals, such as training over individual coaching or organizational-level offerings. Alternatively, opportunities to add team coaching to state and Head Start PD menus may be limited (e.g., no vendors or contractors available to provide them). Additional information is needed to better understand the factors driving these investment patterns.

Table 1. Top two QI supports for child care in which states invest the most funds (n=33)*

Individual Training (Q1)	Individual Coaching (Q2)	Team Coaching (Q3)	Group Training (Q4)	Other
30	8	3	6	0

Note: *Respondents from 33 states answered this question, but some had multiple respondents answer this question, and each respondent could select up to two options. As such, the numbers in the table do not total 33.

Source: CCDF survey, CCR&R survey, QRIS survey (2024)

Table 2. Top two QI supports in which Head Start Regions invest the most funds (n=12)*

Individual Training (Q1)	Individual Coaching (Q2)	Team Coaching (Q3)	Group Training (Q4)	Other
3	2	1	5	1

Note: *This question was given to all respondents but skipped by many. Respondents from twelve states responded to this question, but some had multiple respondents answer this question, and each respondent could select up to two options. As such, the numbers in the table do not total 12.

Source: HSCO survey (2024)

What is the reach of team coaching?

Generally, there is limited information about the utilization of team coaching and group training as PD strategies. The CCL Landscape Study sought to understand who has access to different QI strategies, particularly team coaching strategies. Beyond identifying what QI offerings exist, it is important to examine who can access them within states. Information on the “reach” of QI offerings within a state would ideally include data on the number of programs or individuals within a state that *utilized* the various QI strategies that were available.

Our examination of publicly available data sources through the CCL Landscape Study did not yield answers to this important question about the “reach” of team coaching. This gap likely reflects characteristics of team coaching initiatives. For example, our survey data indicate that team coaching may be funded by time-limited sources (e.g., a grant to a university) and/or implemented as a pilot initiative. Because these initiatives are often not offered to a wide range of educators across a state or regions, they may not be included in training calendars or tracked in state registries. In addition, while state child care registries can track PD activities for individual educators, tracking what and how PD is offered to programs and a subset of staff within them is more complicated and varies across registries. These details may be housed in a separate QI database that isn’t connected to a registry.

Examples of Team Coaching Initiatives

While it is a less prevalent PD strategy, team coaching is offered in some states using a variety of approaches. Below, we present three examples of team coaching projects, including a project within a statewide QI system, a state partnership with a national PD vendor, and one with small pilot sites in three states. These examples were selected because each incorporates the key features that evidence suggests are critical for sustaining quality improvement.

Early Childhood Support Organizations (ESCO) Initiative

Statewide QI system and partnership with a national PD vendor

Massachusetts' Early Childhood Support Organizations (ESCO) initiative is an intensive, job-embedded PD approach that integrates coaching, training, and professional learning communities (PLCs) for leaders and educators in centers serving children from birth to five. The ESCO Initiative was launched in 2020 through a public-private partnership with New Profit, a philanthropy organization, and the state's Department of Early Education and Care (EEC). Now led by EEC, the ESCO initiative is a key strategy in the state's quality improvement system, which is designed to improve instructional leadership capacity and quality improvement in center-based programs. The state expects to spend over \$18 million on this initiative between FY25-FY30.²²

Each year, the ESCO initiative serves 80-90 center-based programs across the state, and programs are engaged for three years. The state partners with three contracted entities to implement the ESCOs: (1) the Children's Literacy Initiative, (2) University of Florida's Lastinger Center for Learning, and (3) Early Education Leaders, an institute at the University of Massachusetts Boston. While each of these entities uses its own evidence-based approach, all ESCO models share the following features.²³

Cross-role teams: EEC describes its focus on cross-role team engagement of directors and educators in the ESCO Initiative:

Educational leaders should work alongside classroom educators through an approach that reflects characteristics of a distributed leadership approach that encourages inclusion and representation of educator and family perspectives in the change and improvement process. By working at the leader and educator levels simultaneously, ESCOs promote holistic program improvements and leaders develop the capacity to sustain those improvements after their engagement with an ESCO ends.²⁴

Expert coaches: The ESCO initiative is grounded in the principles of adult learning, implementation science, and differentiation to meet the unique needs of programs. ESCO coaches deliver team coaching, training, and facilitate PLCs with program directors and educators.

Collaborative learning environment: Coaches work with cohorts of approximately 8-10 center-based programs over a three-year period, forming a collaborative learning environment. The PLCs create a setting in which educators and directors from different programs come together to learn with and from each other. Leaders from these programs receive coaching, training, and participate in PLCs. The state contracts with three different vendors to deliver the ESCO model, and each vendor's model is slightly different. As an example of dosage, one ESCO delivers a total of 12 hours of PLCs for leaders each year, along with cohort training and individual coaching.

Guiding framework: ECSOs have a well-specified logic model (change framework) that is aligned to the state’s logic model for the initiative and evidence-based practices. All ECSOs focus on high-quality curriculum, child assessment, effective educator-child interactions, instructional practice, educational leadership, and continuous quality improvement (CQI), all with a goal for improving child outcomes. The ECSO logic model helps ensure that the ECSOs, leaders, and educators have a shared understanding of the goals, practices, and outcomes they are working on together.

Continuous learning: The ECSOs support teams’ use of CQI methods, such as Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) cycles, using data to inform improvement, and setting goals and action plans, to guide their improvement activities.

Evaluation findings: An evaluation of the pilot phase, conducted by Abt Associates, identified promising results since the initiative launched in 2020.²⁵ The evaluation found that the ECSOs nearly met or in some cases exceeded their goals for delivering support to leaders and educators. Additionally, early evidence indicated that participating in the initiative resulted in promising outcomes for early education program leaders and educators. For example, after one year, leaders in ECSO-supported programs reported greater confidence in supporting their staff and more frequent use of positive leadership practices compared to those in non-ECSO programs. Notably, the initiative has evolved over time, with each successive cohort demonstrating stronger gains in key outcomes.

Program-Wide Supports for the Pyramid Model Implementation (PWS-PMI)

Partnership with national PD vendor

The Pyramid Model is a framework of evidence-based practices for supporting young children’s social and emotional development in ECE settings. States can partner with national PD vendors, such as the Pyramid Model Consortium (PMC) or the National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI), to receive technical assistance with implementing Pyramid Model practices in ECE programs. One option for states, among a menu of PD available to partners, is Program-Wide Supports for the Pyramid Model Implementation (PWS-PMI). PWS-PMI supports ECE programs in implementing Pyramid Model practices to improve children’s social and emotional outcomes using a systematic approach that is grounded in implementation science.²⁶ This PWS-PMI strategy is centered around a coordinated, program-based leadership team (comprised of administrators or family educators, classroom teachers, classroom coaches, family members, and/or behavior support specialists) that works with a Process Coach to guide implementation.

The role of the Process Coach is to support the leadership team in building the infrastructure and supports necessary for the successful implementation of the Pyramid Model. Pyramid Model Process Coaches must have a Bachelor’s degree and background in early childhood education, a strong understanding of the Pyramid Model methodology, and may be required to complete other specific PD opportunities to work in their role.²⁷ Together with the Process Coach, the cross-role leadership team works collaboratively to implement the Pyramid Model with high fidelity. The leadership team uses data-based decision-making to guide quality improvement efforts and goals. Key elements essential to high-fidelity implementation include a leadership team, staff buy-in, family involvement, program-wide expectations, classroom implementation of the Pyramid Model, staff PD, and support plans that include practice-based coaching, behavior support procedures, and data-based decision-making.²⁸

Cross-role teams: The PWS-PMI approach brings together participants from different roles and levels within an ECE program to form a leadership team. A leadership team may consist of a program

administrator or family educator, teachers, classroom coaches, family members, and behavioral support specialists, such as an infant/early childhood mental health consultant.

Expert coaches: The Process Coach helps guide the leadership team towards fully implementing the Pyramid Model to fidelity within an ECE program. There are certain requirements to serve as a Process Coach, primary among them is familiarity with implementing the Pyramid Model to fidelity. The Process Coach guides the leadership team by leading or facilitating leadership team meetings, small workgroups, and/or committees.

Collaborative learning environment: The PWS-PMI model establishes program-wide expectations to share a specific focus and language for describing children's social and emotional behaviors among the leadership team, program staff, and families. The leadership team works together to create a process for creating individualized support plans for children with challenging behaviors, PD supports for educators, a family engagement plan, and a process for using data to make decisions to implement the Pyramid Model to fidelity.

Guiding framework: Built upon a public health approach, the Pyramid Model is comprised of three tiers of support: primary, secondary, and tertiary.²⁹ First, high-quality, supportive environments and nurturing, responsive relationships form the primary or universal promotion tier intended to benefit all children within an ECE program. Next, targeted social and emotional support is provided to children who are at-risk of challenging behaviors at the secondary prevention tier. Finally, intensive, individualized interventions are provided to a small number of children who present persistent challenging behaviors at the tertiary prevention tier. Supporting an effective workforce to adopt and sustain these practices underpins all three levels of support that children and their families receive.

Continuous learning: Teams receive Pyramid Model-specific observations to identify strengths and areas in which to grow, and to engage in practice-based coaching to guide evidence-based practices. Practice-based coaching is a cyclical process for guiding practitioners' use of evidence-based practices, and includes the use of collaborative partnerships, shared goals and action planning, focused observation, reflection, and feedback. The team collectively reviews data on implementation and outcomes using Pyramid Model tools to make data-based decisions.

Evaluation findings: A study of 16 ECE programs that were randomly assigned to either 10 months of training and coaching in the PWS-PMI or "business as usual," found that programs receiving PWS-PMI showed significant "take-up" of the intervention activities. Furthermore, classroom observations indicated a moderate to large effect on classroom-level implementation of evidence-based, Pyramid Model practices as well as significant improvements in overall classroom quality for the intervention programs compared to the control programs.³⁰ Child-level effects, measured by the teacher-reported Social Skills Improvement Rating System Scales, found slight changes in children's social skills (in the positive direction) and challenging behaviors (in the negative direction) at the end of the intervention period, but neither trend was statistically significant. Following implementation science principles, the researchers concluded that it would take more than one year of coaching at the intended level of intensity to achieve high fidelity to program-wide implementation of the Pyramid Model.

Culture of Continuous Learning Project Breakthrough Series Collaborative

Pilot sites within states

The CCL Project aims to explore how child care programs and Head Start programs can improve the quality of services they provide to children and families and sustain a culture of ongoing quality improvement. The landscape activities described earlier in this brief are part of the CCL project. Phase 2 of the project also

includes a 4-year pilot that is studying the implementation of a particular CQI methodology and PD strategy, the Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC), in ECE centers across three states.

The BSC is designed to build organizational capacity for quality improvement, promote the use of data to guide decisions, engage leaders at every organizational level to support change, and ultimately improve quality and outcomes.³¹ Originally developed for the healthcare field, the BSC has since been adapted for use in other contexts, such as child welfare and early care and education.³² In the CCL pilot project, approximately eight ECE centers in each of the three locations are participating in a BSC to support social-emotional learning (SEL) practices within their centers.

Cross-role teams: The BSC brings together cohorts of teams composed of individuals from various roles and leadership levels within an organization. Within an ECE context, this may include an ECE director/owner, an assistant director or family coordinator, classroom educators including both lead and assistant teachers, and parents.³³

Expert coaches: A typical BSC lasts between 12 and 18 months, during which teams receive support from expert coaches who provide guidance and implementation assistance. Expert coaches have either content knowledge in the topical area that is the focus of improvement (in the CCL project, this is SEL practices), and/or expertise in the BSC methodology and quality improvement technical assistance.

Collaborative learning: Cross-role teams are brought together by the expert coaches three or four times over a period of 12 to 18 months either in person or virtually to learn together and from one another. In addition, same-role meetings are convened across teams so that peers in like-roles can learn from each other. For example, there are separate meetings offered for ECE directors, ECE teachers, and parents. In these shared learning environments, participants address both individual and organizational factors that influence the implementation and sustainability of high-quality practices.³⁴

Guiding framework: The topic of each BSC varies depending on the specific setting and goals of the participating teams. This focus shapes a change framework that is used to identify the drivers of change for the specific improvement and defines the intended outcomes. Indicators of progress associated with each driver of change are identified and teams are encouraged to collect and report upon these metrics monthly. Teams can use this monthly indicator reporting to monitor their own progress and to compare their progress to other cross-role teams within the collaborative. This information supports collaborative learning by encouraging teams to learn what is working well for others.

Continuous learning: Teams collaborate to improve practices by testing and implementing small, data-informed changes. They do this by implementing Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) cycles to test small changes, and by collecting and reflecting upon monthly indicators of progress towards their shared goals.

Evaluation findings: Multiple studies have examined the BSC method in ECE settings. A case study of the BSC approach found it effective in improving trauma-informed care practices.³⁵ Reported outcomes included improvements in teacher knowledge and attitudes, classroom teaching and communication, and overall center culture, such as a more caring workplace and better interagency collaboration. Another pilot study of the BSC in one northeast city found positive results related to SEL practices.^{36,37} Results included increased teacher knowledge, confidence, and job satisfaction, as well as center-level adoption of new practices. The current CCL project will yield further research evidence regarding the effectiveness of implementing the BSC methodology in different geographic locations and sustaining QI practices within participating centers. The CCL pilot project will also begin to shed light on what it will take to offer the BSC within states through interviews with state administrators and conducting a cost analysis of implementing the methodology within a state system.

Summary of example team coaching initiatives

These three innovative initiatives—Massachusetts’ ESCO initiative, PWS-PMI, and the CCL Project BSC—offer promising models for strengthening ECE programs through strategies that include team coaching. Together, they demonstrate how team coaching can be embedded in state QI systems, implemented through national partnerships, and tested in pilot sites.

Despite differences in structures and focus, these initiatives share several key features of team coaching. All three emphasize **cross-role teams**, bringing together educators, administrators, and, in some cases, families to lead change efforts. Each uses **expert coaches** with specialized training or content expertise and a **guiding framework** that aligns improvement efforts with clearly defined outcomes. They promote **collaborative learning environments** where teams can reflect, share experiences, and learn from one another.⁸ Finally, all three initiatives are anchored in a commitment to **continuous improvement**, using data and methods like Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles to drive progress and spread improvement. Evaluations across all three initiatives show promising outcomes, including stronger leadership practices, improved program culture, enhanced teacher practices, and increased educator confidence and job satisfaction.

Summary

In this brief, we described team coaching strategies: what they are, how they work, and how they have been used in state PD and QI systems. Looking across our synthesis of findings from the PD literature, data analysis from the CCL landscape study, and examples of initiatives that incorporate team coaching, we highlight the following key findings:

- Team coaching can refer to a range of relationship-based PD activities that involve an expert facilitating practice change among a group of early educators. Distinct features of this strategy may include **cross-role teams** (including early educators in different roles, ECE program leaders, and even parents) and opportunities to engage with teams from other programs to facilitate **collaborative learning**. While individual coaching offers strategies to help early educators apply knowledge to practice, team coaching facilitates engagement with others inside and outside of early educators’ workplaces, which may provide even stronger reinforcement of new learning and practices.
- The landscape analysis revealed that team coaching is less frequently offered in state PD and QI systems. Data gaps make it difficult to determine the full reach of team coaching. It will be important to conduct studies of team coaching to understand more about how many early educators have the opportunity to participate in team coaching and any implementation challenges they encounter as team coaching initiatives are launched.

Research Methods & Limitations

This brief summarizes data from the CCL Landscape study, which includes a secondary data analysis of the landscape of QI systems, a survey of individuals working in state and regional QI delivery systems, and interviews with state administrators. This section provides an overview of the research methods used to identify the findings from the data used to inform this brief. This study received generic OMB clearance;

⁸ The size of teams and the dosage of team coaching varied across initiatives. Further research is needed to document and compare the features used to structure collaborative learning opportunities. These may occur in person or virtually and may be held monthly or more frequently. They may be supported by a virtual platform that encourages engagement across teams or individuals on topics of interest.

therefore, the information is intended to primarily inform research activities and is not meant for broad generalizability.^h

The **secondary data analysis** included data from both publicly available and restricted-access datasets to describe the landscape of QI delivery systems in all 50 states, territories, the District of Columbia, and Head Start Regions. As part of this process, the research team analyzed state and territory CCDF plans for fiscal year 2020-2022 that mentioned how states allocated CCDF funds across the four quadrants of the PD Matrix. Additionally, the team analyzed state and territory PD databases, where ECE educators and staff can find training and coaching session calendars. Our team coded different elements included in PD databases to determine if PD opportunities advertised to the ECE field can be categorized across the PD Matrix.

From these efforts, our team found individual examples of team coaching being offered in state/territory QI systems that are included in the section titled “Examples of State Team Coaching Initiatives.” However, despite the research team’s multiple approaches to identifying the prevalence and reach of team coaching opportunities, the team was unable to find a data source that would allow for a systematic analysis of how team coaching is included in current QI delivery systems. While we could often identify the purpose of the activity (i.e., whether the activity was intended to support increasing knowledge or to support improving practice), we found that team coaching was not explicitly documented in the QI delivery data sources analyzed.

The **landscape survey** examined seven types of leadersⁱ in QI delivery systems that serve Head Start programs and CCDF-funded child care programs between Fall 2023 – Winter 2024. Each respondent type represented a key position in QI delivery systems, and the survey questions were designed to gather similar information across respondents in order to fill in gaps in publicly available information. Our original goal was to explore ECE QI systems across all 50 states, territories, DC, and Head Start Regions, including any similarities and differences across geographies. However, we did not receive sufficient survey responses to allow for separate analyses of the QI systems in U.S. territories, in DC, or in different Head Start Regions. Instead, to allow for some comparisons of QI delivery strategies across different parts of the system, we aggregated survey responses in two groups for each state, territory, and DC where one or more individuals responded to the survey:

1. **81 child care respondents** (including 34 CCDF Administrators, 22 QRIS Administrators, 11 Pyramid Model Leads, and 14 CCR&R contractors)
2. **67 Head Start respondents** (including 40 Education Managers, 3 Regional Managers, and 24 Head Start Collaboration Office Directors)

While the landscape survey allowed us to identify high-level themes among respondents, the survey sample was not representative of all states and territories. Further, the results should be interpreted with caution, as there was some level of disagreement among responses within a state, territory, or Head Start Region. The research team opted to aggregate responses among child care and Head Start respondents to account for this level of disagreement within a state or region’s QI system.

Lastly, the research team supplemented their search by **interviewing state administrators** from three states participating in the CCL BSC. The purpose of these interviews was to supplement our quantitative data with qualitative data to provide an in-depth understanding of select state QI offerings. As part of the interview

^h For more information: <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/08/11/2023-17205/proposed-information-collection-activity-formative-data-collections-for-acf-research-and-evaluation>

ⁱ Early Childhood QI delivery system leaders surveyed include CCDF Administrators, QRIS Administrators, Pyramid Model leads, CCR&R contractors, Head Start Education Managers, Head Start Regional Managers, and Head Start Collaboration Office Directors.

protocol, state administrators were asked whether their state QI or PD systems offer team coaching. Responses from state administrators informed the examples used in the “Examples of State Team Coaching Initiatives” section. A limitation of this approach is that our team was only able to interview administrators from a small number of states.

Acknowledgments

We wish to thank staff who contributed to the CCL Landscape Study: Jennifer Cleveland, Katie Richards, Alexandra Verhoye, Analisa Pines, Shreya Mukhopadhyay, Gabriella Guerra, Rowan Hilty, and Maria Abdul-Masih. We also thank Phoebe Harris for her assistance in final preparation of this document.

Suggested citation: Tout, K., Halle, T., Bredeson, M., Vansell, C., Douglass, A., & Warner, M. (2026). Coaching Teams for Quality Improvement in Early Care and Education Programs. Child Trends. DOI: 10.56417/5741b727n

Disclaimer: This project was funded by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of ACF or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.



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