



Perspectives on Integrating the Breakthrough Series Collaborative Methodology into State Early Care and Education Quality Improvement Systems

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Summary

1. The purpose of this brief is to provide insights into the potential of including a continuous quality improvement (CQI) methodology—the Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC)—in state early care and education (ECE) quality improvement systems.
2. As part of a larger evaluation of using a BSC in ECE programs to promote improved social and emotional learning practices (the Culture of Continuous Learning project), state administrators in three states shared their perceptions about the BSC. Participants also described their experiences in the BSC.
3. Insights from this study include the following:
 - State administrators believe a BSC can be embedded in their quality improvement (QI) systems if it extends and reinforces broader strategic goals rather than operates as a standalone initiative. To be feasible, a BSC should align with recent or ongoing system redesigns, ensuring the BSC complements and builds on prior state investments, funding, and implementation efforts. State administrators noted that the BSC generally aligns with the goals and direction of QI initiatives.
 - To obtain buy-in for a BSC, state administrators described the need for evidence of effectiveness across multiple levels such as child- and ECE program-level outcomes.

- State administrators note that participation in a BSC could be an effective strategy to support quality improvement and increase awareness and buy-in to the use of CQI practices. ECE center staff also agreed that the BSC could complement current QI initiatives in their state.
- To promote engagement, ECE center staff who participated in the BSC named financial resources as an essential facilitator of their participation. State administrators all referenced classroom-level stipends or bonuses and getting credit to meet state professional development requirements as essential facilitators of participation.
- Both state administrators and center staff participating in the BSC noted that, compared to other initiatives, the BSC enables ECE centers to identify and implement changes tied to specific classroom needs and priorities, rather than apply generalized strategies.
- State administrators agreed that existing funding sources such as the Child Care and Development Fund could be used to support a BSC.

Introduction

Young children benefit from high-quality early care and education (ECE) programs.¹ Achieving and sustaining high-quality learning environments and interactions with young children is a process that requires intentional planning, ongoing professional learning, regular assessment of practices, and leadership to guide the process.²

The purpose of state ECE quality improvement (QI) systems is to provide services and resources that ECE programs—including licensed center- and home-based programs, Head Start and Early Head Start programs, and state pre-kindergarten programs—can access to engage in the QI process by building on areas of strength and addressing areas that are challenging in their practices.^a These services are delivered through different structures depending on program type and funding (e.g., private tuition, Child Care and Development Fund subsidies, Head Start grants, state pre-K funding).³ For example, state quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) typically include quality assessments, ratings, incentives for quality, and coaching and technical assistance on quality improvement.⁴ Other QI initiatives may include provision of financial resources or distribution of educational materials to ECE programs (e.g., free curricula and assessment tools). Professional development is a common component of QI systems.⁵ State ECE leaders make decisions about the types of professional development strategies to offer ECE programs and early educators and may benefit from information about how to incorporate evidence-based, effective professional development strategies into their QI systems that have the potential to support sustained changes in practice.⁶

This report explores the potential of incorporating a Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC) into state QI systems to expand professional development opportunities for early educators. The BSC is an evidence-based continuous quality improvement (CQI) method that has been widely used in other sectors and is gaining interest in the ECE sector.⁷ CQI is defined as a cyclical and ongoing process in which people use data to identify opportunities for improvement, and then test new strategies, learn, and iterate to achieve improvement goals.⁸ In ECE settings, the BSC methodology supports teams of individuals holding various roles within ECE programs to implement improvements through rapid cycle testing, collaborative peer learning within and across programs, and data-informed decision-making. A BSC can be used to support practice improvements across different content areas.

^a 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 Culture of Continuous Learning 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. The state administrators we interviewed often referred to participants as “programs” (not centers); this language was not changed in their quotes.

The Culture of Continuous Learning (CCL) Project (see text box) examined the implementation and outcomes of a BSC implemented in 19 child care and Head Start centers across three states using a longitudinal mixed-methods case study design. This included engagement with state ECE administrators in the three states. This report summarizes the state administrators' experiences with the CCL Project and what we learned from state administrators and ECE center staff who participated in the BSC about how the BSC could integrate into state QI systems.

Project Context

The Breakthrough Series Collaborative methodology

One way to support quality in ECE programs is to promote the use of evidence-based practices by early educators. There are many methods by which states can promote evidence-based practices in ECE settings, including individual or group training and individual or group coaching.⁹ However, only coaching approaches are designed to move *knowledge* of evidence-based practices into *actual use* of those practices.^{10, 11} The BSC is an innovative and flexible CQI methodology that uses organizational-level coaching to support educators in adapting evidence-based content to support children's well-being in their unique ECE contexts. The BSC supports organizational change by building capacity for continuous improvement and making sustained changes to evidence-based practices that lead to better outcomes for children and families. In this way, the BSC has the potential to help ECE programs move knowledge into practice.¹²

The BSC is different than other professional development offerings commonly used in ECE systems. In the CCL project, it brings together teams of four to eight staff members from ECE centers to participate in the BSC activities; members of center teams include center leadership, center teaching and support staff, and parents. Together, team members implement improvements in their centers through rapid cycle testing, peer learning, and data-driven decision-making.¹³

The BSC activities are facilitated by quality improvement experts who help members of the collaborative develop shared goals for change that are based on research evidence. Quality improvement experts also provide ongoing support on the content and processes of quality improvement. For example, they help teams to identify small changes in evidence-based practice that can be tested in their respective centers, encourage team members to contribute ideas for adapting evidence-based practices for their local context, and coach them in the use of tools that can help team members make data-based decisions by gathering data to determine whether a change they make in their practice leads to an improved outcome. The BSC quality improvement experts are trained in the BSC methodology as well as the ECE content area that is the focus for improvement. This BSC implementation team typically includes a director who leads the BSC, as well as content expert coaches who support the teams.¹⁴

Engagement with states

The CCL project team conducted a landscape analysis that explored 34 states' use of professional development (PD) methods such as the BSC.¹⁵ It examined the PD states offer as part of their QI systems to learn about the prevalence of different types of PD such as training (a method designed to increase knowledge) and coaching (a method designed to support the transfer of knowledge into practice). It also looked at whether PD was provided to individuals or to groups of individuals who work together in an organization or network, such as teams within an ECE program. The CCL landscape scan did not examine why states made the choices they did about types of PD, but rather what kinds of PD they offered and invested in. The purpose of this analysis was to have a foundation for determining how the BSC might complement the existing landscape of PD options.

The landscape scan analysis revealed that organizational-level PD methods such as team coaching are less likely than other types of PD to be offered in state QI systems. More common types of PD offered by states included training and coaching of individuals. States also reported investing less in CQI methods such as team coaching than in other types of PD. The CCL project has documented how these organizational-level CQI methods have the potential to support improved outcomes for quality in ECE, yet we found that state systems do not frequently use such methods in their QI systems.¹⁶

Building on the landscape scan, the next CCL Project Phase 2 activity included intentional selection of states and engagement of state ECE leaders in learning about the implementation of a BSC with ECE centers in their state. The goal was to document 1) the experiences of ECE center participants in the BSC, 2) state ECE leaders' perceptions of how the BSC aligned with their current QI system methods, and 3) state ECE leaders' reflections on whether and how a BSC or similar initiative could be offered as a more permanent CQI strategy within state QI systems.

The CCL project team selected three states to participate in the BSC based on a state selection process. The goal was to identify states that were interested in trying a new QI approach, improving social and emotional learning, and learning about the BSC throughout the project's implementation. We selected states that were using the Pyramid Model, a framework for social and emotional learning that is also used in the CCL BSC. We also chose states where the CCDF administrator and Head Start Collaboration officer were embedded in the same department and where Head Start programs were participating in the state's QRIS. This provided us with a state partner positioned to support the inclusion of both Head Start and child care centers in the BSC. This process resulted in the selection of three states that represented different regional and state systems contexts, all with state administrators enthusiastic about the project and the opportunities to learn more to inform their state QI systems.

Within each selected state, we engaged state ECE leaders who had knowledge about ECE systems and insight into—and some decision-making power over—PD and QI in their state. These leaders agreed to support the recruitment of ECE centers to participate in the BSC, provide us with feedback to inform the content of the BSC, participate in two meetings during BSC implementation to share updates and discuss any questions, and participate in two interviews for research purposes.

Primary Research Questions

1. What potential benefits drew state administrators to the CCL Project?
2. What did state administrators know about the BSC and how did this change over time?
3. How might state policies or resources support ECE programs' participation in a BSC?
4. Where is there alignment between existing state QI systems and the BSC methodology?
5. What would it look like in practice to offer a BSC within state QI systems?

Methods

This study used a longitudinal mixed-methods case study design. The data in this report were collected through focus groups and key informant interviews with state ECE leaders, BSC participants, and staff who implemented the BSC. Please refer to the [CCL Phase II Methodology Report](#) for full details on location selection and site recruitment methods, detailed sample characteristics, interview and focus group protocol content, the timing of data collection across data sources, and analysis plans. This report focuses on a subset of the data from the larger case study, relevant to the five research questions presented above.

Table 1 shows the data sources summarized in this brief and the number of participants contributing data across time points: Time 1 (baseline, before the BSC started, March–April 2024), Time 2 (mid-point, during BSC implementation, October–December 2024), Time 3 (post-BSC, April–June 2025; note that no data for this report were collected at Time 3), and Time 4 (follow-up, six months after the conclusion of the BSC, October–December 2025).

Table 1. Summary of Data Sources and Timing of Data Collection

Data Source		Time 1 (Baseline, March – April 2024)	Time 2 (Mid-Point, Oct – Dec 2024)	Time 3 (Post BSC, April – June 2025)*	Time 4 (Follow- up, Oct – Dec 2025)
State /regional administrators interviews	Discussion guides included these topics: • Knowledge about the BSC and buy-in • Perceived benefits and challenges of the project • Structural elements of the state’s QI/PD systems • Alignment between the state’s QI/PD systems and the BSC • Practical considerations for offering a BSC within state systems	n = 8			n = 6
BSC participant interviews/ focus groups^a	Relevant topics from the discussion guides included: • State- and center-level factors that may have helped or hindered BSC participation • How the BSC compares to other experiences of QI		n = 63		n = 34

Note: ^aThe numbers in this table represent all individuals with whom we spoke during these time points, regardless of whether we spoke to them in focus groups or interviews. At T2, all discussions were in focus group format organized by BSC team. At T4, discussions consisted of interviews with ECE center directors, and a blend of focus groups and interviews by role (e.g., parent, teacher) for other BSC participants.

*No data for this report were collected during T3.

Analysis

Interviews and focus groups were transcribed verbatim and the transcripts were uploaded into Dedoose for analysis. The study team used a directed approach to content analysis,¹⁷ combining deductive and inductive coding. The team developed an initial coding scheme based on the research questions and iteratively refined it based on a review of a subsample of transcripts with input from subject matter experts, activity leads, and the PIs based on the initial transcript reviews. Please see the [CCL Phase II Methodology Report](#) for further details about our data analysis methods.

For Time 1 (T1) and Time 2 (T2), all transcripts were double-coded. For Time 4 (T4) qualitative data collection, 30 percent of transcripts were double-coded to verify consistency. Coders met regularly to reconcile differences and any codes that emerged during coding were applied retrospectively. Once coding was complete, the team ran targeted queries and examined code co-occurrence frequencies to identify patterns related to the research questions.

Findings

This section presents findings organized around the five research questions. We provide a synthesis of key themes from the interviews and share quotes from participants to illustrate their experiences.

RQ1. What potential benefits drew state administrators to the CCL Project?

We expected to hear that state administrators chose to participate in the CCL project because it aligned with one or more of their state priorities, such as social and emotional learning, implementation of the Pyramid Model, or increasing access to program QI supports. We asked state administrators to share what interested them about the CCL project and the BSC methodology.

State leaders wanted their state to participate in the BSC to support ECE program quality improvement. They believed participation in the BSC could offer a number of benefits, including increasing the reach of PD opportunities to more programs in the state, increasing the quality of child care, and generating educator buy-in for CQI. The BSC offered a structured improvement approach in support of state CQI efforts, as described by a state administrator:

“I think it's important for a lot of reasons. It helps to provide some structure to programs as they're thinking about improving program quality.” – State Administrator, T4

This administrator noted a desire to learn and apply learnings to their ongoing efforts to support program quality improvement:

“Knowing that someone has coaching and support to be going through a CQI process was very attractive because we can take those lessons and transpose them onto what [state quality support program] is doing.” – State Administrator, T1

State leaders were also drawn to the CCL project because it aligned with existing state initiatives such as Early Multi-Tiered System of Supports (Early MTSS), Pyramid Model, and a state CQI program. They described a strong alignment of the BSC with state QI efforts—particularly the opportunity to integrate lessons learned from the CCL project into broader QI systems. Some also noted the value of offering different types of supports for improving social and emotional learning:

“The ability to deepen some of their Pyramid Model work and to focus more deeply on SEL, which we had heard from so many programs was such a critical piece of the work that they were doing after kind of the peak of the pandemic.” - State Administrator, T1

“I think it’s always important to offer several different methodologies to programs. You know, what works for one might not work for another, so to be able to have access to offering different ways to approach social, emotional supports I think is important.” - State Administrator, T1

Additionally, administrators wanted to learn about what motivated ECE centers to participate in the CCL project because this information could inform outreach and engagement approaches for future state CQI efforts:

“Is it the topic of SEL? Is it the focus on CQI? Is it something for the Head Start programs as it related to compliance through performance standards? ... I would expect to learn some things that would help us to frame out some of our quality initiatives as we move forward.” - State Administrator, T1

State administrators also emphasized a desire to learn from participating centers’ experiences with the BSC to inform future state approaches to quality improvement supports:

“We hope to be able to gain a better understanding of what is helpful for programs now ... I think that’s what’s most helpful is to be able to hear from you all and to hear back from programs and educators about what exactly do you need for support so that we can help you feel like you’re more empowered in your position and help support children.” - State Administrator, T1

RQ2. What did state administrators know about the BSC and how did this change over time?

We expected that when state administrators have more knowledge about the BSC, they may be more likely to want to offer this type of CQI model through their state systems. To find out whether state administrators increased their knowledge about the BSC by participating in the CCL project, we asked them to share what they knew about the BSC before the BSC began, and to share their knowledge again after the BSC ended.

Specifically, we asked, “Based on the meetings you’ve had and what you’ve learned so far, can you share your understanding of what the BSC is and why it might be helpful? You can talk about the structure of the BSC, the content, or any other details that you think are important about a BSC.”

State administrators described the content focus of the BSC (i.e., SEL); the high level of support offered to teams through the BSC; a focus on CQI tools and strategies such as plan, do, study, act (PDSA) cycles; and the fact that the BSC allows teams to set their own priorities and focuses on organization-wide learning.

From T1 to T4, state administrators’ responses reflect increasing familiarity with and understanding of the BSC model. While no BSC terminology was used in T1 discussions, administrators referenced key concepts such as PDSA cycles and cross-role teams by T4. Also by T4, more state administrators emphasized the individualized nature of the BSC, highlighting how the approach allows ECE programs to use their own data to identify priorities, focus on what is most meaningful to them, and implement self-directed, incremental changes rather than adhering to a prescribed framework.

“It allows programs to identify what they need to work on using their data.” - State Administrator, T4

“It allows programs to think about what is meaningful to them, what’s important to them, and then to try small changes.” - State Administrator, T4

“It was another way to offer programs the ability to focus on processes or strategies that they self-chose rather than a framework kind of coming in and saying you need this.” - State Administrator, T4

Q3. How might state policies or resources support ECE programs' participation in a BSC?

We wanted to learn about what kinds of state policies or resources might support ECE programs' participation in a BSC. We asked state administrators and center staff for their perspectives about supportive policies or resources that could enable programs to participate in a BSC.

At the state and system levels, ECE center staff consistently identified financial resources, credentialing pathways, and workforce infrastructure as supports that could meaningfully facilitate participation in initiatives like the BSC. Across states where the BSC had been implemented, participants received professional development credits for the BSC—consistently named as an essential facilitator.

State administrators also described strategies for helping programs engage in a BSC or similar QI support. These included providing program- or classroom-level stipends or bonuses to support or incentivize participation, offering structures to support paid planning time for educators, and ensuring that programs' participation could be used to meet state QI system, PD, or credentialing system requirements.

"It's been fun the last several years to be in a position to provide... concrete financial supports to programs like annual bonuses that just really address quality ...if you are increasing your [QIS rating], there's substantial financial benefits to you. So I think in that respect we're hopefully changing the mindset of the field that hey, if you're working on these quality improvements, there is not just a programmatic and moral benefit, but there's also a financial benefit that could help them." – State Administrator, T4

"Something that can be aligned with credit-based learning ... We're really trying to move to credit-based professional development because it's much more transferable than 'I get 100 hours of PD,' especially since we have the [ECE workforce bill] moving through the legislature." – State Administrator, T4

RQ4. Where is there alignment between existing state QI systems and the BSC methodology?

We expected that the alignment of the BSC with state QI system goals and structures might make the BSC of interest to states, ECE programs, and ECE center staff. We asked state administrators and ECE center staff about how the BSC aligned with—or might complement—supports offered through their state's QI systems.

CQI focus

State administrators noted that the BSC generally aligns with the goals and direction of QI initiatives:

"There is potential to really align it well with some of the goals of [state legislation] that mandates investment in early education ..." – State Administrator, T4

One state administrator explained how she saw the BSC fitting into their state's focus on CQI specifically:

*"That piece fits in beautifully with the way that we think about CQI. We have a state-developed CQIP template that you could easily sub in kind of the same methodology, which now features PDSAs. It just seems like it could be a pretty seamless integration to the way that we think about program quality."
– State Administrator, T4*

ECE center staff described how the BSC could complement current QI initiatives in their state. The majority of ECE center directors agreed that they saw the BSC complementing current state QI initiatives because of its unique components—such as fostering interorganizational learning (i.e., collaborating with and learning

from other centers), systematically tracking monthly metrics data to guide decision making and PDSA cycles, offering individualized coaching for cross-role teams, and providing flexible and responsive supports:

“That one-on-one support, like even if we weren’t able to make it to one of the calls, they could get on and meet with us when there was a time that was convenient for us. [And] having somebody to really bounce ideas off of and talking through things was really helpful. That isn’t something we get a lot of through the state.” – Director, T4

Center directors in one state noted they are now required to participate in a new CQI program that uses a plan, do, study, review process as part of their quality [improvement] system (for programs that receive CCDF subsidies):

“I was able to explain to [other programs] since I had already gone through it, and it definitely made more sense the second time ... It’s given me a leg up.” – Director, T4

ECE program choice

Both state administrators and center staff spoke about the importance of programs having opportunities to choose and direct the kind of QI supports they want:

“My vision is to have a number of choices for programs because programs are going to know what’s going to work best for them ... It depends on the program and it depends on what their goals are.” – State Administrator, T4

This same state administrator noted how the BSC gave centers choice in determining their QI goals based on what they want to improve:

“When this project was first offered to [our state] as an invitation to participate, we were just launching the new quality improvement system, CQI process, the whole system had been revamped and we were launching it as a new concept. So the idea of engaging programs in a CQI process driven by their own ... goals was very attractive because we also were like ‘Oh, let’s see how they do it’ because we might be able to say ‘Look at how these programs have done it’ and also because we really loved the idea of a program choosing to undertake this process as its own thing ... I think anytime you can help people keep agency in their choices for themselves or their program or the way they teach in their classroom, I’m all for that, because I think a lot of times teachers have their agency stripped from them in a variety of ways.” – State Administrator, T4

ECE center directors also noted areas of alignment between the BSC and their state systems, especially because the BSC offers an additional modality to help staff translate knowledge to practice:

“I think that it would be a great complement to what’s going on with [CCR&R] throughout the state, and hopefully offer additional supports for providers.” – Director, T4

A unique and complementary opportunity

State administrators and BSC participants also reflected on how the BSC is unique from other state QI initiatives in offering complementary supports that they viewed as beneficial. For example, state administrators highlighted that the BSC is grounded in research-backed methodologies. State administrators and center staff highlighted the engagement of cross-role teams, the collaborative leadership of those teams in driving QI in their centers, the BSC’s extended duration, structured opportunities to collaborate with other centers, and collecting and using data to guide decision-making:

"We don't have opportunities like this where you go out into these spaces where you remember that you are a professional and your role is so important and has an impact ... We don't leave these walls, this space, often, particularly to collaborate with others in such a community-based way." – Director, T2

Both state administrators and BSC center staff noted that, compared to other initiatives, the BSC allows centers to identify and implement changes tied to specific classroom needs and priorities, rather than applying generalized strategies:

"Usually when I do PD I just kind of sit there and listen to someone talk, and every now and then you give your feedback. But this one's personalized to us, it's data that we're taking ourselves and taking from our classroom, you know, so it's actual issues that we're having within our classroom and trying to help with that as opposed to just generalizing a topic." – Teacher, T2

While some participants had received coaching in other contexts, they noted that these other settings had not given them the kind of sustained support provided in the BSC; rather, coaches would observe and share feedback, and participants would be left to implement changes on their own. These participants saw value in the opportunity for center staff to lead ongoing improvement efforts over time with support from BSC team coaches:

"I think sometimes it's like 'Here are all these strategies' and that's it. But here, it's like, 'OK, here are all these strategies, [and] we're following along with you and supporting you through it.'" – Center Support Staff, T2

"BSC was such a long-term consistent thing that builds upon itself, that is what I like the most. It's not one and done. It's, 'Here's what we're doing. Now work on it and then report back and let's see how it goes.'" Then, you know, we come back. Something like that doesn't happen in our center, even the professional development I'm running is more focused on a single domain and best practice within that domain." – Director, T4

RQ5. What would it look like in practice to offer a BSC within state QI systems?

We asked state administrators to share their perspectives on what it would look like, practically, for states to offer a BSC as part of their menu of quality improvement initiatives. Administrators talked about several different considerations: alignment with state priorities, evidence of effectiveness, and a range of feasibility considerations.

Alignment with state priorities

To consider investing in a BSC, state administrators emphasized the need for clear alignment with existing state priorities and systems. This would include alignment on state CQI domains, early learning standards, state strategic plans, and knowledge and competency frameworks. Administrators also discussed that a BSC should extend and reinforce broader strategic goals rather than operate as a standalone initiative. Administrators noted the desire to align the BSC methodology with recent or ongoing system redesigns, ensuring the BSC complements and builds on prior state investments, funding, and implementation efforts.

"I would say it would just need to be aligned to the domains of quality that we have identified as part of our state system, which seems very easy to achieve given the flexibility of the BSC." – State Administrator, T4

"When it comes to dollars being allocated to added initiatives, we would have to see in the grand scope and scheme of things, what benefit does this provide to the target audience, right? So having a very specific scope of service that correlates the dollars connected in this contract to the entities that we fund. So if there is a clear end goal that connects it back to the early childhood landscape, then that's something that ... the state would actually buy into." – State Administrator, T4

Some state administrators viewed the BSC as a way to address a priority to expand PD options in their state. They shared concerns about their own state relying too heavily on a single approach or on something being “the only solution,” and emphasized the importance of offering a variety of supports to meet diverse program needs. Some state administrators also considered how investing in the BSC could streamline existing PD/QI efforts in their state and reduce investments or the need for other supports in other areas.

“When we can offer more options that get programs to where they feel supported, that’s great. We just keep trying to figure out ways to broaden that for programs knowing that truly one size does not fit all in any state.” – State Administrator, T4

“Would it help to integrate work elsewhere? Could we reduce some of the investment in something else because we’re doing this which already has [a] kind of infrastructure, could we reduce some other training through [state online PD system]?” – State Administrator, T4

Evidence of effectiveness

State administrators also highlighted the need for evidence of the BSC’s effectiveness across multiple levels, such as child- and program-level outcomes (e.g., impacts on early learning standards, suspension and expulsion data), and of broader indicators of system stability and sustainability. Administrators also noted the importance of understanding how the BSC affects the well-being of children, families, and ECE staff compared to existing approaches that are implemented across states. One state administrator suggested the use of an evidence-based measurement tool (e.g., the Classroom Assessment Scoring System¹⁸) to track outcomes and assess the model’s effectiveness over time.

“Are children meeting those early learning standards who have participated in environments [that] have had access to a BSC?” – State Administrator, T4

“How does this play into the wellness of children, wellness of staff, wellness of families? I think that would be a really good lane to just hone in on because we’re talking about social-emotional learning, social-emotional development, how all of that, if you have your strong foundation as it relates to those things, it does play into effective wellness, success, and school readiness of children.” – State Administrator, T4

Feasibility

State administrators talked about multiple considerations with regard to the feasibility of adding the BSC into their state QI system.

Funding. We asked state administrators how they might fund a BSC as part of their QI system. Across states, administrators pointed out that existing funding streams like the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) block grant could support the BSC, often in combination with state-specific funding mechanisms or legislation. For example, states specified that their federally funded quality initiatives would also support the sustainability of a potential BSC. One state administrator noted that a grant could be another avenue of funding. State administrators also described cost considerations, including staffing (particularly training and compensation of coaches), marketing of the BSC, and outreach to center staff.

Implementation capacity. As one aspect of feasibility, state administrators were asked about a hypothetical situation in which they rolled out a BSC in their state: In such a case, would they have internal capacity to support the BSC or would they hire a vendor? Several administrators noted that existing infrastructure—such as QRIS or quality support coaches currently engaged in a CQI initiative—could be leveraged to implement the BSC in-house. Other administrators noted that contracting with vendors is common practice for their state, particularly given procurement requirements, capacity limitations, or the need for specialized expertise. Some described using existing intermediary organizations (e.g., a state Association for the Education of Young Children [AEYC] affiliates or child care resource and referral [CCR&R] agencies) to

deliver current CQI supports. Ultimately, decisions about implementation of a BSC would depend on multiple factors.

"I think it probably just depends on how the model really would be implemented statewide. I mean, we've done things where we do a train the trainer, we've done things through vendors, we've farmed things out through the CCR&Rs [child care resource and referral agencies] because they're at that local level and they have that presence in the community. So there would be a lot of different factors that we'd have to consider to determine which path we would go, if we would keep that something in-house or if we would go through any vendors." – State Administrator, T4

State administrators also discussed whether a hypothetical BSC would roll out first as a pilot or statewide. Some administrators favored an immediate statewide rollout if capacity allows, noting the widespread need for SEL supports. Other administrators viewed a pilot as a useful strategy for implementation to assess the need, feasibility, and sustainability of a new strategy. Some administrators noted that rollout might require a phased or blended approach, depending on staff and scale—for example, by gradually integrating a BSC into current QI processes or only offering it to programs currently enrolled in a state's QI program.

"If there's capacity to do it in all regions, then do it in all regions. We know that this is a need, but usually the whole pilot comes when it's like, well, we don't have the staff capacity and we really just need to focus on this one area. And we know that this is a need statewide. We're still in this land of offering workshops and trainings, and it's the coaching we need to get to. So people are hungry for this. Put it out in all regions. You might have to do some combination depending on numbers, but that's just how you run a project"
– State Administrator, T4

"Certainly, we've had pilots. I personally like a pilot because I think it lets you work out the kinks."
– State Administrator, T4

Buy-in. State administrators shared buy-in from key stakeholders as another aspect of feasibility. At the leadership level, they noted the importance of support from state agency or governmental units and leadership. At the same time, buy-in from other department staff, such as those responsible for program quality and CQI, would also be important to ensure alignment with existing efforts. Beyond internal stakeholders, administrators emphasized that collaboration across departments (e.g., behavioral health, early childhood mental health, communications teams), partner organizations, and advocates would aid in implementation and building awareness and credibility. They noted this buy-in also connects to the evidence of effectiveness: Showing the impact of the BSC will increase buy-in. Finally, state administrators discussed buy-in from the ECE field and described the need for clear communication and targeted marketing to reach them.

"What it would take I think is the buy-in from staff on the program side and the program quality work in particular to say this is relevant to our work, this is essentially what we're doing, these are the resources we would need to be able to implement it, which would largely be around training of the state staff to be able to implement the system with fidelity." – State Administrator, T4

"Really it would be getting everyone on board to get this information out to providers and help them understand how it's different [...] I think menu and choice is great, but I understand how folks feel overwhelmed by menu and choice if you're not really clear about this is what exists, and this is what it does, this is how we can help you." – State Administrator, T4

Sustainability. State administrators were asked to reflect on what they would need to ensure sustainability of a BSC if implemented in their state. They described a need for funding that is stable and long-term and won't be dropped within a year as with other initiatives. This is especially important given the turnover of staff in ECE programs. Administrators suggested that sustainability could be achieved by aligning the BSC with existing investments or swapping resources to replace duplicative efforts. One state administrator noted that ongoing technical assistance would also support sustainability.

“We need to figure out ways to be intentional about sustainability because we are also in a state that ping pongs from, ‘Oh, what’s the shiny new toy? Let’s train everybody,’ and then we lose them. There’s turnover, there’s churn, and that entire investment that we’ve just put in has been lost to some extent, so we still need to crack the nut of how are we keeping that [sustained].” – State Administrator, T4

Questions. Some state administrators had questions and a desire to know more about adopting a BSC in their state system. For example, they sought concrete details on implementation, required resources (e.g., costs, staff time, training demands), and overall expectations for ECE program participation to determine whether it could be adopted into their current system.^b The [CCL project field guide](#) contains information about implementing a BSC, including infrastructure and staffing guidelines, site selection, orientation processes, and details about structuring pre-work and learning sessions.

“How does this stand alone or set aside from what we’re already doing? I think that’s my biggest curiosity right now ... just wondering how that would look in [our state] with existing services and programs that we already have and invested dollars in to build infrastructure.” – State Administrator, T4

“How much resources are going to be needed, not just from the state to support programs engaging in it, but from the programs themselves? Do they have to pull a lot of staff to do a lot of trainings? Is there a lot of paperwork or what does it look like to implement with fidelity to the program? How cumbersome is that?” – State Administrator T4

Study Limitations

The CCL project was conducted in three states selected because of their interest in trying a new approach to professional development delivered in their state QI system. They were not selected to be representative of the nation or of the range of QI system configurations seen across states. The fact that states had to buy in to the BSC when they agreed to participate means they were already open to considering new approaches. The perceptions of the state administrators and BSC participants likely reflect this openness to new initiatives.

Summary and Conclusions

The BSC is a CQI methodology that is relatively new to the early childhood field. It uses professional development strategies such as organizational-level (team) coaching to help center staff implement improvements in SEL practices (or other content areas) through rapid cycle testing, peer learning, and data-driven decision-making. A landscape study conducted as part of the CCL project indicates that this type of CQI methodology is not widely available in state PD offerings.¹⁹ Therefore, the purpose of this analysis was to understand the factors that state administrators and project participants recommend considering when implementing a BSC in state QI systems. In this section, we share key findings along with possible research questions that could be embedded in a future state-level examination of BSC implementation.

1. **State administrators believe that a BSC can be embedded in their QI systems if it extends and reinforces broader strategic goals rather than operates as a standalone initiative.** To be feasible, a BSC should align with recent or ongoing system redesigns, ensuring that the BSC complements and builds on prior state investments, funding, and implementation efforts. State administrators noted that the BSC generally aligns with the goals and direction of QI initiatives.
 - **Research questions:** To what extent are state QI systems prioritizing CQI as a goal? What structures are currently used to address CQI?

^b The CCL team produced a field guide in Phase I to provide an overview of implementation and details about supporting a BSC. <https://acf.gov/opre/report/field-guide-implementation-breakthrough-series-collaborative-early-care-and-education>

2. **To obtain buy-in for a BSC, state administrators described the need for evidence of effectiveness across multiple levels, including child- and program-level outcomes.**
 - **Research questions:** Across the variety of short- and long-term outcomes that could be examined in an evaluation of a BSC, what outcomes are most compelling for state administrators? What other features should be examined in evaluations of a BSC (e.g., implementation challenges, costs)?
4. **State administrators noted that participation in a BSC could be an effective strategy to support quality improvement and increase awareness and buy-in to the use of CQI practices.** ECE center staff also agreed that the BSC could complement current QI initiatives in their state.
 - **Research questions:** What are current perceptions of CQI practices among early educators? To what extent is CQI being covered in pre-service preparation degrees, certificates, and/or training priorities?
5. **To promote engagement, ECE center staff who participated in the BSC named financial resources as an essential facilitator of their participation.** State administrators all referenced classroom-level stipends or bonuses and getting credit to meet state professional development requirements as essential facilitators of participation.
 - **Research questions:** What levels of financial resources are most effective? What other outcomes beyond participation are supported by financial resources (e.g., positive engagement)?
6. **State administrators and center staff participating in the BSC noted that, compared to other initiatives, the BSC allows programs to identify and implement changes tied to specific classroom needs and priorities, rather than applying generalized strategies.**
 - **Research question:** How does a more tailored approach to classroom improvements support the sustainability of changes in practice? What are the implications of this approach across a state QI system?
7. **State administrators agreed that existing funding sources such as the Child Care and Development Fund could be used to support a BSC.**
 - **Research question:** To what extent is CCDF or other funding being used currently to support implementation of CQI methodologies?

Overall, the findings document the alignment of the BSC with the priorities and approaches being implemented in the states that participated in the CCL project. The perceptions of state administrators and center staff participating in the BSC indicate positive feelings about the approach and highlight potential interest in using a BSC more regularly as a way to complement existing efforts.

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