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Primetime for Coaching

Improving Instructional Coaching in Early Childhood Education

Bonnie O'Keefe

BELLWETHER
EDUCATION PARTNERS

Table of Contents

Click on each title below to jump directly to the corresponding section.

Introduction

Coaching has received significant attention from policymakers, advocates, and researchers in recent years as a professional development and quality improvement strategy for early childhood instruction. Coaching is an individualized approach to professional development where educators work towards specific teaching goals with support and feedback from a designated colleague or expert. Coaching appears to be increasingly common in early childhood education (ECE) classrooms, and a number of local, state, and federal policy initiatives over the past five years have promoted coaching as a strategy to improve early childhood program quality. Because of the labor-intensive nature of coaching, cost has been one of the top barriers to wider implementation in early childhood settings, but if coaching creates better outcomes for children, it could be a cost-effective strategy. A growing base of research and evidence suggests coaching can yield positive results for teachers and students—but not in all cases. Program leaders and policymakers should understand the research, design choices and tradeoffs, and lessons from the field on coaching in order to make better decisions about it as part of a professional development system.

New Head Start Performance Standards finalized in 2016 effectively mandate coaching in the nation's largest early childhood program. This means coaching could become the new norm for educators serving millions of young children, but access to coaching and the content and quality of coaching models vary significantly from program to program.

Coaching's growing evidence base sets it apart from many other ECE professional development approaches, which too often yield disappointing outcomes. Many early childhood educators have little or no training or professional development opportunities,[1] and those who do receive professional development most often experience one-time, lecture-style trainings. This approach can work for some topics, but it is usually ineffective at changing instructional practice or improving child learning outcomes.[2] Coaching, when implemented well, looks very different: It lasts for a longer period of time, it is grounded in educators' day-to-day work (i.e., it is job-embedded), it focuses on skills and knowledge educators can put into practice, and it gives educators opportunities to pursue personalized improvement goals. These are all the hallmarks of a high-quality professional development approach in early childhood settings.[3]

Coaching is still evolving, and ECE practitioners and policymakers should understand different trends, goals, and frameworks for coaching so they can make informed choices.

Coaching is still evolving, and ECE practitioners and policymakers should understand different trends, goals, and frameworks for coaching so they can make informed choices. Coaching models vary widely in their design, goals, cost, rigor, and effectiveness. As federal, state, local, and program efforts have sought to encourage coaching, new challenges, gaps in the knowledge base and system capacities, and opportunities for improvement have become apparent.

This paper considers ECE coaching programs and research at the state, local, and federal level, for educators of children ages birth to five, with a particular focus on Head Start programs.

It summarizes what we know about coaching in ECE and shares some of the challenges, lessons, and opportunities emerging from research and program experiences. Then it recommends how early learning program leaders, policymakers, funders, and researchers can encourage and implement coaching more effectively.

Defining Coaching in Early Childhood Education

Coaching is a form of training, technical assistance (TA), and job-embedded professional development. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and Child Care Aware define coaching as "a relationship-based process," (page 7).[4] This definition is widely used, but very broad. It does not specify the content of coaching, the role of the coach and their areas of expertise, the role of the recipient, or whether coaching must happen one-on-one. Many local, state, and federal efforts to encourage coaching similarly do not have a clear definition of what they mean by "coaching," and programs must create their own interpretations. For example, the Head Start Performance Standards (page 16) require coaching, and include parameters for what programs must do around coaching, but they do not explicitly define coaching.

This paper focuses primarily on models of coaching that aim to improve instructional practice and child learning outcomes. Sometimes, coaching is framed in research as a tool to ensure teachers implement curricula with fidelity,[5] but the focus of this paper is broader than curricula. A lead teacher or teaching assistant is typically the recipient of instructional coaching, but program leaders may also receive coaching that focuses on aspects of leadership that relate to classroom instructional practices. This paper uses the term "educators" to be inclusive of teachers, teaching assistants, and instructional leaders. Generally, in instructional coaching models, coaches and educators work one-on-one in cycles of initial assessment, goal setting and planning, observation/modeling/feedback, and opportunities for reflection and action.[6]

> Coaching is a relationship-based process led by an expert with specialized early learning and adult learning knowledge and skills, who often serves in a different professional role than the recipient(s). Coaching is designed to build capacity for specific professional dispositions, skills, and behaviors and is focused on goal-setting and achievement for an individual or group.
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> *Source:* National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA), "Early Childhood Education Professional Development: Training and Technical Assistance Glossary," 2011.

Instructional coaching is different from other forms of coaching, consultation, or one-on-one technical assistance that focus on non-instructional issues such as safety, compliance, or operational management. These forms of technical assistance can be beneficial to programs in various ways but are not the primary focus of this paper.

Terms such as mentoring and supervision are often used interchangeably with coaching, but refer to slightly different things.[7] Coaching differs from mentoring in that coaches and educators have different roles and coaches have particular expertise in training adults, whereas mentorships tend to be peer-to-peer relationships between a more-experienced and less-experienced educator. Another approach, supervision, refers to the relationship between an educator and the person with direct managerial responsibility over them. This is usually a program administrator who evaluates their job performance and ensures they fulfill the requirements of their role. Supervisors also act as coaches in some settings, but not all supervisors have the expertise to be coaches, and not all programs want to mix supervisory and coaching functions. Coaching as a professional development approach is more focused on the ongoing process of goal-setting, skill-building, feedback, and improvement, rather than evaluating performance or checking for compliance with rules.

The design and implementation of instructional coaching models vary on some key dimensions. **Figure 1** on page 8 highlights key design features identified based on Bellwether's research and interviews, and informed in part by the Head Start coaching logic model.[8] Decisions related to these elements vary based on program context and goals and have implications for coaching costs and impact.

Figure 1 Coaching Design and Implementation Key Questions

Theory of change and goals	What are the ultimate outcomes coaching aims to achieve? How will coaching change instruction in such a way that student outcomes improve?
Targeting	Which educators receive coaching and how are they chosen? How much is coaching differentiated based on educators' needs?
Staffing	Who are the coaches and what training, guidance, and support do they receive? Do coaches serve one site or multiple sites? Are coaches employed by the provider, or by an outside partner, researcher, or vendor? Is coaching their only responsibility, or do they serve other roles? What skills and expertise do coaches need to have to be effective?
Dosage and duration	How often do coaches and educators meet, and for how long? Does coaching recur continuously, or is it time-limited?
Leadership	How do coaches work with site-level program directors? How are leaders coached and supported, and what role do they play in evaluating and/or coaching classroom educators?
Content	What is the content of the coaching? Is it limited to certain skill, behavior, or knowledge areas, such as literacy or social-emotional learning? Does the focus change over time? How strict or prescriptive are the expectations for the content of the coaching?
Process	What adult learning or behavior change strategies do coaches use in their interactions with educators? How do coaches build relationships and trust with educators? How consistent are coaches in their approach?
Context	How does coaching fit into the professional development and staff evaluation strategy, curricula, and structure of the program overall? How is coaching funded, and is that funding sustainable over the long term?
Venue	Do coaches and educators meet in person or use virtual strategies, such as video chat or email?
Measurement and evaluation	How is program success evaluated, and how does that evaluation inform action or changes to coaching approaches? What metrics measure the outcomes of coaching?

ECE educators are less likely to hold a bachelor's degree than their K-12 peers, and many have never received formal training in early childhood development.

Instructional coaching is not limited to ECE, and is also a popular strategy in K-12 schools, especially around teaching literacy.[9] There are several reasons to consider ECE coaching separately from K-12. ECE programs operate in a different budgetary, regulatory, policy, and operational context than schools. Even in the case of school-based pre-K programs, ECE classrooms often have different rules, staffing, and professional development for educators, which will affect coaching. Moreover, the needs of young children are substantially different from that of their older peers, which means that instructional best practices look different. The ECE educator workforce also tends to have different education and training than the K-12 workforce. ECE educators are less likely to hold a bachelor's degree than their K-12 peers, and many have never received formal training in early childhood development. There is also considerable variance in educator needs within ECE. For example, certification, training, and professional development requirements tend to be higher in Head Start programs and state-funded pre-K classrooms than in other ECE settings.

Coaching Spotlight: MyTeachingPartner

MyTeachingPartner is an online and video-based coaching model aligned to Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) ratings. Teachers spend four to six hours a month in online coaching cycles with a remote coach who reviews and gives feedback on taped classroom activities. Coaches must be experienced early childhood educators and certified CLASS observers, proficient in technology and interpersonal communication.[10] This model has been shown to effectively improve instructional practices and interactions with children, especially in classrooms with high proportions of economically disadvantaged students.[11] The evidence behind MyTeachingPartner is among the most promising for virtual coaching, including evidence of impacts on teacher practice when delivered at scale by practitioners, rather than the model developers.[12]

Research on Instructional Coaching in Early Childhood Education

Research shows coaching has strong potential to change teaching practices and positively affect young children. It also brings up important unanswered questions about when and how coaching is most effective, and why it sometimes falls short of expectations.[13] Like good teaching, good coaching is inherently context- and relationship-based, and thus difficult to pinpoint and measure.[14] Because many coaching approaches integrate coaching with an aligned curriculum, assessment, or other intervention, it can be difficult to tease out coaching's stand-alone impact. Despite the complexity, we know much more today about what makes coaching effective and how to measure its impact than we did just a few years ago. As the prevalence of coaching in ECE has increased, opportunities for research have expanded.[15] The U.S. Department of Education Institute for Education Sciences' (IES) emphasis on experimental and quasi-experimental studies, along with the standards of the What Works Clearinghouse, has also led to more rigorous studies on coaching in ECE, among other professional development and improvement strategies.[16]

Teacher and Student Outcomes from Coaching

Several studies have found that high-quality coaching has positive effects on teachers' practices across various measures of instructional quality.[17] Fewer studies measure child outcomes alongside teacher outcomes.[18] Studies that include child outcome measures have found some evidence that children whose teachers receive coaching made improvements in domains such as language, literacy, and social-emotional development. But child effects are not as large as teacher effects and are often not statistically significant.[19] This suggests that teachers have to improve their instructional practices

substantially to yield significant improvements in children's learning. Studies of the impact of coaching on instructional leaders or teaching assistants are relatively rare.

Some studies that tracked outcomes after the coaching period ended found continued improvement in students and teachers,[20] indicating that even time-limited coaching could yield continuing benefits. This possibility is especially promising for programs with limited budgets for professional development.

Teachers have to improve their instructional practices substantially to yield significant improvements in children's learning

Coaching models generally work to improve practice by focusing primarily on teaching skills.[21] This contrasts with other types of professional development, such as courses or workshops, which often focus primarily on building teachers' knowledge about child development and effective teaching.[22] Many coaching models complement skill-based coaching with knowledge-building resources or trainings. Several research studies support this combined approach. For example, in one study, teachers who received a combination of coaching and training outperformed teachers who received coaching or training separately.[23]

Coaches' Skills and Qualifications

Research gives broad guidance on the knowledge, skills, and competencies coaches need to be effective. Coaches are usually, but not always, former teachers or program leaders with training and subject matter expertise in early childhood.[24] Formal experience in teaching and training adults is preferred, but less common. Most evidence-based coaching approaches specify that coaches must have strong relationship-building skills, be able to teach adults as well as children, reliably document and track their work, and implement a coaching model with fidelity.

Finding and training people who meet these qualifications can be difficult, especially on a large scale.[25] There are few evidence-based tools for defining coaching competencies and supporting coaches on the job. The tools and assessments that do exist to measure coaches' performance may not fully capture all relevant dimensions and variations of high-quality coaching practices. Some states have created certification programs or skill frameworks around coaching, but only a few, such as the University of Florida Lastinger coaching academy program (discussed on page 31), have evidence of effectiveness.

Translating Coaching Research for the Field

One challenge in putting lessons from coaching research into practice is that much of the research literature on coaching is either very general, looking at coaching as a broad category, or very specific, evaluating models designed and implemented by researchers under controlled, small-scale situations.

One challenge in putting lessons from coaching research into practice is that much of the research literature on coaching is either very general, looking at coaching as a broad category, or very specific, evaluating models designed and implemented by researchers under controlled, small-scale situations. Both kinds of research can be valuable—general research informs our understanding of coaching, and lifts up broader insights, trends, and impacts; carefully designed pilots can inform evidence-based decisions, and build the evidence base around specific strategies. But neither type of research directly answers some key design questions facing policymakers or practitioners seeking to implement instructional coaching at a significant scale.

A symptom of the challenges in taking research-based approaches to scale is the fact that smaller-scale coaching programs tend to show better results than large-scale programs.[26] Researchers piloting a coaching intervention have more resources than a typical program site and can carefully control the hiring and training of coaches, ensure fidelity in delivery, specify aligned curriculum, and provide coaching to teachers who volunteer to participate. This type of approach can't be sustained long-term, however, or scaled to reach a critical mass of early educators. Scaling coaching models often requires delegating implementation to sites instead of the model's creators, introducing new challenges. The smaller-scale, evidence-based models also tend to be more expensive to implement, on a per-teacher basis, than many providers can afford.

Coaching Spotlight: Pyramid Model Coaching

The Pyramid Model for Supporting Social-Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children (the Pyramid Model) is a widely used teaching approach to supporting social competence and preventing challenging behavior in young children.[27] Coaching is a key component for implementing the Pyramid Model well, and researchers have found that when teachers received weekly coaching over four months, their use of Pyramid Model practices and their students' SEL outcomes in the classroom improved significantly.[28] The studies conducted on the Pyramid Model are an important example of the impact of an aligned instructional strategy, coach training and content, and an observation measure (the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool) that contributed to its effectiveness. Much of the current published evidence on the Pyramid Model and coaching comes from small-scale studies, but larger studies are underway.[29]

Figure 2 Coaching Design and Implementation Research Trends and Gaps

Returning to the design framework from Section 2, research studies highlight some emerging consensus on best practices as well as gaps in our current knowledge:

Theory of change and goals	Coaching models focus on improving educator skills and practices as a means to improve child outcomes.[30]
Targeting	There is not a clear consensus on which educators benefit most from coaching. Many pilot studies require educators to participate voluntarily, and those who volunteer might be more enthusiastic or open to coaching and professional development at the outset than someone assigned a coach involuntarily. In contrast, when a large program such as a multisite Head Start grantee implements coaching they are likely to assign coaches to those who need the most support.
Staffing	Coaches in smaller-scale research studies are most often recruited and trained directly by researchers. This ensures consistency, but also means that coaches will leave the environment when the study ends. Coaches are usually recruited from among ECE educators. For practical reasons, coaches tend to serve multiple sites.
Dosage and duration	There is no research consensus regarding how often coaches and educators should meet and for how long. Generally, researchers agree that more coaching is better, holding quality constant. But there are no clear indications of how much coaching is enough to yield desired impacts and how the dosage and duration could interact with the goals and content of the coaching, or the needs of each educator.
Leadership	Most research studies do not mention site-level leaders at all and do not explain what relationship site leaders should have with coaches. Research therefore does not address the role leaders can take in modeling and reinforcing coaching for educators or in facilitating the logistics of coaching. Coaching research almost always separates coaching from any evaluative or supervisory functions, because the stakes of evaluation could disrupt trust or hinder relationship building between coaches and educators.
Content	Most coaching models in the research literature focus on language and literacy, general pedagogy, or social and emotional learning. Math and science content in early learning is only addressed by a few evidence-based coaching models,[31] and it is unclear whether coaching works better for some teaching skill domains than others.

Figure 2 Coaching Design and Implementation Research Trends and Gaps, continued

Process	Research-based coaching models take a variety of approaches to structuring the coach/educator relationship and coaching strategies (see spotlights for some examples), drawing process lessons from fields such as adult learning, implementation science, and behavioral science. To ensure consistency and fidelity to the study design, coaches in research-based models usually use tools and rubrics, and record the content of their coaching sessions. But not all research-based models document or structure their process or fidelity such that they can be replicated elsewhere—recent reviews of ECE professional development literature found that many studies were vague on key process and fidelity details.[32]
Context	Research on coaching focuses largely on teachers of three- or four-year-old children in publicly funded center-based ECE settings, rather than home-based or infant/toddler care. As noted above, many studies omit key context data points about the teachers and sites. In cases where coaching models are designed and implemented independent of curriculum, curriculum and coaching may be misaligned. Another underexplored question is whether coaching has greater effects when implemented in all classrooms in a site, which could increase teacher and leader engagement in coaching.
Venue	Most coaching sessions take place in person at a program site. Some promising models have seen significant improvements using video coaching and other technology-assisted coaching.[33] Technological capacity in schools can be a barrier; nevertheless, technology-assisted coaching is an interesting strategy for connecting educators with coaches at lower costs.
Measurement and evaluation	Observational measures of instructional quality are most common in coaching research, especially the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). CLASS is a measure of teacher-student interaction associated with child outcomes that Head Start and many state pre-K programs use as a primary performance measure.[34] Other measurement tools include the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT), a measure of teacher practices to support social-emotional competence,[35] and the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS),[36] a measure of process quality in early childhood classrooms. The relatively few studies that measure child outcomes do so using validated assessments for early childhood.

All of the unanswered questions above offer rich possibilities for future research into what coaching works best for whom in which contexts.[37] But providers and policymakers are moving forward and encouraging coaching now, and they need support to make wise decisions about dimensions of coaching design and implementation on which research evidence is lacking or mixed, and to assess the results of those decisions. This in turn creates new opportunities for bringing research insights into practice and allowing questions and lessons from the field to guide research.

Coaching Spotlight: Practice Based Coaching

Practice Based Coaching (PBC) is an influential coaching framework developed by the Office of Head Start National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning (NCQTL).[38] PBC uses a three-part coaching cycle of planning, engaging in observation, and reflecting on shared feedback all around effective teaching practices.[39] This basic cycle forms the backbone of many other coaching models and variants on PBC. PBC takes a broad view of who can serve as coaches and where, emphasizing that coaching should not be evaluative or judgmental and that educators should use it to grow professionally and form a partnership with their coach. Unlike other models spotlighted in this report, PBC is more of a general framework for coaching—leaving many decisions about implementation, such as the focus and duration of coaching, up to those implementing it. The PBC approach has been integrated into EarlyEduAlliance, a higher education collaboration that seeks to make relevant, affordable bachelor's degrees accessible to the early childhood workforce. Partner institutions of higher education use the Coaching Companion, a video sharing and coaching feedback app created to support PBC, to give educators individual support to improve their teaching practice.

National Policies and Prevalence of Coaching

Recent federal and state policy trends have encouraged and expanded ECE coaching approaches. As noted above, new Head Start Performance Standards required all 2,920 Head Start and Early Head Start programs across the country to implement a research-based, coordinated coaching strategy by 2017.[40] Additionally, 25 states require some form of coaching in at least one of their publicly funded ECE programs, but that coaching may not be available to all educators and requirements are not a guarantee of quality.[41] Many state-run quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) also offer coaching and/or TA to participating ECE programs.

Head Start

Head Start's coaching requirements, captured in the Head Start Performance Standards, will directly affect programs serving about 1 million children per year in nearly 60,000 early childhood classrooms.

The standards summarized in **Figure 3** set some parameters and requirements around coaching, but do not specify a particular coaching model or approach, or define coaching versus other forms of technical assistance or professional development. This provides Head Start grantees flexibility in how they design and implement coaching, but it may have created some confusion among grantees. For example, a few coaching providers we spoke with thought that some grantees believed the performance standards required them to contract with an outside provider for coaching, which is not the case.

Figure 3

Head Start Performance Standards for Coaching

The Head Start Performance Standards put coaching under the category of educator professional development. The standards specify that a program "must implement a research-based, coordinated coaching strategy for education staff." This strategy must:

- Assess all education staff to "identify strengths, areas of needed support, and which staff would benefit most from intensive coaching," and provide opportunities for intensive coaching for those identified staff;
- Include opportunities during intensive coaching to be observed, to set goals, to receive feedback, and to see modeling of effective teacher practices related to program goals;
- Align with the program's goals and curricula;
- Ensure coaches must have adequate training and expertise in adult learning and data-driven coaching strategies; and
- Ensure that coach assessments aren't used for solely punitive actions, and that staff are given time and resources to improve.

If a program wants to pursue an approach to professional development that does not meet the requirements of this section, programs have the flexibility to do so, but must work with outside experts and researchers to assess and evaluate their approach.[42]

Source: Excerpted from the Head Start Performance Standards, 45 C.F.R. § 1302.92

Head Start has emphasized and required professional development for educators for many years, and Head Start teachers are more likely than their peers in other programs to report having received recent professional development opportunities. As of 2014, about 75 percent of Head Start teachers report having a coach or mentor of some kind.[43] But relatively little is known about the typical quality or rigor of coaching these teachers received, or whether it changed their instructional practices.

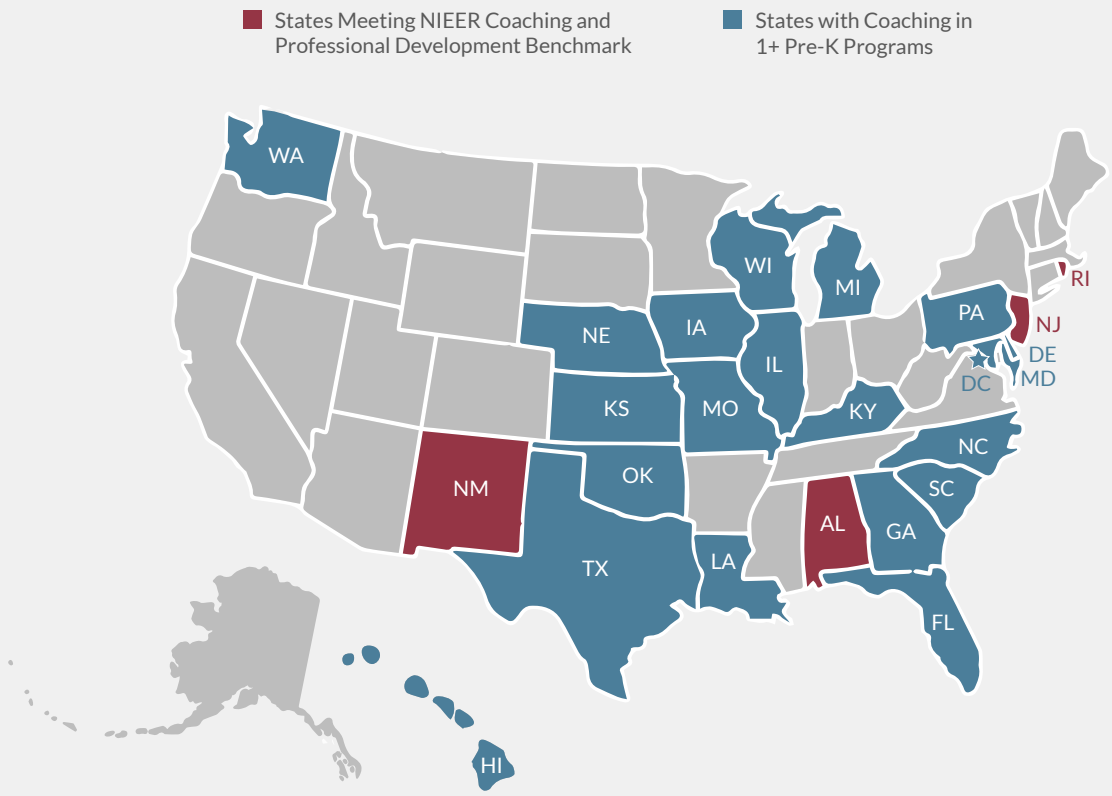
Over the past two decades—and particularly since 2007—the federal Office of Head Start has supported a variety of pilot programs and TA supports to encourage quality instructional coaching in Head Start grantees, including a $25 million pilot grant program in 2010.[44] These efforts encouraged more experimentation, interest, and documentation of coaching among Head Start grantees, and influenced the eventual shape of the performance standards.

State Coaching Trends

Beyond Head Start, 25 states require some form of coaching in their pre-K programs. As an indicator of coaching's increased prominence, the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) state preschool quality standards benchmarks[45] now recommend all lead teachers and assistant teachers in state-funded pre-K programs have individualized professional development plans and coaching, plus at least 15 in-service hours of professional development per year for lead and assistant teachers. The NIEER quality benchmarks are widely used and referenced in state and local ECE programs, and this new requirement could encourage more states to add coaching requirements for pre-K. Just six programs in four states met this revised benchmark in 2016; 21 other states required some form of coaching in a publicly funded pre-K program but did not meet the full NIEER benchmark.

Coaching is also a component in many states' QRIS. QRIS are systems that assess, improve, and communicate quality in ECE settings by setting quality standards, awarding ratings, and supporting programs to improve.[46] In several states, child care providers that participate in QRIS receive coaching or other forms of technical assistance. Coaches or TA providers

Figure 4 States With Coaching Requirement in Pre-K



Source: NIEER State of Preschool, 2016

are associated with the agency administering the QRIS. Arizona's Quality First QRIS, for example, assigns all participating programs a coach who works with program leaders to identify strengths and weaknesses and determine ways to improve their quality.[47] This type of coaching, however, is different from instructional coaching, which is the subject of most research literature. Some state QRIS also provide higher star ratings for programs that provide professional development and coaching.[48]

During the Obama administration, the federal Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant (RTT-ELC) and Preschool Development Grant (PDG) programs provided funds for states to build state early childhood systems and improve preschool quality. Neither of these programs explicitly emphasized instructional coaching, but several states used these initiatives as an opportunity to implement new coaching supports.

Professional development is a central component of many states' ECE strategies, but state policies, mandates, and plans are often vague beyond high-level commitments to training and technical assistance.

Professional development is a central component of many states' ECE strategies, but state policies, mandates, and plans are often vague beyond high-level commitments to training and technical assistance. Most state policies related to coaching require coaching without clearly defining it, recommending models, or setting a quality bar, and few offer credentials or training for coaches. States often have limited authority to prescribe coaching models or provide coaching supports directly, particularly outside of state-funded preschool programs. Even when states do fund coaching directly, they are usually not staffed or equipped to dive deeply into coaching, and tend to defer to local program leaders.

State involvement in coaching can encourage a high-quality professional development strategy but can also have unintended consequences. Mandating coaching while leaving it loosely defined can create confusion for providers, and may encourage some to implement low-quality programs that fulfill a requirement. Requirements for evaluation, requirements for coaching based on grant funds, QRIS coaching, and requirements for Head Start don't always align well. Some state or local policies may be duplicating efforts or confusing educators with incoherent coaching approaches.

Coaching Lessons From the Field

Early education programs across the country are implementing coaching in various forms. They are operating and innovating in ways that go beyond the research literature. Interviews with several Head Start grantees and coaching providers revealed new information and perspectives from the field around coaching. These interviewees were chosen from several sources, including Bellwether's work with a range of early childhood providers, funders, and other ECE organizations; an ongoing research project on Head Start grantees that produce exceptionally strong results for children; and recommendations from experts in the field. Several interesting themes emerged from these conversations.

While researchers often seek to isolate the impacts of coaching, successful programs are trying to integrate coaching into many other systems as part of an overall improvement strategy.

Programs we interviewed emphasize cycles of coaching and learning for educators, and stress the active role of educators in guiding their own goals, development, and growth. Several programs utilize tiered models of coaching based on teacher needs, where inexperienced teachers and/or teachers in need of more support receive more intensive coaching, and highly effective teachers get a lighter touch. Because funding limits coaching dosage or duration, these models often seek to develop teachers' capacity to improve their own practice on an ongoing basis.

While researchers often seek to isolate the impacts of coaching, successful programs are trying to integrate coaching into many other systems as part of an overall improvement strategy. Providers who implement coaching programs were often surprised by the cascade of changes coaching created in their practices and systems—including staffing and hiring, logistics of their daily and weekly schedules, evaluation plans, leadership roles, and overall approach to educator professional development.

Coaching Spotlight: Texas School Ready (TSR) Coaching

Coaching is a key part of professional development for teachers in the Texas pre-K program.[49] Teachers receive individualized coaching in person or remotely four hours per month in a teacher's first year in TSR, two hours per month in the second year, and one hour per month in the third year. Coaching sessions are structured around several assessment tools, including student formative assessments, a classroom environment checklist, and a classroom observation checklist. Coaches encourage utilization of high-quality curricula and other teaching resources. Studies have shown positive effects from coaching on instructional and child outcomes, as well as added benefits from combining coaching with online professional development coursework and aligned formative assessments for children.[50] Researchers are currently examining the impact of remote versus face-to-face coaching for teachers in rural areas.

Because of these unexpected changes, programs we spoke with often seemed to have a different framework for coaching than suggested by the bulk of the research literature. Providers think about building coaching and professional development systems, and managing and sustaining those systems in their sites. This differs from the linear relationship from individual coach to teacher assumed in much of the research literature. Providers must decide how coaches operate in the building day to day, how they complement or overlap with program leaders and other supports for educators, and how coaching fits into budgets and continuous improvement strategies. The coaching design choices a program makes change based on how coaching relates to program goals and context.

In some places, educators were outpacing the site leaders in their thinking about effective teaching practice. Leaders needed to catch up and receive coaching and support of their own.

As coaching matured in these sites, meta-coaching systems evolved to support site leaders and coaches in their roles. In some places, educators were outpacing the site leaders in their thinking about effective teaching practice. Leaders needed to catch up and receive coaching and support of their own. In other places, coaches were isolated in sites or regions, and needed opportunities to learn from peers and supervisors, or help managing large caseloads. Examples of supports included professional learning communities where coaches and leaders from different sites can come together for training and peer support, rubrics and tools to guide coaches and leaders in their roles, and technology solutions to reduce administrative work associated with coaching. Decreasing the paperwork burdens of coaching frees up time for coaches and site leaders to spend in classrooms and one-on-one meetings, making coaching more efficient and more effective.

Research usually advises that coaching and supervisory functions be performed by separate people, because the implicit threat of a negative evaluation could reduce educators' trust and openness to feedback from their coach.[51] However, some programs still choose to have supervisors act in a coach capacity. In places where evaluation systems are well developed and clear for teachers, informing performance evaluations with information

and context from the coaching process can make sense. Also, in places with tight budgets, having two separate people perform overlapping observations and feedback processes can be complicated and inefficient. Combining these roles could help make coaching more sustainable and attainable for programs.

Internal challenges often emerged when programs took an overly prescriptive and compliance-based approach to educator-coach interactions. There is a delicate balance between providing sufficient structure to ensure quality and consistency in implementation and overly rigid expectations for educator-coach relationships. Several programs echoed the same themes: Coaches should have the structures and supports to be consistent and focused, but the flexibility to form relationships with individual educators and set individual goals. A checklist-based coaching program, especially one that is not consistent and coherent with curriculum, assessments, and evaluation systems, could frustrate educators and coaches alike.

Programs also faced challenges from state or school district systems that do not adequately "count" coaching as professional development for the purposes of licensing, continuing education, and QRIS, or mandate different initiatives that may clash with or duplicate what the programs are already doing. On the other hand, government agencies and policies can help by putting statewide focus on high-quality coaching through credentials, technical assistance, pilot grants, or technology support. They can also help connect lower-capacity programs with resources and models that work in similar contexts.

Cost is always a factor in programs' decisions, and there is little in the research to inform the tradeoffs and decisions program leaders must make to design an effective but sustainable approach

Cost is always a factor in programs' decisions, and there is little in the research to inform the tradeoffs and decisions program leaders must make to design an effective but sustainable approach. Going above and beyond what is required by the Head Start Performance Standards and state policy mandates requires additional resources. Currently, sophisticated or innovative coaching models are usually only attainable for a subset of high-quality, high-capacity programs. The programs we spoke with are larger programs that have more centralized staff and capacity than many early childhood operators, and most of those we interviewed relied on a combination of public, philanthropic, and private funding to support their coaching work. This is important to remember when considering coaching on a national scale.

The profiles that follow dive deep into four very different programs that provide unique lessons from the field around coaching in an array of real-world early childhood settings.

Acelero Learning

About the Organization: Acelero is a Head Start grantee serving more than 5,000 children at 46 centers in four states: New Jersey, Wisconsin, Nevada, and Pennsylvania. Shine Early Learning, Acelero's sister company, provides training and technical assistance to other Head Start programs on data systems, tools, and strategies developed at Acelero centers, including their coaching approach.

Coaching Key Features:

- Reflective coaching cycle aligned with teacher expectations rubric
- Differentiated support based on teacher needs
- Center directors serve as coaches
- All teachers and assistant teachers receive coaching
- Directors supported and trained as coaches by regional staff
- Multiple layers of rubrics, tools, and resources maintain consistency and spread lessons across regions and sites

Coaching Approach: Acelero describes coaching as one of the three central tenets of their educational strategy, alongside curriculum and assessments, and coaching is one of the primary vehicles for educator professional development.[52] The current iteration of Acelero's coaching model began in 2011 in response to research and experience showing that other professional development strategies rarely translate into classroom practice changes, and reflection that former expectations for observing teachers and giving them feedback were not in-depth or individualized to teachers' needs.

One unique characteristic of Acelero's coaching model is that site-level directors serve as both coaches and evaluators. This differs from the recommendation of many researchers and other programs, who believe mixing coaching and evaluation can hinder coaching relationships or provoke a teacher backlash. Acelero leaders are aware of this risk; however, they say that they are clear about their expectations for teachers throughout coaching and evaluation. They also point out that consistent alignment with their Teacher Success Rubric makes pairing coaching and evaluation responsibilities a natural choice. Acelero emphasizes to directors that coaching meetings should be focused on collaboration, reflection, examining evidence, and identifying next steps for teacher growth. Supervisory conversations about compliance and job expectations should be conducted separately.

Coaching aligns with the Teacher Success Rubric (TSR), which explains expectations for teachers and guides a path to mastery on seven domains of teaching. This is also aligned with Acelero's curriculum and assessment approach. A toolbox of rubrics, standards, competencies, protocols, and other resources help Acelero maintain a consistent and effective approach to coaching across their multistate network, but these tools are not meant to overly constrain the coaching relationship. The coach and the teacher develop goals and focus areas jointly. Like the other providers we spoke with, Acelero emphasizes the reflective coaching cycle, where teachers build capacity to guide their own development. Teacher needs determine the intensity and dosage of coaching. All teachers meet at least monthly with their coaches, but new teachers and those who need extra support might have biweekly or weekly meetings. Coaches have flexibility to use different coaching techniques, such as recording video of teachers and reviewing video together, or modeling teaching practices.

Acelero aims for directors to spend half their time on coaching and instructional leadership.

Acelero aims for directors to spend half their time on coaching and instructional leadership. When they began this coaching model Acelero faced a common challenge to directors serving as instructional coaches: time and competing responsibilities. Acelero conducted a detailed study of how directors spent their time, and found little left over for coaching and supervision after administrative and operational responsibilities. This study helped the organization identify activities that could shift to centralized Acelero staff serving multiple sites in the region, or an on-site administrative clerk. Now, Acelero is piloting a model where sites have two leaders: one devoted only to administrative and operational duties, and an instructional leader who spends the majority of their time supporting and coaching teachers. Staffing models differ depending on the size of the site and the region—classrooms per center range from two to fourteen.

Two years into the new coaching program Acelero introduced a more formalized support system for directors as coaches. Regional instructional specialists serving multiple sites visit centers frequently to observe center directors in meetings with staff, offer ongoing support, and coach the coaches. Acelero developed an Educational Leader Success Rubric that mirrors the TSR and reflects coaching expectations and responsibilities for directors, as well as a coaching playbook to give coaches a how-to guide for observations and coaching meetings. Acelero leaders acknowledge a tendency for many acronyms and resources around coaching, but they stress that these documents are supportive and not restrictive.

Lessons Learned:

- Using site leaders as coaches can be a more sustainable strategy
- Coach the coaches, provide support systems and guidance to enhance outcomes
- Adapt staffing and leadership roles to make space for substantive coaching
- Be clear with expectations at all levels of the coaching relationship
- Coaching should be frequent and long-term, but individualized to educators' needs
- Improve the coaching model and implementation over time based on data and feedback from teachers, coaches, and leaders

Southwest Human Development

About the Organization: Southwest Human Development (SWHD) is a multiservice family- and child-focused nonprofit and Head Start/Early Head Start grantee based in Phoenix, Arizona. Their Head Start and Early Head Start programs serve approximately 1,300 children at 24 sites throughout the city. Among those sites is Educare Arizona, of which SWHD is a founding partner and primary program provider. Educare is a national network of early childhood schools run by local public-private partnerships that must include philanthropy, a school district, and Head Start/Early Head Start.

Coaching Key Features:

- Coaches serve a specialized role
- Differentiated support based on teacher need
- Technology platform streamlines coaches' administrative responsibilities
- Coaches work with teachers biweekly and co-lead professional learning communities with center directors
- Consistent, defined process for coaching that can be adapted for different content areas

Coaching Approach: SWHD developed an adaptive, individualized job-embedded coaching model. The model began with CLASS and teacher-child interactions and has since expanded to include comprehensive expectations for teacher and leader practices based on both research and SWHD's experience of success in the classroom. One-on-one coaching is at the center of professional development at SWHD, but it is not the only professional development strategy. In addition to coaching and observing each teacher approximately biweekly, coaches co-lead professional learning communities for teachers with center directors. Leaders from different sites also meet as a professional learning cohort to share experiences and learn together on topics such as curriculum, assessment, and teacher-child interaction.

SWHD has a defined process for coaching that includes modeling, observing, feedback, reflection, and planning. This coaching process is targeted to specific teaching practices in a variety of content areas. Other aspects of their model are more flexible. The number of coaching meetings per month and the goals and content of coaching vary based on teacher needs and the site. Each coach serves approximately 10 classrooms, which have between one and three teachers.

Coaches make notes and document meetings in a tablet-based system that records coaches' observations and feedback for each teacher alongside goals and progress.

SWHD uses technology to support fidelity of implementation and streamline coaches' reporting responsibilities. Coaches make notes and document meetings in a tablet-based system that records coaches' observations and feedback for each teacher alongside goals and progress. This software supports continuous improvement efforts, and allows for communication and data sharing between coaches and child development managers (CDM) at each site. CDMs are the primary teacher supervisors.

Coaches serve exclusively in that role and are not directly involved in supervising or evaluating teachers' performance. Coaches and CDMs communicate often and co-facilitate professional learning meetings on curriculum. Some CDMs do side-by-side meetings and observations with coaches and teachers a few times a year to stay aligned and up-to-date on teacher progress.

SWHD's coaching model has evolved substantially since it first began. It was initially supported in part by a grant from the Head Start Early Learning Mentor Coach initiative and focused exclusively on CLASS. But SWHD did not want teachers to only focus on one performance metric, and widened the coaching approach to be more reflective and encompass a wider array of effective teaching practices. SWHD uses CLASS as a performance measure, but they have reduced their emphasis on CLASS in coaching. Despite this shift in focus, SWHD has seen strong improvements in their CLASS scores while using this coaching approach.

SWHD has worked to share their approach with other ECE programs, which revealed some important prerequisites for effective coaching. SWHD partnered with Arizona State University to implement and evaluate their model in other ECE and child care settings in the Phoenix area. They are currently working to share their approach with Educare sites in other states. Pressure testing their model in new environments gave SWHD insights into staffing, training, and budgetary environments in non-Head Start providers, and deepened their emphasis on coaching center leaders. Because SWHD had extensive professional development experience with staff and teachers for many years, coaching was a manageable logistical and cultural shift. They found that systems capacity and culture building were bigger initial challenges in child care centers with tight budgets and without those experiences. For example, simply having the ability to take teachers out of the classroom for a coaching meeting and still maintain legally required teacher-child ratios was a common challenge. Their model evolved over time to be more responsive to these variables.

Because their work in these partner sites was time-limited, SWHD leaders have thought about how coaching can build up lasting internal systems and self-directed capacity, even if coaching doesn't continue indefinitely. In the future, they would like to better understand how coaching can be effective in settings with scarcer resources, have a clearer sense of which specific coaching practices are most effective for which teachers, and how their model can be replicated and adapted in new contexts.

Lessons Learned:

- Programs can improve CLASS scores without focusing exclusively on CLASS-aligned coaching
- Coach leaders in parallel with teachers
- Complement skill-building coaching with knowledge-building learning communities
- Adapt implementation based on environment, but stick to the core principles of the model
- Providers need some prerequisite capacity to implement effective coaching

Ounce of Prevention Fund

About the Organization: Ounce of Prevention Fund (the Ounce) is a Chicago-based nonprofit organization focused on advocating for and providing high-quality early learning opportunities for children living in poverty. In addition to being a Head Start/ Early Head Start grantee, the Ounce created the first Educare school and supports the national network of 23 Educare early learning schools (which include SWHD's Educare Arizona site). The organization also researches and advocates for birth-to-five funding and policy improvements in Illinois and nationwide. The Ounce's coaching and professional development model for early childhood leaders began as a pilot in five Chicago child care centers, and was adapted into "Lead Learn Excel," which serves 250 programs in Illinois.

Coaching Key Features:

- Leaders build capacity and knowledge to take on instructional coaching roles, supported by protocols, advisers, and resources
- Coaching is part of six- to eight-week cycles of professional learning, combined with trainings, team lesson planning, and peer learning communities
- Integrates collaborative professional learning routines for teachers in centers' day-to-day schedules
- System changes create time, space, and leadership to allow for the learning cycles to proceed

Coaching Approach: The Ounce's professional development approach, which built on the approach to developing teachers that began in their Educare school, was designed and piloted with support from a U.S. Department of Education Investing in Innovation (I3) grant.[53] The pilot focused on advancing knowledge, skills, and dispositions for effective teaching among educators serving children ages birth to five. In 2014, the Ounce was awarded funding as part of Illinois' Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant to adapt and evaluate its model in diverse ECE settings statewide, with the new name Lead Learn Excel. Lead Learn Excel introduced additional tools to support leaders, and refined other aspects of the Ounce's approach to be more effective in various environments. It aims to improve program and instructional quality through job-embedded professional development, coaching, and collaboration.[54]

The Ounce's approach uses structured learning cycles, which include 1) trainings to build teacher and leader knowledge; 2) coaching supports, job aids, and protocols to support the transfer of knowledge into practice; and 3) collaboration routines to reflect and plan among educators and leaders, and inform future areas for growth.[55] In order for these

Centers had to adapt their logistics and systems to allow space and time for professional development to occur, and leaders had to be very hands-on in professional learning.

learning cycles to be effective, centers had to adapt their logistics and systems to allow space and time for professional development to occur, and leaders had to be very hands-on in professional learning.[56] For example, teachers needed coverage to leave their classrooms for coaching and collaboration meetings and leaders had to make time in their schedules for coaching duties and observations.

An evaluation by the University of Illinois at Chicago, Center for Urban Education Leadership found that centers in the pilot increased leaders' knowledge and skills around job-embedded professional learning, successfully established new systems for professional learning in centers, and brought about significant growth in child social-emotional learning and development.

In Head Start settings, the Ounce found education coordinators were well suited to take on coaching responsibilities for teachers, but needed support creating time in program schedules to do so. One challenge in adapting the model outside of a Head Start environment is that not all program leaders are versed in early childhood, especially in an elementary school that may only have one or two pre-K classrooms. In these settings, the Ounce found that a district-based leader or a high-capacity teacher-leader in the school could step into some aspects of the coaching role alongside a principal.

Over the course of the initial pilot, the Ounce realized that the long-term sustainability and success of the approach rested in the hands of program leaders. The Ounce staff shifted from coaching teachers directly to coaching leaders to take the reins. This formed the foundation of Lead Learn Excel, which taught program leaders in various ECE contexts to use the PDI principles, tools, and approaches themselves. The Ounce is now working to bring this leader-oriented professional development approach to other states and environments.

Lessons Learned:

- Support leaders to bring impacts to scale
- Integrate coaching practices into program routines and staff duties
- Coaching should be one piece of a comprehensive and aligned instructional improvement approach
- Make large-scale changes easier to implement with supports and clear protocols

The University of Florida Lastinger Center

About the Organization: The University of Florida Lastinger Center (Lastinger) creates new educational models in K-12 and ECE, focused on professional development for educators to support child learning and development. Lastinger is not a direct early learning provider. Instead, they partner with states, school districts, and other education institutions to create and implement new professional development and learning models. Lastinger certifies ECE coaches in Florida through their UF Coaching Academy, and works with state governments and Head Start providers to improve their approaches to coaching and professional learning.

Coaching Key Features:

- State-level approach to improving coaching: optional competency-based coach certification
- Skills-based training for coaches that can be adapted to different local contexts
- Teaches coaches to use data effectively, and to build trusting, productive relationships with educators and leaders
- Focuses on strategies to build teacher capacity, cultivate better teaching practices beyond the coaches' direct involvement
- Training for coaches mirrors coaching best practices: job-embedded, competency- and skill-driven, over a longer time frame

Coaching Approach: Lastinger's Early Childhood Coaching program differs from the other models profiled because it focuses on training coaches.[57] Lastinger offers certification for coaches in Florida, and it works with other states and Head Start providers in a technical assistance capacity to extend the lessons and success of that certification model. This is an example of state-level involvement in coaching that acknowledges the varied programmatic and public/private landscape of ECE.

Because Florida's quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) vary across 30 regional Early Learning Councils, and coaches work in a variety of programmatic settings, Lastinger designed their coaching certification to be flexible to different local curricula and program contexts. Certification is optional, and Lastinger has certified over 300 coaches in Florida thus far. Rather than training coaches on a specific content area like literacy, they focus on widely applicable skills for coaching, such as using data and assessments to guide feedback, building teachers' independent capacity to improve, and building trusting relationships with educators and program leaders.

Lastinger's coaching certification is not designed as a single-dose course or training. Coaches participate in a four-day immersion training and five follow-up sessions over the

course of the school year as they put new skills into practice. Successful completion is based on demonstration of competency across various coaching skills. In the training process Lastinger uses techniques such as video reflection, where instructors review a taped coaching session and give time-stamped feedback to participants. This technique mirrors a popular approach for coaching sessions, where a coach tapes a lesson and reviews it with the teacher to point out specific areas for feedback.

Lastinger emphasizes the role of coaches as part of a system of professional development and quality improvement. Because coaches they train might serve several sites, or work in a variety of ECE programmatic contexts, coaches should understand and be able to navigate their roles in various organizational systems. Lastinger hopes their coaches are able to create collaborative learning environments and quality improvements at the programmatic level, by working with leaders and changing programs' approaches to professional development.

Because coaches they train might serve several sites, or work in a variety of ECE programmatic contexts, coaches should understand and be able to navigate their roles in various organizational systems.

Prior to the ECE coaching academy, Lastinger staff worked extensively on professional learning communities and coaching in K-12 schools. They see some unique challenges facing coaches in ECE settings, which their program is designed to address:

- ECE coaches are less likely to be embedded in one school full-time, so they need to navigate relationships and organizational structures in multiple programs.
- ECE educators may not have had prior formal training on teaching, learning, and child development, so coaches need to be prepared to build foundational knowledge, or coaching needs to be accompanied by knowledge-building opportunities.
- ECE programs are less likely to have a pre-existing culture of professional support and learning opportunities for educators, so coaches might be starting those systems from scratch.

An evaluation in partnership with the Yale Child Study Center found that teachers with Lastinger-certified coaches had significantly higher improvement on their CLASS ratings than teachers with a non-certified coach. Based in part on the results of this evaluation, Florida's Office of Early Learning expanded funding for the certification program and more strongly encouraged certification via state policy. Lastinger is working on related efforts to improve coaching quality from the state level in Georgia and California. They are also looking to expand the scale of the coaching academy with an online platform.

Lessons Learned:

- States can encourage high-quality coaching at scale in ways that preserve local flexibility and program variety
- Relationship-building is the backbone of effective coaching
- Core coaching skills and competencies are transferrable across ECE program contexts
- Even experienced coaches can benefit from training and support systems

Conclusions and Recommendations

Coaching for early childhood educators is a promising strategy that, when implemented well, can have far-reaching positive impacts on educator professional development, student outcomes, instructional leadership, and organizational systems. But coaching addresses just one piece of the quality improvement challenges facing early childhood education, and high-quality, comprehensive coaching requires resources and capacity that too few early childhood education providers currently have.

The umbrella of "coaching" includes models and examples that look very different from one another and yield varying results. There are many areas where we cannot say for sure what specific design choices work best, what cost and effectiveness tradeoffs are, for what populations and settings, and why. This means that policy encouragement for programs to adopt coaching strategies should be accompanied by strategic thinking, further targeted research, ongoing evaluation, and some healthy skepticism. Leaders and decision-makers at different levels of the early childhood sector must think carefully and creatively about how more early childhood educators can access coaching experiences that will effectively advance their instructional practices and allow them to better serve their students.

Here are concrete recommendations for different members of the early learning community.

For Early Childhood Program Leaders:

- Create or choose a coaching strategy that fits into an overall professional development and quality improvement approach.
  - Consider alignment with other core aspects of teaching and learning, including curriculum, assessments, learning standards, and evaluation.
  - Create a theory of action and set goals around coaching.
  - Continuously monitor, evaluate, and adapt the coaching strategy based on feedback and results.
- Set up for sustainability by looking at professional development investments and outcomes as a whole, and considering how coaching could fit into an aligned, cost-effective approach. Consider cost-saving options such as virtual models, and tiered or targeted coaching.
- Don't forget about support and coaching systems for assistant teachers, instructional leaders, and for coaches themselves.
- Ensure that internal systems and structures, such as staffing and schedules, will allow for coaching to occur logistically, and be integrated into teacher and leader routines.
- Align coaching expectations and approaches between leaders and coaches, so that site-level administrators and supervisors are bought-in to the coaching approach, protect educators' time for coaching, and emphasize its importance.
- Research available coaching options and models, speak with other program leaders about their approaches and lessons, and draw on resources available from local and state agencies, Head Start, and university-based centers and researchers.
- Be wary of any coaching model that promises rapid results without broader operational changes, or does not connect with other aspects of educational practice.

For State Policymakers:

- Define high-quality coaching in state policy across pre-K and QRIS, considering alignment with Head Start and other programs. Definitions should be precise enough to ensure all stakeholders share a common understanding of coaching, but loose enough to allow for local variations and innovation. In particular, states should remember to differentiate between coaching for teachers, leaders, and other educators, and instructional vs. non-instructional forms of assistance.
- Avoid mandating particular coaching models or design choices, as the evidence base is not yet strong enough to support a one-size-fits-all approach.
- Include hours spent in coaching as eligible professional development time for the purposes of educator licensing and QRIS, and explore ways to encourage *quality* over *quantity* in professional development.

- Ensure any new policies around coaching do not create redundancies, confusion, or undue administrative burdens for programs with multiple funding streams.
- Survey programs on coaching practices, and report on trends and promising examples.
- Cultivate and facilitate high-quality coaching in early childhood programs by offering resources, incentive grants, and pilot programs.
  - Consider optional coaching certifications or state/regional support systems for coaches and program leaders, but evaluate to ensure these certifications and supports improve coaching practice and outcomes.
  - Offer shared tools and resources that programs can adapt and put to use, like database platforms for documenting coaching, or model competency and strategy frameworks for coaches.

For Federal Policymakers:

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start

- Support high-quality implementation of coaching performance standards.
  - Deepen commitment to high-quality coaching by continuing to document what works and provide evidence-driven technical assistance and guidance to grantees.
  - Create a specific definition of coaching, or adopt the NAEYC definition, for the purposes of implementing the Head Start performance standards.
  - Dispel any grantee misconceptions that coaches must be externally contracted providers or that site-based staff cannot also serve as coaches.
- Work with researchers to better connect research and practice in coaching and achieve the recommendations for researchers below: push toward more actionable research that encompasses diverse program settings, addresses cost and sustainability, and fills gaps in research on design and implementation of instructional coaching in ECE.
- Incubate and lift up innovative coaching approaches for environments beyond urban ECE centers for three- and four-year-olds, such as rural ECE providers, and home- or center-based infant/toddler care.

U.S. Department of Education

- The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) should continue its focus on experimental and quasi-experimental research designs and testing promising models at larger scales, which has helped spur the recent increase in rigorous coaching studies. It should also encourage research-practice partnerships so researchers and practitioners can inform each other's work in the development of more actionable, rigorous research.

For Researchers:

- Expand upon existing research to focus on research questions that can inform quality improvement at scale and fill gaps in the knowledge base around coaching—beyond "does coaching work?" and toward, "where do specific types of coaching work best, for which educators, and in what contexts?"
- Explore ways to document and measure systemic and leadership impacts of coaching models, in addition to teacher and child outcomes.
- Investigate slimmed-down or innovative coaching models that could create substantial impacts at scale or at lower cost, such as capacity building among existing program staff and online coaching.
- Document costs and investigate tradeoffs in coaching design.
- Expand coaching studies in less well-researched settings, such as those for infants and toddlers, home-based child care settings, and providers in rural areas.
- Develop measures of coaching that can be used across program models to better understand features of effective coaching approaches.

For Funders and Philanthropists:

- Support promising coaching providers and programs to evaluate, adapt, and expand their models in new settings.
- Work with grantees to choose comprehensive outcome indicators and measures aligned to coaching goals, including measures for leaders.
- Fund rigorous, actionable research on coaching, embedded in various program settings.
- Encourage grantees to adapt and innovate on models, share findings, and disseminate lessons learned across grantee contexts.

Appendix

Interviewees

- Dr. Bridget Hamre, Research Associate Professor and Associate Director of the Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL), University of Virginia
- Dr. Mary Louise Hemmeter, Professor, Department of Special Education, Vanderbilt University
- Dr. Shannon Riley-Ayers, Associate Research Professor, National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers University
- Dr. Matthew Kraft, Assistant Professor of Education and Economics, Brown University
- Dr. Abby Thorman, Manager, Early Learning Innovations, and Valerie Mendez-Farinas, Programs Coordinator, University of Florida Lastinger Center
- Mindy Zapata, Director, Early Head Start and Head Start, and Dana Staser, Associate Director for Coaching, Southwest Human Development
- Dr. Debra Pacchiano, Vice President, Translational Research and Improvement, Ann Hanson, Director, Advancing Quality, and Marsha Hawley, Director, Lead Learn Excel, Ounce of Prevention Fund
- Tori Winters, VPI+ Lead Teacher, Angela Clexton, Instructional Development, and Maris Wyatt, Data, Enrollment, and Assessment, Henrico County Public Schools, Virginia
- Rachel Bragin, Vice President of Training and Program Resources, and Lynsey Werkheiser, Vice President of Education, Acelero Learning

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About the Author

Bonnie O'Keefe

Bonnie O'Keefe is a senior analyst at Bellwether Education Partners. She can be reached at bonnie.okeefe@bellwethereducation.org.

About Bellwether Education Partners

Bellwether Education Partners is a national nonprofit focused on dramatically changing education and life outcomes for underserved children. We do this by helping education organizations accelerate their impact and by working to improve policy and practice.

Bellwether envisions a world in which race, ethnicity, and income no longer predict opportunities for students, and the American education system affords all individuals the ability to determine their own path and lead a productive and fulfilling life.