INTRODUCTION
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The past decade has seen a renewed focus on improving the quality of Early Care and Education (ECE), spurring a proliferation of new initiatives to enhance child care providers’ practices, enrich curricula, and improve caregiving environments.

The growth of quality interventions in an era of reduced budgets has brought an essential question to the surface: which interventions have the most lasting impact on ECE quality? Recent research on teacher preparation and professional development converges on a common theme: child care providers’ practices are more likely to change—and these changes are more likely to be sustained—when providers receive personalized support, in their unique settings, from a skilled, caring, and knowledgeable professional. As a result, an increasing number of quality intervention and support initiatives are building on-site technical assistance, such as coaching,* into their menu of services.

This growing interest in coaching as an intervention has increased the demand for the provision of coaching services to support ECE programs on a range of child care issues. Those issues include early childhood mental health, ECE curriculum, health and safety practices, teacher-child interactions, and ECE business and fiscal practices.

The dramatic increase in coaching initiatives has also created a need for knowledgeable initiative administrators who are familiar with the unique considerations of implementing effective coaching initiatives within the singular context of ECE.

Professional coaching in ECE brings professional development directly into the day-to-day realities of ECE professional caregivers. Coaching, in general, requires intellectual adaptivity and interpersonal dexterity. In the diverse and socially significant world of caring for young children, coaching can be particularly demanding, requiring specialized knowledge, advanced skills, and continual self-reflection. To date, there are few formal training resources to prepare ECE coaches and coaching initiative administrators on the critical aspects of quality coaching. That deficit triggered the creation of this manual.

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* "Coaching" is a relatively new term in ECE professional development and there is currently no universally accepted definition of “coaching” versus “consultation.” See Definitions page in Section 2 for definition of coaching.
**THIS MANUAL**

This manual, *Administration of ECE Coaching Initiatives*, is designed for use by coaching administrators who are responsible for the creation and oversight of effective coaching initiatives for ECE providers.

The manual provides an overview of the myriad initiative structural and administrative issues to consider when developing and leading effective ECE coaching initiatives.

**WORKING TOWARD “QUALITY” IN EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION**

ECE coaching initiatives generally share the same ultimate goal of improving and/or sustaining the quality of child care programs. Various national policy agencies such as the National Association of Educators of Young Children (NAEYC), have developed broad statements of quality, as have many states and localities. First 5 Alameda County has adopted the following principles as basic elements of quality child care:

- Highly skilled teachers
- Small class sizes and high adult-to-child ratios
- Safe physical settings
- Age appropriate curriculum
- Language-rich environments
- Warm responsive interactions between staff and children
- Low turnover among staff and children

While many in the broad child care field agree with these quality statements in principle, many ECE providers, parents and professional development professionals may have very different opinions on which specific practices and caregiving approaches meet these goals. It is critical that everyone involved in your coaching initiative be clear not only about which general definition of quality applies to the programs you are working with, but also what specific practices and approach your initiative will promote and how improvements in quality will be gauged.

ALIGNMENT WITH LOCAL, STATEWIDE, AND NATIONAL INITIATIVES

Interventions to improve quality have evolved from ad hoc, local initiatives to state and national-level discussion and coordination. This policy shift is most evident in the recent increase in the number of states adopting statewide Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS).3

Recently the federal government has taken up this policy platform by providing targeted funding for research, development and expansion of QRIS. The rapid growth of national and state-level initiatives raises a complex issue: to what extent will existing initiatives—many of which have been developed and administered on the local level—match the standards and measures set by state and national standards? Administrators developing coaching initiative outcomes and measures should consider the advantages and potential challenges of aligning their initiatives with broader state and national standards.

The benefits of alignment with broader initiatives are numerous:

- Adoption of universal terms and standards creates a common language across program types and geographic distance, facilitating dialog among programs, regulators, funders, parents, and communities.
- Adoption of universal standards and measures eases the burden on individual programs; assessments and documentation can be streamlined to fit one set of regulations.
- Adoption of broadly used measures makes it possible for individual programs to measure progress relative to local as well as state and national standards.
- Adoption of universal terms, standards, and measures allows trends to be tracked for comparative research and analysis.
- Universal standards and measures provide a platform for more unified policy advocacy, as well as coordinated funding and regulation practices.

Potential challenges of such alignment may include:

- Necessitating a move away from locally developed standards and terms, which may have more meaning to and “buy-in” from the local community.
- Finding a universally used measure that is appropriate for the area of quality addressed by your initiative.
- Having to train existing coaches and providers to fully understand the new terms, standards, and measures.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The content in this manual has been informed by the primary authors’ own experiences developing and implementing coaching initiatives; in-depth conversations with ECE professional development researchers such as Susan Neuman, PhD (University of Michigan), Kathryn Tout, PhD (Child Trends), Donna Bryant, PhD (Frank Porter Graham Institute), and others; input gathered from coaching administration colleagues from throughout the U.S.; reviews of relevant research and policy literature (see bibliography); and our own participation in the Quality Interventions for Early Care and Education (QUINCE) national research study which validated the efficacy of our coaching approach. Additionally, the primary authors have presented on ECE coaching at state and national conferences such as California Association for the Education of Young Children (CAEYC), NAEYC, and Zero to Three.

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We hope this manual will serve as a valuable resource for your child care coaching initiative. Thank you!

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