



RACE TO THE TOP – EARLY LEARNING CHALLENGE:  
ACHIEVEMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM REGIONAL QRIS IMPLEMENTATION | BRIEF 4

# COACHING IN QUALITY RATING & IMPROVEMENT SYSTEMS



Bay Area Quality Early Learning Partnership

First 5 Alameda County | First 5 Contra Costa | First 5 San Francisco | First 5 San Mateo County  
| First 5 Santa Clara County | First 5 Santa Cruz County

*In 2011, California was awarded a 4-year, \$75 million, Federal Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant to improve early childhood education systems and better serve children and families by enhancing the quality of programs, developing quality standards, and aligning disconnected systems. Sixteen counties in California received funding to develop a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) to achieve this goal. In the Bay Area, six First 5 County Commissions created the Bay Area Quality Early Learning Partnership to pilot a regional QRIS approach. The following brief is a product of their experience implementing QRIS locally and as a regional partnership from 2012-2015.*

Coaching plays a significant role in the Bay Area Quality Early Learning Partnership's quality improvement efforts both locally and regionally. Coaching supports teachers' professional development by providing a coach who has specialized learning knowledge and skills and who builds teachers' capacity through a process of reflection, goal-setting, and achievement. Coaching is viewed as one critical piece of an effective quality rating and improvement system (QRIS), and there are opportunities to further develop coaching as a formal part of the effort.

The QRIS matrix measures quality through a number of elements that focus on teacher and program effectiveness, including the utilization of child observation tools to inform curriculum planning, effective teacher-child interactions, and the program environment, including materials, schedule, curriculum, and interactions. Coaching is used to improve teachers' quality in these and other areas.

## LOCAL COACHING EFFORTS

Counties in the Partnership have found that coaching is most successful when it is personalized and educator driven. This means a significant investment in coaches and coaching programs. Each county in the Partnership has a model for providing coaching to educators that, in most cases, preceded the QRIS effort. Coaching has typically been funded through a range of different grants and programs with different goals and strategies. With QRIS, counties have been able to map their coaching efforts and identify

efficiencies in distributing and sequencing different coaching resources, as well as use data from the QRIS rating components to determine coaching needs. This has helped to ensure that educators are able to focus on improvements in one priority area of practice at a time.

Counties have also worked to better align their different coaching streams to ensure that coaching is consistent regardless of funding source. Coaching collaboratives that bring coaches together on a regular basis to share and adopt best practices have been helpful tools for providing consistent—yet personalized—experiences to teachers.

Still, coaching is an intensive and costly quality improvement intervention, and counties are exploring other models to make it more efficient without compromising effectiveness. First 5 Santa Clara County has piloted a video coaching model that utilized videos and conference calls to provide more cost-effective coaching. The initial pilot showed improvements in CLASS scores among participants and will be expanded to gather additional data on its effectiveness.

An additional goal of the Partnership is to finalize a shared data system that can provide insight into the types and dosages of coaching that are having the most impact on quality improvement across the counties. With this data, the Partnership will be better able to determine effective coaching types and dosages. (For more on data, refer to the "Development of a Quality Early Learning System" brief.)



## COACHING IN ALAMEDA COUNTY: A MENU OF SERVICES

First 5 Alameda County has created a coaching model that provides a menu of services to educators based on their unique needs:

- + Sites rated at 4 or 5 develop quality improvement plans (QIP), links to resources, and light case management. Depending on their QIP, they may also choose specialty consultation such as ASQ support, CLASS team coaching, or mental health consultation.
- + Sites rated at 1, 2, or 3 receive support from a generalist coach to create and implement a quality improvement plan. After basic environmental and structural goals are met, the plan may move on to specialty consultation.
- + Family child care home educators and Title 22 sites receive pre-coaching prior to the assessment & rating.



## COACHING IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY: A FOCUS ON RELATIONSHIPS

First 5 Santa Cruz County developed a coaching model as part of its QRIS work, focusing on equity, CLASS, and powerful interactions. The model complements existing successes that the county has had in utilizing the SEEDS of Early Literacy program, which contributed to improved CLASS scores as a result of its focus on helping teachers create language-rich classrooms. In addition, coaches are also participating in a monthly professional learning community that allows for follow-up and reflection on areas of training focus.



## COACHING IN SAN FRANCISCO: A CITY-WIDE APPROACH

First 5 San Francisco County braids funding from multiple sources to create a comprehensive structure for city-wide technical assistance which includes supports to over 140 centers and 230 family child care sites participating in the city's QRIS. Coaching is provided through San Francisco Quality Partners, seven professional development organizations who are charged with improving the quality of centers and family child care programs, targeting those who serve children furthest from opportunity. Cross-agency collaboration and coordination of mental health, inclusion and instructional coaching services are strengthened through the utilization of a common quality improvement data system, individualized quality improvement planning, and shared capacity building opportunities for technical assistance specialists.

## REGIONAL COACHING EFFORTS

Coaching has been a focus of the Partnership's work from the beginning. Counties have benefited from sharing their experiences and successes with different coaching models, enabling each county to refine its own model to be more effective. Additionally, a professional development ad hoc group was formed to define regional agreements, activities, and share resources related to coaching and professional development. As part of this work, a coaching inventory was conducted to assess how each county was utilizing and supporting coaching. The result of this was the development of a Regional Standard for Coaching Qualifications, which has the following objectives:

- + Better define qualifications in the evolving field of training and technical assistance.
- + Provide a guide for prioritizing potential regional coaching supports and services in order to strengthen the overall efficacy of the field.

- + Be used as fields to map the capacity of individuals who are providing coaching and technical assistance in the Bay Area.

The intent has not been to create a minimum requirement for coaches, but rather to provide guidance for coaches' own professional development and capacity-building efforts.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ROLE OF COACHING IN QRIS

Coaching is a significant part of the QRIS effort; it is an important component in raising the quality of the workforce in key areas of the matrix. The Partnership has four recommendations to help address coaching-related challenges and ensure that coaching can remain an effective and sustainable part of quality improvement efforts:

*“Coaching is a meaningful part of quality improvement and one of the most effective parts of the system—but you do need a system around it.”*

**DAVID BRODY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
FIRST 5 SANTA CRUZ COUNTY**

- 1. Coaching needs to be part of a broader network of quality improvement supports to most effectively contribute to raising quality.** Most critical among these, as relates to coaching, is adequate workforce development through higher education and hands-on training. Sean Casey, Executive Director of First 5 Contra Costa, says, “The workforce needs to enter with the right skills and be prepared. Coaching should be about enhancing effectiveness, not providing the basic skills.” (To learn more about the need for early learning workforce development, read the Partnership’s brief, “Early Learning Workforce Development.”)

The regional vision is that coaching serves to enhance the theoretical and practical training that teachers receive prior to entering the workforce and to provide targeted support in areas where teachers want to improve based on their teaching experiences. In order to achieve that vision, teachers must enter the field with adequate knowledge and preparation. In turn, teachers need to be adequately compensated.

- 2. Coaching should be embedded into quality improvement initiatives.** As noted above, the personalized and relationship-based approach to coaching that has been most effective is expensive to provide and scale, a cost that is currently outside of state and federal quality improvement funding streams. The Partnership recommends that high quality coaching be built into future quality early learning initiatives and funded appropriately. This includes providing teacher release time to receive coaching. Embedding coaching into quality improvement initiatives will support the long-term sustainability of successful coaching models.
- 3. Coaching should remain a flexible and personal component of quality improvement.** Ingrid Mezquita, Senior Program Officer, First 5 San Francisco, cautions that “the state should be hands-off with coaching—not prescriptive.” Counties in the Partnership have seen improvements in areas of the QRIS matrix even when teachers were not coached directly on those areas. For

example, First 5 San Francisco saw increases in CLASS scores following inclusion-focused coaching. It is believed that this is because many of the skills developed through coaching are transferable—and because coaching can help create a culture of improvement that extends beyond specific practice areas. The Partnership recommends that while funding for coaching should be incorporated into the system, it shouldn’t be tied to specific coaching types or requirements.

- 4. Statewide guidelines on coaching should be developed.** Like the Partnership’s Regional Standard for Coaching Qualifications, the state guidelines should standardize the way in which coaching is defined so that the field has a common language and shared understanding of the purpose of coaching in a QRIS without prescribing coaching types, focuses, or dosages.