San Diego Quality Preschool Initiative

Year 5 Summative Evaluation Report

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Table of Contents

San Diego Quality Preschool Initiative 1
Table of Contents iii
LIST OF BOXES iv
LIST OF EXHIBITS iv
Introduction 6
History and Current Context of SDQPI 6
Evaluation Questions 8
Evaluation Approach 8
Sample and Methods 9
Reach of SDQPI 14
SDQPI Supports 19
Overall Usefulness of SDQPI Supports 19
SDQPI Coaching 22
SDQPI Professional Development 34
SDQPI Stipends and Incentives 35
Quality Improvement Over Time 37
Perceived Impact on Site Leader Capacity 37
Engaging Site Staff in Quality Improvement 42
Perceived Impact on Center-Based Sites 43
Perceived Impact on FCC/FFN Sites 48
Well-being and Future Supports 51
Coach Well-Being and Future Supports 51
Site Leader Well-Being, Stressors, and Future Supports 56
Professional Development Topics for Site Leaders 60
Conclusion 64

Overall Takeaways 64

Future Considerations 65

Words of Appreciation from Site Leaders 66

References 69

Appendix A: Survey Topics 71

Year 2 Surveys (2021-2022) 71

Year 3 Surveys (2022-2023) 72

Year 4 Surveys (2023-2024) 73

Year 5 Surveys (2024-2025) 74

Appendix B: Quality Improvement Over Time 76

Growth in Confidence Leading Quality Improvement 76

LIST OF BOXES

Research Highlight: Site Leader Confidence in Leadership 38

How does participation in SDQPI support children's development and learning in center-based sites? 47

How does participation in SDQPI support children's development and learning in FCC and FFN sites? 50

Research Highlight: Site Leader Well-being 55

LIST OF EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1. Key Changes in SDQPI Implementation from 2020–2025 7

Exhibit 2. Focal Areas and Methods 8

Exhibit 3. Timeline and Samples of SDQPI Surveys 10

Exhibit 4. Participating SDQPI Site Leaders Over Time 15

Exhibit 5. Site Leader Race & Ethnicity and Language Spoken Fluently (*n* = 359) 16

Exhibit 6. Site Leader Highest Level of Education Completed (*n* = 343) 16

Exhibit 7. Site Leader Professional Background 17

Exhibit 8. Number of Years Coaches Worked with SDQPI (*n* = 39) 17

Exhibit 9. SDCOE Coach Turnover by Year 18
Exhibit 10. YMCA Coach Turnover by Year 18
Exhibit 11. Usefulness of SDQPI Supports 20
Exhibit 12. Usefulness of SDQPI Support by Site Type 20
Exhibit 13. Usefulness of SDQPI Support by Years of Experience Participating in QRIS 21
Exhibit 14. Site Leaders' Average Perceptions of SDQPI Coaching Support in Year 5 22
Exhibit 15. Coaches' Perceptions of QIP Tool Effectiveness from Year 2 to Year 5 25
Exhibit 16. Coach Knowledge and Confidence Implementing GRR (Year 2 to Year 5) 26
Exhibit 17. Amount of Sites Coaches Reported Using GRR With from Year 3 to Year 5 27
Exhibit 18. Summary of Coaches' Reported Successes in Year 5 (*n* = 25) 29
Exhibit 19. Site Leader Reported Group Coaching Structure (*n* = 128) 32
Exhibit 20. Coach Perceptions of Group Coaching in Year 4 and Year 5 33
Exhibit 21. Site Leader Perceptions of Professional Development Workshops 35
Exhibit 22. Coaches' Perceived Impact on Site Leader Capacity (*n* = 25) 38
Exhibit 23. Conceptual Model of Confidence Leading Quality Improvement 40
Exhibit 24. Impact of SDQPI on Center-Based Sites (*n* = 120) 44
Exhibit 25. CLASS Pre-K Domain Averages Over Time (*n* = 110) 46
Exhibit 26. Coaches' Perceived Impact of SDQPI on Centers and FCCs 47
Exhibit 27. Impact of SDQPI on FCC/FFN Sites (*n* = 234) 48
Exhibit 28. Types of Effective Professional Learning for SDQPI Coaches (*n* = 26) 53
Exhibit 29. Site Leaders' Self-reported Job Stressors by Site Type 57
Exhibit 29. Desired Frequency of Future Coaching (*n* = 288) 59
Exhibit B1. Confidence Leading Quality Improvement CFA Model Fit 77

Introduction

The San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE) contracted with WestEd to conduct an evaluation of the San Diego Quality Preschool Initiative (SDQPI). The evaluation used mixed methods to examine the implementation and effectiveness of the Quality Rating Improvement Systems (QRIS) supports to enact quality improvement strategies in early learning and care (ELC) settings. This report summarizes key learnings across the five-year evaluation, which spanned from January 2021 through June 2025. The findings focus on the reach of SDQPI, perceptions of the QRIS supports (coaching, professional development, stipends, incentives), quality improvement, and future supports needed by coaches and site leaders.

History and Current Context of SDQPI

SDQPI aims to support continuous quality improvement (CQI) of ELC sites that provide services to children from birth to age five within San Diego County. In 2020, SDQPI began implementing the multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) model as a framework for providing individualized coaching to site leaders based on their sites' strengths and needs. SDQPI coaches build the capacity of site leaders to sustainably support site staff in implementing high-quality adult-child interactions and learning environments. SDQPI coaches include both SDCOE and YMCA Childcare Resource Service (CRS) staff. In addition to coaching, SDQPI offers site leaders and site staff professional development (PD), stipends, and incentives (i.e., learning materials) for their ELC sites.

During early implementation of the MTSS model from July 2020 through June 2021, existing Quality Preschool Initiative (QPI) participating sites, typically publicly funded centers, transitioned into SDQPI. In addition, new sites were recruited into the county's QRIS for the first time, which included family child care (FCC) providers; private centers; and family, friend, and

neighbor (FFN) providers. SDQPI participants continued to be recruited and onboarded on a rolling basis until the fall of 2024.

As part of the MTSS model, SDQPI coaches partner with site leaders to complete the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) Planning Tool to document each site's areas of strength and growth. This collaborative process leads to the creation of a QIP for each site, including a quality improvement goal and action steps. After the QIP development process, site leaders participate in ongoing coaching cycles with their SDQPI coaches, attend PD offerings, and engage their staff in making progress toward their QIP goal. While this overall process has been consistent over time, Exhibit 1 highlights some key changes that occurred across the five years of the evaluation. Additional information on how the QIP Planning Tool and process has changed over time is in the section, "SDQPI Coaching" on pages 23–25.

Exhibit 1. Key Changes in SDQPI Implementation from 2020–2025

Type of Change	Early Implementation	Mid-Implementation	Later Implementation
Participating Sites	• Publicly funded centers • Privately funded centers • FCC sites	• Publicly funded centers • Privately funded centers • FCC sites • FFN sites	• Publicly funded centers • Privately funded centers • FCC sites • FFN sites
Frequency of Coaching	• Coaching sessions ranged from 2 sessions per year to every 4 – 6 weeks, depending on site and site leader strengths and needs • Nearly all coaching sessions were 1:1 with site leaders	• Coaching sessions ranged from 1 to 15 sessions per year (average of 5-8 sessions), depending on site and site leader needs • Most coaching sessions continued to be 1:1, with a few group coaching sessions offered	• Coaching sessions ranged from 6 to 12 sessions per year (about every 4 – 8 weeks, closer to 8 weeks, as reported by SDQPI leadership) • Most coaching sessions continued to be 1:1, with some group coaching offered
QIP Planning Tool	• QIP 1.0: 43 indicators rated as *not in place, partially in place, in place*	• QIP 2.0: 34 indicators rated as *emerging, developing, proficient, extending*	• QIP 3.0 and 4.0: Between 3-24 indicators rated as *emerging, developing, proficient, extending* (depending on which 1-2 Pathways selected)
Process of Developing QIPs	• Collaborative goal setting between coaches and site leaders • Completed indicators for all 8 Quality Counts	• Collaborative goal setting between coaches and site leaders, with reflective prompts • Completed indicators for all 8 QCC CQI Pathways to	• Collaborative goal setting between coaches and site leaders, with reflective prompts • Use only the indicators for the 1-2 QCC CQI Pathways

Type of Change	Early Implementation	Mid-Implementation	Later Implementation
	California (QCC) CQI Pathways to identify QIP goal	identify QIP goal	selected, along with any other site-specific data to identify QIP goal

Evaluation Questions

This summative evaluation report aims to address four overarching questions:

1. To what extent has SDQPI expanded reach to diverse ELC sites over the past five years?
2. What are site leaders' perceptions of SDQPI coaching, professional development, stipends, and incentives, including how they perceive that these supports relate to quality improvement?
3. To what extent and in what ways does participation in SDQPI support quality improvement in ELC sites?
4. What are the current and future needs of SDQPI coaches and site leaders?

Evaluation Approach

To evaluate the feasibility, implementation, and effectiveness of the MTSS coaching model to promote quality improvement, WestEd proposed an approach with four focal areas that build upon and support one another (see Exhibit 2). The first focal area set the stage for the evaluation by learning about the SDQPI context. The second focal area examined the early implementation and feasibility of using an MTSS model to guide SDQPI coaching. The third focal area explored how sites' participation in SDQPI supports quality improvement. The fourth focal area further documented how SDQPI promoted quality improvement over time. This summative report focuses on key learnings related to the fourth focal area. Given the emphasis on quality improvement of sites, our evaluation questions broadly include the full set of SDQPI supports offered to participating sites and site leaders (coaching, PD, stipends, and incentives), with a more in-depth examination of the coaching approach.

Exhibit 2. Focal Areas and Methods

Focal Area	When	Purpose	Methods
1: Setting the Stage for the SDQPI Evaluation	Year 1	• Describe the current MTSS model and stakeholders. • Learn about the SD QCC Consortium approach to governance.	• Key informant interviews • Review of existing data sources

Focal Area	When	Purpose	Methods
		• Develop and pilot data collection instruments.	
2: Implementation and Feasibility of MTSS	Years 1–4	• Learn about the process of implementing the MTSS coaching model. • Assess QIP goals and action steps. • Understand participants' perceptions of the SD QCC Consortium approach to governance (only in Years 1-3).	• Surveys • Focus groups • Secondary data analysis of QIPs and coaching logs
3: How SDQPI Promotes Quality Improvement	Years 3–5	• Examine quality improvement in ELC sites. • Understand if and how the MTSS coaching model and other SDQPI supports relate to quality improvement.	• Surveys • Interviews • Secondary data analysis of Common Data File, QIP data, and coaching logs
4: Quality Improvement Over Time	Years 4–5	• Continue to examine quality improvement of sites over time. • Understand the experiences and outcomes of the diversity of participating sites (e.g., site type, length of participation in QRIS)	• Surveys • Secondary data analysis of CLASS scores and Common Data File • Triangulation of data sources over time

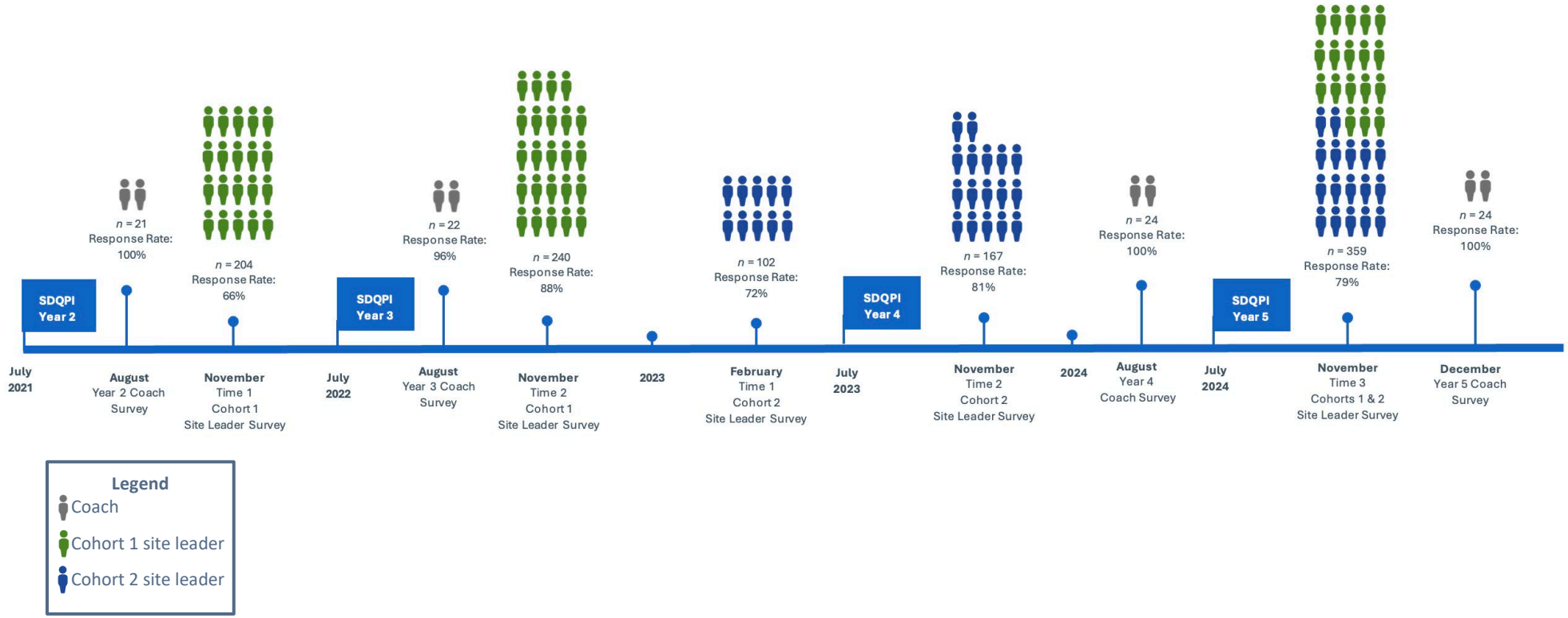
Sample and Methods

Due to ongoing enrollment of sites in SDQPI, as well as inclusion criteria to participate in the evaluation, WestEd collected and analyzed data from several samples of participants across the past four years. Although the following description offers an overview of this information, see previous evaluation reports for complete descriptions of these samples and methods.

Surveys (Years 2–5)

During Year 2 (2021–2022), Year 3 (2022–2023), Year 4 (2023–2024), and Year 5 (2024–2025) of the SDQPI evaluation, WestEd gathered survey data from coaches and site leaders. Surveys were administered online via Qualtrics or REDCap (Harris et al., 2009; Harris et al., 2019), depending on the year. Exhibit 3 depicts when the surveys were collected along with their corresponding sample sizes and response rates. All surveys included both quantitative items and qualitative open-ended responses.

Exhibit 3. Timeline and Samples of SDQPI Surveys



Throughout this summative report, the evaluation team draws on survey data from multiple perspectives and time points to address key evaluation questions. See Appendix B for an overview of the topics covered in each survey.

Workplace Well-being

In the last year of the evaluation, workplace well-being emerged as a new construct of interest. To measure coach and site leader well-being, we used the workplace Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment (PERMA)–Profiler (Butler & Kern, 2016). The PERMA-Profiler is a valid and reliable tool designed for use in educational settings (Cadima et al., 2021) and has been tested for use with Spanish-speaking populations (Chaves et al., 2023). The full measure consists of 16 items; however, the evaluation team selected six items from four of the five workplace PERMA Profiler scales given their relevance to SDQPI. The four scales include the following:

- Positive Emotion - general tendencies toward feeling contentment and joy,
- Relationships - feeling connected, supported, and valued by others in the organization,
- Meaning - having a sense of purpose in one's work, and
- Accomplishment - subjective feelings of accomplishment and staying on top of daily responsibilities. It involves working toward and reaching goals and feeling able to complete tasks and daily responsibilities.

We calculated workplace well-being by averaging responses to the six items, each rated on a scale from 0 to 10. A score of 0 represented *never* or *not at all*, depending on the item, whereas a score of 10 represented *always* or *completely*.

Data Discussion with SDQPI Team (Year 5)

In February 2025, the WestEd team engaged the SDQPI leadership and coaching team in a data discussion around the Year 5 site leader and coach surveys. The discussion focused on workplace well-being for site leaders and coaches, job stressors for site leaders, impact of SDQPI on centers and FCCs/FFNs, and perceptions of coaching. Throughout this report, we occasionally draw on the examples and interpretations shared by the SDQPI team.

Focus Groups (Year 4)

Qualitative data from the Year 4 coach and site leader focus groups were used to triangulate Year 5 findings, offering insights into factors that contributed to stability and change in the SDQPI coaching model and the QIP development process over time.

Analysis of SDQPI Longitudinal Data (Year 5)

In addition to survey data, we analyzed two secondary data sources from SDCOE: the Common

Data File to examine the reach of SDQPI and CLASS scores to measure the impact of SDQPI on California Statewide Preschool Program (CSPP) sites. Furthermore, we analyzed survey data longitudinally to learn about the impact of SDQPI on building site leader confidence in leading quality improvement.

Site Leader and Coach Reach Analysis

The reach of SDQPI to site leaders and coaches focused on participation patterns across Years 2 through 5 of the evaluation. We used administrative data to determine how many site leaders from each site type participated each year. For coaches, we used administrative data to determine how many coaches had an active caseload each year. We then calculated how many years each coach participated in the current iteration of SDQPI and identified annual turnover by tracking which SDCOE and YMCA coaches were new or returning each year.

Classroom Observation Impact Analysis

To assess the quality of teacher-child interactions, trained observers conducted classroom observations using the Preschool Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS Pre-K; LaParo et al., 2004) at 110 center-based CSPP sites during two time periods. Time 1 occurred between 2019 and early 2020 (before/early SDQPI implementation), while Time 2 occurred between 2023 and 2024 (later SDQPI implementation). The CLASS Pre-K measures three domains of classroom quality:

- Emotional Support: the extent to which teachers create a warm, responsive, and supportive environment for children
- Classroom Organization: how effectively teachers manage classroom routines, behavior, and instructional time
- Instructional Support: the ways teachers build on children's existing knowledge and scaffold learning

Trained observers completed four 20-minute cycles of classroom observations, rating dimensions of teacher-child interactions on a 7-point scale. Dimensions were averaged together to create a 1 to 7 domain score, where 1 represents low-quality and 7 represents high-quality.

We examined change over time in CSPP centers using linear mixed effects models in R (R Core Team, 2024). Specifically, we explored change over time in each dimension of the CLASS.

Latent Growth Impact Analysis

We used latent growth analysis, a statistical method that models individual change over time, to examine how site leaders' confidence in leading quality improvement evolved during SDQPI. To assess growth, we used an 8-item confidence matrix that asked site leaders to rate their confidence leading quality improvement across the eight QCC CQI Pathways including: school-readiness, social-emotional development, health, nutrition, and physical activity, teacher-child interactions, PD, environment, program administration, and family engagement.

Site leaders rated their confidence on a Likert scale from 1 (*not at all confident*) to 4 (*very confident*), with 2 representing *somewhat confident* and 3 representing *moderately confident*. Site leaders responded to this matrix up to three times across the course of SDQPI.

The sample for the latent growth impact analysis included 367 site leaders that completed the confidence leading quality improvement items in at least two surveys. Site leaders completed this matrix at different times based on whether they were part of Cohort 1 or Cohort 2. To account for the different timing of survey responses across the two cohorts, we used a second-order latent growth model with individually varying time scores in Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). This approach allowed us to estimate growth in confidence leading quality improvement over time while (1) treating confidence as a latent construct based on eight indicators at each time point, and (2) using each site leader's survey dates to flexibly model change.

Reach of SDQPI

This section summarizes data related to Evaluation Question 1:
To what extent has SDQPI expanded reach to diverse ELC sites over the past five years?

This section offers an overview of the reach of SDQPI over the past five years. The section includes the demographics and professional backgrounds of the overall sample of site leaders. Moreover, this section provides data on the number and stability of SDQPI coaching staff.

Data presented in this section come from the following sources:

- SDQPI administrative data
  - Common Data File (2021, 2022, 2023, 2024)
- Quantitative data
  - Year 5 coach survey (December 2024)

Over the past five years, SDQPI expanded its reach to site leaders from diverse site types.

Over the five-year evaluation period, SDQPI successfully expanded its reach to include a growing number of center and home-based site leaders (see Exhibit 4). Participation steadily increased from an initial 431 site leaders (2021–22) to 504 in Year 5 (2024–25). FCC leaders consistently represented the largest group of participants each year, rising from 254 to 316, which is a 24% increase in the number of FCC leaders enrolled in SDQPI. Participation among center site leaders also grew over the evaluation, but to a lesser degree, rising from 164 to 181, which is a 10% increase. FFN site leaders consistently represented the smallest proportion of the site leaders enrolled. Overall, the consistent increase in site leader enrollment reflects SDQPI's commitment to engaging diverse leaders in CQI efforts, including those with historically less access to PD (e.g., home-based sites).

Exhibit 4. Participating SDQPI Site Leaders Over Time

Site Type	Year 2 Frequency (%)	Year 3 Frequency (%)	Year 4 Frequency (%)	Year 5 Frequency (%)
Center	164 (38%)	161 (37%)	162 (34%)	181 (36%)
FCC	254 (59%)	267 (61%)	304 (64%)	316 (63%)
FFN	13 (3%)	12 (3%)	9 (2%)	7 (1%)
Total	431 site leaders	440 site leaders	475 site leaders	504 site leaders

***Note*. Total percentages sometimes do not add up to 100 percent due to rounding. All data is from the Common Data Files for the respective year.**

Participating site leaders represent a diverse population, bringing with them a range of educational and professional backgrounds.

Most site leaders identified as Hispanic or Latine (67%) and speak English (68%) and/or Spanish (66%; see Exhibit 5). Similar percentages of site leaders had a high school degree or less (30%), an Associate's degree or trade certification (32%), or a Bachelor's degree (38%; see Exhibit 6).

In terms of their professional experience, most site leaders had more than three years of experience caring for infants/toddlers (89%) or preschoolers (91%; see Exhibit 7). They also had high levels of experience being a site leader, with 82% having three or more years of experience. However, site leaders varied in their length of participation in SDQPI or previous iterations of QRIS.

In our analyses, we found that some characteristics of sites and site leaders related to one another. Because site type, education level, and years of QRIS experience will be used in analyses later in this report (see Perceived Impact on Site Leader Capacity section), we highlight the moderate associations across these three variables. There is a positive correlation between years of QRIS experience and education level ($r = .28$, $p < .001$), indicating that site leaders who participated in QRIS for longer are more likely to have a higher educational attainment.

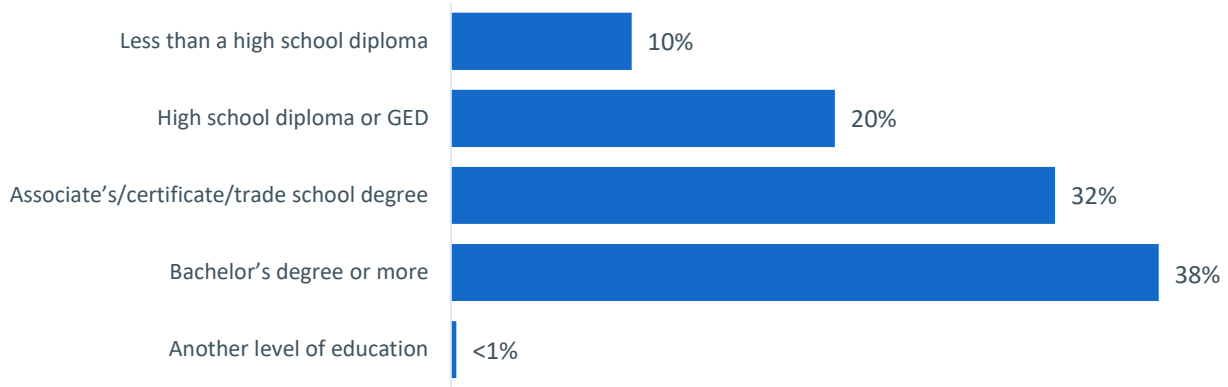
Bivariate correlation analyses also demonstrated a moderate negative correlation between site type and years of QRIS experience ($r = -.32$, $p < .001$) and education level ($r = -.42$, $p < .001$). Center site leaders reported participating in QRIS for more years, and center leaders had higher educational attainment. In turn, FCC/FFN leaders were less likely than center leaders to have extended experience participating in QRIS or a bachelor's degree. These findings offer important context for interpreting site leader differences in later sections of this report (see Perceived Impact on Site Leader Capacity section).

Exhibit 5. Site Leader Race & Ethnicity and Language Spoken Fluently (*n* = 359)

Race & Ethnicity	Race & Ethnicity %	Language Spoken Fluently	Language %
Hispanic, Latine, or Spanish Origin	67%	English and Spanish bilingual	35%
White	17%	Spanish monolingual	29%
Asian	6%	English monolingual	28%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1%	English and other	4%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1%	Spanish and other	<1%
Another race or ethnicity	3%	English, Spanish, and other	<1%
Prefer not to answer	3%	Unknown	4%

***Notes*. Percentages may not add up to 100% because site leaders selected all that apply; "other" race & ethnicities include Middle Eastern, Somali, and mixed race; "other" languages include, but are not limited to, ASL, French, and Hindi.**

Exhibit 6. Site Leader Highest Level of Education Completed (*n* = 343)



***Note*. "Another level of education" included Montessori.**

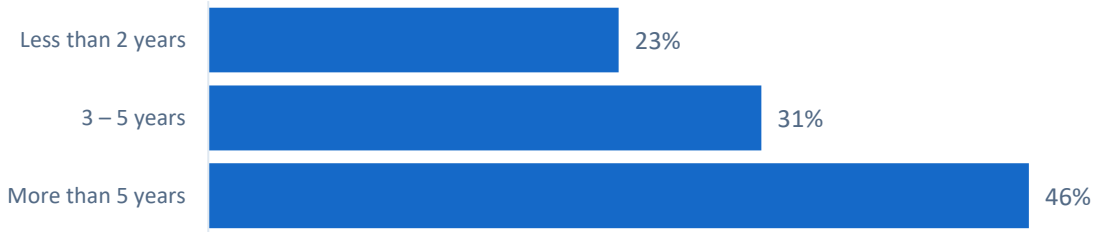
Exhibit 7. Site Leader Professional Background

Professional Background	Less than 1 year	1 to 2 years	3 to 5 years	More than 5 years
Providing early learning and care for infants and/or toddlers (*n* = 330)	4%	7%	11%	78%
Providing early learning and care for preschoolers (*n* = 340)	2%	7%	9%	82%
Being a site leader (*n* = 333)	3%	15%	19%	63%
Participating in SDQP, QPI, and/or Preschool for All (*n* = 319)	10%	35%	29%	26%

Over time, SDQPI increased its number of coaches and improved retention of coaches.

In parallel with the increase in SDQPI site leaders, the number of SDQPI coaches increased over time. The total number of coaches increased from 21 in Year 2 to 26 in Year 5. Additionally, the majority of SDQPI coaches (77%) worked with SDQPI for three or more years (see Exhibit 8).

Exhibit 8. Number of Years Coaches Worked with SDQPI (*n* = 39)



Notes. **Graph only includes site leaders who completed at least one coach survey. Number of years based on the site leader's self-reported number of years that they worked as an SDCOE or YMCA coach in the last survey they completed.**

Coach turnover data demonstrates an increase in coaching staff stability over time. In Exhibits 9 and 10, all coaches are listed as new to the current iteration of SDQPI in Year 2, although some may have coached in earlier versions of SDQPI (e.g., QPI, Preschool for All). By Year 5, all of the SDCOE coaches were returning coaches (Exhibit 9). Turnover still occurred for YMCA coaches; however, over time there is a slight decrease in turnover rate (Exhibit 10).

Exhibit 9. SDCOE Coach Turnover by Year

SDCOE Coach Type	Year 2 Frequency (%)	Year 3 Frequency (%)	Year 4 Frequency (%)	Year 5 Frequency (%)
New Coaches	13 (100%)	3 (20%)	6 (32%)	0 (0%)
Returning Coaches	N/A	12 (80%)	13 (68%)	18 (100%)
SDCOE Total	13 coaches	15 coaches	19 coaches	18 coaches

***Note*. Total percentages sometimes do not add up to 100 percent due to rounding. Coaches may have withdrawn during the year so there may be more coaches listed here than were invited to the yearly coach survey. All data is from the Common Data Files for the respective year.**

Exhibit 10. YMCA Coach Turnover by Year

YMCA Coach Type	Year 2 Frequency (%)	Year 3 Frequency (%)	Year 4 Frequency (%)	Year 5 Frequency (%)
New Coaches	8 (100%)	4 (50%)	3 (38%)	3 (38%)
Returning Coaches	N/A	4 (50%)	5 (63%)	5 (63%)
YMCA Total	8 coaches	8 coaches	8 coaches	8 coaches

***Note*. Total percentages sometimes do not add up to 100 percent due to rounding. Coaches may have withdrawn during the year so there may be more coaches listed here than were invited to the yearly coach survey. All data is from the Common Data Files for the respective year.**

Key Takeaways. Previous research has shown that many QRISs have historically excluded home-based providers, such as FCCs and FFNs (Meek et al., 2022). At the outset of this evaluation, key informants shared that SDQPI aimed for more equitable and inclusive access to PD and financial resources for diverse sites and site leaders. Five years later, evaluation data confirm that SDQPI expanded its reach to diverse site types, including centers, FCCs, and FFNs. In a recent conversation with SDQPI leadership, they also shared they have a new partnership with military-serving child care sites. As detailed throughout this report, SDQPI offers valuable PD and financial resources to support a wide range of ELC sites across San Diego County.

A key element of SDQPI's model is individualized support through coaching. Over the past five years, SDQPI increased the size and stability of its coaching team to meet the needs of a growing number of participating sites. Furthermore, reduced turnover among coaching staff has led to greater continuity and experience among coaches, strengthening relationships and sustaining quality improvement efforts with site leaders.

SDQPI Supports

This section summarizes data related to Evaluation Question 2: What are site leaders' perceptions of SDQPI coaching, professional development, stipends, and incentives, including how they perceive that these supports relate to quality improvement?

This section begins by examining site leaders' overall perceptions of the usefulness of all SDQPI supports. Given that the evaluation initially focused primarily on the coaching approach, this section provides the most data and findings related to the site leaders' and coaches' perceptions of coaching. First, it shares site leaders' perceptions of the coaching approach and some context of how the QIP Planning Tool and process have evolved over the five years of SDQPI. Next, this section discusses the implementation of the Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) approach, including coaches' self-reported confidence and knowledge of the GRR. The coaching section also includes reflections on coach-reported successes and the growing role of group coaching in supporting peer learning and leadership development. Finally, the section presents site leaders' perceptions of SDQPI PD, stipends, and incentives.

The data presented in this section come from the following sources:

- Quantitative data
  - Year 5 site leader survey (November 2024)
  - Year 2 through Year 5 coach surveys (August 2021–December 2024)
- Qualitative data
  - Open-ended responses from the Year 5 site leader survey (November 2024) and Year 5 coach survey (December 2024)
  - Year 4 coach focus groups (January 2024)

Overall Usefulness of SDQPI Supports

In the Year 5 site leader survey, site leaders reported on the overall usefulness of each SDQPI support, including coaching, PD, stipends, and incentives on a scale from 1 (*not at all useful*) to 4 (*very useful*; see Exhibit 11). Just over half of the site leaders reported that all SDQPI supports

were *very useful* in helping improve the quality of their sites. Approximately 40% of all site leaders reported that the SDQPI supports were *moderately useful* in improving the quality of their sites. Only very small percentages (5% or less) of site leaders reported that SDQPI supports were *not at all useful* or *slightly useful.*

Exhibit 11. Usefulness of SDQPI Supports

In the past year, how useful were the following SDQPI supports in helping you improve the quality of your site?	Not at all useful	Slightly useful	Moderately useful	Very useful
Stipend that my staff and I received (*n* = 338)	1%	2%	38%	59%
Access to professional development for my site staff (*n* = 270)	1%	3%	40%	56%
Coaching that I received (*n* = 343)	2%	2%	41%	55%
Access to professional development for me (*n* = 342)	1%	2%	42%	55%
Incentive that our site received (*n* = 323)	1%	3%	41%	55%
Coaching that my staff received (*n* = 247)	1%	4%	43%	53%

Note. **Total percentages sometimes do not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.**

Site leaders varied in how they rated the usefulness of SDQPI supports, with center-based and longer-term QRIS participants rating the SDQPI supports more positively.

Center site leaders consistently rated their perceptions of SDQPI supports as more useful compared to FCC/FFN site leaders (see Exhibit 12). In addition, site leaders who have participated in QRIS for 3 or more years consistently rated the SDQPI supports as more useful than those with less than 3 years of experience in QRIS (see Exhibit 13).

Exhibit 12. Usefulness of SDQPI Support by Site Type

SDQPI Support	FCC/FFN *n*	FCC/FFN *Mean (SD)*	Center *n*	Center *Mean (SD)*
Stipend that my staff and I received	221	3.45 (.53)	113	3.82 (.45)***
Access to professional development for me	227	3.39 (.55)	114	3.81 (.42)***
Coaching that I received	224	3.42 (.53)	114	3.79 (.45)***
Access to professional development for site staff	159	3.38 (.56)	108	3.76 (.47)***
Incentive that our site received	225	3.44 (.54)	96	3.73 (.55)***
Coaching that my staff received	147	3.41 (.57)	97	3.63 (.55)***

Note. **Utility was rated on a scale from 1 (*not at all useful*) to 4 (*very useful*). The asterisks reflect statistical significance in group differences by site type. ****p* < .001.**

Exhibit 13. Usefulness of SDQPI Support by Years of Experience Participating in QRIS

SDQPI Support	Less than 3 years participating in QRIS *n*	Less than 3 years participating in QRIS *Mean (SD)*	3 years or more participating in QRIS *n*	3 years or more participating in QRIS *Mean (SD)*
Stipend that my staff and I received	138	3.47 (.54)	165	3.67 (.50)***
Access to professional development for site staff	110	3.43 (.55)	133	3.63 (.54)**
Coaching that I received	141	3.45 (.53)	167	3.63 (.51)**
Access to professional development for me	142	3.46 (.53)	166	3.62 (.51)**
Incentive that our site received	136	3.44 (.57)	154	3.60 (.54)*
Coaching that my staff received	102	3.37 (.56)	121	3.58 (.54)**

Note. **Utility was rated on a scale from 1 (*not at all useful*) to 4 (*very useful*). The asterisks reflect statistical significance in group differences by years of experience participating in QRIS. **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001.**

Key Takeaways. Overall, nearly all site leaders find the various SDQPI supports to be useful. As we have seen in previous evaluation data, those from center-based sites and those participating in QRIS longer, rated the supports as more useful than their home-based colleagues or those newer to QRIS, respectively. In discussions with SDQPI leadership, we have acknowledged that meaningful quality improvement takes time. SDQPI offers multiple supports and rich content, which require time and continuity to fully realize their impact. SDQPI leadership and coaching staff may consider ways to further individualize support for home-based sites and those newer to QRIS.

SDQPI Coaching

Site leaders consistently reported positive experiences participating in SDQPI coaching.

In Year 5, site leaders provided high ratings of their experiences with SDQPI coaching (see Exhibit 14), with mean responses ranging from 4.44 to 4.65 on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree)* to 5 (*strongly agree*). The highest-rated item indicated that site leaders felt their cultural identity was respected and valued by their coach, underscoring the model's emphasis on culturally responsive practice. Additionally, site leaders reported having opportunities to reflect on and discuss their PD with their coach and feeling empowered to lead quality improvement efforts at their sites.

Responses also indicated that coaches gradually gave site leaders more responsibility to improve their practices independently, reinforcing the model's emphasis on building sustainable capacity over time. Site leaders reported that coaching helped reduce feelings of isolation and supported their ongoing leadership growth. These findings highlight the strength of the individualized coaching model in fostering reflective, empowering, and equity-centered relationships that build leadership capacity and promote CQI.

Exhibit 14. Site Leaders' Average Perceptions of SDQPI Coaching Support in Year 5

Item	*Mean (SD)*
I feel that my cultural identity is respected and valued by my SDQPI coach. (*n* = 340)	4.65 (.69)
I had opportunities to reflect on and discuss my SDQPI professional development experiences with my coach. (*n* = 338)	4.59 (.69)

My SDQPI coach empowered me to lead quality improvements at my site. (*n* = 340)	4.56 (.74)
My SDQPI coach gradually gave me more responsibility to improve my practices on my own. (*n* = 340)	4.46 (.81)
SDQPI coaching has helped me feel less isolated and alone in my role. (*n* = 340)	4.44 (.87)
I developed my leadership skills by working with my SDQPI coach. (*n* = 341)	4.44 (.82)

Note. **Responses are on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).**

Over the course of SDQPI, the QIP tool and process have evolved to be responsive to the needs of diverse site types.

The QIP Planning Tool and process were designed to support site leaders and coaches to intentionally set goals and guide ongoing coaching. From Year 1 (2020–21) to Year 5 (2024–25), the QIP Planning Tool and process underwent several modifications to more effectively meet these objectives.

In Year 1, the QIP Planning Tool 1.0 featured 43 indicators within the eight QCC CQI Pathways. Coaches guided site leaders individually through each indicator and discussed their level of implementation, assigning a rating of *in place*, *partially in place*, or *not in place* for each indicator. The coach then invited the site leader to reflect on what they learned and identify an area of focus for their annual goal. The coach and site leader collaboratively set a goal and action steps. Across the program year, the coach and site leader examined progress and modified action steps, as needed. At the end of the year, the coach and site leader assessed goal attainment, updated the QIP Planning Tool with current data, and developed a new annual QIP goal and action steps. This process took various amounts of time, depending on site leader capacity and availability. For some site leaders, the process could take several coaching sessions across many months.

In Year 2, coaches raised concerns about the QIP Planning Tool 1.0, which used the metrics*: in place*, *partially in place*, or *not in place*. Coaches felt these metrics did not align with a strengths-based approach, particularly given the number of FCC and FFN programs that were new to participating in a QRIS. Coaches also found these metrics limiting for sites who had most indicators already *in place*, desiring a system that would allow these sites to continue to go deeper in improving the quality of their sites.

In Year 3, the introduction of the QIP Planning Tool 2.0 included 34 indicators across the eight QCC CQI Pathways, using a revised rating system with metrics of *Emerging*, *Developing*, *Proficient*, and *Extending* to better align with a strengths-based approach. The tool also defined key terms and added reflective prompts for coaches to use with site leaders. While these were

improvements, ongoing challenges remained when using the tool with some FCC and FFN sites, including the considerable time required for site leaders and coaches to complete the QIP tool, the tool's limitations in accurately capturing quality indicators for FCC and FFN sites, and the need for more support in understanding the QIP indicator language.

In Year 4, the QIP Planning Tool 3.0 incorporated a more flexible process, allowing sites to select 1–2 focus pathways rather than completing the indicators for all pathways. A guidance document was also introduced to support site leaders, alongside a Spanish-accessible companion document to enhance usability for bilingual or monolingual Spanish-speaking providers. The guidance document stated that all sites should have a goal and QIP within three months of their contract date. Fewer quality indicators were particularly beneficial for FCC and FFN providers, as it decreased the time coaches spent on completing the tool and created more space to focus on making progress toward their QIP goals. Furthermore, site leaders were encouraged to set SDQPI QIP goals that aligned with goals for other funding streams, such as CSPP Program Self Evaluation or Head Start School Readiness Goals. This change allowed sites, particularly centers, to have more streamlined quality improvement efforts.

In Year 5, the current iteration of the QIP Planning Tool 4.0 maintains the QIP 3.0 structure, yet it incorporates even more reflective practices, such as using guided prompts for self-assessment and helping site leaders reflect on their prior implementation progress. Coaches continue to work with site leaders to identify their own areas for quality improvement based on their existing data, goals set for other funding streams, or their anecdotal observations. This simplified process takes less time and should be completed within the first few months of the program year, leaving more time for quality improvement efforts.

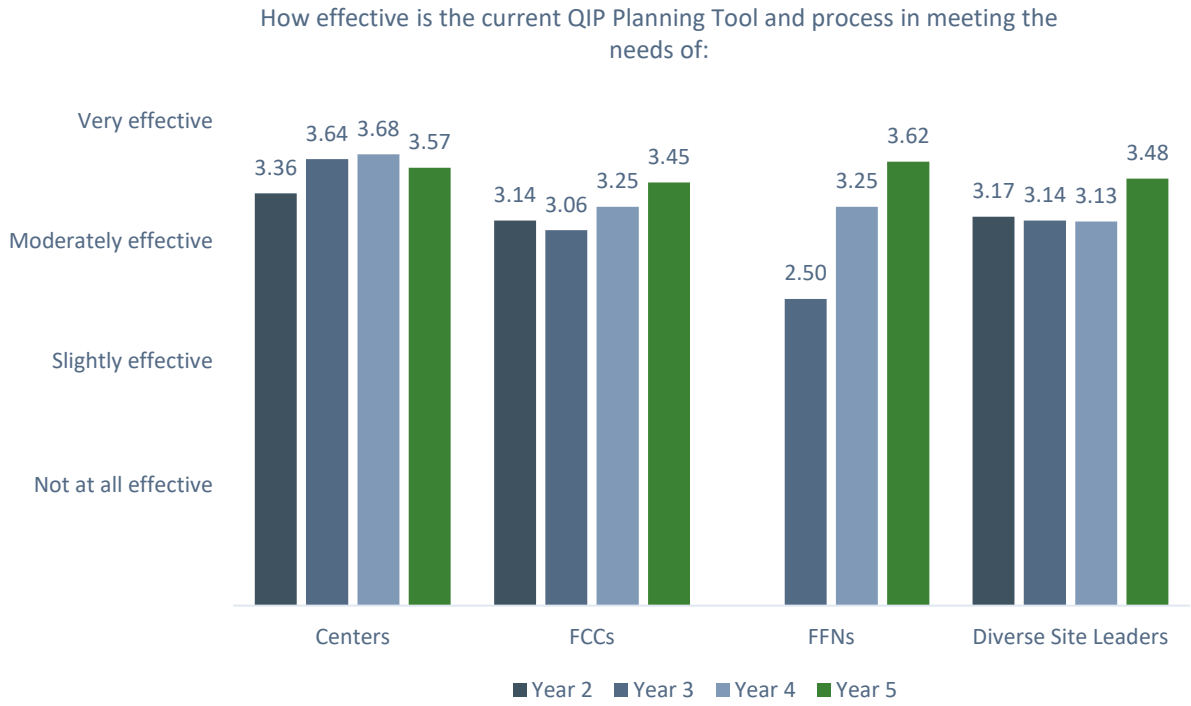
Coaches' perceptions of the QIP tool's effectiveness have improved over time.

Across all site types, coaches' overall perceptions of the QIP tool's effectiveness have generally improved over time (see Exhibit 15), particularly for FCCs and FFNs. We primarily examined changes from Year 3 to Year 5 because these reflect time points where the QIP Planning Tool and process differed most and where we observed notable growth for three of the four groups. On average, mean differences between the full sample of coaches in Year 3 and Year 5 indicated significant increases in how well coaches felt that the tool met the needs of FFN sites ($p < .01$; n = 6–8 coaches) and site leaders from diverse cultural and language backgrounds ($p < .05$; n = 21–25 coaches). For FCC sites, the overall mean difference in coaches' perceived effectiveness from Year 3 ($n = 16$) to Year 5 ($n = 22$) was approaching significance ($p < .10$). In contrast, for center sites, the data show a slight decrease in coaches' perceived effectiveness from Year 3 to Year 5, though this difference was quite minimal and not statistically significant.

Although the QIP tool has become more effective over time, Year 4 focus group findings suggested that some centers may benefit from a more comprehensive review process, as site leaders felt that the current approach lacks a broader analysis of their QIP data. In addition, some experienced site leaders found the tool repetitive, whereas newer site leaders found it helpful in familiarizing themselves with pathways for improvement.

Past findings suggested that the tool was more effective for centers than FCCs and FFNs, but Year 5 survey data indicated no statistically significant difference based on site type. We compared coaches' perceptions of the tool's effectiveness in meeting the needs of FCCs and centers among those who responded to both items (n = 17). Although the tool's effectiveness was rated slightly higher for centers (M = 3.59) than for FCCs (M = 3.35) in Year 5, the difference was not statistically significant, suggesting that the tool may now be similarly effective for both groups, demonstrating progress in meeting the needs of all site leaders, regardless of site type.

Exhibit 15. Coaches' Perceptions of QIP Tool Effectiveness from Year 2 to Year 5



***Note*. "Diverse Site Leaders" includes site leaders from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.**

Future Considerations. Across the full span of the evaluation, SDQPI leadership used feedback from coaches and site leaders, as well as ongoing evaluation findings, to make refinements to both the QIP Planning Tool and process. Coach data indicated that they perceived the QIP Planning Tool to be increasingly effective from Years 3 to 5 for FCC sites, FFN sites, and site leaders from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, suggesting that these refinements helped make the tool more responsive to site and site leader needs.

These evaluation findings suggest that maintaining a flexible, reflective process for the QIP Planning Tool and process is critical for meeting the diverse needs of sites. SDQPI leadership may consider whether a standardized QIP planning process for all site types remains appropriate, given the unique strengths and needs of diverse site types and site leaders. For example, some publicly funded centers with longstanding participation in SDQPI may desire a more comprehensive QIP Planning Tool (similar to the QIP 2.0), while some FCC/FFN providers who are newer to SDQPI may prefer the streamlined, reflective QIP 4.0.

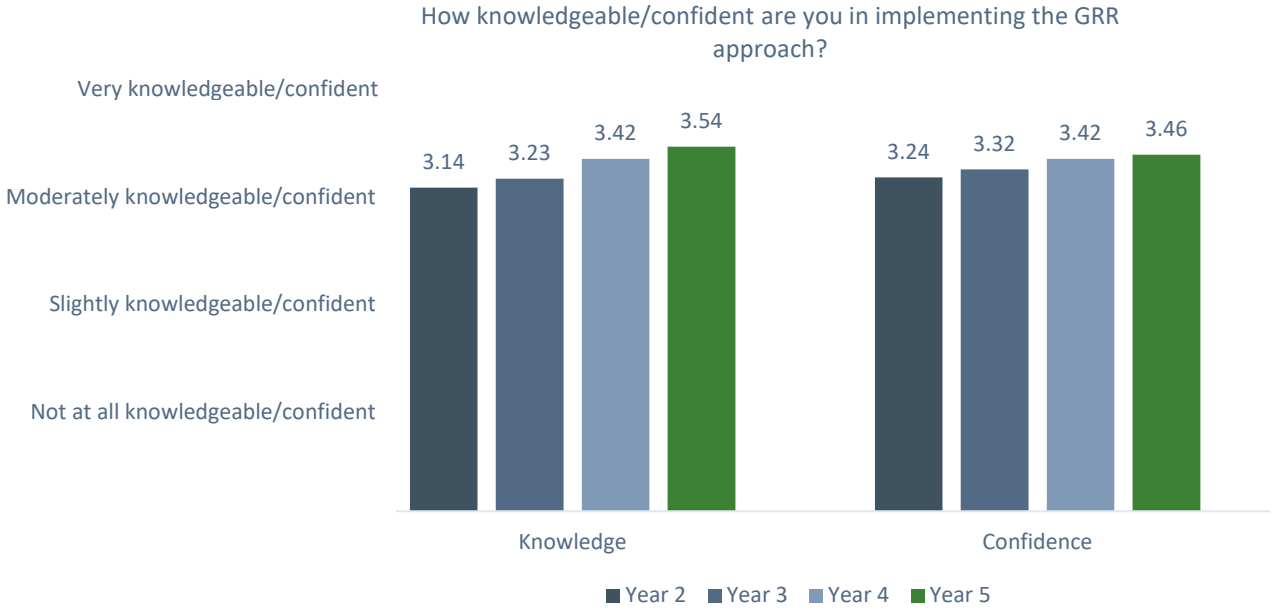
Coaches' knowledge and confidence in implementing the Gradual Release of Responsibility approach have steadily increased over time.

Across the five years of SDQPI, coaches showed a steady increase in their knowledge, confidence, and practice of implementing the GRR approach with site leaders.

> *"I support site leaders in doing something new (pulling DRDP data reports) – either by empowering them do it themselves … or supporting them during a coaching session to navigate their online platform, showing them where they can access the data."*
> *—SDCOE Coach, Dec 2024*

Since the start of SDQPI implementation, the GRR has served as a core approach to build site leaders' capacity for sustainable practice. Exhibit 16 illustrates coaches' self-reported knowledge and confidence implementing GRR from Years 2 to 5. Data showed significant gains in knowledge from Year 2 (2021) to Year 5 (2025) and from Year 3 (2022) to Year 5 ($p < .05$ for both). Coaches' confidence levels also followed an upward trend, with the change from Year 2 to Year 5 approaching significance ($p < .10$).

Exhibit 16. Coach Knowledge and Confidence Implementing GRR (Year 2 to Year 5)



***Note*. The scale option changed from knowledgeable or confident depending on the item stem.**

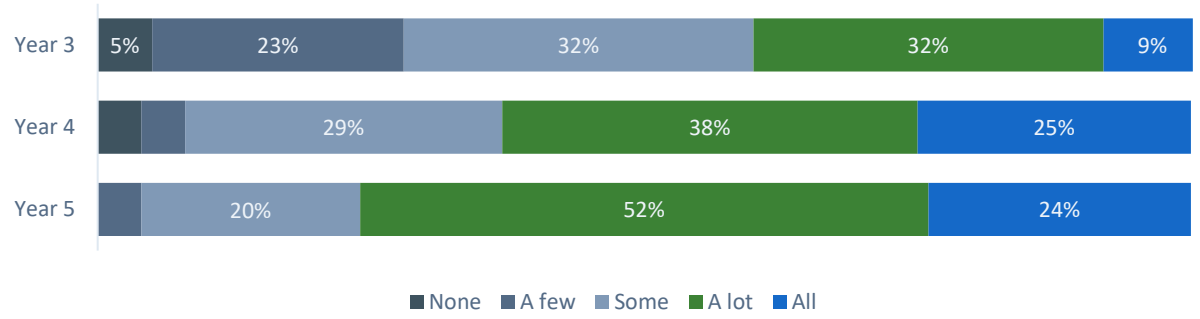
The most substantial gains in coaches' knowledge and confidence occurred between Year 3 and Year 4, which aligns with PD opportunities focused on GRR that were provided to coaches in response to earlier evaluation findings. Additionally, the coaches' need for further training on the GRR decreased significantly over time—while 68% of coaches in Year 3 reported wanting additional support with GRR, only 17% expressed the same need by Year 4. These findings suggest that the targeted training in implementing GRR has been effective in equipping coaches with both the knowledge and confidence to implement GRR more consistently with sites.

Use of the GRR approach became more widespread and consistent across sites over time.

Over time, coaches reported an increase in their use of the GRR approach across sites (see Exhibit 17). In Year 3, the number of sites where coaches reported using GRR varied widely, ranging from *none* to *all*. From Year 3 to Years 4 and 5, greater percentages of coaches reported using the GRR with *a lot* or *all* of their sites. Among coaches who completed both the Year 3 and 4 surveys (n = 14), data showed a significant increase in the number of sites coaches used GRR with ($p < .05$). In Year 3, coaches typically reported using GRR with *some* of their sites, whereas by Year 4, they reported using it with *a lot* of their sites.

From Year 4 to Year 5, greater percentages of coaches continued to report using GRR with *a lot* or *all* of their sites. By Year 5, no coaches reported using GRR with *none* of their sites. However, there were no significant differences in GRR implementation levels between Year 4 and Year 5, indicating that use of the approach remained stable.

Exhibit 17. Amount of Sites Coaches Reported Using GRR With from Year 3 to Year 5



Notes. Total percentages sometimes do not add up to 100 percent due to rounding. Values of less than 5% are not labeled on the graph. Small percentages of coaches selected none in year 4 (4%) and selected *a few* for each year, as follows: Year 4 (4%) and Year 5 (4%)

In Year 5, for those coaches who implemented GRR with at least a few sites, they reported using the approach in various areas. The most cited application of GRR was modeling a teaching practice (58%), followed by providing training or coaching to educators (54%). Half of the coaches reported using GRR for collecting or analyzing child assessments (50%) and collecting or analyzing program quality assessments (50%). Other areas where GRR was applied included

conducting observations of educators (46%) and setting up the learning environment (42%). No coaches selected 'Other,' suggesting that GRR was consistently implemented within these defined areas. These findings highlight the diverse ways in which coaches integrate GRR into their work, with a strong emphasis on instructional modeling and educator training.

> *"A common success I experience is when a coachee shares that they have started asking reflective questions—similar to the ones I use—with their staff, families, and children to gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives." —SDCOE Coach, Dec 2024*

Key Takeaways. Findings from Year 2 to Year 5 suggest consistent growth in coaches' knowledge, confidence, and use of the GRR approach. SDQPI leadership has been instrumental in facilitating this progress by using coach feedback and evaluation findings to design targeted PD that directly addressed coaching staff needs. This responsiveness, as well as coaches' increased experience in using the GRR approach, have likely both contributed to coaches' increase in knowledge and confidence implementing GRR with more sites over time.

Although the GRR approach focuses primarily on building site leaders' capacity, our data suggest it may also influence instructional quality more broadly. At this stage of implementation, about half of coaches reported using GRR with site leaders in ways that extended to site staff, such as modeling teaching practices, facilitating trainings, coaching, or conducting observations of educators. While we cannot directly attribute these activities to changes in teaching quality or student learning, these data highlight how coaches are applying GRR beyond supporting site leaders alone. This suggests the potential for a cascade effect, where strengthening leadership practices may support improvements in classroom instruction. Given that teaching practices are a direct link to children's learning, these findings underscore the role of the GRR approach in enhancing instructional quality at multiple levels within a site.

Future Considerations. Evaluation data suggest a potential shift in how GRR is being applied over time. In Year 5, fewer coaches reported using GRR in conducting observations (46% compared to 71% in Year 4) and setting up the learning environment (42% compared to 63% in Year 4). This trend may indicate that coaches are moving beyond foundational applications of GRR—such as brief observations or setting up the learning environment—toward more complex coaching practices, such as in-depth training for educators and conducting full coaching cycles with educators, which requires a deeper level of engagement than a single observation. A full coaching cycle typically involves goal setting, modeling, guided practice, observation, and feedback, allowing for deeper and more sustained instructional improvement. If this pattern continues, future PD efforts could focus on advanced applications of GRR, equipping coaches to facilitate ongoing, multi-step coaching processes that drive sustainable instructional change across sites.

Coach-reported successes align with the key features of the SDQPI coaching approach.

In Year 1 of the evaluation, key informants described key features of the coaching approach that remained consistent through Year 5. For example, when discussing the coaching approach in Year 1, coaches and coach supervisors focused on relationship-based practices (e.g., acting as a secure base, cheering and having empathy for coachee, strengths-based). Across all levels of SDQPI, site leaders and coaches emphasized the importance of a strengths-based approach that builds on leaders' assets. Site leaders also affirmed that their coaches recognize and value their strengths. Finally, key informants mentioned the importance of empowering site leaders to choose their own quality improvement path. They shared that, ideally, empowering site leaders to actively engage in the process—by allowing them to choose their own goals and path—can motivate them to make quality improvements.

In Year 5 of the evaluation, coaches were asked to reflect on their top two to three successes during their time as an SDQPI coach (*n* = 25). Exhibit 18 includes a summary of their responses. Remarkably, three of the most frequently reported themes in these responses focused on the key features of the coaching approach described in Year 1: supporting sites in making progress toward their quality improvement goals (56%), building and sustaining trusting relationships with site leaders (52%), and empowering site leaders' confidence and competence in leading quality improvement (48%).

Exhibit 18. Summary of Coaches' Reported Successes in Year 5 (*n* = 25)

Major Themes	*n* (%)	Examples
Supporting Site Growth	14 (56%)	• "Seeing the progress being made over time, the positive responses [FCCs] received from their children, and differences they observe." • "Support site leaders to improve best practices at a site level."
Building Relationships	13 (52%)	• "Building stronger relationships with site leaders and teachers." • "Getting to have a bond and trust of my providers; this is great because they feel comfortable opening up."
Empowering Site Leadership	12 (48%)	• "Empowering site leaders to build their confidence in their role as leaders." • "A coachee gains confidence in assessing data, can articulate strengths and areas for growth, and then takes actionable steps."

Providing Trainings and Sharing Resources	12 (48%)	• "Facilitating meaningful and intentional professional learning." • "Sharing relevant resources… especially when it is a new resource [site leaders] are not familiar with."
Coaches' Professional Growth	9 (36%)	• "My professional growth as a coach and the ability to facilitate reflective coaching conversations." • "Developing active listening and paraphrasing skills."
Instructional Practices and Supporting Children's Growth	10 (40%)	• "Empowered providers to strengthen teacher-child interactions and understand brain development in young children." • "Social emotional supports were created and established in all classrooms."
Supporting Staff Development	7 (28%)	• "Staff appreciated group coaching as it fostered teamwork and shared insights." • "Helping staff understand the importance of equitable practices and how to integrate them into their work"
Supporting Onboarding and System Integration	6 (24%)	• "Starting with a new agency… within three months, all staff obtained a workforce registry profile."
Supporting QIPs	5 (20%)	• "Guiding providers through the development and implementation of a meaningful QIP." • "Empowering site leaders… to each create their own goal."
Supporting Families	4 (16%)	• "Fostering strong family-provider relationships."
Meeting Professional Deadlines	3 (12%)	• "Meeting deadlines even though many of the responsibilities assigned require dedicated time that interferes with coaching responsibilities."
Group Coaching	3 (12%)	• "Noticed higher levels of learning happening across site supervisors during group coaching sessions."
Supporting Diverse Learners	2 (8%)	• "Provide coaching in providers' language." • "…the ability to facilitate reflective coaching conversations with diverse learners and diverse agencies."

Implementing Inclusive Practices	2 (8%)	• "I have also felt success in supporting FCC site leaders in the importance of equitable practices and understanding what it means to be culturally responsive." • "I have also helped FCCs create more equitable and inclusive spaces—whether by adapting curriculums, supporting children with IFSPs, or fostering strong family-provider relationships."

> *"I have incredible relationships with my site leaders and have developed psychological safety and trust. I've been able to build systems that support meaningful change within both large and small programs, and I feel confident in my ability to guide systems change at a variety of levels." —SDCOE Coach, Dec 2024*

These outcomes reflect a coaching model that is not only relational and equity-driven but also aligned with the initiative's broader goal of building sustainable capacity CQI across early learning settings.

Key Takeaways. Taken together, evaluation findings reflect the development and long-term impact of a coaching model that has stayed true to its core strengths—relational trust, reflective practice, and research-based strategies—while deepening and expanding in scope over time. Early insights emphasized the strong qualifications of coaches and their ability to build trusting, supportive relationships with site leaders, as well as their use of research-based strategies such as reflection, collaboratively planning goals and action steps, and resource sharing.

By Year 5, these foundational practices have scaled as coaches not only continued to use reflective coaching strategies and share relevant tools but also facilitated PD opportunities, guided systems-level change, and strengthened culturally responsive instructional practices across diverse settings. Site leaders' growth in confidence, leadership, and instructional quality observed by coaches reflect the coaching model's success. These findings highlight the value of investing in a well-prepared, relationally grounded coaching workforce capable of building capacity, equity, and CQI across early learning sites.

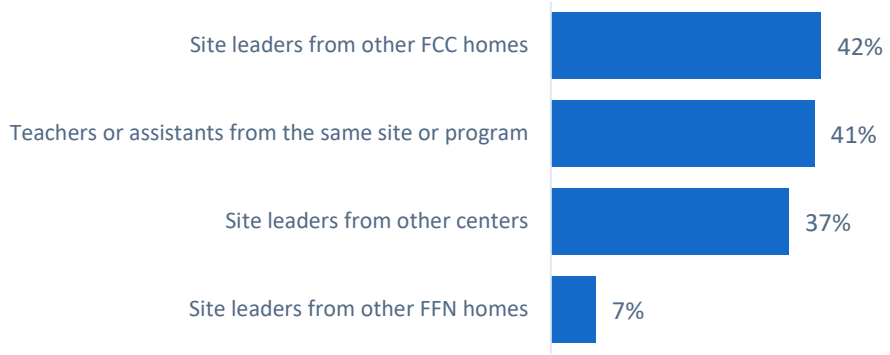
Group coaching was introduced late in SDQPI implementation and use of this strategy has grown.

Group coaching was introduced as a new coaching approach in Year 4 and remained part of coaches' practice in Year 5, with a majority reporting some use of this approach over the past year. In Year 4, for instance, coaches were asked how frequently they provided group coaching and about half reported offering group coaching to site leaders (50%) or site staff (53%) in some

of their coaching sessions. In Year 5, 62% of coaches indicated that they had provided group coaching to site leaders at least once in the past year. Among those coaches who implemented group coaching, the most common participants were site leaders and teachers from the same center-based site or agency (63%), followed by groups of center-based leaders from different sites (31%) and FCC leaders with their assistants (19%).

Site leader survey data from Year 5 offer a more nuanced insight into group coaching participation, with 52% of publicly funded center leaders, 38% of private center leaders, 31% of FCC providers, and 60% of FFN providers reporting participation in group coaching. Exhibit 19 illustrates site leader reported group coaching structures. Among site leaders who reported participating in group coaching (*n* = 128), 41% said they participated with teachers or assistants from their own site or program, 37% with site leaders from other centers, 42% with site leaders from other FCC homes, and 7% with site leaders from other FFN homes.

Exhibit 19. Site Leader Reported Group Coaching Structure (*n* = 128)



Note. **Total percentages do not add up to 100% due to rounding.**

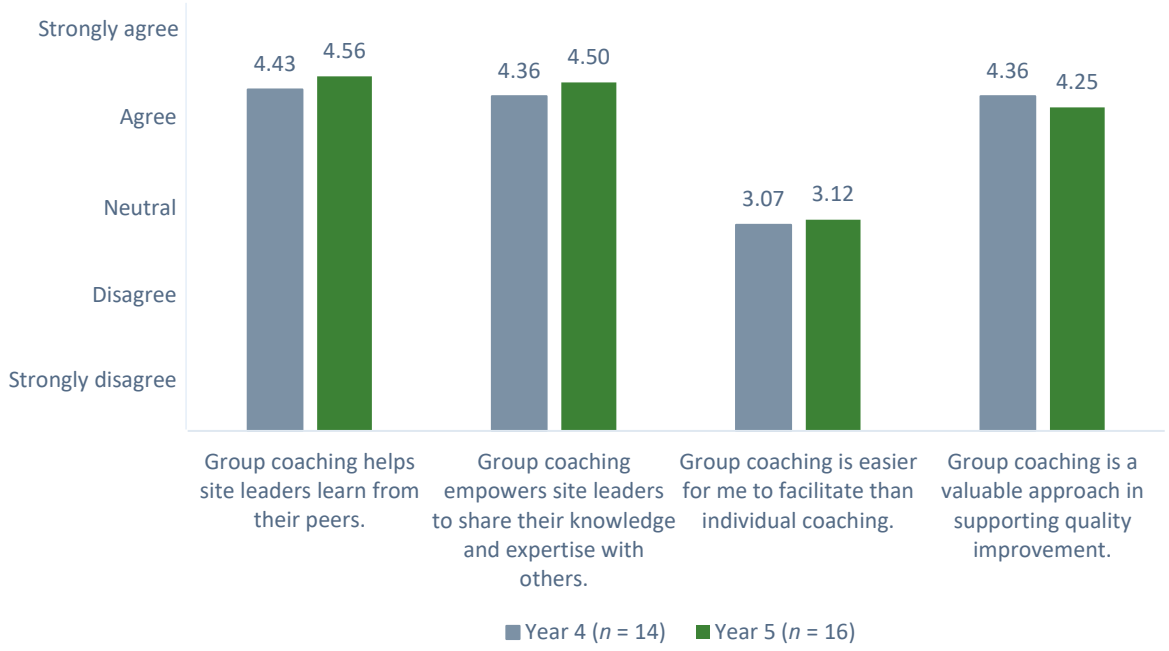
Both coaches and site leaders viewed group coaching as a valuable approach for fostering peer learning and leadership development.

Across both Years 4 and 5, coaches generally reported positive perceptions of group coaching, particularly its ability to foster peer learning and build leadership capacity among site leaders (see Exhibit 20). In both years, about 80% of coaches *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that group coaching helps site leaders learn from their peers, empowers them to share their expertise with others, and is a valuable approach to supporting quality improvement. Notably, average ratings for three of the four items increased from Year 4 to Year 5, indicating growing confidence in the potential of group coaching. However, 75% of coaches were more neutral in their views about group coaching being easier to facilitate than individual coaching, suggesting that while they see value in the approach, it is not necessarily easier to implement.

Site leader survey data from Year 5 corroborated many of the positive perceptions reported by coaches. On average, site leaders agreed that group coaching helped them learn from

colleagues (*M* = 4.55) and share their knowledge and expertise with others (*M* = 4.53)—closely aligning with coaches' beliefs that group coaching fosters peer learning and leadership growth. Site leaders also noted that group coaching helped reduce feelings of isolation (*M* = 4.48) and contributed to quality improvement at their site (*M* = 4.33), reinforcing coaches' views of its value. However, site leaders gave more moderate ratings when asked if group coaching was more effective than one-on-one coaching (*M* = 3.98), demonstrating that while group coaching is viewed as a valuable approach, it may serve as a complement rather than a replacement for individualized coaching.

Exhibit 20. Coach Perceptions of Group Coaching in Year 4 and Year 5



Note. **Response scale was on a 5-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) with 3 representing *neutral*.**

Key Takeaways. Qualitative data from Year 4 highlighted two promising approaches to group coaching—working with site leaders and their staff at the same site and grouping site leaders from similar settings by QIP pathway—both of which were viewed favorably by coaches and site leaders. Still, findings across both years suggest that additional support may be needed to help coaches plan and facilitate group coaching sessions effectively. This need is underscored by more neutral views from coaches about its ease of implementation and site leaders' neutral views about its effectiveness compared to one-on-one coaching, as well as varying levels of site leader comfort and buy-in. Of note, SDQPI provided additional PD to the coaching team in January 2025, after the coaches took the Year 5 survey.

Nevertheless, survey findings from Year 5 reflected positive perceptions for the value of group coaching among both coaches and site leaders. This was echoed in coaches' reflections on their

top successes. As one coach shared, "In creating group coaching, all the providers want to participate all the time and make the most out of it," while another noted, "Site leaders and staff provided feedback on how they appreciated group coaching." These reflections highlight growing enthusiasm for group coaching among both coaches and site leaders.

Although group coaching is not yet a dominant strategy across all sites, more than half of coaches are now integrating it into their practice—particularly in center-based settings. The variation in how group coaching is structured and delivered highlights the need to clarify effective models and adapt them to different site contexts.

SDQPI Professional Development

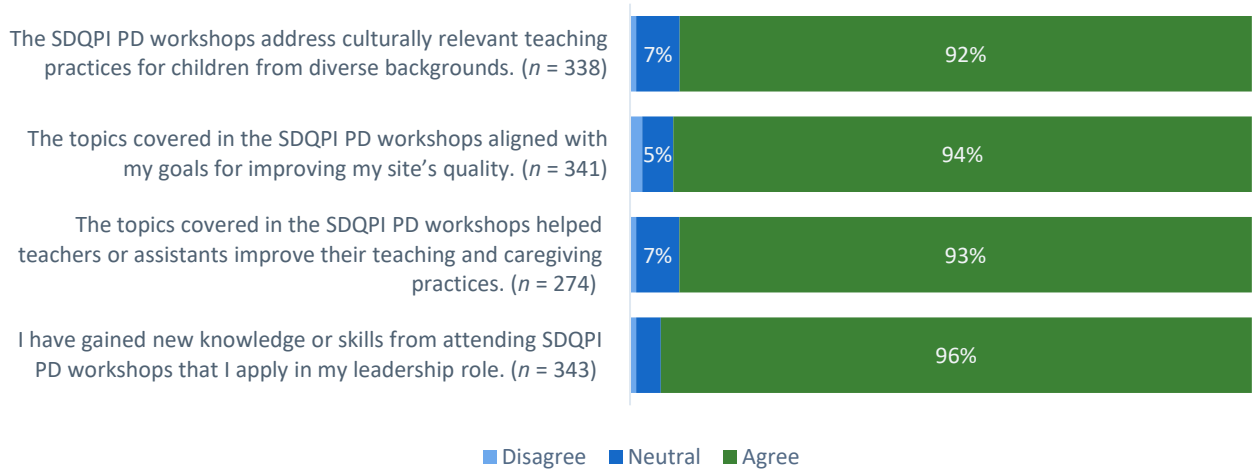
Site leaders reported overwhelmingly positive perceptions of the SDQPI professional development workshops.

Across all items, site leaders expressed overwhelmingly positive perceptions of the PD workshops (see Exhibit 21). Nearly all leaders (93–96%) agreed that the workshops were relevant, useful, and aligned with their goals. For instance, 96% reported gaining new knowledge or skills they apply in their leadership roles, and 94% agreed that PD topics align with their quality improvement goals. One FCC leader shared, "He aprendido tantas cosas: el cómo interactuar con los niños de mejor manera, el interactuar con los padres, la importancia del juego, y cómo ellos aprenden jugando."[1] A center leader noted that PD "helped create a more supportive and stimulating environment, aligning well with my emphasis in creating an inclusive and nurturing classroom." These reflections highlight how SDQPI PD enhances leaders' capacity to support both instructional quality and broader leadership goals.

> *"[PD] workshops and self-paced online courses have been highly effective for staff's professional development. The combination of expert-led instruction and flexibility to learn at a comfortable pace ensures my teachers are supported in mastering the tools and strategies available to them." –Center Site Leader, Jan 2025*

[1] I've learned so many things: how to interact with children better, how to interact with parents, the importance of play, and how children learn through play.

Exhibit 21. Site Leader Perceptions of Professional Development Workshops



***Notes*. Values of less than 5% are not labeled on the graph. Small percentages of site leaders (<1–2%) selected disagree for each item. Four percent of site leaders selected neutral on the last item.**

PD offerings also directly supported improvements in staff practice. Ninety-two percent of site leaders agreed that the workshops helped staff improve their teaching or caregiving practices and supported culturally relevant teaching practices for children from diverse backgrounds. As one center leader shared, "The greatest impact is overall quality improvement of the program. By supporting staff with professional development opportunities, staff are better equipped to teach and provide engaging, quality, educationally appropriate curriculum for children."

Key Takeaways. Survey results indicate that the SDQPI PD workshops were perceived as highly valuable, with ratings highlighting their relevance, practicality, and alignment with site leaders' goals. The workshops supported leaders in fostering inclusive, supportive environments and in strengthening engagement with children, families, and staff. Site leaders also reported improvements in staff practice, particularly in implementing culturally responsive and developmentally appropriate teaching. Overall, the findings suggest the PD offerings are a key contributor to instructional and organizational improvement.

SDQPI Stipends and Incentives

SDQPI stipends continue to motivate site leaders and staff to participate in ongoing professional development.

In Year 5, site leaders rated their perceptions of stipends offered as a support by SDQPI. Over 90% of site leaders agreed that the stipend motivated them and their staff to participate in PD opportunities. In reporting the impact of SDQPI participation on their site, one center site leader responded, "It has helped the staff to continue their education and their training

attendance on topics that they are interested in and/or need support with. Teachers are encouraged to maintain a high-quality education when receiving a stipend."

Over 80% of site leaders agreed that the stipend helped supplement their income and meet their financial needs, and that the process of applying for the stipend is easy to navigate. Another center site leader described how the stipends help provide an additional boost to teachers' salaries, "Participation in SDQPI has enabled our program to increase quality and staff morale by providing stipends and incentives for staff to want to continue their professional education and training. While other benefits are plenty, being able to reward dedicated underpaid teachers with stipends has been a catalyst in increasing quality."

Site leaders also rated their perceptions of incentives offered as a support by SDQPI. Over 90% of site leaders agreed that the learning materials from the SDQPI incentive positively impacted children's engagement and learning. Over 80% of site leaders agreed that they were satisfied with the variety of learning materials available through the SDQPI incentive and that the process for receiving the incentive was easy to navigate. Another FCC site leader highlighted the environmental improvements as direct impacts on the children in their care. She reported, "Behavior! Their behavior is better because I have more materials for them, and they aren't fighting over things and getting bored. I have learned that separating them into smaller groups is ok, and they don't argue because there's enough toys for a few kids at a time."

Key Takeaways. Stipends and incentives offer additional supports to site leaders and staff. The survey data suggested that site leaders continue to appreciate stipends as a tool for motivating staff to attend PD, helping to build staff capacity and support quality improvement efforts. Likewise, the survey data highlighted how access to additional learning materials and resources positively impacts the learning environment, another direct connection to children's experiences in ELC sites.

Quality Improvement Over Time

This section summarizes data related to Evaluation Question 3:
To what extent and in what ways does participation in SDQPI support quality improvement in ELC sites?

This section first provides an overview of perceived impacts of SDQPI on site leader capacity, emphasizing how site leaders' confidence in leading quality improvement evolved through their participation in SDQPI. Then, it explores how site leaders engaged their site staff in CQI efforts. Finally, this section reports on perceived impacts of SDQPI on sites, including observational evidence of quality improvement occurring in publicly funded, center-based classrooms over time, as well as impacts on children and families.

The data presented in this section come from the following sources:

- Quantitative survey data
  - Time 1 site leader survey (November 2021 for cohort 1; February 2023 for cohort 2)
  - Time 2 site leader survey (November 2022 for cohort 1; November 2023 for cohort 2)
  - Time 3 site leader survey (November 2024 for cohorts 1 and 2)
  - Year 5 coach survey (December 2024)
- Qualitative open-ended responses from the Year 5 site leader survey (November 2024)

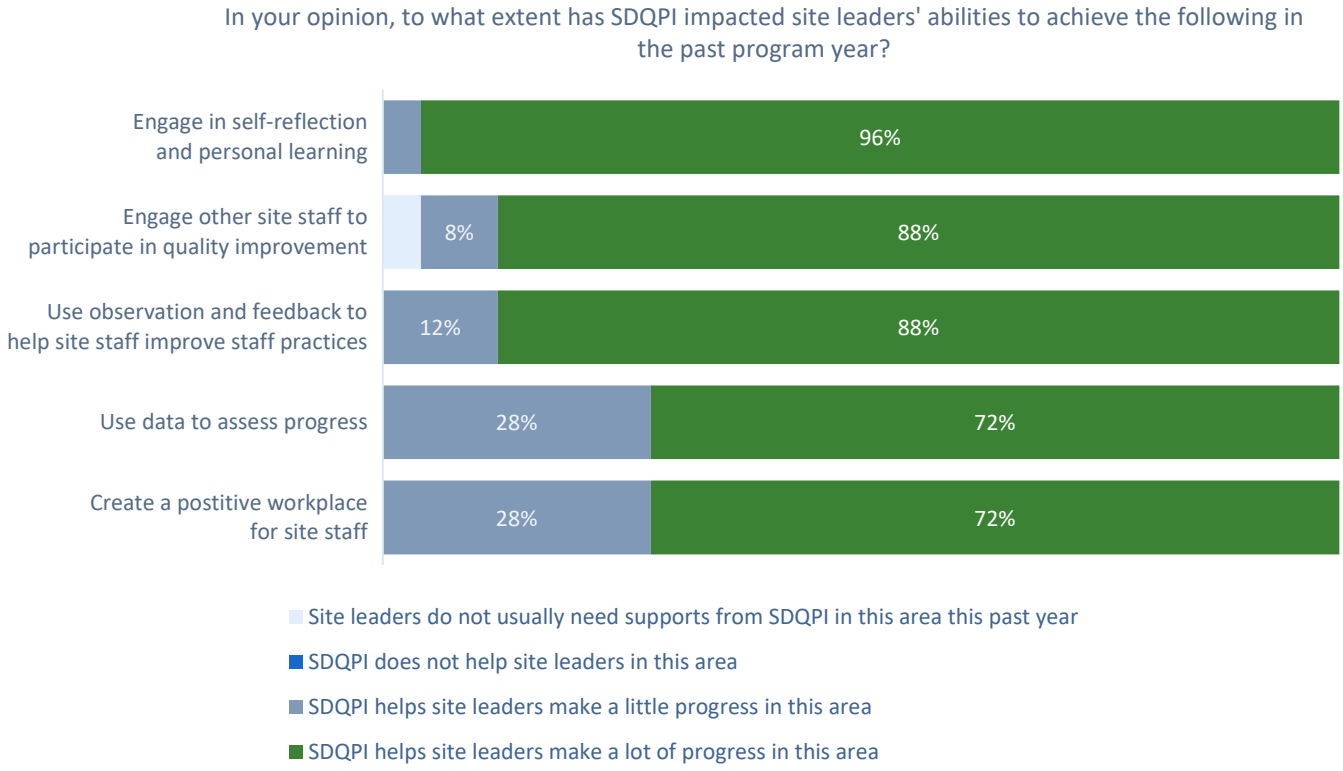
Perceived Impact on Site Leader Capacity

Most coaches believed that SDQPI helps make a lot of progress related to building site leaders' leadership capacity.

In the current model, SDQPI invests heavily in building site leader capacity to lead CQI. Coaches support site leaders in their capacity building through individualized and sometimes group coaching. In the Year 5 coach survey, most coaches reported that their site leaders made a lot of progress engaging in self-reflection and personal learning (96%), engaging their site staff to

participate in quality improvement (88%), and using observation and feedback to help improve site staff practices (88%; see Exhibit 22). Overall, this data highlights how coaches identify the impact of participation in SDQPI on site leaders' capacity.

Exhibit 22. Coaches' Perceived Impact on Site Leader Capacity (*n* = 25)



***Notes*. Values of < 5% are not labeled in the graph. Four percent of coaches selected *SDQPI helps site leaders make a little progress in this area* for the item "Engage in self-reflection and personal learning," and 4% of coaches selected *Site leaders do not usually need supports from SDQPI in this are in the past year* for the item "Engage other site staff to participate in quality improvements."**

Research Highlight: Site Leader Confidence in Leadership

Self-confidence, or an individual's sense of capability, plays an important role in leadership. In early childhood settings, site leaders with higher self-confidence are more likely to take initiative, navigate challenges effectively, and engage in CQI efforts (Douglass, 2019; Glen, 2023). Confidence in one's leadership abilities can also serve as a protective factor against stress and burnout (Park et al., 2020), particularly in settings where leaders have limited

opportunities for feedback and encouragement, such as home-based settings or agency directors who lead multiple center-based sites.

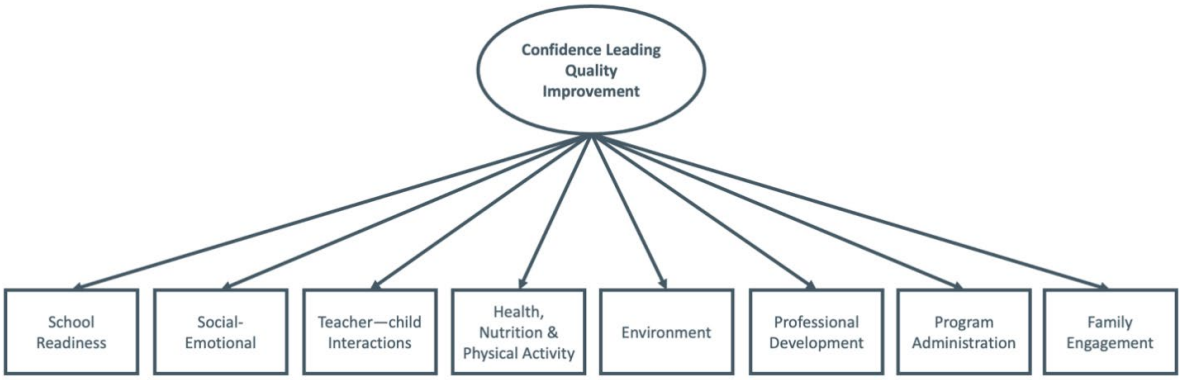
SDQPI may offer an important opportunity to support the development of leadership confidence across a range of early childhood settings. Through individualized coaching, access to professional development, and opportunities for reflection and collaboration with colleagues, SDQPI supports help create the kinds of experiences—such as mastery, encouragement, and peer connection—that contribute to stronger self-confidence (Douglass, 2019; Hwang & Kim, 2025). Although these supports may be particularly critical for FCC and FFN leaders who often work in isolation (Porter & Bromer, 2020), center-based leaders also benefit from structured feedback, time for reflection, and affirmation of their leadership capacity.

Across settings, these components of QRIS may serve as catalysts for building the confidence needed to lead and sustain quality improvement efforts. As such, we explored how SDQPI participation influenced site leaders' confidence in their leadership skills across the SDQPI CQI pathways.

From Year 2 to Year 5, site leaders demonstrated significant growth in their self-reported confidence leading quality improvement.

Site leaders play a key role in driving quality improvement at their sites. As part of the SDQPI evaluation, we examined how site leaders' confidence in leading quality improvement grew over time. Using Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA) we examined if confidence in the eight CQI pathways represented a single confidence construct (see Appendix B for more information). CFA results validated that the confidence measure reliably represented a single underlying construct across multiple time points. Individual pathways of CQI were not analyzed separately, rather, they collectively represented the overall concept of confidence leading quality improvement. Exhibit 23 presents a conceptual model illustrating the CFA model. Then, using a latent growth curve model, we found that site leader confidence in leading quality improvement significantly increased over the course of their participation in SDQPI ($b = 0.91$, $SE = .10$, $p < .001$).

Exhibit 23. Conceptual Model of Confidence Leading Quality Improvement



SDQPI supports were most impactful for site leaders with lower initial confidence leading quality improvement.

Three site leader characteristics significantly predicted differences in initial levels of confidence: years of QRIS experience, education level, and site type. Site leaders with more years of experience participating in QRIS reported significantly higher initial confidence leading quality improvement (b = 0.59, SE = .04, p < .001). This suggests that sustained involvement in QRIS may build leadership confidence over time or that site leaders with more confidence leading quality improvement opted to participate in SDQPI earlier than those with less confidence leading quality improvement. Similarly, site leaders with higher education levels (e.g., bachelor's degree or above) reported significantly higher initial confidence leading quality improvement (b = 0.58, SE = .04, p < .001). Site type also was associated with initial confidence leading quality improvement with center-based site leaders reporting significantly higher initial confidence than FCC and FFN leaders (b = -0.88, SE = .10, p < .001). It is important to note that site leaders who lead home-based sites are historically excluded from QRIS efforts, but SDQPI makes an intentional effort to include diverse site leaders.

Despite differences in initial leadership confidence, site leaders with lower levels of education reported a significantly greater increase in confidence leading quality improvement over time (b = -0.12, SE = .20, p <.001), compared to site leaders with higher levels of education. FCC and FFN leaders reported a significantly greater increase over time (b = 0.17, SE = .04, p < .001), compared to center leaders. Additionally, site leaders with fewer years of QRIS participation, reported a significantly greater increase over time in their confidence leading quality improvement compared to those who had been participating in QRIS for longer periods of time (b = -0.17, SE = .24, p < .001).

Although center site leaders tended to report higher levels of education and more years of QRIS experience, these characteristics were associated with higher initial confidence leading quality improvement, not necessarily more growth. Moreover, FCC/FFN site leaders, those with lower levels of education, and site leaders who had fewer years of QRIS participation experienced the

greatest increases in confidence leading quality improvement over time. These findings suggest that the SDQPI model may be a good fit for site leaders who start with less education or QRIS experience. Further, it may be important to include site leaders who are historically excluded from QRIS efforts, like FCC/FFN leaders. SDQPI intentionally included many site leaders from various settings (e.g., home-based), professional backgrounds, and exposure to QRIS. This strategy appears to have helped reduce gaps in leadership capacity across site leaders.

Notably, growth is not uniform across all site leaders because site leaders who reported lower initial confidence leading quality improvement reported the fastest growth (b = -0.13, SE = .03, p < .001). This finding suggests that participation in SDQPI including coaching, PD, and working on QIP plans may be particularly effective in supporting site leaders with less confidence leading quality improvement. Moreover, because site leaders who had lower initial confidence tended to report participating in QRIS for fewer years, attaining lower levels of education, and leading home-based sites, it is possible that SDQPI helped build these site leaders' confidence leading quality improvement more rapidly than their peers.

Growth in confidence leading quality improvement related to higher workplace well-being.

We used a structural equation model to examine the association between confidence leading quality improvement and site leader workplace well-being. Site leaders with higher initial confidence reported significantly greater workplace well-being (b = 4.76, SE = .01, p < .001). Additionally, site leaders who reported greater growth in confidence leading quality improvement also reported higher workplace well-being (b = 17.68, SE = .03, p < .001). These findings suggest that having a strong foundation of confidence leading quality improvement and building confidence over time may contribute to how positive, purposeful, and effective site leaders feel in their work.

Higher confidence leading quality improvement was associated with positive perceptions of SDQPI's cultural responsiveness.

Site leaders rated their level of agreement with two items related to SDQPI's cultural responsiveness: (1) I feel that my cultural identity is respected and valued by my SDQPI coach and (2) The SDQPI PD workshops address culturally relevant teaching practices for children from diverse backgrounds. Site leaders reporting higher initial confidence had significantly more positive perceptions of SDQPI's cultural responsiveness (b = 1.76, SE = .03, p < .001). Similarly, site leaders who reported greater growth in confidence leading quality improvement also viewed SDQPI as more culturally responsive (b = 5.42, SE = .31, p < .001). Taken together, this correlation may suggest that the cultural responsiveness of SDQPI is related to site leaders' confidence in their leadership. However, because it is a correlation, this data may suggest higher confidence leading quality improvement enhances appreciation of SDQPI's cultural responsiveness. Although the directionality of this association cannot be conclusively

determined, the findings underscore the importance of integrating cultural responsiveness into SDQPI.

Key Takeaways. Site leaders with more years of QRIS participation and higher levels of education reported higher initial confidence to lead quality improvement. At the same time, site leaders with lower levels of education or leading FCC and FFN sites, demonstrated the greatest growth in confidence over time. These patterns suggest that growth in leadership confidence takes time, but SDQPI may help reduce disparities in leadership capacity by providing meaningful support to those who begin with fewer resources.

Leadership confidence also showed a positive association with workplace well-being. Site leaders who began with higher confidence, and especially those who experienced growth over time, reported stronger feelings of connection, accomplishment, and purpose in their work. Additionally, site leaders who reported greater increases in confidence also perceived SDQPI as more culturally responsive, indicating a potential reciprocal relationship between inclusive practices and leadership development.

Overall, the results point to the value of continued investment in SDQPI as a strategy to strengthen leadership capacity, promote equitable supports, and improve the quality of early learning environments.

Limitations. The leadership confidence growth analyses include several limitations to consider when interpreting the findings. First, we limited the sample to site leaders who completed the confidence matrix at two or more timepoints. Although we used robust modeling techniques and full information maximum likelihood (MLR) estimation to account for missing data, the sample may overrepresent site leaders with longer or more consistent participation in SDQPI. Second, all measures relied on site leaders' self-reported perceptions, which may introduce bias related to social desirability. We also cannot confirm whether site leaders received coaching or PD specifically targeted at building confidence across all eight CQI pathways.

Engaging Site Staff in Quality Improvement

SDQPI helped site leaders involve their staff in modifying teaching practices and using instructional leadership strategies to meet quality improvement goals.

As discussed above, coach and site leader data highlighted different ways SDQPI builds the capacity and confidence of site leaders. The current MTSS approach requires that site leaders effectively engage their site staff, to make meaningful quality improvements that will serve children and families.

First and foremost, most site leaders reported involving their staff in activities connected to their site's QIP goals. Specifically, all center site leaders and 95 % of FCC/FFN leaders reported

that they *sometimes* or *often* focused on using classroom activities and teaching practices to support their QIP goals. These data highlight how site leaders support their staff to implement practices that will make progress toward their quality improvement goals.

High percentages of site leaders also reported regularly using instructional leadership strategies. Among center site leaders, over 80 percent reported they observed staff to understand how they support children's learning (89%), shared information about teaching practices (85%), or modeled instructional strategies (81%) on a weekly or monthly basis. Most FCC/FFN leaders also reported they observed assistants to understand how they support children's learning (84%), shared information about teaching practices (86%), or modeled instructional strategies (85%) on a weekly or monthly basis. The widespread use of these strategies may indicate that SDQPI supports, including coaching, helped site leaders feel more prepared to guide and support site staff in aligning their teaching practices with their QIP goals.

Taken together, these data help understand the linkage between building site leader capacity and impacting children and families, by way of strengthening the teaching practices of the caregiving staff who work in centers, FCCs, and FFN homes. The SDQPI supports of coaching site leaders, group coaching with site leaders and staff, and professional development workshops for site leaders and staff likely contribute to this pathway of site leaders engaging site staff in quality improvement.

Perceived Impact on Center-Based Sites

Center-based site leaders and coaches agreed that participation in SDQPI impacts teacher-child relationships and interactions, as well as has a meaningful impact on children's development and learning.

In Year 5, center-based site leaders reported on the most significant areas of impact on their sites as a result of their participation in SDQPI. Exhibit 24 displays the percentage of center-based site leaders who identified each area of impact from a *select all that apply* quantitative survey item, as well as illustrative quotes from open-ended survey responses. A total of 120 center site leaders responded to the quantitative item, and 89 center site leaders answered the open-ended questions.

Overall, center-based site leaders most frequently reported the following areas of impact from participating in SDQPI: teacher-child interactions (74%), setting up the learning environment (70%), and children's development and learning (68%). It is important to note that the teacher–child interactions area of impact is highly related to the classroom observation explored in the next section (i.e., CLASS measures the quality of teacher–child interactions). Business practices and program policies (18%) was the least frequently reported area of significant improvement by center site leaders. Likewise, coaches (n = 17) reported moderate to significant impact for center site leaders in the areas of child development and learning (100%), quality of adult–child relationships (100%), curriculum planning (94%), and conducting observations or assessments

(94%). Coaches also rated the impact on business practices as the lowest area of impact—47% of coaches reported no to minimal impact in this area.

Exhibit 24. Impact of SDQPI on Center-Based Sites (*n* = 120)

Area of Impact	%	Examples from Open-Ended Survey Responses
Teacher–child relationships and interactions	74%	"The quality of the interactions teachers [are] having with the children in their care has greatly improved; it has a purpose and meaning."
Setting up the learning environment	70%	"The preschool is more organized, and it helps the children to utilize the learning areas properly and enjoy them every day."
Children's development and learning	68%	"SDQPI significantly benefits our children and families by providing high-quality early childhood education. SDQPI fosters improved cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development in children, laying a strong foundation for future academic and life success. Additionally, it empowers families with the tools and knowledge to make informed decisions about accessing quality early learning opportunities, supporting their child's growth and long-term well-being."
Planning learning experiences for young children, curriculum or lesson planning	63%	"Children and families have benefitted by having their teachers skilled in social emotional literacy, age-appropriate activities, language and literacy activities, and family engagement activities. They are also continuing to benefit as they become the models in kindergarten and on up in elementary school, etc."
Conducting observation or assessment	60%	"Staff have improved their abilities to make creative observations, are more equipped, and gained more confidence in doing what they needed to do."
Family support and partnerships	58%	"For families, SDQPI has led to stronger partnerships with educators and a better understanding of their child's development. It has also provided families with resources and support to engage more effectively in their

		child's education. This aligns with our goal of building strong relationships and creating a supportive environment, ultimately helping children become confident, compassionate, and lifelong learners."
Providing individualized supports for children, such as culturally responsive or inclusive practices	53%	"Teachers have improved in using the different approaches that will enhance the children in improving their language and communication skills especially for the non-verbal and multilingual learners. By reaching our QIP Goal, there is evidence of good relationship with the families. By learning and understanding the different culture and language of every family there is a positive result."
Business practices and program policies	18%	"When the director and staff have a better understanding of program requirements, it allows us to reflect on and improve our practices. This is especially important when there are updates/changes, such as CLASS and PTKLF. Coaching and on-site PD provided helps to refine our practice, reflect on and improve our program."

***Notes*. The first two columns display the frequencies from the *select all that apply* survey item, "Which of the following areas have you or the teachers in your center made significant improvements on due to your participation in SDQPI?" The third column offers an illustrative quote from the open-ended survey items: "What is the greatest impact that participating in SDQPI has had on children and families at your site or program?" or "What is the greatest impact that participating in SDQPI has had on your site or program?"**

CSPP center-based sites showed significantly higher classroom quality from early to later SDQPI implementation.

As a way of exploring quality improvement over time, our evaluation team analyzed the change in CSPP centers' CLASS scores from early to later implementation of SDQPI. The CLASS scores provide a valuable insight into the quality of teacher–child interactions, which represents one of the quality improvement pathways site leaders can focus on for their QIP goal.

Using linear mixed-effects models, we explored change over time in CSPP centers' ratings for CLASS Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support. We controlled for the following site characteristics: teacher–child ratio, percentage of children who are Dual Language Learners (DLLs), percentage of children with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), and how long the site was enrolled in QRIS.

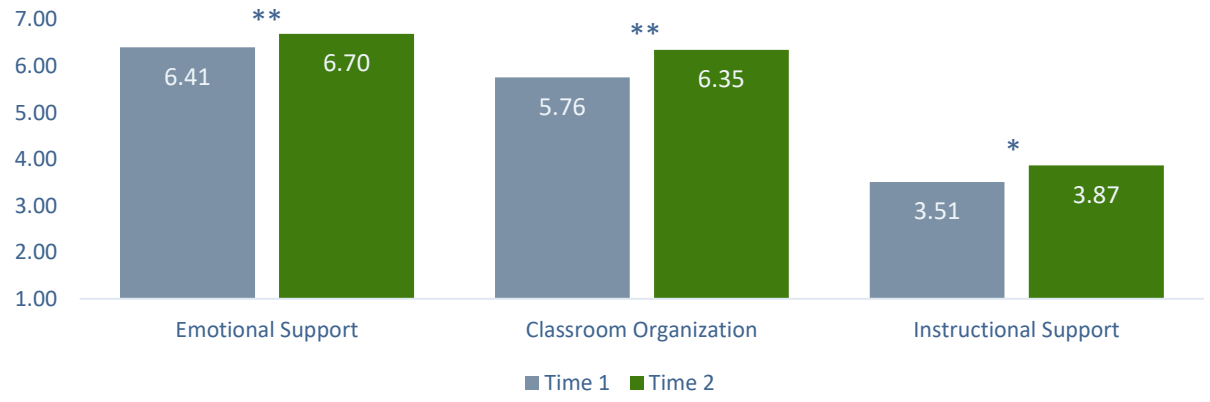
From early implementation (Time 1: 2020–2021) to later implementation (Time 2: 2023–2024), significant improvements were observed across all CLASS domains (see Exhibit 25). Emotional Support ratings significantly increased ($p < .001$), indicating that teachers were increasingly effective in creating a supportive classroom environment. Classroom Organization ratings

significantly increased (p <.001), reflecting enhanced teacher management of classroom routines and instructional activities. Instructional Support ratings also significantly increased (p < .01), reflecting increased quality of how teachers scaffolded children's learning. It is worth noting that we do not know if these sites focused their QIP goal on teacher–child interactions, so we do not know if the site leaders received coaching specifically about how to increase the classroom quality through teacher–child interactions. Therefore, CSPP sites classroom quality increased over time regardless of what QIP goals they identified.

From the various site characteristics, years of experience participating in QRIS and teacher–child ratio played a key role in classroom quality. At Time 2, the SDQPI Common Data File indicated that the rated CSPP centers had been participating in QRIS between 5–12 years. Sites with longer participation in QRIS demonstrated significantly higher Classroom Organization ratings compared to those who participated for fewer years (p < .05).

Moreover, teacher–child ratio was related to both Classroom Organization and Instructional Support. Sites with lower teacher–child ratios demonstrated a higher Time 2 score in Classroom Organization (p <.05) and Instructional Support (p <.05), accounting for their Time 1 score and other site characteristics. This may indicate that classrooms with fewer children per teacher may be able to more effectively manage classroom routines and behavior, build on children's existing knowledge, and scaffold children's learning (Browne et al., 2017). The proportion of children at the site who had an IEP or were DLL was not associated with Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, or Instructional Support scores.

Exhibit 25. CLASS Pre-K Domain Averages Over Time (n = 110)



Note. ****p < .01, ** p < .001***

How does participation in SDQPI support children's development and learning in center-based sites?

Most (68%) center site leaders identified children's development and learning as an area where they and the teachers in their center made significant improvements on due to participation in SDQPI (see Exhibit 26). Of these site leaders, nearly all (94%) reported improvements related to children's social-emotional development. Given that the QIP has a QCC Pathway focused exclusively on social-emotional development, it makes sense that this was the most frequently selected area where children's development was impacted. High percentages of site leaders identified improvements made in children's language and literacy development (75%) and cognitive development (67%). Around half of site leaders shared improvements in children's physical development (51%) and mathematical and scientific reasoning (46%).

Additionally, 53% of center site leaders identified providing individualized supports for children, as an area where they and the teachers in their center made significant improvements on due to participation in SDQPI. Specifically, most identified environment and practices to support children with disabilities or other special needs (73%) or practices to support children who are multilingual learners (63%). Around half also cited learning opportunities that build on the racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds of children (55%) and trauma-informed practices (53%).

Exhibit 26. Coaches' Perceived Impact of SDQPI on Centers and FCCs

Impact	Center *n* = 17 Mean (*SD*)	FCC *n* = 21 Mean (*SD*)
Child development and learning	3.65 (0.49)	3.71 (0.46)
Quality of adult-child relationships and interactions in ECE settings	3.47 (0.51)	3.62 (0.59)
Curriculum planning, lesson planning, or planning learning experiences	3.35 (0.61)	3.29 (0.64)
Conducting observations or assessment	3.35 (0.61)	2.76 (0.89)
Providing individualized supports for children	3.29 (0.69)	3.48 (0.81)
Setting up the learning environment	3.24 (0.75)	3.81 (0.40)
Family support and partnerships	3.06 (0.83)	3.33 (0.73)

Impact	Center *n* = 17 Mean (*SD*)	FCC *n* = 21 Mean (*SD*)
Business practices and program policies	2.71 (.92	2.90 (.83)

Perceived Impact on FCC/FFN Sites

FCC/FFN site leaders and coaches agree that SDQPI impacts their learning environments and children's development and learning.

Exhibit 27 displays the frequencies and illustrative quotes for each area of impact reported by FCC/FFN site leaders. A total of 234 FCC/FFN site leaders responded to the quantitative survey item, and 176 FCC and FFN site leaders answered the open-ended questions.

Overall, FCC/FFN site leaders most frequently reported the following areas of impact from participating in SDQPI: setting up the learning environment (84%), children's development and learning (73%), and planning learning experiences (73%). Likewise, coaches of FCC site leaders (*n* = 21) reported moderate to significant impact in the following areas: setting up the learning environment (100%), child development and learning (100%), and quality of adult–child relationships and interactions (96%). Coaches of FFN site leaders (*n* = 6) reported moderate to significant impact in similar areas: child development and learning (100%), setting up the learning environment (100%), quality of adult–child relationship and interactions (100%), and family support and partnerships (100%).

Coaches reported no to minimal impact on FCC/FFN site leaders in conducting observations (34%) and business practices and policies (29%). FFN coaches reported minimal impact on conducting observations (17%) and were not asked about business practices and policies for this type of provider.

Exhibit 27. Impact of SDQPI on FCC/FFN Sites (*n* = 234)

Area of Impact	%	Examples from Open-Ended Survey Responses
Setting up the learning environment	84%	"It has improved the way my room is set up and the flow of the room. They have helped me make my environment more inclusive for all age groups."
Children's development and learning	73%	"The greatest impact on our children and families at my site has been the improvement in children's readiness and overall development

Area of Impact	%	Examples from Open-Ended Survey Responses
		through enhanced teaching practices and personalized learning experiences. Families benefit by being more engaged in their children's education, receiving regular updates on their progress and participating in a supportive community that values their input and involvement in the learning process."
Planning learning experiences for young children or lesson planning	73%	"Helped us make and stay on track with improving the quality of our social emotional curriculum and teacher- child interactions."
Adult–child relationships and interactions	67%	**"**The children feel connected to the teachers more so they can be more confident and emotionally safe at school. The parents notice the children have learned lots of words related to social emotional learning (like names of emotions, and conflict resolution ideas)."
Family support and partnerships	63%	"Mayor tranquilidad para las familias los padres se sienten mas seguros al saber que nuestro programa cumple con los estandares de calidad establecido por el programa de SDQPI. Esto genera confianza y puede reducir el estres en las familias sabiendo que sus hijos estan en un entorno seguro y que favorece el desarrollo en los ninos."[2]
Providing individualized supports for children	62%	"Offering an environment that is conducive to learning and that promotes learning in the child's first language"
Conducting observation or assessment	53%	"Con las evaluaciones y observaciones he podido referir a padres a los primero 5 para evalucaiones profesionales a los ninos y estar seguros de empezar tempranamente con algun programa si es necesario."[3]
Business practices and program policies	37%	"Everything from materials to business practices to daily routines, etc."

Note. **The first two columns display the frequencies from the *select all that apply* survey item, "Which of the following areas have you or the assistants in your FCC/FFN home made significant improvements on due to your participation in SDQPI?" The third column offers an illustrative quote from the open-ended survey items: "What is the greatest impact that participating in SDQPI has had on children and families at your site or program?" or "What is the greatest impact that participating in SDQPI has had on your site or program?"**

[2] "Greater peace of mind for families. Parents feel more secure to know that our program meets quality standards established by SDQPI. This garners confidence and can reduce stress for families as they know their children are in a safe place that prioritizes children's development."

[3] "With evaluations and observations, I have been able to refer parents to First 5 for professional evaluations for their children and be sure to start a program early if it's necessary."

How does participation in SDQPI support children's development and learning in FCC and FFN sites?

Most (73%) FCC and FFN site leaders identified children's development and learning as an area where they and their assistants made significant improvements on due to their participation in SDQPI. The site leaders who selected this area went on to specify the significant improvements made towards children's development and learning. Nearly all (96%) of these site leaders identified improvements made in children's social-emotional development. Given that the QIP has a QCC Pathway focused exclusively on social-emotional development, it makes sense that this was the most frequently selected area where children's development was impacted. High percentages of site leaders identified improvements made in children's cognitive development (80%), children's language and literacy development (77%) and physical development (75%). Over half of FCC and FFN site leaders identified improvements in mathematical and scientific reasoning (56%).

Additionally, 62% of FCC and FFN site leaders identified providing individualized supports for children, such as culturally responsive and inclusive practices as an area where they and their assistants made significant improvements on due to their participation in SDQPI. The site leaders who selected this area went on to specify the significant improvements made toward providing individualized supports for children. Most identified practices to support children who are multilingual learners (76%), learning opportunities that build on the racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds of children (75%), and environment and practices to support children with disabilities or other special needs (66%). Over half identified trauma-informed practices (57%), and few identified "other" improvements (3%) including practices to support social-emotional challenges and sharing other culture's traditions among others.

Key Takeaways. Taken together, site leader and coach data indicated that SDQPI had the greatest impact on adult–child interactions, children's development and learning, setting up the learning environment, and curriculum planning. The current MTSS approach of engaging site leaders requires that quality improvement efforts engage site staff to have a direct impact on children's learning environments and subsequently their development and learning. Based on both site leader and coach reports, the impact of SDQPI on sites' business practices and policies was less frequently noted.

Well-being and Future Supports

This section summarizes both coaches' and site leaders' workplace well-being and the supports needed to sustain their roles within SDQPI. First, it begins with an overview of coaches' well-being across key domains, such as relationships, meaning, positive emotions, and accomplishment. The section then highlights coaches' perceptions of their work environment, workload, and preferred professional learning (PL) supports, including variations by organizational affiliation and years of coaching experience. Next, this section presents findings related to site leaders' well-being, including primary sources of stress and how these vary by site type. The section also reviews the additional supports site leaders identify as necessary to sustain quality improvement, their preferred frequency for future coaching, and the PD topics where they feel further support is needed.

The data presented in this section come from the following sources:

- Quantitative survey items from:
  - Year 5 site leader survey (November 2024 for cohorts 1 and 2)
  - Year 5 coach survey (December 2024)
- Qualitative data include:
  - Open-ended responses from the Year 5 site leader survey.

Coach Well-Being and Future Supports

Coaches reported high levels of professional well-being, with positive perceptions of collaboration, meaning, and accomplishment in their roles.

Understanding coaches' professional well-being offers valuable insight into how they may approach their coaching roles, particularly in terms of the positivity, relationships, and sense of purpose they bring to their work (see Research Highlight box on pg.55 for more on the importance of supporting coach and site leader well-being). Survey results showed that coaches reported high to very high levels of professional well-being across the four measured domains of the PERMA Workplace Profiler, which uses a 0 to 10 scale to assess Positive Emotion, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment.

According to the measure's scoring guidance (Kern, n.d.), ratings of 9 or above indicate very high functioning, while scores from 8.0 to 8.9 reflect high functioning (see

https://www.peggykern.org/questionnaires.html).[4] Among these workplace well-being domains, Relationships received the highest average ratings, with coaches indicating strong support from colleagues (*M* = 9.69) and satisfaction with professional relationships (*M* = 9.54). Coaches also reported high levels of meaning in their work (*M* = 9.15). Positive emotion (*M* = 8.42) and Accomplishment (*M* = 8.42) were slightly lower, though still high, suggesting that coaches often feel joyful and capable in managing their work responsibilities.

These findings align with coaches' positive perceptions of their roles and experiences in SDQPI. On a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), nearly all coaches (97%) agreed that the coaching team regularly shares ideas and best practices with one another (*M* = 4.58) and 88% agreed that SDQPI leadership communicates a clear vision for how coaching and PD support quality improvement (*M* = 4.27). Most coaches (73%) also agreed that their caseload of sites was manageable (*M* = 3.92), though 23% were neutral and 4% disagreed, indicating some variation in coaches' ability to manage their workloads.

Although overall perceptions were positive, some data highlight areas that may benefit from continued support. For example, coaches' feelings of burnout or fatigue due to their responsibilities were generally low (*M* = 2.62). However, 46% of coaches selected neutral, and 15% expressed agreement in often feeling burnout or fatigue. These findings suggest that a portion of the coaching team may experience some level of burnout in their role.

Finally, most coaches (73%) disagreed with the statement that it is hard to work with site leaders who have limited background in early childhood or are new to SDQPI (*M* = 2.00), demonstrating their confidence in supporting less experienced site leaders. However, 15% responded neutrally and 12% agreed, indicating that a small subset of coaches may encounter some challenges in this area.

Key Takeaways. Overall, the data suggested that coaches are thriving across multiple domains of workplace well-being, particularly in terms of their relationships with colleagues and the sense of meaning they derive from their work. Coaches perceived the SDQPI coaching environment as collaborative and supportive. While most coaches felt confident supporting site leaders who are new to SDQPI or have limited early childhood experience, a small subset reported some difficulty. This may be an area where targeted support could be beneficial, alongside helping coaches in managing their workloads and responsibilities to help mitigate burnout and fatigue.

Coaches found peer-based, practice-focused, and tailored supports to be effective in building their coaching capacity.

When asked about the types of PL most effective for building their capacity to facilitate coaching, coaches reported a strong preference for more relational, dynamic forms of learning over passive approaches. Most notably, 81% of coaches identified small group discussions with

[4] Kern, M. L. (n.d.). *PERMA Profiler and Workplace Wellbeing Measures*. Retrieved from https://www.peggykern.org/questionnaires.html

other SDQPI coaches as especially effective (see Exhibit 28). These peer-based interactions offer opportunities to exchange ideas, reflect collaboratively, and build a shared understanding of practice. This aligns with the data point above where 97% of coaches agreed that the SDQPI coaching team regularly shares ideas and best practices with one another, highlighting the value of existing collaborative spaces like the QLIT meetings.

The next most frequently selected type of effective PL was access to planning tools and templates, identified as effective by 65% of coaches. Supervisor support also emerged as an effective form of PL, with 62% of coaches identifying individual discussions with SDQPI supervisors as effective. Likewise, 62% reported that attending a team training virtually was an effective form of PL, emphasizing the value of collaborative learning environments in virtual settings. In contrast, more passive learning formats were less frequently viewed as effective. Fewer than half of all coaches rated participating in self-paced online learning (46%) or reading articles and other resources (42%) as effective strategies for building coaching capacity.

Exhibit 28. Types of Effective Professional Learning for SDQPI Coaches (*n* = 26)

Coaches' preferences for effective professional learning varied by their coach affiliation and previous years of coaching experience.

Although several forms of PL were broadly valued by SDQPI coaches, preferences often varied based on coaches' organizational affiliation and years of coaching experience. The following section highlights distinct patterns that emerged when examining responses by these two characteristics, offering insights into how PL supports can be better tailored to meet the diverse needs of the coaching team.

Differences by Coach Affiliation

Findings revealed notable differences in perceived effectiveness of PL supports based on coaches' organizational affiliation. Small group discussions with other SDQPI coaches were broadly valued, however, they were rated as especially effective by SDCOE coaches (89%) compared to YMCA coaches (63%). Similarly, individual discussions with SDQPI supervisors were more frequently identified as valuable by SDCOE coaches (72%) than by YMCA coaches (38%), suggesting a greater perceived benefit from one-on-one supervisor support among SDCOE coaches.

YMCA coaches, on the other hand, placed greater value on virtual team trainings and access to planning templates and tools. For example, 88% of YMCA coaches identified both virtual trainings and planning tools as effective, compared to 50% and 56% of SDCOE coaches, respectively. Shadowing another coach and watching video examples of coaching were viewed similarly across affiliations, with 63% of YMCA coaches and 50% of SDCOE coaches rating these strategies as effective. This reflects the value coaches place on peer-based learning, where observing colleagues in action offers practical insights that are directly applicable to their own coaching practice.

Differences by Coaching Experience

Preferences for type of PL also varied by coaching experience. Coaches with fewer years of experience (particularly 0–2 years) were more likely to value structured and guided supports. For example, 86% of coaches with 0–2 years of experience rated virtual team trainings as effective, compared to just 29% of those with 5 or more years. Similarly, newer coaches were more likely to find planning tools useful (86%), compared to only 29% of those with 5+ years of experience.

Coaches early in their careers also placed higher value on observational and expert-led formats: 71% of coaches with 0–2 years of experience found shadowing more experienced coaches effective (versus 14% of those with 5+ years), and 86% selected having external trainers or consultants provide more training opportunities (versus 29% of those with 5+ years). These findings are not surprising as observing other experienced coaches may be more relevant for coaches in the early stages of their professional experience, and expert-led learning opportunities may be particularly helpful for coaches who are still building foundational

coaching skills. Supervisor support, however, showed a different pattern, with the highest ratings among coaches with 3–5 years of experience (82%), compared to 29% of those with 0–2 years.

These trends suggest that newer coaches benefit most from structured and scaffolded learning opportunities, while more experienced coaches may draw on prior experience and supervisor support to guide their ongoing development. Interestingly, one area of alignment across groups was having another coach or supervisor observe and provide feedback—61% of SDCOE coaches, 50% of YMCA coaches, and 55–57% across experience levels identified this approach as valuable.

Key Takeaways. Coaches consistently identified peer-based and practice-focused supports as the most effective for building their coaching capacity. Small group discussions with other SDQPI coaches were the most valued, indicating a strong preference for collaborative spaces to exchange ideas and reflect on practice. Existing structures like the QLIT meetings serve as important opportunities to support this type of learning. This was followed by access to planning tools and templates and engaging in individual discussions with supervisors. Overall, coaches preferred interactive forms of PL over more passive formats like self-paced online learning or reading articles.

Differences in preferences emerged based on coach affiliation and coaching experience. SDCOE coaches were more likely to find peer discussions and supervisor support as effective, while YMCA coaches placed greater emphasis on virtual trainings and planning tools. Newer coaches (those with less than 2 years of experience) favored structured supports such as shadowing other coaches, learning from external consultants, and attending virtual trainings. These formats were selected less frequently by more experienced coaches (5 or more years).

Research Highlight: Site Leader Well-being

Workplace well-being is foundational to sustainable quality improvement in early learning settings. For site leaders, well-being influences site climate, staff morale, and overall quality of care (Cramer et al., 2023). Leaders influence workplace dynamics through the emotional climate they establish, the relationships they build, and the support they offer their teams, making leadership support a key driver of staff well-being (Cramer et al., 2023). Strong leadership support has been linked to higher levels of teacher retention and job satisfaction, which contribute to a thriving and sustainable ECE workforce. Moreover, effective leadership requires that site leaders cultivate their own leadership skills, self-confidence, and self-efficacy to meaningfully engage with staff and promote instructional quality (Kirby et al., 2021).

Supporting coach well-being is equally critical. Coaches play a central role in quality improvement by guiding, encouraging, and modeling effective practices for site leaders. Their

own sense of well-being can shape how they build relationships, navigate challenges, and maintain energy over time. While research on ECE coach well-being remains limited, studies on parallel roles—such as mentors and consultants—highlight the importance of emotional support, reflective practice, and role clarity in sustaining effective, relationship-based professional support (ZERO TO THREE, 2013).

By examining both coaches' and site leaders' well-being, SDQPI aims to better understand the conditions that foster leadership capacity, workforce retention, and the ability to carry out long-term quality improvement efforts across diverse early learning settings.

Site Leader Well-Being, Stressors, and Future Supports

Site leaders reported high levels of well-being, particularly in meaning, accomplishment, and relationships, which are key factors in fostering a positive site climate.

Overall, site leaders' survey responses reflected high to very high levels of well-being across four key dimensions: positive emotion, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. On a scale from 0 to 10, average ratings ranged from 8.56 to 9.31. The highest ratings were in Meaning (M = 9.31), indicating that leaders' view their work as highly meaningful and purposeful. Leaders also reported high levels of Positive Emotion (M = 8.68), Accomplishment (M = 8.63), and Relationships (M = 8.56), suggesting that they experience joy at work, feel a sense of success in their roles, and are supported and satisfied with their professional relationships.

Site leaders reported job stressors related to staff management, administrative demands, and caring for children with varying needs, with variation by site type.

Despite site leaders reporting high levels of workplace well-being, they also described a range of stressors that highlight areas where additional support may be needed. Exhibit 29 summarizes the primary job-related stressors identified by 248 site leaders (69% of those who completed the Year 5 survey). Open-ended responses were grouped into five key categories: (1) program management and business administration, (2) caring for and teaching children with varying needs, (3) managing staff, (4) relationships and communication with families, and (5) site leader leadership and well-being.

Exhibit 29. Site Leaders' Self-reported Job Stressors by Site Type

Job Stressor Category	Sub-category	Center Leaders	FCC/FFN Leaders
Program Management and Business Administration	• Time constraints • Meeting program requirements • Finances • Administrative duties	26%	17%
Caring for and Teaching Children	• Managing children's behavior • Working with multiple age groups • Caring for infants and toddlers	8%	25%
Managing Staff	• Staff shortages • Supervising or leading staff • Communication challenges	35%	2%
Relationships and Communication with Families	• Lack of parental engagement • Difficulty in effective communication, particularly in child referrals	10%	10%
Leadership and Personal Well-being	• Juggling multiple roles • Burnout • Time management • Balancing PD with daily responsibilities	7%	10%

The most frequently reported stressor among FCC/FFN site leaders (25%) was caring for or teaching children with varying needs. Specifically, site leaders noted challenges such as managing children's behavior, working with multiple age groups, and caring for infants and toddlers. Leadership and well-being also emerged as a stressor that is more common for FCC/FFN site leaders (10%). Stressors in this category included juggling multiple roles, burnout, time management, and balancing PD with daily responsibilities.

For center-based site leaders, managing staff was the most frequently cited stressor (35%), with specific concerns around staff shortages (20%), supervision (11%), and communication (7%). In contrast, only 2% of FCC/FFN site leaders identified staff management as a primary stressor, although some noted difficulties when assistants were unavailable.

Program management and business administration was another major area of stress for both groups, though the specific challenges varied by setting. Among center-based site leaders

(26%), these stressors often related to time constraints and meeting program requirements. For FCC/FFN site leaders (17%), these stressors included those related to financial management and administrative duties.

Finally, 10% of both FCC/FFN and center-based leaders reported stressors related to relationships and communication with families. Site leaders noted challenges such as limited parental engagement and difficulties maintaining effective communication. Some also expressed concerns about navigating conversations with families regarding child referrals.

Key Takeaways. High PERMA scores suggest that although site leaders are thriving in many areas of workplace well-being, including their positive emotions, strong sense of meaning, accomplishment, and supportive professional relationships, they also face distinct stressors related to their roles. These challenges include managing staff (particularly for center-based leaders), caring for children with varying needs (especially among FCC/FFN leaders), and navigating program administration and communication with families. Leadership-related challenges such as burnout, time management, and balancing multiple responsibilities also emerged as a significant source of stress, highlighting the need for ongoing targeted supports to sustain leaders' well-being and help them manage the complex demands of their roles.

Site leaders and coaches identified a range of additional supports needed to sustain quality improvement, with notable differences by site type.

Site leaders identified a range of supports needed to sustain their quality improvement efforts in the future. Center-based leaders most frequently identified a need for additional training and coaching for their site staff (66% and 58%, respectively), underscoring a strong emphasis on building staff capacity. In contrast, fewer center leaders selected training or coaching for themselves (26% and 13%, respectively), suggesting that PD efforts for center leaders may be more focused on supporting others than on their own growth. This emphasis on staff support also aligns with coach perspectives where 73% of coaches identified ongoing coaching for site staff as a critical factor for sustaining quality improvements. The strong focus on staff development from both groups reflects the central role that site leaders play in managing staff, which was also reported as the most common stressor among center-based leaders, including challenges with staff shortages, supervision, and communication.

FCC and FFN leaders, on the other hand, placed greater emphasis on concrete supports and continued PD for themselves, with 77% selecting materials and equipment for their sites, 52% selecting more training for themselves, and 31% selecting more coaching for themselves. In contrast, only 28% identified training for site staff (if they had any) and 18% identified coaching

for staff as additional supports needed, which aligns with their reported stressors where only 2% cited staff management as a significant stressor.

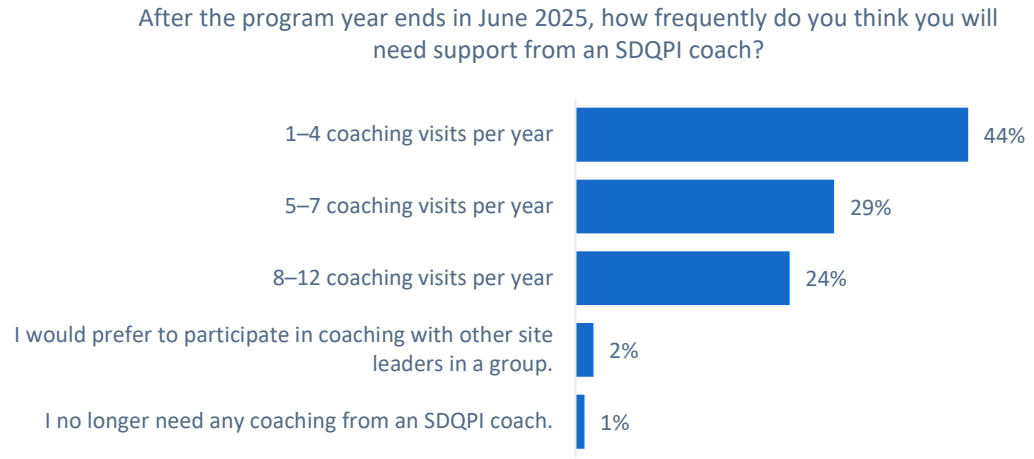
Notably, both groups expressed interest in peer-based learning, with 38% of center leaders and 33% of FCC/FFN leaders selecting group coaching with others who share similar experiences. This aligns with coach perspectives where 65% identified group coaching for peer learning as an important support for sustaining quality improvement. These findings underscore the value of peer learning models across settings and roles, suggesting that shared experience and collaboration can serve as a meaningful lever for professional growth.

From the coach perspective, most believed that the current set of SDQPI supports serve as critical factors in ensuring the sustainability of sites' quality improvement efforts. Most coaches selected provision of stipends (92%), ongoing coaching for site leaders (92%), provision of PD workshops (92%), and provision of incentives (88%) as critical for sustainability. A significant portion also highlighted the importance of ongoing use of data to support quality improvement (85%).

Future Coaching Needs and Preferences

Most site leaders (86%) indicated a desire for ongoing coaching support beyond the end of the current SDQPI program year in June 2025 (see Exhibit 29). Among those who expressed this need, preferences for future coaching varied, with 44% preferring 1–4 individual coaching visits per year, 29% preferring 5–7 visits, and 24% desiring 8–12 visits annually. Very few respondents indicated a preference for group coaching (2%) or reported no need for further coaching (1%). These results reflect a continued interest in individualized coaching and suggest that ongoing support remains important for maintaining site leaders' progress and confidence in leading quality improvement efforts at their sites.

Exhibit 29. Desired Frequency of Future Coaching (*n* = 288)



Note. **Site leaders who indicated that they had a need for future coaching after SDQPI ends received this item.**

Professional Development Topics for Site Leaders

In both the coach and site leader surveys, we asked about a range of areas where site leaders may need ongoing PD. Overall, coaches more frequently selected areas of need than site leaders. However, there was broad agreement across both groups on several core priorities, including setting up the learning environment, instructional planning, and supporting children's social-emotional development. Differences between site leader and coach reports may reflect coaches' broader systems-level perspective and their exposure to a wider range of site-level challenges across their caseloads. This section highlights select areas where there was either strong alignment between groups or notable differences between site types.

Coaches and site leaders across site types identified needs in learning environment setup and instructional planning.

Site leaders identified several instructional areas where additional PD is needed, particularly in setting up the learning environment and planning learning experiences for children. Over half of FCC/FFN leaders (51–52%) identified these areas for further support. This aligns with coach feedback where 100% of coaches working with FFN providers and 86% working with FCCs identified the learning environment as an ongoing area of need. Similar trends emerged around curriculum planning and designing learning experiences, with 86% of FCC coaches and 83% of FFN coaches selecting this area of need. Coaches reinforced this during the February 2025 QLIT discussion, noting that after Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale (FCCERS) sessions were discontinued, a gap emerged in coaching sessions on how to effectively set up the learning environment, particularly for home-based sites. Relatedly, caring for and teaching children with varying needs was one of the most frequently cited stressors among FCC/FFN site leaders (25%), suggesting that the complexity of serving children across developmental stages contributes to the demand for more targeted support in these areas.

Center-based leaders were somewhat less likely to identify these specific stressors (8%), though a sizable portion (47%) still identified instructional planning as an area where more support is needed. Likewise, 61% of coaches working with center-based sites identified setting up the learning environment as an ongoing need, and the same percentage selected curriculum planning and designing learning experiences. These findings show strong alignment between site leaders and coaches in prioritizing instructional planning and environment setup as key areas for ongoing PD support, with distinct considerations across settings.

Supporting children's social-emotional development remains a critical area of need across program types.

Both site leaders and coaches recognized the importance of supporting children's social-emotional development as an area for further support, which consistently ranked as a top PD priority across roles. Given that one of the QCC CQI Pathways focuses exclusively on

social-emotional development, both site leaders and coaches may have more awareness around the importance and their particular site needs related to this topic.

Among site leaders, 53% of center-based leaders and 47% of FCC/FFN leaders selected this area as a priority—making it one of the most frequently cited PD needs. Additionally, 47% of center leaders and 30% of FCC and FFN leaders identified adult-child relationships and interactions as an area where more support is needed. Coaches emphasized this area even more strongly, with 89% of those working with centers and over 80% working with FCC and FFN sites selecting social-emotional development as a top PD need.

Although both site leaders and coaches highlighted social-emotional development as an area for further PD, stressor data adds further context. As noted earlier, 25% of FCC/FFN leaders reported challenges related to supporting children with varying needs. Within this broader category, many (8%) specifically identified behavior management as a key stressor. In comparison, 8% of center-based leaders reported challenges in this area overall. Although stressors in this area were reported less frequently by center leaders, the data suggest that support for children's social-emotional needs remains important across settings. These findings point to the value of PD focused on social-emotional strategies, behavior guidance, and supporting children across age groups, particularly in home-based programs.

Supporting children with disabilities and trauma-informed care emerged as key areas of need, particularly in center-based programs.

Site leaders identified supporting children with disabilities and special needs as an area where additional PD is needed. Among center-based leaders, this was the most frequently selected PD need, with 66% identifying this area for more support. Forty-five percent of FCC/FFN leaders also reported needing further support in this area. Coaches echoed these perspectives, with 94% of those working with centers and 76% working with FCCs identifying it as an area for additional support.

Observation and assessment were identified as ongoing areas of professional development need, particularly by coaches across all settings.

Site leaders identified observation and assessment as an area for further PD, though at lower rates than coaches. Forty-eight percent of center-based leaders and 41 percent of FCC and FFN leaders selected this area for further PD support. While there is some alignment between site leaders and coaches, the difference in responses may reflect variation in how this area is prioritized across roles and settings.

Coaches more frequently identified conducting observations and using assessments to inform instruction as a PD need across all settings. For instance, 78% of coaches working with center-

based programs, 57% working with FCC providers, and 67% working with FFN providers selected this area. These findings suggest that coaches across all settings view observation and assessment as a key focus for continued PD, particularly for center-based programs. This likely reflects the context of center-based settings, where they have greater expectations and requirements around using child assessment data to inform instruction.

Site leader well-being emerged as a priority area for professional support among both coaches and site leaders.

Over 80% of coaches identified support for site leaders' well-being and mental health as a top PD need across both center-based and FCC/FFN settings. This finding aligns with site leaders' reported stressors related to leadership and well-being, with 10% of FCC/FFN leaders and 7% of center-based leaders citing challenges such as time management, juggling multiple roles, and burnout. These findings highlight the importance of PD opportunities that address not only instructional leadership but also personal well-being and emotional resilience. During the February 2025 QLIT data discussion, coaches proposed the idea of integrating wellness strategies into all PD workshops such as making space for participants to "empty the cup" and engage in grounding practices like deep breathing.

Program administration and business practices represent an area for further leadership support or professional learning.

Among center-based programs, 25% of site leaders identified business practices and program policies as ongoing PD needs. This was supported by stressor data showing that 26% of leaders cited administrative responsibilities—such as time constraints and meeting program requirements—as key challenges. Coaches echoed this view, with 28% also selecting business practices as a priority, indicating alignment across both site leader and coach perspectives.

Among FCC/FFN providers, 40% of site leaders identified business practices as a PD need, though this was notably lower than the 71% of coaches who identified it as a top priority. Stressor data offer additional insight, with 17% of FCC/FFN leaders reporting financial management and administrative tasks as significant sources of stress. The findings suggest that even if FCC/FFN site leaders do not prioritize business practices as a PD need, these responsibilities continue to present meaningful challenges. Together, these results underscore the importance of embedding business and operational practices into PD to better prepare leaders for the multifaceted demands of their roles.

Coaches also identified a need to help site leaders adapt to changing program demands.

Beyond leadership and administration, coaches identified other emerging operational challenges where site leaders may benefit from targeted support. These included learning how to use technology, particularly for FCC (57%) and FFN (67%) providers, as well as managing shifts in program enrollment and enhancing care for infants and toddlers. For example, 56% of coaches working with centers and 48% working with FCCs reported these topics as areas of need. These findings reflect the evolving nature of program operations and highlight the value of responsive professional learning systems that equip leaders to adapt to shifting demands.

Although less frequently prioritized, family engagement was still viewed as an important area for additional PD support by coaches and site leaders.

While not the most frequently prioritized area, both coaches and site leaders identified a need for additional support in family engagement, particularly around referrals and communication. A sizable portion of FCC/FFN site leaders (32%) and center-based leaders (41%) reported stress related to communicating with families. Similarly, 63% of FCC coaches and 50% of center coaches selected supporting leaders in family engagement and referrals as an area for further development. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening leaders' capacity to engage families and connect them to needed services.

Key Takeaways. Site leaders and coaches identified shared areas for ongoing PD support, including instructional planning, setting up the learning environment, and supporting children's social-emotional development. Observation and assessment were also identified as areas where additional PD is needed to strengthen instructional practices. Both groups emphasized site leader well-being as an area for further support. While some areas like business practices and family engagement were less frequently prioritized by site leaders, stressor data show these remain persistent challenges where additional support may be needed. These insights underscore the importance of aligning PD with the day-to-day realities and pressures leaders face. Embedding targeted, practical supports—particularly in behavior management, business operations, staff management, family engagement, and leadership well-being—will be essential for addressing the complex managerial and relational demands of site leaders.

Conclusion

This conclusion synthesizes five years of SDQPI implementation, highlighting how the initiative has expanded access to supports, strengthened site leader capacity, and adapted to the diverse needs of early learning settings. It outlines how SDQPI's coaching model and related supports have fostered meaningful change and identifies key considerations for sustaining quality improvement and advancing equity in early learning environments moving forward.

Overall Takeaways

Over the past 5 years, SDQPI has expanded their reach to diverse providers, broadening access to coaching and PD for more site leaders across the county and strengthening leadership capacity of diverse early learning site leaders. By intentionally including historically underrepresented providers—especially FCC and FFN site leaders—SDQPI has worked toward a more equitable early learning system.

Throughout its implementation, SDQPI has adapted responsively to effectively serve the diversity of sites in their county. Ongoing consideration of differentiated approaches for center- and home-based sites will be important to sustaining impact across diverse settings.

Positive perceptions of individualized coaching remain a strength, and early evidence shows promise for group coaching as a peer learning strategy, provided that efforts remain grounded in individualized relationships. At the same time, coach capacity and workforce stability have increased, laying a foundation for continued implementation and deeper impact.

Taken together, findings highlight the cascading impact of SDQPI on site leaders' ability to lead and sustain quality improvement, extending from site leaders to staff, and ultimately to children and families.

- Participation first translates into increased site leader confidence and capacity.
- Site leaders then engage their site staff in implementing quality improvement practices.
- These efforts result in site leader-reported improvements in learning environments, children's development and learning experiences, and family engagement.

As SDQPI looks ahead, sustaining high-quality coaching and embedding supports that reflect the real challenges site leaders face, particularly around instructional planning, learning environments, social-emotional development, and well-being, will be key to advancing CQI and equity across early learning settings.

Future Considerations

Considerations for Ongoing Provision of SDQPI Supports

As SDQPI shifts their implementation to more of a group coaching model, future efforts may benefit from continuing to consider how to tailor strategies to meet the needs of different site types and levels of QRIS experience. Home-based providers and those newer to QRIS may need more time, scaffolding, and targeted supports, such as focused PD, leadership guidance, or access to learning materials, to fully benefit from SDQPI's offerings. Evaluation findings also suggest the importance of maintaining flexibility in tools like the QIP Planning Tool to reflect the unique capacities and priorities of diverse settings.

Coaching remains a key driver of SDQPI's impact. As coaches grow in their use of the GRR approach, evidence points to a shift toward more advanced coaching practices like sustained coaching cycles and instructional modeling. Continued investment in reflection, collaboration, and role clarity will be important for sustaining a strong coaching workforce.

Group coaching also continues to show promise as more coaches incorporate group formats into their practice. SDQPI may consider offering clear models and implementation guidance, along with strategies for adapting group coaching to home-based settings. This approach presents an opportunity to support teams of leaders and teaching staff collaboratively, while also reducing feelings of isolation by fostering peer learning and connection across sites.

In addition, findings highlight the importance of exploring site leaders' economic well-being more broadly. Most site leaders agreed that the stipend helped supplement their income and meet their financial needs, underscoring the value of this type of support. This points to a need for continued attention to how financial supports and working conditions influence leaders' ability to remain in their roles and fully engage in quality improvement efforts. Sustained investment in stipends, incentives, and other workforce supports may be critical for long-term retention and equity.

Considerations for Strengthening Quality Improvement Over Time

Future evaluation efforts could help clarify which coaching strategies most effectively support site leaders' leadership capacity. As SDQPI plans to shift exclusively to a group coaching model, future analyses could explore how group coaching supports different types of site leaders, like FCC/FFN leaders who often work in isolation and may benefit deeply from connecting with peers.

Tailored coaching approaches may continue to be especially important for FCC/FFN site leaders, site leaders with fewer years of QRIS participation, or lower average levels of educational attainment. Site leaders with these backgrounds tended to report the greatest gains in leadership confidence, suggesting that SDQPI participation may be particularly effective for these site leaders. SDQPI has already made efforts to simplify tools and integrate coaching

strategies that reflect the realities of home-based settings. Future efforts could focus on how these strategies continue to support growth in confidence leading quality improvement in group settings.

It may also be important to explore how site leader capacity translated to changes in teaching practices and child outcomes. Although CLASS observations provide insight for CSPP sites, FCC/FFN sites may require different observation tools. In the future, it may be important to capture instructional practices in home-based settings to gain an objective measure of how site quality changes across the course of SDQPI participation. In addition, including family surveys and child assessments for center and home-based settings may provide a more complete picture of the impact of sustained SDQPI participation on children and families.

Words of Appreciation from Site Leaders

Over the past 5 years, our evaluation team has had the pleasure of working closely with SDQPI leadership, coaches, and site leaders. Throughout this time, we have heard and read many words of appreciation from site leaders and staff about SDQPI services and staff. To conclude this report, we wanted to share some of these positive comments with the SDQPI team.

Appreciation from Center-Based Site Leaders

"I feel heard and understood by my Coach. She supports me with all the questions I might have." Center leader, FA4 Site Leader Survey, January 2025

"The coaching I receive has helped me to effectively support staff with increasing their knowledge and improving their skills. This has allowed both personal and professional growth for me and staff." Center leader, FA4 Site Leader Survey, January 2025

"The greatest impact would have to be that I receive a coach who works step-by-step with me to set and accomplish site goals. [SDQPI] has brought our site closer and stronger." Center leader, FA4 Site Leader Survey, January 2025

"Well, my coach has been amazing. She has guiding me through my goals and my staff goals. She has explained everything being my first year as a site supervisor. I have learned so much." Center leader, FA4 Site Leader Survey, January 2025

"Accountability and specific quality elements that are rated [are the greatest impact]. I think in general programs should be regulated, and I love that SDQPI has very specific, detailed, and clear elements that are used in the rating system for school sites to follow. Additionally, having a coach for admin, has been a key to our continued success. Having a knowledgeable and passionate early ed champion, like an SDQPI coach, has been great!" Center leader, FA4 Site Leader Survey, January 2025

"For our children, it means access to higher quality early childhood education, which supports their curiosity, capabilities, and eagerness to learn. The initiative helps create environments that are more conducive to exploration and discovery, fostering their individual growth. For families, SDQPI has led to stronger partnerships with educators and a better understanding of their child's development. It has also provided families with resources and support to engage more effectively in their child's education. This aligns with our goal of building strong relationships and creating a supportive environment, ultimately helping children become confident, compassionate, and lifelong learners." Center leader, FA4 Site Leader Survey, January 2025

"The San Diego Quality Preschool Initiative (SDQPI) significantly benefits our children and families by providing high-quality early childhood education. SDQPI program fosters improved cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development in children, laying a strong foundation for future academic and life success. Additionally, it empowers families with the tools and knowledge to make informed decisions about accessing quality early learning opportunities, supporting their child's growth and long-term well-being." Center leader, FA4 Site Leader Survey, January 2025

Appreciation from FCC and FFN Site Leaders

"Que me siento más segura y apoyada."[5] FCC site leader, FA4 Site Leader Survey, October 2024

"My coach has helped me a lot, and I have learned many good techniques; the materials also have been a great addition to my site." FCC site leader, FA4 Site Leader Survey, October 2024

"I just mentioned the renewed strength I feel to do a better job that come from all the support I receive from the program. I think the level of trust my parents show towards me increased because of that, which in the end spills over to the children's feeling safe, well-cared for and loved." FCC site leader, FA4 Site Leader Survey, October 2024

"It has been amazing to be in this program. I learn so much with the coaching and the required classes. Having the incentives at the end help tremendously as well because learning about all the things you want to implement but not having any funds to implement them is a huge struggle. I would never have been able to make improvements without the SDQPI." FCC site leader, FA4 Site Leader Survey, October 2024

"It made a big difference, now our site looks like a little preschool, and we are more engaged with our students educationally. We are having them ready for kindergarten." FCC site leader, FA4 Site Leader Survey, October 2024

[5] "I feel more confident and supported."

"The greatest impact comes from the support I get from the program, from excellent coaching to excellent training opportunities and great material, which strengthened my abilities as a FCC provider" FCC site leader, FA4 Site Leader Survey, October 2024

"Overall quality in all aspects of my program is notable. The impact [of SDQPI] is immense." FCC site leader, FA4 Site Leader Survey, October 2024

"I am very grateful and very thankful for all the help and support that I have receive[d], the resources, the classes, the workshops by being a part of SDQPI." FCC site leader, FA4 Site Leader Survey, October 2024

"Participating in SDQPI has greatly enhanced our program by improving the quality of teacher-child interactions, fostering stronger family engagement, and creating a more enriching and developmentally appropriate learning environment for all children." FCC site leader, FA4 Site Leader Survey, October 2024

"The personal support from the program is phenomenal. Being able to talk through child care issues with another knowledgeable professional and make positive plans to my childcare is the greatest impact [of SDQPI]." FCC site leader, FA4 Site Leader Survey, October 2024

"Families love that I am in a program like SDQPI, to show that we are committed to their children." FFN site leader, FA4 Site Leader Survey, October 2024

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Appendix A: Survey Topics

Below is a list of topics that were included in the coach and site leader surveys administered in Years 2–5 of the evaluation.

Year 2 Surveys (2021-2022)

Year 2 Coach Survey (*n* = 21)

- Demographics and professional background
- Frequency and types of coaching supports provided
- Knowledge related to the MTSS model and GRR approach
- Confidence in individualizing coaching
- Effectiveness of the QIP Planning Tool in meeting diverse site needs
- Perceptions of the QIP development process, including collaboration with site leaders in developing their goals and action steps
- Implementation challenges for coaches in implementing the MTSS model
- Perceptions of challenges for site leaders in developing a QIP
- Additional supports needed
- Familiarity with the SD QCC Consortium

Time 1 Cohort 1 Site Leader Survey (*n* = 204)

- Demographics and professional background
- Site type and children served
- QCC tier rating participation
- Open-ended examples of what site leaders hope to gain or learn from participating in SDQPI
- Confidence in providing leadership in the QCC CQI Pathways
- Perceptions of SDQPI coaching
- Perceptions of the QIP development process
- Perceptions of SDQPI stipends and incentives
- Perceptions of SDQPI professional development
- Challenges and successes

- Additional supports needed
- Familiarity with the SD QCC Consortium

Year 3 Surveys (2022-2023)

Year 3 Coach Survey (*n* = 22)

- Demographics and professional background
- Knowledge related to the MTSS model and the Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) approach
- Open-ended examples of how coaches facilitate the GRR
- Confidence in individualizing coaching
- Knowledge and skills related to coaching competencies
- Effectiveness of the QIP Planning Tool in meeting diverse site needs
- Frequency of coaching, including characteristics that impact frequency of coaching
- Ways that coaches assess whether site leaders have built their capacity or accomplished their site QIP goal
- Perceived impact of coaching on site leader and sites
- Perceived impact of SDQPI on growth in site leader capacity
- Implementation challenges or barriers that made SDQPI coaching difficult in the past year
- Implementation challenges in helping sites progress toward QIP goals
- Additional supports needed
- Familiarity with the SD QCC Consortium

Time 2 Cohort 1 Site Leader Survey (*n* = 240)

- Demographics and professional background
- Confidence in providing leadership in the QCC CQI Pathways
- Engaging site staff in quality improvement
- Progress toward QIP Goals
- Focus of site QIP goals
- Types of actions site leaders and site staff took to make progress toward the site's QIP goal
- Ways site leaders assess progress toward their QIP goals
- Utility of SDQPI supports of stipends, coaching, incentives, professional development
- Prevalence and effectiveness of coaching strategies
- Helpfulness of professional development

- Challenges experienced
- Impact of SDQPI on site leader capacity
- Successes documented
- Open-ended examples of what site leaders or staff know or do differently due to their participation in SDQPI
- Additional supports needed
- Familiarity with the SD QCC Consortium

Time 2 Cohort 2 Site Leader Survey (*n* = 102)

- Demographics and professional background
- Site type and children served
- QCC tier rating participation
- Open-ended examples of what site leaders hope to gain or learn from participating in SDQPI
- Confidence in providing leadership in the QCC CQI Pathways
- Perceptions of SDQPI coaching
- Perceptions of the QIP development process
- Perceptions of SDQPI stipends and incentives
- Perceptions of SDQPI professional development
- Challenges and successes
- Additional supports needed
- Familiarity with the SD QCC Consortium

Year 4 Surveys (2023-2024)

Year 4 Coach Survey (*n* = 24)

- Demographics and professional background
- Confidence in individualizing coaching
- Knowledge related to the MTSS model and the Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) approach
- Knowledge and skills related to coaching competencies
- Effectiveness of the QIP Planning Tool 3.0 in meeting diverse site needs
- Perceptions of the QIP development process, including collaboration with site leaders in developing their goals and action steps
- Frequency of coaching, including characteristics that impact frequency of coaching

- Ways that coaches assess whether site leaders have built their capacity or accomplished their site QIP goal
- Open-ended examples of how coaches measure whether a site's QIP goal has been accomplished
- Perceived impact of coaching on site leader and sites
- Perceived impact of SDQPI on growth in site leader capacity
- Implementation challenges or barriers that made SDQPI coaching difficult in the past year
- Additional supports needed
- Familiarity with the SD QCC Consortium

Year 5 Surveys (2024-2025)

Time 3 Site Leader Survey (*n* = 359)

- Demographics and professional background
- Workplace well-being, job stressors, and intent to stay in current job
- Confidence in providing leadership in the QCC CQI Pathways
- Engaging site staff in quality improvement
- Perceptions of SDQPI supports of stipends, coaching (including group coaching), incentives, professional development
- Impact of SDQPI on site leader capacity
- Impact of SDQPI on job stress
- Impact of SDQPI on sites, children, and families
- Additional supports needed for quality improvement
- Professional development needed for continued quality improvement
- Ongoing coaching needs and desired frequency of future coaching
- Open-ended examples of impact of SDQPI on sites, children, and families

Year 5 Coach Survey (*n* = 26)

- Demographics and professional background
- Workplace well-being
- Roles and experiences in SDQPI
- Time and opportunities to reflect on biases
- Types of effective professional learning for coaches
- Effectiveness of the QIP Planning Tool 4.0 in meeting diverse site needs
- Focus on engaging site staff within coaching sessions

- Perceptions of group coaching, including effective professional learning to build capacity in group coaching
- Knowledge and confidence related to the implementation of the Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) approach
- Perceived impact of SDQPI on growth in site leader capacity
- Perceived impact of SDQPI on sites, children, and families
- Ongoing professional development needs for site leaders
- Additional SDQPI supports needed for sustainability of quality improvement

Appendix B: Quality Improvement Over Time

Growth in Confidence Leading Quality Improvement

The following appendix includes detailed information about the sample and data analysis of site leaders' growth in confidence leading quality improvement.

Analytic Sample

To model growth in confidence leading quality improvement, site leaders needed to have completed at least two of the three surveys. As a result, approximately 30% of the site leaders were removed from the analytic sample due to insufficient data across timepoints. We compared the characteristics of included and excluded site leaders to assess where removal of participants introduced bias. Results from independent samples t-tests indicated that site leaders who were removed from the analytic sample reported significantly fewer years of participation in QRIS, both in administrative data (M = 1.87 years) and in self-reported survey data (M = 3.35 years) compared to site leaders who remained in the sample (M = 3.30). As expected, site leaders who had shorter duration participating in SDQPI had fewer opportunities to participate in our evaluation surveys, which caused them to be dropped from this particular analytic sample.

When examining other site leader characteristics, we found only one significant difference between the site leaders retained and dropped from the analytic sample. There were no significant differences in self-reported: years of teaching experience, years of experience being a site leader, years of experience using assessment tools, level of education, or number of site staff. However, one significant difference emerged; site leaders who identified as Hispanic or Latine were more likely to remain in the sample (68%) compared to those who were removed (55%). It is important to note that FCC/FFN leaders (73%) are more likely to identify as Hispanic

or Latine compared to center leaders (55%). Given the higher enrollment of FCC/FFN leaders in SDQPI compared to center leaders, the race difference may be associated with site type as well.

These results suggest that while the analytic sample included site leaders who were more experienced in QRIS and were more likely to identify as Hispanic and Latine, it was otherwise comparable to the full sample in terms of other characteristics.

Confirming the Structure of Confidence Leading Quality Improvement

To ensure the measure of confidence leading quality improvement was reliable and meaningful across time, we conducted several analyses to ensure the measurement stability. First, we conducted separate confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) at each timepoint. The single factor model, meaning all items were used to create a single confidence leading quality improvement construct, fit the data at all timepoints (see Exhibit B1).

Exhibit B1. Confidence Leading Quality Improvement CFA Model Fit

Survey	*n*	χ^2	*p*	RMSEA	CFI	SRMR
Time 1	246	31.27	.06	.06	.99	.03
Time 2	349	47.86	<.001	.08	.98	.03
Time 3	307	28.74	.03	.05	.99	.02

The parameters presented in Exhibit B1 estimate model fit in different ways, as follows:

- χ^2 and *p* -value – Tells us how much the model's predictions differ from what site leaders actually reported. The *p*-values is associated with the χ^2 value. If the model fits the data well, the *p*-values will be above .05. Our models show *p*-values less than .05, which means there is a statistically significant difference between the model's predictions and the actual site leader data. However, with large samples like ours, even small differences make the *p* -value low, so we can rely on the other measures of model fit if they all indicate that the model is a good fit. Specifically:
    - RMSEA – Estimates how well the model would work if we looked at a bigger sample of site leaders. Smaller numbers (i.e., .08 or below) indicate that the model fits well.
    - CFI – Shows how much better our model is compared to a simple, basic model (i.e., the null model). A result close to 1 indicates that our model explains the data well.

- SRMR – Measures the average gap between what the model expects and what site leaders actually reported. A smaller gap (i.e., .06 or less) means the model matches the data closely.

Factor loadings remained strong over time, ranging from .64 to .84, which confirms that the latent construct of confidence leading quality improvement over time was well-defined. Residual variances decreased over time, indicating that more variance in site leaders' responses was explained by latent confidence leading quality improvement over time. In particular, family engagement became a stronger indicator of confidence leading quality improvement by the final site leader survey, which may be a result of the increasing enrollment of FCC and FFN site leaders. Additionally, these patterns suggest that as SDQPI progressed, site leaders may have increasingly integrated family engagement into their quality improvement plans.

Then we examined measurement invariance of confidence leading quality improvement to ensure that it was stable across cohorts, who enrolled at different times, and across time because site leaders took multiple surveys. We analyzed configural, metric, and scalar invariance, which held and indicated that confidence items measured the same underlying construct consistently across time points. Therefore, observed growth in confidence leading quality improvement could be interpreted as true change in confidence leading quality improvement, not the result of changes in measurement structure.

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