



**Integrating Expanded Learning Opportunities into
Early Achievers to Support the Quality Continuum:
Design Team Recommendations**



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Opening Call for Action

As we write this report, we are facing a dramatically altered landscape for what is needed, and what is possible, within high-quality child care for children from birth to age 12.

With schools closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, school-age child care and youth development programs are stepping up to provide emergency child care and will almost certainly be serving children and youth long before schools re-open. At the same time, early learning sites are also serving an increased proportion of school-age children. As we look to the next school year, it is clear that school-age child care programs once more will be asked to be extraordinarily flexible and creative to meet the expanded child care and social-emotional needs of children and families as schools either remain closed or move to staggered schedules to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

At the same time, the impacts of the pandemic and the resulting economic crisis, paired with the trauma being experienced by our Black, Indigenous, and Youth of Color, may feel even more acute at this time of social unrest. This means that child care providers need to have a strong understanding of structural and interpersonal racism, and possess skills to support the social-emotional and learning needs of children in developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive ways. Older school-age children are acutely aware of their social environment and need support to make meaning of the events that surround their lives. Child care providers are likely some of the few adults outside of the family that children will connect with for many months during the COVID-19 pandemic, and thus have an outsized influence during this time. This is a lot to hold, and school-age child care providers need support through robust access to training and coaching on high-quality practices, similar to that of their early learning counterparts.

In the face of this growing need, we've also seen how the systemic silos and lack of integration around public funding and quality systems across the developmental continuum have served as obstacle, as our government agencies and districts tried to work quickly to address the need for child care and supports for school-age children during the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis. While this may have resulted in increased awareness of these systemic shortfalls, we are also now facing an economic contraction that will impact the public funding to support child care. Further, new safety and health guidelines make the business of running successful and sustainable child care all the more challenging. While we are aware that this will make adding new resources to our Early Achievers system challenging, we also have seen that this period is ushering in a new level of innovation and adaptation to respond to the changing needs of youth and families across the early learning and child care system.

In the face of these heightened needs and systemic shortfalls, and with the opportunity that comes with change, the work of the Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) Quality Initiative offers a pathway forward. While the impact of this crisis may lengthen the time it will take to fully embed these supports and recommendations into Early Achievers and beyond, there are some tangible, immediate actions we strongly recommend taking to build on this work now so we can work to meet the emergent needs of this crisis.

These include:

- Convening an ongoing workgroup to continue to discuss integration, capacity building, advocacy and coordination of care for families. This would include convening family home providers to continue the design process for a system of supports that meet the unique needs of family child care providers.
- Continuing to provide existing professional development and create new responsive supports for providers serving children across the age span in collaboration with School's Out Washington (SOWA) and Cultivate Learning. Collaborative projects need to focus on building providers' capacity for serving Black, Indigenous and Children of Color children in equitable and responsive ways.
- Building coach and data collection infrastructure to support ELO integration as a part of the changing system. This can be done virtually and/or in-person in partnership with SOWA, Child Care Aware of Washington (CCA of WA) and Cultivate Learning to provide the immediate benefit of preparing coaches and data collectors to better support providers in their ability to serve school-age children throughout the crisis and beyond.
- Partnering with SOWA and the Weikart Center to develop virtual versions of the Weikart Methods trainings and other school-age trainings so they are accessible to all school-age providers within and outside of the Early Achievers system.
- Invest in expanding data collection tools to collect data that increases our understanding of the landscape of school-age child care, including an analysis of school-age enrollments by program type.
- Leverage ELO evaluations results in the newly Early Achievers system.

Introduction

Learning does not stop when children and youth leave the K-12 classroom, and neither should the quality of educational opportunities available to them. Children and families seek access to high-quality care and education opportunities from birth through young-adulthood. ELO programs have long provided children and youth with a unique blend of academic and social-emotional learning enrichment, and the recent COVID-19 crisis has shed light on the critical role these programs play in supporting working families, particularly in low-income communities of color.

Building on its investments in Early Achievers, the legislature funded a pilot starting in 2015 to explore how Washington can support quality ELO programming as an extension of the quality system built in birth to five learning environments. This ELO Quality Initiative (ELOQI) served as an opportunity to integrate disparate systems to better serve children and families, as well as provide professional development support to Early Achievers sites that currently serve school-age children in both centers and family homes. Once integrated, Early Achievers sites that currently serve school-age children will finally have organizational wide measures of quality improvement and support.

Prior to ELOQI, ELO programs, including licensed school-age only programs, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, and non-licensed youth development programs, while not fully connected in a single

quality rating and improvement system, had worked to develop a Quality Improvement System (QRIS) . Like the early learning field, the ELO field has invested in and built consensus around a variety of its critical system components which were included in the design of the ELOQI. These include a field-tested quality improvement process using the David P. Weikart Center tools, Washington State Quality Standards for Afterschool and Youth Development Programs, Core Competencies for ELO professionals and a primary intermediary offering technical assistance, training and coaching to the ELO workforce. The ELOQI expanded upon that existing QIS. While these systems of Early Achievers - QRIS and ELO QIS are distinct, in order to recognize the differences in developmentally appropriate practice and programming, the general pillars of quality improvement are aligned.

These include:

- Focused professional development and training to support quality and culturally responsive practice paired with data collection at intervals to measure changes in practice
- Use of coaching to work toward data driven goals to increase quality and equity
- Use of data to help determine areas of strength and need for quality improvement
- Incentives for sites to invest in the continuous quality improvement process

The ELOQI allowed us to study the features of this system, make improvements and build new resources that can now be integrated into a larger continuum of support for sites serving children birth through age 12. Leaders who collaborated on the development and implementation of the ELOQI modeled the system to be in alignment with some components of Early Achievers, which allowed resources to be leveraged for efficiencies (e.g. existing Early Achievers coaches, Coaching Companion and Coach Framework) and applied lessons learned after many years of Early Achievers implementation. The ELOQI was deliberately more intense than an implementation model for the purposes of evaluation. Now that we have solid ELOQI evaluation data and a better understanding of the prime factors contributing to quality improvement, we are better positioned to provide recommendations on embedding ELO into the Early Achievers system to transform a birth to five system into a birth to 12 system.

Building Infrastructure for Implementation of a Birth to 12 System

For implementation considerations of a birth to 12 system, there are several areas of work to think through, all of which align to the existing system of Early Achievers, increasing capacity of regions/hubs for coaching and training, data collection, professional development, program incentives and specialization. Given the impacts of COVID-19 on our sector and public funding, we recognize that some of these changes may take time to implement. That said, we strongly encourage that these recommendations be taken into consideration in any child care system redesign conversations, along with the recommendations for immediate action outlined in the opening.

Increasing Regional Capacity for Coaching & Training

It is recommended that each of the six CCA of WA regional offices establish a regional hub that would house and call upon a variety of experts to support specialization areas which might emerge over time within the Early Achievers system. The hub could function as a virtual model or could be housed within regional settings - but either way the hub would serve the function of coordination to support varied needs. This model also aligns with the developing mental health consultation system. The hub concept is grounded in the notion that many different areas of expertise are needed when supporting the holistic quality of an early learning program as well as recognizing that programs have varying needs depending on their model, families served, availability of community-based supports, etc. Additionally, this model ensures that programs are served by individuals from within their communities. Given CCA of WA's reach, expertise and

relationships within communities, it could serve as the coordinating entity for a statewide hub structure ensuring that each region has the capacity and coordinated support to guide programs toward foundational quality and beyond.

For example, Early Achievers coaches might be generalist in focus and could support Early Achievers sites working toward achieving a foundational level of quality, by coaching primarily to developmentally appropriate practices for early learning and business supports. Coaches might also “specialize” and/or have specific content expertise to assist with instructional coaching that would support future specialization areas to engage programs in continuous quality improvement. It is recommended that sites achieve at least a 3+ rating in order to begin potential specialization areas in the future.

To prepare for site support of an ELO specialization, the coach infrastructure must first be built. It is recommended that at least 1-2 coaches in each of the six CCA of WA regions become ELO anchors and have a train-the-trainer status for many of the Weikart Center trainings. This would leverage existing capacity within Early Achievers and ensure that regional experts were located across the state. These coaches would complete the ELO training series, have familiarity with all two-minute tips and become trained and reliable on the Weikart Center tools. Anchor coaches could support other regional coaches working on foundational ELO concepts that are introduced prior to the specialization. In Appendix A, we have included a recommended training series and timeline for building coach ELO knowledge.

SOWA has 30+ years of experience supporting licensed school-age child care and youth development professionals and for over a decade has supported field implementation of quality work, locally and nationally. In partnership with DCYF, SOWA has been offering professional development aligned to the Washington State Core Competencies for Child and Youth Development Professionals specifically to school-age only licensed child care centers. SOWA further holds the Washington state licensing agreement with the Weikart Center and is the subject matter expert for the Weikart Center’s Program Quality Intervention and associated assessment tools.

In this model, it is recommended that a SOWA staff sit in each of the regional hubs to provide consultation to anchor ELO coaches on school-age and youth development topics and provide regional trainings aligned to the Washington State Core Competencies for Child and Youth Development Professionals on Weikart Center trainings that do not allow for train-the-trainer options. Additionally, Weikart Center trainings could be expanded to include school-age only and youth development sites that are not participating in Early Achievers, leveraging opportunities to reach more practitioners. SOWA recommends a series of trainings to build coach knowledge. This could be rolled out in a variety of formats and languages. While it would be ideal to build infrastructure over time, the changes in the early learning landscape due to COVID-19 may require a timelier response given the increases in mixed-age groups.

Translated Materials and Training in Multiple Languages

The school-aged and youth-serving workforce is diverse and multi-lingual; reflecting the children served in ELO care across the state. Ensuring adequate public investment that results in materials and training being available in multiple languages is central to building a system that is accessible by all providers. As noted in Appendix A, virtual trainings are being created by the Weikart Center. Ensuring these are available in multiple languages will be important to the success of meeting the needs of Washington children and youth.

Data Collection

Integration of ELO in Early Achievers might also leverage the existing infrastructure for data collection across the state and, like the coaching approaches stated above, it is recommended that we improve data collection capacity prior to roll-out. Currently, data collectors are becoming reliable in the Quality Seal assessment tool developed by the University of Washington to measure levels of quality in ELO programs that link to child and youth outcomes. There are two assessments that are used to support ELO sites - one to provide data for coaching work and another to measure attainment of the specialization area:

- The Weikart Center Program Quality Assessments include both the school-age program quality assessment (SA-PQA) and the social emotional learning program quality assessment (SEL-PQA) tool. These assessments would be conducted once sites enter the ELO specialization to generate reliable, baseline data for the purpose of coaching toward quality improvement.
- The Quality Seal tool integrates coaching efforts on the Weikart Center tools to measure achievement of high levels of quality. This tool is aligned to the Program Quality Assessment (PQA) and might be implemented after a site completes the ELO specialization requirements to earn a Quality Seal. When programs complete coaching goals and professional development aligned with the PQA data, Quality Seal scores improve. Current data shows that there is a threshold range that would indicate high levels of quality that could equate to achieving the Quality Seal.

In order to integrate ELO into Early Achievers, it is recommended that SOWA offer train-the-trainer opportunities on the PQA for current data collectors. Data collectors at Cultivate Learning would become reliable in both the Quality Seal and PQA and leverage current methods for conducting reliability checking, scheduling on-site visits, etc. Again, the hub structure would enable SOWA to serve in the role of subject matter expert on the Weikart Center tools. In this model, Cultivate Learning would provide data collection for Early Achievers sites focusing on ELO and SOWA would offer data collection to ELO programs outside of the Early Achievers system. If in-person data collection is paused for extended periods of time, Cultivate Learning could also build the capacity to provide information on ELO quality in a newly developed virtual system.

While we are shifting to make necessary changes in Early Achievers to meet the current health and economic crisis, we recommend building the new data collection system to include school-age quality assessment in addition to early learning and to leverage the Quality Seal for this purpose.

Professional Development

Building off the ELOQI, there are a variety of trainings that support ELO quality work.

- David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality: This organization is a division of the Forum for Youth Investment and has built research-validated quality assessments with associated professional development. The quality improvement model is similar to the Early Achievers framework and includes attention to safe and supportive environments as well as quality engagement and interaction. The professional development includes foundational training (basics self-assessment training) and youth work methods trainings that support specific areas of the assessment such as youth voice.
- SOWA trainings and professional development: SOWA offers a wide range of professional development supports for school-age providers outside of the Weikart Center trainings, including

live and pre-recorded webinars, learning community meetings and foundational workshops on structural racism and cultural responsiveness.

- Washington State professional development: The Raikes Foundation invested dollars during the ELOQI pilot to develop additional professional development offerings based on pilot data and ELO field needs. This has resulted in training that covers some of the current gaps as well as training that can be used flexibly within a program that has little time to devote to professional development. These trainings are fully online and can be leveraged by all Early Achievers sites and coaches at no cost. During the pilot, we leveraged the Washington practice-based coaching framework and all ELO coaches completed the practice-based coaching certificate which is being updated to intentionally include ELO focus. SOWA also has a coaching approach and is currently working with CCA of WA to review and align onboarding for coaches and foundational coach training on relationship-based concepts that form the critical base for practice-based coaching.

Recommended Incentives

In addition to specialized coaching, programs might receive funding to support staff attendance at Weikart Center trainings. The substitute pool might also be expanded to support programs accessing coaching or attending longer trainings. To assist with completion of the specialization, programs might also receive a stipend at the beginning and/or when achieved.

Proposed ELO Specialization:

If Early Achievers is to transition from a birth to five system to a birth to 12 system, some of the current trainings and on-boarding processes will need to be revised to include ELO language and content such as Early Achievers orientations and Quality Institutes. Implementation of ELO within Early Achievers would become more focused within an ELO specialization that sites pursue after reaching a foundational level of quality.

Programs that are eligible to work on an ELO specialization would complete additional professional development and receive specialized coaching. Once the site enters the specialization, they would complete Basics training which helps programs orient to the PQA and prepare to complete self-assessments. Programs would then receive data from an external PQA assessment and complete the Planning with Data training. Data from the site's self and external assessments would be used by the site and ELO coach to collaboratively build quality goals. In this way, the PQA is used as a coaching and improvement tool. Programs would receive their data to use in partnership with their assigned ELO coach to focus on quality improvement. Once goals are set, programs could identify two-three aligned method trainings to attend and choose relevant Two-Minute Tips to practice as part of their improvement action plan.

In addition to the Weikart Center trainings, programs could also complete Cultivate Learning's online series of training on social emotional development and youth driven spaces and/or attend additional, relevant trainings offered by SOWA. For best practice, both the director/owner, lead teachers and assistant teachers working with school-age children complete these modules (team learning and support was a key finding for success in the ELOQI evaluation).

Programs completing a specialization would receive coaching from professionals who have been trained to support ELO sites. The frequency of coaching will depend on budget and caseloads, but it is recommended that sites receive at least 15 hours of ELO coaching per year to work on specialization goals. Given the ELOQI evaluation results on the efficacy of a mostly online coaching intervention, Coaching Companion

could be leveraged to reach more sites at lower cost. However, to fully utilize virtual coaching, sites may need more time and additional technology supports. Given the diversity of providers across the state, ensuring there are flexible options for accessing coaching supports will be important. To attain specialization, it is recommended that programs complete a variety of professional development based on quality goals, complete at least three cycles of improvement (following the Practice Based Coaching and Weikart's Assess-Plan-Improve intervention model), and attain a minimum threshold of quality score on the Quality Seal.

Prior to entering a specialization, programs can still work on building foundational knowledge in ELO topics. We recommend that programs interested in continuous quality improvement in ELO environments complete:

- 30-hour School-age Basics Training
- Attend community workshops offered by SOWA and DCYF contractors that are aligned to Core Competencies for Child and Youth Development Professionals
- Access and try out the Two-Minute Tips

Recommendations for Family Child Care Versus Child Care Centers

The Design Team weighed the pilot data on the different experiences that family child care programs (FCC) and child care centers had in the ELOQI pilot. A small number of FCC sites participated in the pilot and while these sites found the supports useful to their work, it was more difficult for FCCs to participate in trainings and learning communities due to scheduling. Given the small numbers of FCC participants in the pilot, it is difficult to determine whether these barriers would create inequities for an ELO specialization for FCCs if the intervention does not match their specific needs. It is recommended that an ELO specialization rollout in child care centers serving school-age children, and additional work is completed to co-create an equivalent path for ELO specialization specific for FCC programs. This might entail use of the substitute pool and/or modification of trainings specific for the FCC audience and learning environment. In the meantime, many of the introductory and equity trainings related to school-age care being rolled out for child care centers can also be made available to FCC providers, although there may be scheduling issues to consider.

Considerations for Non-Early Achievers School-Age Programs

Early Achievers resources and supports are not available to many programs serving children ages 5-12. These programs may be licensed or unlicensed and often provide care and enrichment to children everyday as a support to working families. While the focus of the Design Team is Early Achievers, it is critical to also raise the topic and strategize around continued supports to school-age ELO programs that are not participating in Early Achievers.

While there is so much variability in program types as children age, the ELOQI pilot allowed us to test and demonstrate that quality intervention works across program types, particularly the school-age only programs that tend to meet more regularly and mirror child care in approach. Again, the pandemic has resulted in changes for many programs to serve a larger range of ages to support families that also have school-age children who have been out of school for extended periods of time. With additional funding, we could expand a version of the quality initiative proposed in this recommendation paper to school-age only programs that are not participating in Early Achievers. For example in this model, SOWA would serve as the primary intermediary providing coaching and training. Additionally, there is opportunity with the

organization of DCYF and their new Adolescent Programs Division to continue conversations, research and refinement of a parallel system that might support youth development programs that serve children older than age 12. As a next step, it is recommended that a workgroup be created to consider recommendations for extending this framework in Early Achievers to licensed school-age only sites. This workgroup could bring together the right partners and programs to build off the recommendations included in this report.

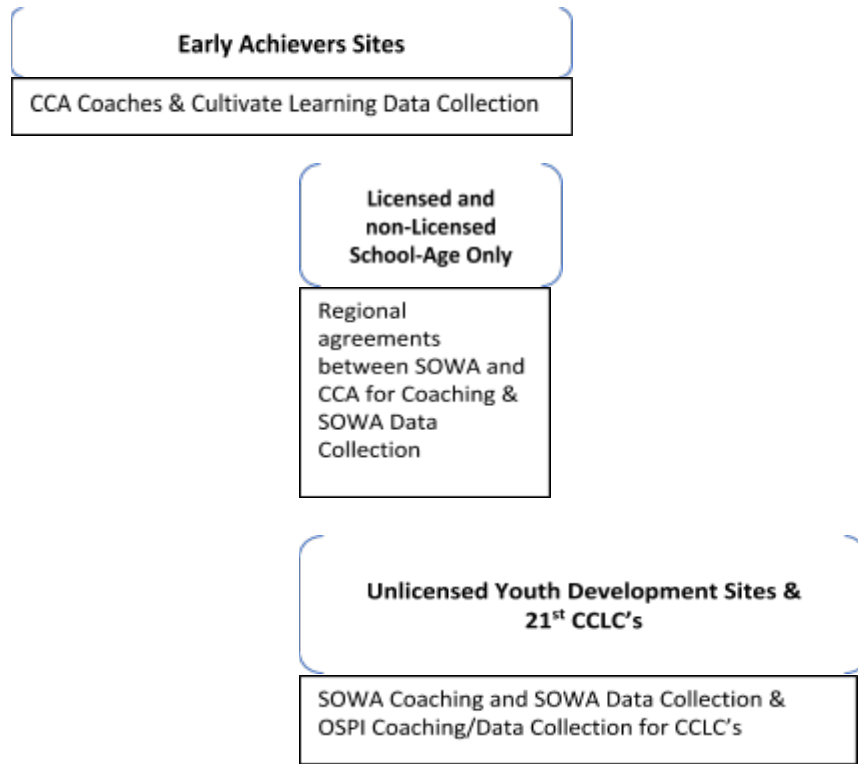
Communications and Messaging

Transitioning Early Achievers to a birth to 12 system will require widespread and consistent messaging by all partners. There is a clear need to better integrate the early learning and ELO systems and break down the current siloes. The challenges with system responses to COVID-19 has raised the visibility and urgency for better connections between early learning and ELO to help families find care and help children thrive as they age. If the fields were better integrated, referral systems for families and messages about the importance of quality could be more consistent and coordinated across fields. Integration could also reduce duplicative costs if early learning and ELO programs shared resources such as leveraging opportunities for joint professional development. Finally, Early Achievers sites are currently serving school-age children in their daily practice and the staff that work in those environments have not been intentionally supported with school-age professional development and coaching in a systemic way. Clear communications from DCYF will be needed to successfully move through this process. Additionally, leadership and advocacy to support the ELO specialization will be critical in future years in order to both resource the recommendations in this report as well as continue to think about and implement connections to the larger youth development system.

Proposed Structures for an Integrated Birth to 12 System and Beyond

The following chart is a proposed structure for agency support to ELO programs both within Early Achievers and the broader ELO field. This model leverages the existing infrastructure within Early Achievers and reduces confusion for sites that have existing relationships with agencies for coaching as much as possible.

Site Age Group: **Birth to 5** **5-12 years** **12 years and beyond**



In this plan, coaching and data collection would be analogous to the structure within Early Achievers and similar to the ELOQI structure for birth to 12 sites. CCA of WA coaches would serve as the ELO coaches to Early Achievers sites and Cultivate Learning would participate as data collectors in the system.

SOWA would provide the coaching and data collection on the PQA tools for programs serving children 5-12 years outside of the Early Achievers system as well as youth development programs. Exceptions may arise for licensed school-age only programs that might not be participating in Early Achievers but are a part of early learning systems within communities. Early Achievers has had public investment for the past five years that has resulted in a robust system of supports for licensed child care providers serving birth to five. We will need to grow a similarly robust School Aged/Youth model that reflects the developmental needs of School Aged Children. Because there may be some overlap in these site types, it is recommended that SOWA and regional CCA of WA offices create agreements on an annual basis to clarify the entity responsible for coaching and data collection for these specific sites.

The chart below details proposed roles for the various agencies engaged in supporting ELO integration into the Early Achievers Quality Improvement System.

OSPI is included in the field visual to capture the federally funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers that are located throughout the state and also use the PQA tools for quality improvement.

DCYF	SOWA	CCA of WA	Cultivate Learning
Administrative oversight of Early Achievers (expanded to birth to 12 years)	Hub members with subject matter expertise	Hub Coordinator for regional offices	Data Collection for Early Achievers sites
Licenses programs serving children birth to age 12 (both within and outside of Early Achievers)	Training of trainers to CCA of WA, OSPI and Cultivate Learning on Weikart Center tools and PD for Early Achievers system. Ongoing technical assistance to EA System. *Annual partnership agreements needed to clarify the coaching roles of the CCA of WA system and SOWA.	Coaching and training in Early Achievers sites	Administration of WA ELO professional development including online learning modules and Quality Seal. Maintain reliability of Quality Seal for field use.
DCYF Adolescent Programs Division Strategy	Coaching/training/data collection to school-age only sites per regional agreement with CCA of WA and coaching/training/data collection to youth development sites	Coaching for some school-age only sites per regional agreement with SOWA	Administration of Coaching Companion to support virtual coaching to ELO programs
	When possible, open existing Weikart Center trainings for Early Achievers coaches and providers when offering to broader school-age and youth development field		Coach Certificate for both early learning and ELO coaches

Conclusion: Seizing the Moment to Drive Systemic Change

Periods of crisis often result in opportunities for innovation and opportunities to address gaps in current systems. The pandemic has brought the need for better integration between child care and school-age care front and center. Changes in the system due to both COVID-19 and the resulting economic impacts provide an opportunity to rebuild the system. While we can both use this time to correct some of the system elements that have not worked well for programs, we can also re-build with ELO integration.

The Design Team partners at Child Care Aware of Washington, Cultivate Learning at the University of Washington and School’s Out Washington are committed to integrating early learning and ELO systems in meaningful ways such as:

- including school-age content in professional development when relevant, and



- ensuring that early learning and school-age voices are at the table and leading communication in our respective fields to underscore our collective and collaborative roles to support children across a developmental pathway.

While the Design Team prepared recommendations based on embedding ELO resources into Early Achievers specifically, other school-age and youth development programs that are critical to our system of continuous quality were consistently kept at the forefront of our planning conversations. Ultimately, we must leverage the lessons learned from this period to mobilize the political will to create a true system of supports from early learning to school-age and beyond.

Appendix A: Recommended ELO Trainings & Onboarding for Coaches



Year One:

- Introduction to Coaching for Quality - For coaches to be able to offer support to providers that are completing PQA Basics training and self-assessment (3 hours)
- PQA External Assessment Reliability Training - Supports coaches to become grounded in PQA tools and use data for coaching purposes (currently two full days, 8.5 hours each day, virtual needs to be developed)
- Methods Training of Trainers - Prepares coaches to deliver methods trainings aligned with coaching goals (currently four weeks of online, pre-course work and four webinars, plus three days live in-person training, virtual-only option is being created)
- Other: It is recommended that coaches also complete the PQA Basics Training of Trainers, however this agreement is dependent upon the David P. Weikart Center license which is currently being restructured - (TBD)

Year Two:

- ELO Anchors complete the Management Training of Trainers - Prepares coaches to train on “Planning with Data” and “Quality Coaching” which supports supervisors in their role with coaches (Currently three weeks online of pre-course work and three webinars with two full days live, in-person - virtual model is TBD)
- ELO Anchors complete the SEL Methods Training of Trainers - Supports coaches to offer Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Methods trainings, which are designed specifically to support the ELO model. In the interim, SEL Methods can be offered by SOWA coaches and trainers (original plan is three-to-four weeks of online, pre-course work and four days in-person - no current plan for virtual option)
- Ongoing quarterly (or semi-annual) trainings/learning community meetings for coaches to continue learning and developing their practice

Ongoing:

- Ongoing quarterly (or semi-annual) trainings/learning community meetings for coaches to continue learning and developing their practice.
- Training will be developed to address emerging issues, needs and challenges so coaches are prepared to meet the workforce’s needs in their day-to-day practice