

Project Snapshot

OPRE Report #2023-098

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Study of Coaching Practices in Early Care and Education Settings, 2016–2021

Overview of the study

The Study of Coaching Practices in Early Care and Education Settings (SCOPE) was funded by the Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation. This project was conducted by Mathematica in partnership with Child Trends, consultant Chrishana Lloyd, and the Children’s Learning Institute at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston.

SCOPE goals

Our primary goal in the SCOPE project was to learn more about the ways coaching is implemented to improve instructional practice in early care and education (ECE). SCOPE focused on coaching in center-based classrooms and family child care (FCC) homes that served preschool-age children from families with low incomes. SCOPE also explored the programmatic and systems-level factors associated with coaching.

Data collection topics and respondents

SCOPE included two data collection periods (see Exhibit 1 for details).

The SCOPE 2019 surveys of coaches, center directors, center-based teachers, and FCC providers covered the following topics: coach training and supervision; the characteristics of coaches, center

teachers, and FCC providers; structural and process features of coaching; perceptions of the coach-teacher or coach-FCC provider relationship; challenges to coaching; center director involvement and support for coaching; and overall center and FCC home context.

The SCOPE 2021 follow-up surveys were conducted with coaches, center directors, and FCC providers who responded to the SCOPE 2019 surveys. The SCOPE 2021 surveys covered some of the same topics, with the goal of understanding how coaching might have changed since the COVID-19 pandemic began. These surveys also included questions about other professional development efforts that centers and FCC homes might have experienced during the pandemic. We interviewed a small sample of the coaches, center directors, and FCC providers who participated in the SCOPE 2021 surveys, to learn more about their coaching and broader professional development experiences.

Exhibit 1. SCOPE survey and interview time period and number of respondents

Data collection	Time period	Respondents			
		Coaches ^{a,b}	Center directors ^{b,c}	Center teachers	FCC providers
SCOPE 2019 survey	February to July 2019	100	66	130	38
SCOPE 2021 follow-up survey	August to October 2021	43	25	n.a.	32
SCOPE 2021 interviews	August to October 2021	9	4	n.a.	6

Note: SCOPE 2021 respondents were recruited from those who completed a SCOPE 2019 survey. All SCOPE 2021 interview respondents completed a SCOPE 2021 survey. Center-based teachers were not recruited for SCOPE 2021.

^a One of the coaches who worked with centers and FCC homes responded to the survey twice in 2019, once about coaching with centers and once about coaching with FCC providers. This coach is counted in both groups in Exhibit 1. Therefore, there are 99 unique coach respondents who provided a total of 100 responses. This coach responded only once in the SCOPE 2021 follow-up survey, about their coaching with centers.

^b Three of the center directors also served as the coach for their setting in 2019. These director-coaches responded to both the center director and coach surveys. One of these respondents completed a coach survey in the SCOPE 2021 follow-up.

^c Three of the center directors who responded to the SCOPE 2021 follow-up survey were new to the center since the 2019 survey.

FCC = family child care; n.a. = not applicable.

SCOPE criteria

The respondents in SCOPE were from seven states across three geographic regions (East, Central, and West).

There were two main criteria for participation in the SCOPE surveys.

1. Type of coaching. SCOPE focused on coaching designed to improve instructional practice for preschool-age children. We first selected states for SCOPE based on information about coaching happening in the state. For a state to be included, we required it to have at least one defined approach to coaching (that is, at least some documentation describing the process or model), but we also looked for evidence of other coaching approaches operating in the state. We then intentionally selected ECE settings (centers and FCC homes) that would be likely to be using a variety of different coaching approaches (see Exhibit 2).

2. Funding of settings. SCOPE focused on centers and FCC homes that primarily served children and families with low incomes. Those centers and FCC homes mostly received funding through a Head Start grant or Child Care and Development

Fund subsidies, but some settings used other types of funding to serve children from families with low incomes.

Exhibit 2 shows additional factors we considered to meet our goal of including a variety of coaching approaches in SCOPE.

Exhibit 2. Capturing a variety of coaching in SCOPE

When recruiting for the study, we looked for variation in the following characteristics of settings and coaching:

- Whether ECE settings had internal or external coaching
- The intensity (or dosage) of coaching in the center or FCC (that is, how often coaches had in-person meetings with teachers and FCC providers)
- Coach and teacher/provider experience (either their overall experience in their current role or how long they have worked in their current setting)
- The size of the setting (for centers only)
- The distribution of settings across geographic areas (rural, small urban, and large urban) ▲

Links among SCOPE respondents

SCOPE 2019 respondents. For the SCOPE 2019 surveys, we recruited coach-teacher and coach-provider pairs when possible (88 percent of center teachers and 95 percent of FCC providers who responded are paired with a coach who also responded). For centers, we aimed to recruit the center director, a coach, and one to four teachers in the center who worked with the coach. For FCC homes, we aimed to recruit the FCC provider and a coach. Given that fewer FCC providers tend to be involved in coaching, we expected that some of the FCC providers would be working with the same coach. All participating center teachers and FCC providers worked with their coach for at least four months or had four coaching meetings before survey participation.

SCOPE 2021 follow-up respondents. For the SCOPE 2021 follow-up surveys and interviews, coaches who responded in 2019 were eligible to participate if they were still providing coaching at all (not necessarily to the setting they were paired with in 2019). Center directors and FCC providers who responded in 2019 were eligible to participate if they were experiencing coaching or other types of professional development. Because the research questions could be answered with these groups of respondents—and to lessen burden on respondents overall—we did not survey or interview center teachers in 2021.

Focus of responses about coaching

Coaches focused on coaching in one type of setting when responding to the survey. About half (44 percent) of the coaches who participated in the SCOPE 2019 surveys worked with both centers and FCC homes. For SCOPE, we aimed to recruit one type of setting (either a center or FCC) for each coach. If a coach was linked to an FCC provider who had also been recruited for SCOPE, the coach was directed to answer questions about their coaching with FCC providers (even if they also worked as a coach in centers).

Across all 100 coach responses for the SCOPE 2019 surveys, 70 focused on coaches' work with centers, and 30 focused on coaches' work with FCC providers. Across the 43 coach responses for the SCOPE 2021 follow-up surveys, 33 focused on coaches' work with centers, and 10 focused on coaches' work with FCC providers. For the SCOPE 2021 interviews, on the other hand, coach respondents who worked with both centers and FCC providers could provide information from their work across settings during the interviews.

Center directors, center teachers, and FCC providers focused on a specific coach when responding to the survey or interview. If center directors, teachers, or FCC providers were working with more than one coach, we asked them to focus on the coach who had also been recruited for SCOPE 2019 when answering.

For more information about SCOPE

Visit the project page:

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/project-study-coaching-practices-early-care-and-education-settings-2016-2021>

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SCOPE data and findings

The SCOPE surveys and interview protocols as well as the study data are archived with the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR), located here: <https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/web/pages/>

Study briefs and reports from the 2019 surveys and the 2021 surveys and interviews can be found here: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre> These briefs and reports highlight findings about the characteristics of coaches, center teachers, FCC providers, ECE centers and FCC homes; the structure of coaches work (their caseload and communications); coach-teacher and coach-provider interactions; coaching features; and coaching supports and challenges.

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Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation
Administration for Children and Families
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Contract Number: 25450/HSP233201500071I

Mathematica reference number: 51387

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This brief is in the public domain. Permission to reproduce is not necessary. Suggested citation: Moiduddin, Emily and Cavadel, Elizabeth (2022). Study of Coaching Practices in Early Care and Education Settings, 2016-2021, OPRE Report #2022-XX, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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