

Comparing Two Pyramid Model Professional Development Opportunities for Early Childhood Educators in Georgia

Executive Summary

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Since 2022, Georgia's Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) has offered professional development (PD) on the Pyramid Model, a framework that helps early childhood educators support children's social and emotional development, create positive classroom environments, and instill trauma-informed approaches for supporting children's behaviors.

In the 2024–2025 school year, DECAL offered two forms of Pyramid Model PD:

- The Foundational Training, self-paced online eModules and facilitated peer learning community (PLC) sessions for teachers and administrators new to the Pyramid Model.
- Practice-Based Coaching (PBC), one-on-one coaching and on-site group trainings for teachers who had already completed the Foundational Training.

DECAL partnered with [Child Trends](#), a nonprofit research organization, to evaluate the Foundational Training pilot and scaled-up implementation in 2023 and 2024, respectively. In these evaluations, the early childhood educators who participated in Foundational Training reported increased knowledge, self-efficacy, and practices related to social-emotional learning (SEL). In the 2024–2025 school year, DECAL offered PBC for the first time. The current report was designed to measure outcomes of both the Foundational Training and PBC, and to draw comparisons between the two forms of PD to understand whether there was an added benefit of PBC over and above Foundational Training alone.

Glossary

SEL (Social and Emotional Learning): The process of developing skills that support children's social, emotional, and behavioral growth.

Foundational Training: A three-month training for early childhood educators to begin learning about the Pyramid Model. The two components are eModules and Professional Learning Communities.¹

eModules: Self-paced online lessons created by the Pyramid Model Consortium to teach early childhood educators the fundamentals of the Pyramid Model. DECAL provided two packages of eModules titled *Birth to Five* and *Practices to Reduce Suspension and Expulsion*.

PLCs (Professional Learning Communities): Virtual groups facilitated by DECAL specialists for early childhood educators to collaborate and discuss the topics covered by the eModules.

PBC (Practice-based coaching): “An adult-learning strategy that is used to build the capacity of a parent or colleague to improve existing abilities, develop new skills, or gain a deeper understanding of practices for use in current and future situations;” (p. 1).² Coaching includes goal setting, observation, action/practice, and reflection/feedback, within the context of a collaborative coaching partnership.³

PD (Professional development): The ongoing process of acquiring new knowledge, skills, and competencies to advance one's career and improve job performance.

Methods

The mixed-methods evaluation design included surveys, classroom observations, focus groups, and analysis of service delivery data. The surveys and observations were collected before and after PD (as well as at a midpoint for PBC). The surveys asked participants about their SEL knowledge, self-efficacy, practices, perceptions of challenging behavior, and feedback on the training. The observations used structured tools (Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool, TPOT and Teaching Pyramid Infant-Toddler Observation Scale, TPITOS) to look for teachers' use of Pyramid Model skills in the classroom. We developed the evaluation methods to be able to:

1. Describe each type of PD provided, including the amount of PD that participants received and their satisfaction with the PD.
2. Investigate change over time in social and emotional learning (SEL) mindsets, knowledge, and practices for participants for each type of PD, and determine whether the amount of change depended on how much PD they received.

To describe the PD provided, we analyzed data from the service logs and participant feedback on surveys. To analyze change over time, we used survey data and classroom observation for both groups over the course of three months.⁷ We supplemented these findings with insights from the focus groups.

Evaluation findings

Description of PD provided

How much PD did participants receive?

- **Foundational Training:** Both ECE teachers (N=60) and administrators (N=23) participated in Foundational Training. Most (77%) participating teachers and administrators completed both eModules; about half attended all six PLCs.
- **PBC:** Thirty-two teachers participated in coaching and on-site trainings. On average, they received 10 hour-long coaching sessions (fewer than the 14–18 planned). Most (84%) teachers attended all four on-site group sessions. Administrators did not receive coaching and had the option to participate in on-site trainings, attending two, on average.

What content and strategies did PBC coaches use?

- Coaching focused on a range of topics including responding to challenging behaviors and teaching social-emotional skills. Teachers reported that goal setting, observation, feedback, and hands-on support were some of the most useful coaching activities.

How satisfied were participants?

- Both groups reported high satisfaction and most found the PD relevant for their role. In the PBC group, teachers described their coaches as nonjudgmental, helpful, flexible, and reassuring.

⁷ PBC lasted for 7-9 months, whereas Foundational Training lasted for three months. Outcomes from the full length of PBC are presented separately in Appendix C.

Changes in knowledge, mindsets, and practice⁸

Did participants report changes in SEL knowledge?

- **Yes, in both groups.** Teachers in both types of PD self-reported significantly increased knowledge of social-emotional development.

Did confidence and mindsets change?

- **Partially.** Foundational Training administrators and PBC teachers both reported significantly greater confidence in supporting children with challenging behavior. Neither group showed significant shifts in how they thought about challenging behavior in the classroom, suggesting this may require more targeted support.

Did classroom practices change?

- **Only in PBC.** Observed Pyramid Model classroom practices did not change significantly for Foundational Training teachers, though starting scores were already high. PBC teachers showed a significant improvement in observed use of Pyramid Model practices that were maintained even in the new school year with new children in their classrooms.

Did exclusionary discipline change?

- Rates of exclusionary discipline were very low before PD began and remained low for both groups. No significant reductions were found, which reflects a strong starting point rather than a limitation.

Did outcomes depend on how much PD participants received?

- For Foundational Training teachers, more participation was linked to larger knowledge gains. For PBC teachers, neither knowledge nor practice changes depended on the number of coaching sessions received.

Conclusions and future considerations

Both forms of PD improved educators' knowledge and confidence. However, only PBC produced measurable gains in observed use of classroom practices that promote SEL. This difference is expected: the Foundational Training introduces the Pyramid Model to educators who are new to it, whereas PBC builds on that foundation through individualized support to translate knowledge to practice. These results suggest that these two programs may work best as a sequence.

These evaluation findings support the following suggestions for DECAL to consider:

- Continue providing PBC in the Pyramid Model because it has an added benefit over and above the benefits of Foundational Training. Continue to provide Foundational Training as a precursor to PBC.
- Support programs to transition to program-wide implementation of Pyramid Model and help them develop infrastructure to continue classroom coaching with increasing autonomy.
- Ensure that teachers receive the intended amount of coaching.
- Put processes in place to ensure that:
 - PBC participants receive the intended dose of coaching
 - Access to Pyramid Model PD expands over time, including to programs that may not have access to sufficient training resources for their staff

- PD is planned and scheduled strategically to accommodate educators' schedules
- Continue to evaluate DECAL's implementation of the Pyramid Model. Consider investigating:
 - The outcomes of PBC for teachers in program-wide implementation sites
 - How and for whom PBC is most effective, and what "dosage" of coaching is needed for positive outcomes
 - Whether the gains from PBC are maintained over time

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¹The Pyramid Model Consortium. (2021). *Online courses – ePyramid*. <https://www.pyramidmodel.org/online-courses-epyrmaid/>

²Rush, D. D., & Shelden, M. L. (2008). Coaching: Quick reference guide. *Briefcase*, 1(1), 1–2. <https://fipp.ncdhhs.gov/wp-content/uploads/BriefCASE-Vol-1-Number-1-UA.pdf>

³Snyder, P. A., Hemmeter, M. L., & Fox, L. (2015). Supporting implementation of evidence-based practices through practice-based coaching. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 35(3), 133–143. doi: 10.1177/0271121415594925

⁴Snyder, P. A., Hemmeter, M. L., & Fox, L. (2015). Supporting implementation of evidence-based practices through practice-based coaching. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 35(3), 133–143. doi: 10.1177/0271121415594925

⁵Findings below cover the same three-month window for both groups to allow a direct comparison. Extended PBC outcomes across the full nine months are in Appendix C.