

Evaluation of QSLA's Implementation of Online Coaching

October 2021



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Summary

Between January and June of 2021, Child360's Research and Evaluation Department conducted an evaluation of the virtual coaching provided by Quality Start Los Angeles (QSLA) coaches to their early learning providers. Results of the evaluation indicated overall successful implementation of virtual coaching. Coaches and teachers alike were able to use virtual platforms (e.g., Today's One Room School House, Zoom, etc.) to build relationships and deliver quality coaching. A period of adjustment was needed to learn and troubleshoot use of the online platform where coaches provided technical support, but teachers did eventually become comfortable using the software. In addition, new coaches felt best prepared when provided with a variety of support including support from other experienced coaches. Recommendations for future programs include a need for upfront technical support, building further instructional resources, increased peer support, and a clearer understanding of the online capabilities of teachers and coaches.

Introduction

In 2020, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Quality Start Los Angeles (QSLA) – LA County's Quality Rating and Improvement System – sought to support early learning providers in its network with the best possible adaptations to a new remote-work environment. To this end, QSLA leadership invested in the video-based TORSH online coaching software. Coaching partners Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles (CCALA) and Child360 collaborated with the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) to implement online coaching in the second half of the 2020-2021 academic school year. To document efforts to scale up this county-wide program and to measure its success, Child360 conducted an evaluation focusing on participants' experiences, approaches, successes, and lessons learned. This report summarizes the study, which began in January 2021, with data collection completed in July of 2021. Child360, CCALA, and LACOE worked collaboratively to answer the following questions:

1. What were the experiences of teachers and coaches who used online coaching?
2. What did the work of an online coach look like?
3. To what degree did teachers and coaches experience technical challenges with online coaching?
4. What are the best supports for novice online coaches?

Benefits of Online Coaching

Online coaching for teachers on platforms like TORSH has been a growing trend in teacher professional development (Keefe, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic made it necessary for some organizations to quickly transition to online coaching, and fortunately, research has documented many benefits for teachers and coaches alike. Some of these benefits are above and beyond what traditional in-person coaching offers. For example, online coaching reduces problems related to travel logistics and increases flexibility in work timing (Blumke, 2021). Online coaching also allows coaches to observe the virtual classrooms of multiple teachers who may be teaching at the same time, view a more significant portion of the lesson, and give more comprehensive feedback moment by moment (Stapleton et al., 2017; Lewis & Jones, 2019).

Online coaching helps teachers refine their skills in a positive coaching environment without constraining the coaching sessions to specific locations and times (Barrett, 2017). Child360 conducted a multi-year study using the TORSH coaching platform to explore the feasibility of this platform and to adapt their in-person coaching model to a virtual environment. The study found that the online coaching platform allowed geographically disparate coaches and teachers to engage in intensive coaching in an affordable manner, all while maintaining fidelity to the traditional high-quality coaching model (Barrett et al., 2020). The serendipitous timing of the study positioned QSLA coaches to transition smoothly to an online coaching environment in response to COVID-19. It was at that point that lessons learned from prior studies were put to practice in the scaled-up implementation of online coaching across the QSLA network. The current study evaluated the success of QSLA's virtual coaching, admittedly during the far-from-ideal conditions of a global pandemic.

Evaluation Methodology

The study relied on data gathered from surveys, interviews, notes from regular meetings, and data from the online coaching software system. The evaluator designed two **surveys**, one for coaches and one for teachers. The 23-item coach survey contained close-ended and open-ended questions about length of

experience as a coach and about coaches' experiences with online coaching. This survey was administered online in February, 2021. The 10-item teacher survey asked about their experiences with online coaching, technical support, and the level of support received from their coach. This survey was also administered online in June, 2021. Thirty-two Child360 coaches completed surveys (78% response rate), and 55 teachers completed surveys (16% response rate). One **focus group interview** was conducted with four Child360 coaches and centered on program implementation, successes, challenges, and areas for improvement. Two **semi-structured interviews** with Child360 coaches were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of their experience throughout the year. Quantitative data was analyzed through descriptive statistics. Thematic analysis was applied to the qualitative data (survey responses to open-ended items, all interview responses, and meeting notes).

Because CCALA's efforts targeted mostly planning and preparation for online coaching in the 2021-2022 academic school year as opposed to implementation of TORSH, a large portion of the data that was collected and analyzed came from Child360. Therefore, data and findings in this report primarily apply to Child360.

Findings: Coach Background

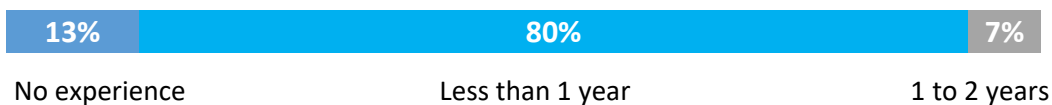
Most coaches had worked as coaches for about 5 years but had less than a year's experience using TORSH. Thirty-two coaches participated in the program and in the study. As shown in the figure below, more than half of the participating Child360 coaches had 4 to 6 years' experience as coaches, and 23% of coaches had between 7 and 9 years of experience. In addition, 13% had over 10 years' experience. Around 13% of Child360 coaches had between 1 and 3 years of experience.

Figure 1. Child360 coaches had at least **4 years' experience** as coaches. (N=32)



More than 80% of Child360 coaches had less than one year of experience using TORSH Online Coaching software. Only 7% of Child360 coaches had between one and two years of experience, and 13% of coaches had no experience.

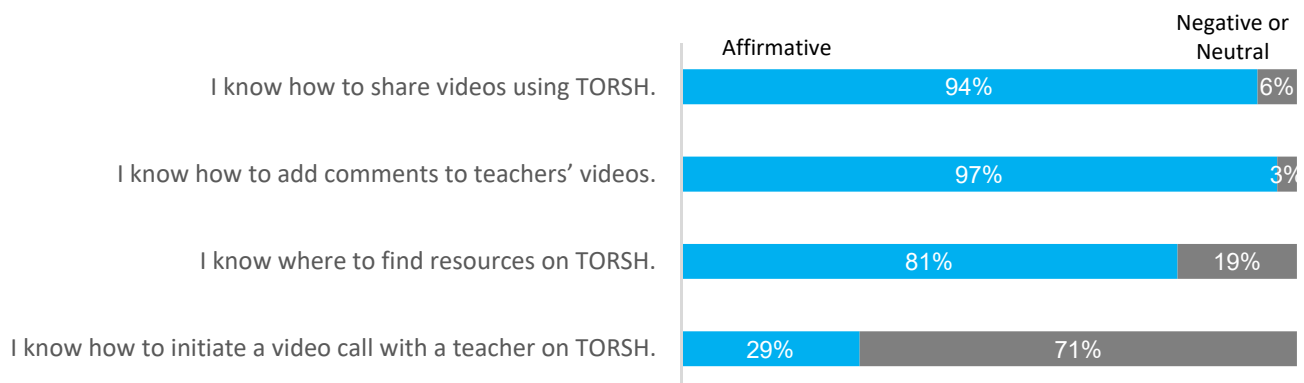
Figure 2. Most coaches had spent **less than 1 year** using TORSH. (N=32)



Findings: Experiences of Coaches and Teachers Using Online Coaching

Since the majority of Child360 coaches had less than one year of experience, most of the following findings represent new users to the program. Child360 coaches and teachers were able to learn and apply new technology quickly and maintain strong relationships. As shown in Figure 3, most coaches felt comfortable using basic features of TORSH. However, the ability to initiate a video call with a teacher was a challenging feature for most coaches.

Figure 3. Coaches knew how to use TORSH functions, except for how to start a video call. (N=32)



The majority of Child360 coaches felt comfortable using TORSH for online coaching. Of the Child360 coaches surveyed, 81% reported feeling comfortable with TORSH for online coaching, 16% felt neutral, and 3% did not feel comfortable. Child360 coaches were trained by colleagues and supervisors on the use of TORSH for online coaching and received handouts, instructional videos, and direct one-on-one support. Coaches who felt comfortable with TORSH were able to support other coaches and decrease the likelihood of support requests.

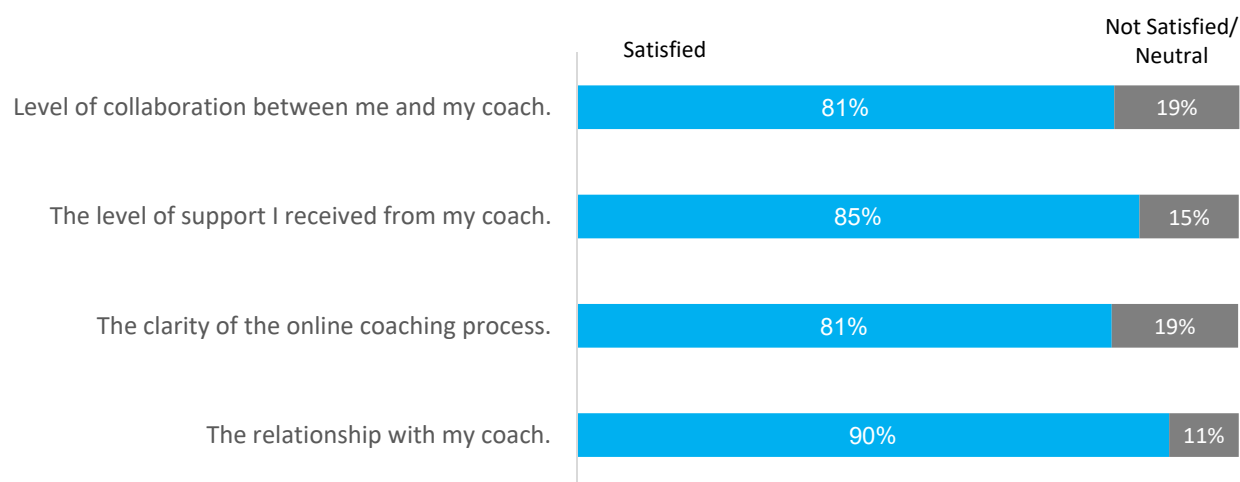
Child360 coaches felt comfortable communicating with teachers using remote methods (e.g., TORSH, phone call, text, e-mail). Forming and maintaining positive relationships, especially in remote settings, is important for success with any program. To maintain positive relationships, coaches and teachers were encouraged to communicate with one another regularly. During a focus group (N=4) with Child360 coaches, participants were asked to discuss areas they felt were going well. Coaches discussed communication with their teachers via Zoom, and the ability to share their screens. One coach noted this was an “Ah-ha” moment for her teacher, and the process was enjoyable for both. Coaches felt online methods of communication encouraged preparation and intentionality with their discussions, a common theme among coaches. Child360 coaches were also asked about their level of agreement with the statement, “I can establish a positive relationship with teachers in an online environment,” with 94% of coaches in agreement.

The great majority of teachers were successful in accessing TORSH coaching. Of the teachers who participated this year, 91% were able to use and experience TORSH online coaching. Teachers who were not able to participate reported feeling overwhelmed, were short-staffed, and lacked internet connectivity. Teachers also reported that additional reminders and in-depth reviews of TORSH would assist in their participation in the coming years.

Child360 teachers improved their skills in using new technology. Child360 teachers were asked to share some of their successes during the year in an open-ended format. Teachers learned how to send Google invites, learn new programs, and incorporate music and videos into their online teaching. To support this finding, teachers were also asked to rate their level of agreement with the following statement, “I developed new technical skills during this year,” to which 79% of teachers agreed.

Teachers and coaches shared a positive relationship. Both teachers and coaches reported feeling connected, and able to spend uninterrupted time working on their goals during the school year. One teacher stated, “It was easier to manage and send information when the coach needed it. And it was easier to reach out to my coach as well.” Frequent and high-quality interactions helped strengthen the relationship between coach and teacher. As shown in Figure 4, teachers reported high levels of satisfaction with their levels of collaboration and support, the clarity of the process, and their relationship. Of the negative or neutral responses, between 2% and 6% of teachers reported “Not satisfied,” while the remaining responses were neutral.

Figure 4. Teachers were satisfied with key aspects of working with their coach. (N=48)



Teachers who reported interacting with their coach every other month or infrequently were less satisfied with key aspects of working with their coach.

Responses to teacher satisfaction ratings were further analyzed by the frequency of interaction between the teacher and their coach. When teachers reported infrequent interactions with their coach, their neutral satisfaction ratings jumped to 25%. It is important for coaches to meet with or interact with their teachers at least once a month to maintain higher levels of satisfaction.

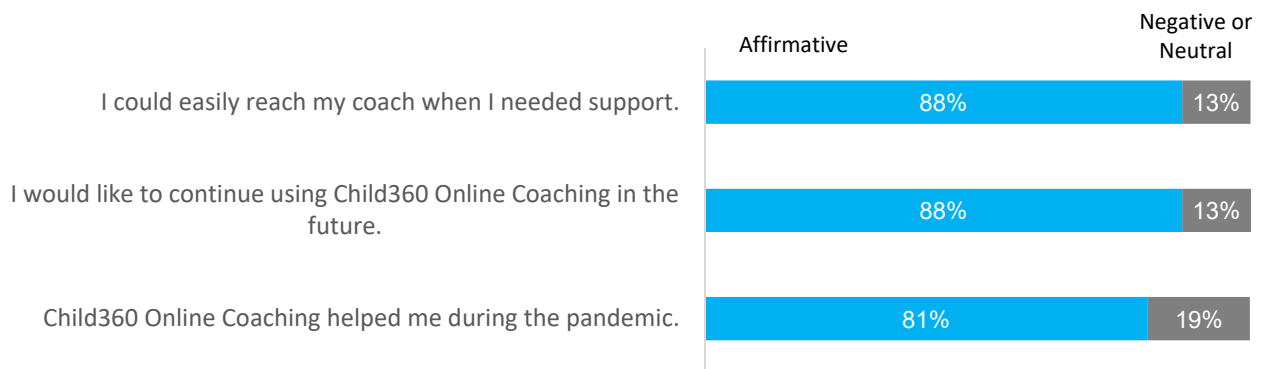
Teachers were able to sustain a connection with their coach during the pandemic.

The 2020 school year saw significant challenges, specifically to the Early Childhood Education community. All coaching activities in person were put on hold indefinitely. These challenges created a shift in the typical coaching process where communication happened face-to-face. However, even in remote settings, teachers reported a strong connection to their coach. As shown in Figure 5, teachers could easily reach their coach, and felt online coaching helped them during the pandemic.

“It was very beneficial for me during this pandemic to be able to communicate with my coach.”
– QSLA Teacher

“Child360’s Online Coaching made the experience of receiving coaching easier and more accessible. It also allowed a more flexible time frame of when I could meet with my coach. I truly enjoyed online coaching this year!”
– QSLA Teacher

Figure 5. Teachers felt that online coaching was **helpful** and would like to **continue to use it**. (N=48)



Findings: What the Work of an Online Coach Looked Like

An important goal of the current evaluation was to determine how coaches spent their time on online coaching activities. Child360 coaches spent time supporting teachers with technical support early in the program but returned to normal coaching once teachers gained experience with virtual procedures.

Coaches spent time with their colleagues to troubleshoot best practices for online coaching.

Among the challenges faced in the ECE community was the inability to visit teachers and programs, to assist with their onboarding of online coaching in the event technology could not be set up remotely. In addition to pandemic-related challenges, some teachers had challenges with district policy that prevented the use of TORSH. To resolve those challenges, Child360 coaches used alternative methods to deliver online coaching to their teachers and established a small group meeting place called “TORSH Cafés.” These cafés were hosted by a more experienced online coach and gave new coaches an opportunity to learn from their peers. Child360 coaches also developed their own materials to support teachers that required alternative methods for online coaching (e.g., Zoom, FaceTime). In a focus group with Child360 coaches, one coach reported, “TORSH cafés have been great opportunities to support other coaches. They are developing their own materials for tech support and empower themselves.”

Teachers and program directors needed the most support and time at the beginning of the program. Child360 coaches reported additional time was spent early on with new teachers. Coaches needed to spend extra time with some teachers to walk them through the process of signing up through TORSH, exploring other methods of delivery for online coaching, and guiding them through the process of sending videos. Uploading videos was the most common challenge teachers faced when they began online coaching. One coach reported spending upwards of one to two hours per teacher at the beginning of the program, although this time decreased as the teacher became more comfortable.

Coaches spent between 0 and 5 hours per week providing technical support to teachers. Approximately half of coaches reported spending less than one hour per week providing technical support, while the other half reported spending between 1 and 5 hours per week. Only two coaches said they provided between 6 and 10 hours of technical support per week.

The following data points highlight Child360 staff and teacher participation in TORSH during the evaluation period from January 2021 to July 2021.

- 426 active users
 - Between January and July of 2021, TORSH had a total of 426 active users, including 41 coaches, 4 supervisors, 1 director, and 380 teachers (74% of Child360's Tier 1-3 teachers).
- 1,692 videos watched
 - During the evaluation period, users watched a total of 1,692 videos. Each video received an average of four comments, which is aligned with Child360's online coaching protocol.

Findings: Technical Challenges Experienced by Teachers and Coaches

With any new program, technical challenges are certain to arise. The goal of this research question was to determine what technical challenges occurred, and the degree to which they impacted teachers and coaches.

All coaches received technical support requests from teachers at the beginning of the program. Coaches were asked to report the frequency of technical support requests from their teachers. In an interview with one coach, it was reported that teachers needed a significant amount of support early on, but the requests dwindled as teachers became more comfortable.

Child360 coaches were able to resolve technical issues on their own in most cases. Coaches were asked to report how often they were able to resolve technical issues on their own. Most coaches were able to resolve the issue, with only one coach who stated "rarely." Among the coaches, 6% "always" resolved technical issues, 52% were "often" able to resolve the issue, and 39% could "sometimes" resolve the issue. This finding was supported during an interview with a Child360 Coach Supervisor. When asked about technical issues, the supervisor responded, "Technical support is minimal at this point in the program. Supervisors do not receive requests for support, hardly at all."

Teachers struggled to learn the use of TORSH early in the program, citing TORSH as a difficult software to learn. One teacher stated,

"Perhaps the biggest challenge was at the very beginning of the year, which was TORSH. At first it was a bit difficult to navigate, but my coach was always there to answer any questions and support me along the way. Once I became familiarized with the program it was pretty much smooth sailing from there."

Teachers also struggled with the software usability via mobile device, with one teacher who stated, "the TORSH system, I was confused and still did not really working well via phone." TORSH continues to develop and update their app to better support the needs of users.

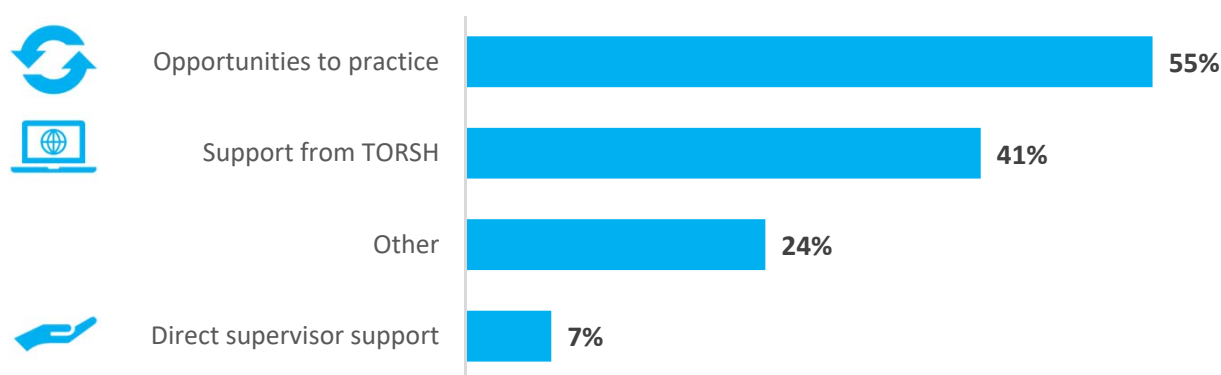
Findings: How to Support First-Time Coaches' Online Learning

Child360 coaches were trained by other, more experienced online coaches prior to implementation of the program. In addition to training, experienced online coaches provided resources and offered their time to support new coaches. The following insights provide practical ways to best support new coaches, and describes best practices for new programs that are interested in online coaching.

Most coaches felt they received enough training on using TORSH software for online coaching. Coaches were asked if they received enough training on TORSH, with 68% who felt they did receive enough. This does, however, leave 32% of coaches who felt they did not receive enough training. In Child360’s pool of teachers, a portion were not able to engage in online coaching through TORSH. Instead, these teachers required alternative methods of coaching (e.g., Zoom, FaceTime). When this was realized, Child360 coaches developed new approaches for providing online coaching (as discussed earlier in the report). The unexpected shift from TORSH-only coaching to a mixed approach (Zoom, FaceTime) may have led some coaches to feel they did not receive enough training.

Coaches expressed a need for a wide array of supports to ensure their success with online coaching. Coaches were asked to select which type of support would be most beneficial to their success with online coaching. As shown in the figure below, most coaches would like to be given opportunities to practice (e.g., sharing videos, providing comments) and receive direct support from TORSH. The figure below illustrates the types of supports coaches would like to see to be successful.

Figure 6. Most coaches would like more **practice** using TORSH (N=32)



Note: Coaches who wrote in “other” would like to see TORSH cafés continue and have all participating teachers trained prior to meeting their coach.

Experienced coaches supporting new coaches led to high teacher ratings. Child360 coaches with more experience in online coaching became known as “online coaching leads.” As leads, a select few coaches would support new coaches with common technical issues, what to expect with online coaching, and a place to share ideas to better support their teachers. Child360 coaches were able to gain practical, hands-on experience with TORSH and online coaching in general. These experiences proved to be impactful because when teachers were asked, “do you rate your coach as knowledgeable about TORSH?”, 98% responded yes.

New coaches felt supported while they learned how to coach online. New coaches were asked if they had the support needed to be successful with online coaching; 90% reported yes. One coach said,

“I haven’t had a hard time, everyone is receptive. The hard part is not seeing people in person. I wish I could be there in person. I haven’t had any challenges really, or not supported. I have had a really good experience.”

Summary of Findings

Experiences of coaches and teachers using online coaching

Overall, the majority of Child360 coaches felt comfortable using TORSH and alternative methods for online coaching. In addition, the coaches felt comfortable communicating with teachers using remote methods (e.g., TORSH, phone call, text, e-mail). These remote methods of communication were used often and did not pose a challenge. The majority of teachers were successful in accessing TORSH coaching with the support of their coach. Teachers were able to connect and communicate with their coaches on a regular basis via remote methods, enabling the development of meaningful relationships in a virtual coaching environment despite difficulties imposed by the pandemic.

What the Work of an Online Coach Looked Like

Coaches spent time with their colleagues to troubleshoot best practices for online coaching. Throughout the year, Child360 coaches worked together in “TORSH Cafés” where they could share ideas and troubleshoot challenges with online coaching. Teachers and program directors needed the most support and time at the beginning of the program. Their challenges included logging on, sharing videos, and finding time. To support teachers, coaches spent between 0 and 5 hours per week providing technical support. Technical support was high early in the program but tapered off as teachers became more comfortable with the software.

Coach Challenges

At the beginning of the program, all coaches reported receiving some form of technical support requests from their teachers. Child360 coaches were able to resolve technical issues on their own, in most cases, without the need to contact their supervisor.

Teacher Challenges

Teachers struggled to learn the use of TORSH early in the program, citing TORSH as a difficult software to learn. Early struggles with TORSH were reported by many teachers, citing trouble with sharing videos and logging on. Most of the challenges teachers faced focused on time and the logistics of recording in the classroom, such as having enough time to set up their room the way they would have liked.

New Coach Supports

Most coaches felt they received enough training on using TORSH software for online coaching and were satisfied with the quantity and quality of training they received. To best support new coaches, it is important to provide a wide range of materials and opportunities to practice. Supports included time to practice using the software, visual guides, and online courses. In addition, new coaches benefited from experienced coaches who could walk them through the process. Positioning these experienced coaches as “online coaching leads” can help support coaches early on. Overall, new coaches felt supported while they learned how to coach online during the evaluation period.

Recommendations from Teachers and Coaches

Both coaches and teachers were asked to provide recommendations that would improve their experience with online coaching.

Teacher recommendations

- Provide video tutorials.
- Reinforce the process of online coaching (video submissions, comments, etc.).
- Offer tips for using online coaching from all device types (e.g., Android, iPad, laptop).
- Create resources for tracking time (checklists for when videos were submitted or when comments were received).
- Dedicate extra time at the beginning of the program to teachers.
- Share tips for time management, as it relates to online coaching.

Coach recommendations

- Continue to hold online coaching cafés (hosted by an online coaching lead).
- Ensure all providers are trained in online coaching approaches (TORSH or Zoom) prior to meeting.
- Continue to develop clear and simple written instructions for basic tasks (e.g., sharing a video, recording, texting, general expectations).
- Have online coaching leads directly train participating teachers.
- Provide video tutorials.
- Develop a course in online coaching (eLearning).
- Allow teachers more time to learn TORSH and the online coaching method.
- Encourage peer-to-peer sharing of ideas.

General Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on analyses of data from Child360 coaches, supervisors, and early education teachers who participated in the program.

- 1. Plan to spend additional time on technical support at the beginning of the program.** Child360 coaches and teachers both reported spending a significant amount of time on technical support early in the program. Onboarding of new coaches needs to focus on what technical support requests are most common, and how to resolve issues that are outside of their ability.
- 2. Continue to build upon existing supports for new coaches and teachers.** Child360 online coaches have developed a wide range of supports for new coaches and teachers. Supports include guides, videos, tutorials, and FAQ documents that are available to all coaches and teachers. Moving forward, it is important to keep these documents up to date and expand upon these resources as we learn more about online coaching. For example, coaches would like to have all teachers trained on TORSH or online coaching before meeting for the first time. To accomplish this, developing an online course for new teachers or programs could be a meaningful first step.
- 3. Establish “online coach leads” to act as a peer support for the larger team.** New coaches benefited from having experienced online coaches support them during the year. Online coach leads were able to set up small group meetings to discuss challenges, share ideas about how to best support their teachers, and practice online coaching.
- 4. Understand the technical needs of teachers and programs.** Transitioning from in-person to virtual coaching is a challenge. To better meet the challenge, it is important to assess the current needs of teachers and their programs. For example, do programs have access to the internet? What devices do teachers have access to? What is the best way to receive training? Understanding these needs will give coaches a way to customize the types of supports they give their teachers and increase the accessibility of virtual coaching.

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Appendix B. Coach Survey (N=32)

1. I have engaged in online coaching using TORSH during the current program year.
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
2. If you have not, what has prevented you from using TORSH?
3. How many years have you been a coach?
 - a) 1-3 years
 - b) 4-6 years
 - c) 7-9 years
 - d) More than 10 years
4. How many years' experience do you have using TORSH?
 - a) None
 - b) Less than one year
 - c) 1-2 years
5. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements.
 1. I feel comfortable using TORSH for online coaching.
 2. I know how to share videos using TORSH.
 3. I know how to add comments to teachers' videos on TORSH.
 4. I know where to find resources on TORSH.
 5. I know how to initiate a video call with a teacher on TORSH.
 6. I feel comfortable communicating with my teachers using remote methods (e.g., TORSH, phone call, text, e-mail).
6. I can establish a positive relationship with teachers in an online environment.
7. I experience technical challenges using TORSH.
 - a) Never
 - b) Rarely
 - c) Sometimes
 - d) Often
8. I can resolve technical issues on my own.
 - a) Never
 - b) Rarely
 - c) Sometimes
 - d) Often
9. Teachers request technical support from me.
 - a) Never
 - b) Rarely
 - c) Sometimes
 - d) Often
10. How much time do you typically spend providing technical support to your teachers per week (total)?
 - a) Less than one hour
 - b) 1-5 hours
 - c) 6-10 hours
11. What is the most common technical support request you receive from teachers?
12. Do you feel you received enough training on using TORSH software?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
13. What type of supports would be beneficial for your continued success? (Select all that apply)
 1. Online tutorials
 2. Direct supervisor support
 3. Support from TORSH directly
 4. Opportunities to practice
 5. Other

14. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements.

1. I have a difficult time using TORSH
2. I feel comfortable documenting TORSH observations in Pinwheel
3. I have the support I need to be successful with online coaching.
4. How can we better support you on the use of TORSH?
5. Is there any additional information you would like us to know?