The Role of Regional Hubs in Quality Counts California

IMPACT Brief (February 2023)

Introduction

This brief summarizes the role of the First 5 California's (F5CA) IMPACT investment in Regional Hubs for the Quality Counts California (QCC) quality rating and improvement system (QRIS). The brief describes how Regional Hubs support training and professional development for technical assistance providers, coaches, trainers, and QRIS administrators and how they promote equity throughout their activities. The brief also discusses the Regional Hub's evaluation efforts. The brief ends with a section on the future role of Regional Hubs.

Overview

QCC is a locally administered state QRIS that seeks to ensure that children throughout the state have access to high-quality programs so that they thrive in their early learning and care settings and succeed in kindergarten and beyond (refer to "Key Successes of IMPACT Within Quality Counts California" for more information).

- **QCC functions at three levels**: state, regional, and local. The role of Regional Hubs is to build capacity by creating regional efficiencies and leveraging local and state resources to reduce duplication of efforts.
- **The 10 regions** each serve between 1 and 14 counties.
- In addition, **F5CA funded the Tribal Child Care Association of California** (TCCAC) to support tribal child care programs throughout the state in their quality improvement efforts and connection with local and regional QCC efforts.
- Refer to "Regional Hub Profiles" for more information.

Context

F5CA awarded the current funding for Regional Hubs in June 2021. The disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic continued to affect early childhood education, and the Regional Hubs had worked with their local consortia and partners to rethink their activities and how to implement them. Several Regional Hubs reported that virtual meetings allowed for more frequent and inclusive discussions at all three levels of QCC. Regional Hubs also reported that their local consortia and partners offered more virtual training and technical assistance.

Approach

To learn more about how the regional level of QCC has supported training, promoted equity, and evaluated their success, representatives of the 10 Regional Hubs and the TCCAC were interviewed in June and July of 2022.[1] Regional Hub responses to the most recent performance report in Spring 2022 as well as Regional Hub and TCCAC applications for funding were also consulted for additional information.

Findings

This section presents key findings related to:

- **Regional Hub support** for training and professional development,
- **Ensuring equity** of access to resources,
- **Evaluating** the success of activities, and
- **Priorities** for the future.

IMPACT funding for Regional Hubs provides an effective and efficient model for training and professional development for the QCC system.

The initial focus areas for Regional Hubs were an efficient system of Environment Rating Scale (ERS) anchoring, supporting ERS capacity, and coordinating efficient training and professional development. Regional Hubs have evolved to expand coordination and support beyond training and professional development to a number of other areas. In the Reginal Hub performance report in Spring 2022, the most important Regional Hub functions were:

- Regional communication, partnerships, and coordination
- Facilitating access to professional development, training, and Communities of Practice (CoPs) in originally identified focus areas, plus various additional topics
- Promoting and facilitating access to coaching, coach supports, and coach professional development

Each Regional Hub and the TCCAC developed strategies to serve their local consortia or population. To understand the training and professional development needs of consortia and to coordinate across the region, approaches included:

- Meeting individually with local consortia to discuss their training and professional development needs,
- Discussing training and professional development at regular Regional Hub meetings with consortia representatives and partner agencies,
- Establishing a Regional Hub subcommittee for training and technical assistance to work with the Regional Hub coordinator to decide on what opportunities to offer, and
- Cultivating open sharing of materials and resources across partner agencies.

The TCCAC established a culture committee to guide the priorities for training and developed professional pathways specifically for tribal child care providers.

Several Regional Hubs also built capacity to provide training and professional development across their regions by supporting training of trainers to ensure sustainability when there was staff turnover. One Hub trained Hub staff on a wide variety of topics and tools to ensure flexibility and sustainability for the trainings they offer in their region. Another prioritized professional development for coaches and funded learning opportunities outside the region, such as conferences. One small region determined it was more cost-effective to contract with trainers rather than to train and certify local staff.

All eight Regional Hubs that served more than one consortium have built capacity for QRIS leadership with the local consortia. Several regions used CoPs to help consortia learn from each other. Others reported facilitating leadership capacity-building trainings and providing training on the data system used by all the consortia in the region.

Regional Hubs leveraged resources across the local consortia they served and partnered with other Regional Hubs to offer trainings. In larger regions with multiple large consortia, the consortia scheduled and opened up trainings to the other consortia in the region. In smaller regions with rural consortia, the Regional Hub often took on the funding and scheduling of training. In one Regional Hub, the larger consortia with more funds allocated to training paid for smaller consortia to join them and attend trainings. A region serving consortia with small budgets in rural areas used Regional Hub funds to ensure the availability of high-quality training. Another Regional Hub leveraged its funding to fill a gap and host an anti-racist training. After the consortia in another region decided on the trainings they would offer using available funds, the Regional Hub funded trainings that the consortia could not offer.

IMPACT funding for Regional Hubs enables equitable access to training and professional development for underserved populations.

While local consortia typically develop strategies for reaching underserved provider populations and providers who serve high-impact child populations (as identified in the IMPACT 2020 Request for Applications), the Regional Hubs supported equitable access in a variety of ways. Two Regional Hubs highlighted that they created more bilingual materials for training and professional development. Another Regional Hub funded training on topics such as trauma-informed care, implicit bias, equity, inclusion, and multi-lingual learners to support their local consortia's work with child care providers, and reported efforts "have enabled equitable access to historically inaccessible trainings that have provided transformational experiences for teachers." Two Regional Hubs provided supports for providers serving infants and toddlers, including training for infant-toddler coaches. Another worked to equalize subsidy payments to better support infant-toddler care.

In addition, Regional Hubs provided ways for consortia to share strategies and best practices for reaching their specific local populations. Regional Hubs held regular meetings that included learning how local consortia support different provider populations and discussing local workforce needs. Another Regional Hub created a workgroup to discuss challenges and barriers to engagement with family, friend, and neighbor providers. Several Regional Hubs described the creation and facilitation of CoPs to enable local consortia to collaborate on approaches and strategies for ensuring equity in training and professional development.

The TCCAC provided culturally appropriate training for tribal child care providers and established relationships with Regional Hubs and local consortia to facilitate access to the range of trainings offered. In addition, the TCCAC invites Regional Hubs and consortia to participate in their quarterly meetings to better understand tribal cultures and their approach to child care.

IMPACT funding for Regional Hubs facilitates local evaluation and data use.

Regional Hub leaders reported using several strategies to evaluate their success in meeting their goals. Most Regional Hubs conducted surveys to gather information regarding the success of their activities. For example, one Regional Hub administers a survey after every training and uses an annual survey at the end of the year to gather participant satisfaction data. Another Regional Hub, which contracts with external evaluators, uses surveys to assess the extent to which they are achieving their goals. Most Regional Hubs conducted qualitative evaluation activities, and several expressed an interest in gathering even more qualitative data. Hub leaders in one region reported that qualitative data helped them understand the reasons behind survey findings and stated, "We would like to do more qualitative evaluation…to be able to hear someone's perspective that isn't necessarily a 'check-off'…understanding the why helps us even more. Data and charts are great but knowing the why is important." Another Regional Hub leader stated that they want to expand their qualitative evaluation and were in discussions with an independent contractor to pursue this objective. One Regional Hub received the state's support to conduct focus groups to gather qualitative data. Regional Hubs referenced additional data sources that guided their decision-making regarding training and technical assistance within the region. The data sources identified were CLASS, Quality Improvement Plans, coaching logs, and other data that can be drawn down from their data systems (e.g., Hubbe and Vertical Change).

Regional Hubs highlighted the importance of understanding their region's needs as part of the evaluation process. One Regional Hub shared that they conduct an annual needs assessment to determine what they will focus on and why. All regions discussed closely monitoring the needs of their region, recognizing that needs can change over time. For example, one Regional Hub gathered abundant qualitative data about incentive inequities from two provider meetings. The Regional Hub designed the meetings to allow participants, both family child care providers and centers, to vocalize concerns. As a

result of these findings, the Regional Hub is now considering the need for more provider networking. Leaders of another Regional Hub explained that they want to "ensure our Hub is evolving as our region's needs evolve."

Additionally, Regional Hubs reported that they created structures and processes—both formal and informal—to assess the extent to which they were reaching their goals. Most Regional Hubs shared that they met regularly to discuss their progress, changing needs, and overall course maintenance. For example, one Regional Hub explained that leaders discuss regional needs during regular ongoing meetings and make decisions about funding to accomplish their goals. Another described how they discuss their Regional Hub plan, including goals, during regular meetings, which they regard as "an opportunity to share about what's working and what's not working." Some Regional Hubs have more formalized structures in place to hold themselves accountable for meeting their goals. For example, one Regional Hub has an evaluation subcommittee. Another has a board to which they are required to submit weekly reports and document the continuous work on their grants. If, for example, they experience turnover in staffing, they must address how they will progress on their goals despite challenges. The Regional Hub leaders stated, "When we have turnover or anything like that, we're making sure that we're still meeting our goals and that we don't fall behind. So, we're always checking in on a weekly basis." Another Regional Hub's structure consists of a council and several working committees. The working committees are responsible for developing annual goals and objectives, which are then presented to the council for approval.

Challenges to Evaluation

When asked about evaluation, some Regional Hubs described challenges in assessing progress toward their goals. Leaders in one Regional Hub explained that they contracted with an outside agency for surveys. They considered whether to do these again but decided not to due to survey fatigue. They stated, "There's survey fatigue going around, and it's in part because of what's been going on with COVID…A lot of people want the train to slow down." In the context of describing that they had to re-adjust after COVID to "just stay afloat," another Regional Hub similarly stated that they are mindful of not sending too many surveys. On the other hand, a different Regional Hub mentioned that using data available a year after it is collected, such as the Common Data File, was not enough to effectively tell the story of their progress. Finally, another reported that resources and time were challenges to conducting more qualitative evaluations and added that they would eagerly collect more qualitative data in their evaluations if they had more funding.

Facilitating Data Systems

Most Regional Hubs contract a data system on behalf of their region, and the most widely used is Hubbe (formerly known as iPinwheel). Two Regional Hubs reported that they have used Hubbe since the inception of their Regional Hub. Regional Hubs did not report purchasing any add-on features through Hubbe. Most Regional Hubs responded

that they would not consider changing to a different data system. The reasons for not wanting to change to a different data system included Hubbe's customer service and satisfaction with how user-friendly Hubbe is. More specifically, Regional Hubs noted that Hubbe was willing to customize systems to meet individualized needs. The three regions that would consider moving to a different data system indicated the following conditions: if it was more efficient, more user-friendly, more cost-effective, and/or a state-wide platform. Three Regional Hubs reported that some consortia used Vertical Change, and one consortium developed their own data system.

Regional Hubs are ready to take on a larger role in coordinating quality improvement activities, advancing equity, and building systems.

Regional Hubs wanted to strengthen and expand their efforts by building on the success of creating efficiencies with regional coordination of training and professional development. One Regional Hub intended to continue regionalizing training and resources for consortia partners. Another wanted to coordinate more sharing across regions, stating, "When Hub coordinators come together, it's an effective way to discuss training needs and leverage across regions."

Regional Hubs were committed to doing more to advance equity in the QCC system. They indicated that equity of provider access to coaching, training, family engagement, and dual language learning supports was the most important priority in the 2022 performance report. In addition, one Regional Hub mentioned training and professional development on equity specifically for coaches and trainers, while another wanted to do more to ensure equity for Black and Latine families. Another Regional Hub wanted to take a more active role in decisions on how to spend funds to advance equity.

The Regional Hubs see themselves as part of broader systems for supporting children and families and want to participate in building those systems. At the regional level, one Hub wanted to promote a whole-child perspective, leveraging partner agency funding to serve specific populations or areas of development and build systems beyond the child care programs and providers participating in QCC.

Future Role of Regional Hubs

This section discusses the vision for the role of Regional Hubs as a continued collaboration between F5CA and the Regional Hubs.

Ensure that QCC rating matrix supports providers.

Regional Hubs play a vital role in identifying and elevating the needs of their constituent partners. They understand both the shared values and the individual priorities within their regions. They should be used as a resource to ensure that any updates or changes to the QCC Rating Matrix reflect local needs and continue to allow implementation

flexibility. They can also help improve access across their regions to the resources needed to achieve high ratings as they work with their local consortia and partners to understand the barriers to access within the diverse communities they serve.

Regional Hub leadership has a role in promoting equity.

Given Regional Hubs' lead role in training on race, equity, anti-bias, and inclusion, as well as in adopting "Commitment to Equity" statements by early learning organizations and partners, F5CA should continue to look to Regional Hubs to ensure equitable distribution of resources, access to supports, and the breaking down of barriers to access across regions and consortia.

Continue to refine data systems and use data effectively.

Regional Hubs have also played a role in sharing best practices of recording rating, assessment, and observation data, which improved the state's access to comprehensive information. While some data systems contracts are managed at the Regional Hub level, day-to-day operations are happening at the consortium level. Managing these costly contracts per consortium is not the most efficient use of Regional Hubs' time or funds, and Regional Hubs would like to request greater state-level coordination and funding of data systems. There is significant interest in one state-funded data system. There is also interest in better data integration between coaching, professional development, provider data trends, and existing data systems (e.g., the California Early Care and Education Workforce Registry, Hubbe, Vertical Change, and other databases). Integrated data systems would improve equity and inclusion. They could be used to share a comprehensive picture of the early learning and care landscape with policymakers as well as meaningful stories about QCC.

Ensure sustainability and flexibility of funding.

F5CA can and will continue funding Regional Hubs to coordinate for the regions. This includes maintaining the role of Regional Hubs in coordinating resources and training across the region and adding the flexibility to train early educators and technical assistance providers. Regional Hubs should continue to expand their reach and foster access to a broad range of supports.

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[1] WestEd contacted Regional Hub and TCCAC leads, provided them with a list of the topics to be covered in the interview, and invited leads to include any team members that could contribute feedback in the interviews. Each interview was scheduled for one hour; some were completed over more than one session. A total of 24 individuals participated in the group interviews across the 10 Regional Hubs and TCCAC. The number of participants in each interview ranged from one to four.