Winning Beyond the Game

FINDINGS FROM THE MILLION COACHES CHALLENGE IMPLEMENTATION STUDY

MILLION COACHES CHALLENGE

AIR®
Advancing Evidence.
Improving Lives.

Winning Beyond the Game

FINDINGS FROM THE MILLION COACHES CHALLENGE IMPLEMENTATION STUDY

Jessy Newman, Amelia Auchstetter, Brad Salvato, and John Kochanek

American Institutes for Research

April 2026

MILLION COACHES CHALLENGE

MILLION COACHES CHALLENGE

Contents

Exhibits

Acknowledgments

Like many sports, conducting an external, multiyear, multimethod implementation study requires teamwork. We are grateful to the Susan Crown Exchange for having the foresight and fortitude to pair research with practice during the Million Coaches Challenge (MCC), and we thank our partners in this work, Project Play at the Aspen Institute, Collaborative Communications, and McPherson Strategies, for working alongside us in support of the implementation study. In addition, we express our gratitude to the 13,807 coaches who have participated in the MCC Coach Perception Survey. Their insights, observations, and anecdotes about practice change are the reason we do this work, and it was our honor to elevate their voices through this study.

Finally, we would like to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the partner organizations of the MCC, without whom the study and this report would not be possible. These MCC Partners worked with us in the early stages of the study to refine our design and methodology, and they each engaged with us in multiple meetings to figure out the best way to align their data collection efforts with ours. The Partners have shared data with us every 6 months for multiple years, and once a data period would end, they moved on to support the survey administration period. The Partners participated in multiple interviews, and they shared their views transparently, openly, and with the passion that comes from holding this work so close to their hearts. They also shared their training materials—many of which are proprietary—for our review. The Partners have worked with us along the way to ensure we reported our findings accurately and with integrity; they checked numbers, reviewed our writing, and engaged with us in collaborative meaning-making sessions to enhance our understanding and improve the quality of our work. The Partners trusted us to capture their journey, elevate their ideas, and share the MCC story, and for that we are truly grateful.

MCC Partners

Move Your Body Calm Your Mind

Center for Healing and Justice through Sport — CHJS — Nothing Heals Like Sport

Center for Leadership in Athletics, University of Washington

Girls on the Run

Kids How to Coach

Laureus Sport for Good — USA

LIFEsports. at The Ohio State University. | OHSAA

Little League

Ball State University | Wichita Public Schools | School of Public Health

NRPA

Positive Coaching Alliance

US Soccer Foundation

United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee

USA Weightlifting

Project Play, aspen institute

susan crown exchange

Key Terms Used in This Report

Sport happens across a variety of contexts, for different ages, types of sport, and in service of many goals. The Million Coaches Challenge (MCC) engaged coaches and organizations that are school based and community based, generally serving young people between the ages of 3 and 26, with coaches who receive pay and who volunteer across a variety of sports that are individual and team based and designed for different levels of performance and competition. Throughout this report, we use language that is intended to include all contexts in which sport (and coaching) happen. Key terms used throughout this report are as follows:

When we say . . .	We are referring to . . .
Partners	The MCC Partner organizations that participated in the MCC and contributed data to the implementation study (indicated in this report with a capital P)
coach	An adult who provides instruction in a sport—be it a volunteer coach, paid coach, teacher, parent, or community member—across all sport contexts
training(s)	All forms of coach training, professional learning or development, and coach education courses delivered live in person or virtually (online), as well as through asynchronous online courses and prerecorded webinars
athletes	Anyone who participates in a sport, regardless of type of sport, age, intended outcomes, or level of performance or competition
youth development and related areas	An approach that is designed to help young people grow into confident, responsible, and healthy individuals by creating safe and supportive environments, building their skills, and fostering strong relationships so that they can thrive. This term is frequently used in the literature we reviewed for the study. It includes many fields, approaches, strategies, and frameworks, including but not limited to positive youth development, social and emotional learning, life skills, positive climate and environments, mental health and well-being, trauma-informed or trauma-responsive care, healing-centered sport, and more.

Executive Summary

Youth sport reaches more than 38 million young people in the United States and is supported by more than six million coaches. Research consistently shows that the quality of coaching—more than sport participation alone—shapes whether sport supports positive youth development. Yet most coaches receive little or no formal training in youth development practices, and few report having been trained in approaches that emphasize relationship building, safety, inclusion, autonomy, and holistic athlete development. This gap is reinforced by a highly decentralized youth sport system, in which coaching requirements and access to training vary widely by sport, organization, and geography. As a result, evidence-based coaching practices are difficult to scale, and young people's sport experiences remain uneven.

Launched in 2021, the Million Coaches Challenge (MCC) sought to address this challenge by expanding access to coach training grounded in youth development and related practices. The MCC brought together 18 national, state, and local youth sport organizations around a shared commitment to strengthening coaching quality at scale by developing, delivering, and expanding access to research-aligned training across diverse sport contexts.

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) partnered with MCC organizations throughout the initiative to conduct a multiyear, mixed-methods implementation study designed to document the scope and reach of the initiative, examine how MCC Partner trainings were developed and delivered, and explore how coaches and organizations perceived the influence of those trainings. Drawing on multiple data sources—administrative participation data, partner interviews, a systematic review of training materials, and a national coach perception survey—the study presents findings that inform understanding of coach training implementation and its perceived influence within the youth sport field.

The Million Coaches Challenge achieved—and surpassed—its central goal.

Between July 1, 2021, and December 31, 2025, **MCC Partners collectively trained 1,173,354 coaches**, exceeding the initiative's goal of training one million coaches in youth development and related practices. This milestone represents a significant achievement in a highly decentralized youth sport landscape and demonstrates that large-scale, coordinated coach training is both feasible and scalable across diverse sport contexts.

Participation data also provide important insight into who was reached and where. Among the subset of coaches for whom demographic data were available (approximately 23% of all coaches trained), the majority identified as White (62.7%) and female (57.9%), and most were between the ages of 18 and 50. Geographic data show that MCC-trained coaches were located nationwide, with particularly strong reach in states where Partners had an established presence. At the same time, fewer trained coaches were concentrated in rural states and parts of the Midwest relative to youth population size, highlighting both the breadth of the MCC Partners' reach and opportunities to further expand access.

MCC Partners converged around a shared, research-aligned vision of quality coaching.

Despite variation in organizational missions, delivery formats, training length, and sport contexts, **MCC Partner trainings reflected strong alignment regarding what coaches were being trained to do**. A comprehensive review of 33 trainings across 10 Partners found that trainings focused primarily on coach practice and emphasized a common set of youth development–oriented strategies, including these:

- Building trust and strong relationships with athletes
- Creating safe, inclusive, and supportive sport environments
- Emphasizing effort, growth, and mastery rather than winning
- Empowering athlete voice, choice, and agency
- Modeling care, consistency, and accountability
- Supporting coach self-regulation, reflection, and growth

This convergence was reinforced through partner interviews. In the second half of the MCC, Partners explicitly grappled with what it means to be a "quality" coach, what it means to be a "trained" coach, and the relationship between the two. Across organizations, Partners articulated a shared understanding: Training is meaningful when it prepares coaches to implement these youth development–focused practices in their day-to-day work with athletes. Together, findings from trainings and interviews demonstrate a level of agreement that is often assumed to be elusive in the youth sport field but was clearly evident across MCC Partners.

Coaches reported strong, consistent benefits from training participation.

Findings from the *MCC Coach Perception Survey* elevate coach perceptions of how training influenced their knowledge, skills, confidence, and practice. Across six survey waves, **more than 13,800 coaches shared their experiences, making this one of the largest data sets to date on coach perceptions of youth development–focused training**.

Across all five outcome areas examined, **the most commonly reported outcome was increased confidence**, followed closely by gains in knowledge and skills:

- **Supporting athletes' life skill (e.g., social and emotional) development**: Nearly 90% of coaches reported gaining new knowledge, and approximately 89% reported increased confidence in their ability to support athletes' development of life skills.
- **Creating environments where athletes feel safe**: About 89% of coaches reported increased confidence in their ability to create environments where all athletes feel safe to be themselves.
- **Fostering positive relationships with athletes**: Nearly 90% of coaches reported greater confidence in their ability to build strong, positive relationships with the athletes they coach.
- **Supporting relationships among athletes**: Approximately 89% of coaches reported increased confidence in their ability to help athletes build positive relationships with peers.
- **Supporting athletes' mental health**: Although slightly lower than other areas, more than 85% of coaches reported increased confidence and new knowledge related to supporting athletes' mental health.

Across all five areas, **88% of coaches agreed or strongly agreed that participating in training made them better coaches**. Importantly, these findings reflect a developmental progression: Training builds knowledge and skills, which in turn strengthen confidence, creating the conditions for practice change. Although a smaller share of coaches reported having already changed their practice at the time of the survey, qualitative responses illustrate how coaches are beginning to apply what they learned—by strengthening relationships, adapting to athletes' individual needs, using more positive communication, and prioritizing enjoyment and belonging.

In addition to reporting benefits for themselves, coaches expressed strong agreement that these competencies mattered for all coaches. Across all five outcome areas, nearly 90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed

that all coaches would benefit from knowledge and skills in these areas, reinforcing the relevance and importance of youth development–focused training across the field.

Coaches perceived positive influences on athletes' experiences, especially enjoyment, relationships, and retention.

Coaches also reported observing meaningful changes in athletes' experiences following their participation in MCC-supported training:

- 66% of coaches reported that athletes were experiencing more joy in their sport.
- 62% observed athletes developing stronger relationships with peers.
- Nearly 72% believed that training participation positively influenced athlete retention, making athletes more likely to continue participating in sport.

Coaches were more divided in their perceptions of changes related to athletes' mental health and life skills, with many indicating that these outcomes may emerge over time rather than immediately. Although these findings are based on coach self-report and should be interpreted with appropriate caution, they align with a robust research base linking relationship-centered, autonomy-supportive coaching practices to positive youth outcomes.

Training matters—and its impact can be amplified by stronger systems, more supports, and increased alignment.

Throughout our work with the MCC Partners, a consistent message emerged: **Training is a powerful and necessary entry point, but it is most effective when embedded within broader systems of support**. MCC Partners emphasized that coaches benefit most when training is paired with ongoing learning opportunities, mentorship, peer communities, and organizational environments that reinforce youth development–focused practices.

Findings from the study also highlight the strengths of the MCC model. By aligning diverse organizations around shared principles, investing in accessible training, and elevating evidence-based coaching practices, the MCC is helping to move the field toward greater coherence while also surfacing where additional infrastructure, data systems, and policy supports could further strengthen impact.

Looking Ahead

Findings from the Million Coaches Challenge implementation study point to both the promise and the limits of large-scale coach training in a highly decentralized youth sport system. The MCC illustrates what is possible when organizations align around shared principles of quality coaching and invest in expanding access to research-aligned training across diverse contexts. At the same time, the study underscores the importance of situating training within broader systems of support. Coaches are more likely to benefit from training when it is reinforced by ongoing learning opportunities, mentorship, aligned organizational expectations, and supportive policies. These conditions shape whether training can translate into sustained changes in practice and, ultimately, more consistent sport experiences for young people.

As the MCC concludes, the initiative's learning continues to inform field-level efforts. Insights from the implementation study contributed to the development of the MCC Calls to Action, which identify priorities and pathways forward across research, practice, and policy. Together, these resources offer a foundation for continued collaboration, learning, and investment aimed at strengthening the youth sport ecosystem and expanding access to developmentally supportive coaching

Chapter 1: Introduction

Research demonstrates the power of youth sport in promoting positive outcomes for young people, both within sport and in life beyond sport (Anderson-Butcher & Bates, 2022; Eccles et al., 2003; Jones et al., 2017). Youth sport participation has been linked to the development of positive social relationships, motivation, leadership skills, improved mental health, and better academic performance (Anderson-Butcher & Bates, 2021, 2022; Jones et al., 2017; Riley et al., 2017). However, there is also evidence that sport can have negative effects, such as increased anxiety and problem behaviors, on young people (Eccles et al., 2003; Holt et al., 2017).

One potential explanation for inconsistent findings is that the relationship between participation in sport and positive development is contingent on the right context and characteristics being in place (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Ewing et al., 1996; Petitpas et al., 2005; Smith & Smoll, 2002). In other words, sport participation alone is not enough to yield benefits, but rather a combination of multiple factors, including the sport climate, youth engagement, and the sport activities themselves, influence the youth experience and subsequent outcomes (Holt et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2021).

Many of these factors are influenced by the youth sport coach (Newman et al., 2021; Petitpas et al., 2005; Whitley et al., 2019). Petitpas and colleagues (2005) claim that whether sport leads to positive youth development (PYD) has less to do with the sport itself and more to do with the quality of the coaching. Prior research and evaluations support this claim. For example, Falcão et al. (2020) found that athletes' connections to coaches were worse for athletes whose coaches were untrained. And ongoing research by Anderson-Butcher and colleagues reveals that, when coaches are trained to implement specific practices that foster youth development (e.g., setting boundaries, providing feedback, creating a mastery climate, intentionally teaching life skills, and encouraging fun), coaches are more effective (Anderson-Butcher, 2019; Anderson-Butcher et al., 2021).

Research on the connection between coach practice and youth outcomes is ongoing, and empirical evidence linking practices to outcomes continues to grow. Prior studies have demonstrated, for example, that emotionally supportive practices (e.g., creating a caring and supportive environment) and autonomy-supportive practices (e.g., providing athletes with choices, encouraging decision making, valuing athletes' perspectives) are linked to improvements in youth athletes' perceived self-control (Fawver et al., 2020; Riley et al., 2017).

Coaches, it would appear, are the linchpin that "can make or break the youth sport experience" (Anderson-Butcher & Bates, 2022, p. 1). Yet, the vast majority of coaches may lack training—and therefore confidence—in key practices that are essential for youth development. Although most coaches understand their impact on youth development, many coaches describe needing additional resources, training, and supports (Anderson-Butcher & Bates, 2022). Existing training programs may be seen as too costly, time consuming, or difficult to implement; meanwhile, the content has historically focused on sport specifics, performance, and winning relative to its emphasis on youth development content (Cushion et al., 2003; Fawver et al., 2020; Santos et al., 2017). This issue has garnered attention from researchers, coach developers, practitioners, policymakers, funders, and advocates alike.

As the role of the youth sport coach has evolved, so too have the resources and supports available. From mandatory safety protocols to certifications in positive coaching, the resources available to coaches today reflect a growing commitment to athlete well-being and holistic development. A recent analysis by Atkinson and colleagues (2024) found that some state athletic associations are moving toward more centralized systems and are incorporating training requirements in areas such as sportsmanship and mental health, indicating shifts toward youth development–focused content and policies in school-based sport (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2024).

Yet the field of coach education is far from uniform, with stark disparities in access, quality, and implementation across the country (Anderson-Butcher & Bates, 2022; Fawver et al., 2020). In response to these disparities and in growing recognition of the need to better support young people, the field has seen a rise in the development of research-based frameworks and standards (e.g., Côté & Gilbert, 2009; SHAPE America, 2019; U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee [USOPC], 2020), coach education programs (see Hedlund et al., 2018, for a review and Li et al., 2025, for a meta-analysis of youth-development focused coach education program interventions), structured training certification programs (e.g., the United States Center for Coaching Excellence's National Committee for Accreditation of Coaching Education), and sport-based youth development programs (Whitley et al., 2019). Yet, the reality in the field is that many coaches—especially volunteers—struggle to access these resources due to financial constraints, time limitations, or lack of awareness or because their organization has not made coach training a priority (Fawver et al., 2020). Moreover, many of the existing resources, coach training programs, and education requirements have tended to focus solely on sport tactics or physical safety rather than approaches that include these areas as a part of the core conditions for fostering PYD (Atkinson et al., 2022; Fawver et al., 2020; Santos et al., 2017).

The state of the youth sport field today reveals a complex mix of progress and persistent barriers, but one thing is clear: Coaches shape the youth sport experience. In the United States, this means that coaches influence the development of more than 38 million young athletes across the country. However, less than one third of the nation's six million coaches have been trained in youth development practices. **This represents a missed opportunity.**

Youth Sport in the United States

The youth sport field in the United States operates in a fragmented and decentralized manner, with no overarching system to regulate or standardize coaching practices. Most coaches are volunteers (e.g., findings from the National Coach Survey indicate 41% of responding coaches were unpaid; Anderson-Butcher & Bates, 2022), with varying backgrounds, philosophies, and expertise and influenced by factors such as athletes' ages, the sport, level of competition, and the presence—or absence—of governing bodies. Many leagues and teams function independently, with minimal oversight, leading to coaching approaches that range from highly structured and developmentally focused to informal and inconsistent, resulting in vastly different experiences for young athletes.

Moreover, the field is evolving rapidly. Post-pandemic participation rates appear to have rebounded, with particularly strong growth among girls and Latino youth, while persistent gaps remain by income and geography (Aspen Institute, 2025). Rising costs and increasing professionalization have intensified concerns about access, early sport specialization, and equity, prompting renewed attention to how youth sport is organized and delivered. This lack of systematization highlights a need for accessible, standardized training to equip all coaches with the tools to prioritize holistic youth development, regardless of the sport or setting.

Responding to the Challenge With . . . a Challenge

To address the gap between what the field needs and what coaches currently have access to, the Susan Crown Exchange launched the Million Coaches Challenge (MCC) in 2021, with the ambitious goal of training one million coaches in youth development techniques by 2026.

The MCC brings together a coalition of leading youth sport organizations committed to developing and implementing training programs that equip coaches with the knowledge and skills needed to foster positive youth outcomes, both on and off the field. These trainings focus on various aspects of youth development, including supporting holistic athlete development, creating a positive sport climate, and promoting physical and mental well-being. Ultimately, the MCC aims to ensure that all young athletes, regardless of their backgrounds, have access to well-trained coaches who can help them thrive. By addressing the gaps in coach training and support, the MCC seeks to build a future where youth sport is a powerful tool for positive development.

To date, 18 MCC Partners have come together around the shared belief that coaches trained in evidence-based youth development and skill-building practices are essential for creating quality sport experiences that meet young people's physical, mental, and emotional needs. By fostering a positive environment through these practices, coaches can enhance youth enjoyment, learning, and growth and their desire to continue playing sport.

The MCC is committed to providing accessible, evidence-based training for coaches in youth development practices to elevate the youth sport experience. In addition, the MCC seeks to raise awareness about barriers in the field, emphasizing that resources alone are insufficient and that improving the system is crucial.

Since its inception in 2021, the participating organizations of the MCC have worked together not only in an effort to train one million coaches but also to elevate the work of MCC Partners that are filling in crucial gaps in training and coach education, specifically related to PYD. Together, the MCC aims to create a future where every coach has the support they need to coach effectively and every young athlete benefits from the guidance of well-trained, supportive coaches.

Who's In?

Eighteen Partner organizations participated in the MCC. Each Partner set goals related to training development and how many coaches the Partner would train. In addition, a team of coordinating partners facilitated the work of the MCC.

MCC Partners

The **California Governor's Advisory Council on Physical Fitness and Mental Well-Being** launched *25×25: The California Coaches Challenge*, which aimed to train 25,000 coaches in positive youth coaching across California by the end of 2025. Through the council's Move Your Body, Calm Your Mind campaign, MCC Partners Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) and the Center for Healing and Justice Through Sport (CHJS) joined a statewide effort to instill the principles of PYD, social and emotional learning, healing-centered practices, and culturally responsive coaching in youth coaches.

The Center for Healing and Justice through Sport (CHJS) works with coaches to better utilize sport as an intentional strategy to support healing, build resilience, and address issues of systemic injustice. CHJS engages with sport at every level, from community centers and juvenile detention centers to major college athletic conferences and professional leagues. Coach trainings are available live in person or online and focus on topics

such as sport-based youth development, healing-centered sport (relationships, resilience, regulation, reflection), and coaching girls.

Girls on the Run is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to creating a world where every girl knows and activates her limitless potential and is free to boldly pursue her dreams. Girls on the Run inspires girls to be joyful, healthy, and confident using a fun, experience-based curriculum that creatively integrates running. Girls on the Run coaches build relationships with participants and create positive, inclusive environments where ALL youth can be themselves. Drawing on research and insights from the field, the Girls on the Run approach combines online asynchronous and in-person training to prepare all coaches to implement the curriculum. Trainings focus on the Girls on the Run curriculum, policies, procedures, sexual abuse prevention, and topics such as recognizing everyone's story; building relationships; creating a positive, inclusive environment; and fostering a mastery climate that emphasizes effort and individual improvement.

How to Coach Kids, inspired by the Aspen Institute's Project Play and co-developed in 2018 by Nike and the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee (USOPC), is a free, 30-minute online course introducing the fundamentals of coaching kids. Its companion course, Coaching Girls, focuses on creating inclusive environments where girls feel valued and supported in sport. Both asynchronous trainings cover key topics such as practice planning, safety, engaging parents, fostering a girl-inclusive culture, and managing stress. These courses are designed to empower coaches, both new and experienced, to create more positive sport experiences for athletes by integrating USOPC Quality Coaching Principles foundational to the American Development Model, which promotes age-appropriate, holistic development and quality coaching.

The Time Is Now

The work of the MCC coincides with the release of two reports. The first is from the U.S. Surgeon General documenting the state of youth mental health and loneliness. The second is a 2024 report by the Commission on the State of U.S. Olympics & Paralympics that emphasizes modernizing America's Olympic, Paralympic, and grassroots sports by prioritizing equity, athlete support, governance, and accessibility while fostering collaboration and investment to promote sport participation. Major sporting events to be held in the United States lie ahead, with the 2026 FIFA World Cup planned across North America and the 2028 Olympics to be hosted in Los Angeles, California.

Throughout the course of the MCC, we have heard from youth sport practitioners, advocates, and influencers who are all looking to optimize the youth sport experience. Many see sport as the antidote to the challenges young people are facing, and there is an urgent need to find solutions at scale.

Laureus Sport for Good Foundation USA is a grant-making, nonprofit organization that supports the growth and deepens the impact of programs that use sport for social change. In four "Sport for Good" cities—Atlanta, Chicago, New Orleans, and New York—Laureus and its partners take a collective impact approach to training and providing resources for thousands of youth sport coaches to learn more about sports-based youth development and social and emotional learning. The Laureus training partnerships focus on nonprofit organizations, professional league and team networks, and other local sport and youth agencies. Trainings are available in person and online in partnership with CHJS. Trainings focus on topics such as sports-based youth development; and healing-centered sport (relationships, resilience, regulation, reflection).

Little League is focused on ensuring children have a positive, well-rounded experience on and off the field. Founded in 1939, Little League provides baseball and softball programs for children around the world, promoting teamwork, sportsmanship, and community involvement. It is one of the largest organized youth sport programs globally, with millions of participants across various age divisions. The course is available online asynchronously. Trainings focus on topics such as impact of coaches; social and emotional learning; supportive team culture; celebrating effort; skills; being a role model; being coachable; and working with other coaches, families, and community.

LiFE*sports* at The Ohio State University is a model for sport-based positive youth development, providing quality programming for youth; preparing and training coaches, youth development and mental health practitioners, and others nationally; and leading policy and research efforts to discover and share best practices. LiFE*sports*, in partnership with the **Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA)** and the **Ohio Department of Behavioral Health**, leads Coach Beyond . . ., a statewide agenda designed to ensure coaches, athletic directors, and other stakeholders are ready to "coach beyond . . . the X's and O's" and intentionally teach life and leadership skills through sport. Central to this work are Coach Beyond newsletters, video vignettes, handouts, webinars, and learning opportunities delivered through in-person sessions, facilitated online trainings, and asynchronous courses. These efforts focus on topics such as fostering positive team environments, improving mental strategies for athletic performance, supporting student-athlete mental health, developing leaders, promoting life skills, strengthening behavior and engagement, managing stress and pressure as coaches, building a community of support, and perfecting practice. In addition, Coach Beyond provides resources and learning opportunities for parents/caregivers, student-athletes, and youth sport administrators, creating a 360-degree system of support that can strengthen the entire athletic ecosystem.

The **MCC State Learning Cohort**, facilitated by LiFE*sports* at The Ohio State University, in partnership with the OHSAA, includes three states: Indiana, Kansas, and Maryland. Teams from these states engaged together in a learning cohort, launched in 2024, that was guided by lessons learned from LiFE*sports*' Coach Beyond . . . and based on LiFE*sports* and OHSAA's efforts to train coaches and inform state-level policy improvements.

National Governing Bodies (NGBs) are organizations that govern and manage all aspects of their individual sports within the United States. NGBs are responsible for training, competition, and development for their sports, as well as for nominating athletes to the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic teams. USA Weightlifting led the development of coach-training modules available online asynchronously and through a facilitated learning community for coaches and coach developers. Many NBGs have partnered to offer these learning opportunities. Topics focus on coaching Generation Z, creating a culture of belonging, partnering with parents, coach self-awareness, and emotional intelligence.

The **National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA)** is dedicated to building strong, vibrant, and resilient communities through the power of parks and recreation. NRPA supports park and recreation professionals as community impact leaders, driving investment in parks and recreation as critical community infrastructure while advancing system-level solutions across seven dimensions of well-being. NRPA provides training to park and recreation agencies and their youth sport partners across the country. Trainings are available in person and

virtually through four MCC Partners: CHJS, How to Coach Kids, PCA, and the U.S. Soccer Foundation. NRPA is also facilitating a learning community of park and recreation agencies to foster peer-to-peer learning focused on coach recruitment, training, and building the long-term coaching infrastructure to ensure youth sport programs thrive.

Positive Coaching Alliance's mission is to change the culture of youth sport so that every child, regardless of social or economic circumstance, has access to a positive youth sport experience. Through partnerships with schools, youth sports organizations, and community-based groups, PCA delivers in-person, virtual, and self-paced online training to coaches nationwide, nearly half of whom serve in under-resourced communities. Beyond coach education, PCA convenes local coalitions and roundtable discussions with community stakeholders to help remove barriers to participation and create more opportunities for youth to play sports..

The **United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee's (USOPC)** serves as both the National Olympic Committee and National Paralympic Committee for the United States. The USOPC is focused on serving America's elite athletes and is responsible for fielding U.S. teams for the Olympic, Paralympic, Youth Olympic, Pan American and Parapan American Games. Additionally, the USOPC serves as the steward of the Olympic and Paralympic Movement in the United States; collaborating with National Governing Bodies of sport and partners to advance initiatives that support long-term athlete development, positive youth development, and quality coaching across sport pathways. Additional information on these efforts is available through the USOPC's Grassroots Hub. Trainings are available as asynchronous online courses and documents, focused on topics such as long-term athlete development, athlete-centered coaching, coaching with emotional intelligence, and maintaining coach well-being.

The **University of Washington Center for Leadership in Athletics (UW CLA)** conducts research, delivers academic programs, and facilitates training for coaches and athletics leaders. Using the Ambitious Coaching™ framework as a foundation, the UW CLA team shares a common goal of using leadership to promote unity and equity in sport. UW CLA also provides training opportunities specifically crafted for women and non-binary coaches, reflecting its commitment to inclusivity and equity within the coaching community. Courses are available online and may be completed asynchronously. In-person training opportunities are also available. Trainings focus on topics such as building skills through sport, fostering physical and emotional safety, creating an environment for learning, modeling positive behavior, and adolescent development.

The **U.S. Soccer Foundation** provides underserved communities access to innovative play spaces and evidence-based soccer programs that instill hope, foster well-being, and help youth achieve their fullest potential. The U.S. Soccer Foundation builds coaches' capacities to create lasting, positive connections with youth by teaching coaches how to also serve as mentors through its Soccer for Success, Just Ball, Safe Places to Play, and Coach-Mentor Training programs. Trainings are facilitated in person or virtually, and asynchronous online courses are available for select programs. Trainings focus on topics such as coaching growth mindset, social and emotional learning, voice and choice, physical and emotional safety, team culture, connection building, and trauma and mental health.

Coordinating Partners

A team of coordinating partners worked together to support the MCC Partners in achieving their individual and collective goals. The coordinating partner organizations provided funding, strategic, technical, and research support for the MCC.

The **Susan Crown Exchange (SCE)** works to prepare youth to thrive in a rapidly changing world. SCE primarily supports organizations that operate in out-of-school time, prioritizing initiatives that promote social and emotional learning, explore the relationships between technology and society, and build critical skills through youth sport.

What unites all SCE's partners is their commitment to creating opportunities for young people. As part of the MCC, SCE funded the cohort of organizations to bring critical training to coaches across the country.

Launched in 2013 by the Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program, **Project Play** develops insights, ideas, and opportunities to help stakeholders build healthy communities through sport. Project Play produces reports that take the measure of the state of play at the national, regional, and city levels, with exclusive data and insights, and creates frameworks and tools that stakeholders can use to grow access to quality sport. Through the MCC, Project Play continues to share resources that improve the quality of coach training and change the conversation about what it means to be a good coach.

Collaborative Communications is a woman-owned small business dedicated to finding collaborative solutions to education, workforce, and community challenges. Collaborative Communications works with its partners to help them tell their stories, shape public and policy conversations about core issues, and develop strategies for sustained success. As part of the MCC, Collaborative Communications Group provided strategic communications, including messaging updates, storytelling, media and public relations support, digital engagement, design, and content development to elevate the initiative's impact and visibility.

McPherson Strategies is a B-Corp certified, women-led boutique social impact strategy and communications firm. For almost 13 years, they have worked alongside committed changemakers at Fortune 500 companies, innovative social enterprises, and the world's leading non-governmental organizations (NGOs). As part of the MCC, McPherson Strategies supported strategic communications, with a focus on shaping the narrative, elevating thought leadership, and driving media engagement.

The **American Institutes for Research® (AIR®)** is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization that conducts behavioral and social science research and evaluation and applies the evidence through individualized technical assistance. The AIR team led the MCC implementation study and produced this report.

Measuring Progress and Capturing Lessons Learned: The MCC Implementation Study

The MCC implementation study is an external effort led by AIR in collaboration with the MCC Partners. The study was designed to track coaches trained throughout the challenge and elevate lessons learned by Partners along the way. Specifically, the implementation study sought to elevate MCC Partners' insights, document their MCC journeys, unpack their training offerings, and explore the influence of those trainings on coaches.

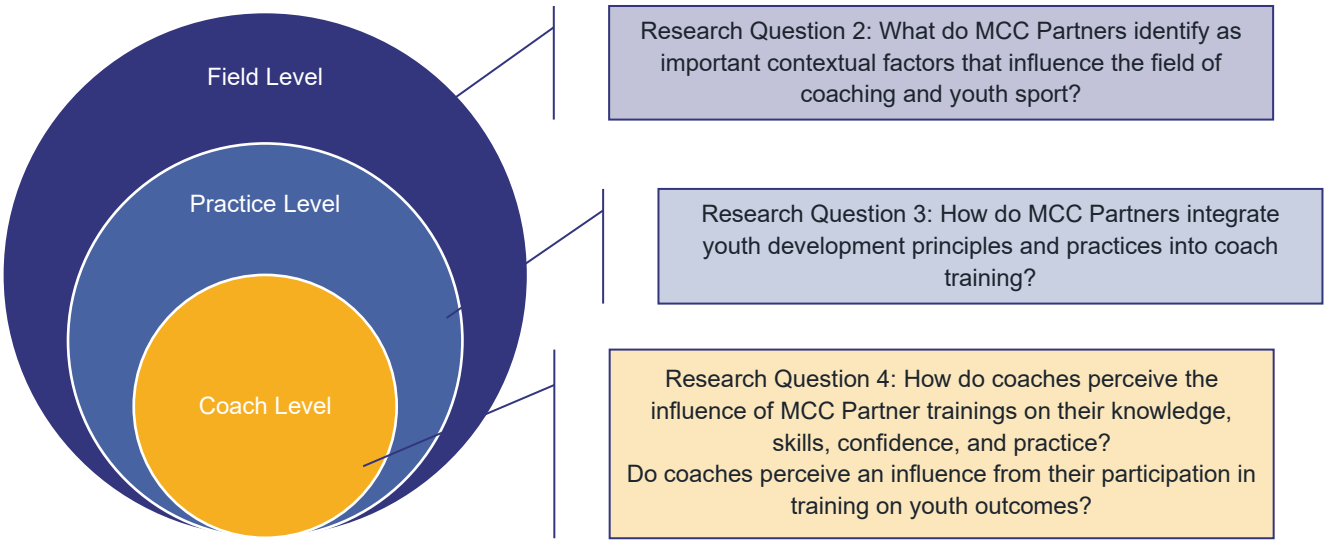
The implementation study draws on PYD (e.g., Lerner, 2009; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2002) and SBYD (Holt et al., 2017; Perkins & Noam, 2007) theories. PYD and SBYD theories posit that, when the strengths of young people can be aligned with strong supports for positive growth in context, then healthy development is optimized. Drawing on developmental systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), PYD and SBYD rely on mutually beneficial individual-context relations. A deep body of research and theory documents the features of settings and practices that support PYD and SBYD, including but not limited to physical and psychological safety, opportunities for belonging, support for efficacy and mattering, opportunities for skill building, active learning, and a strengths-based focus (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2002; Perkins & Noam, 2007). The work of the MCC Partners is grounded in this evidence base, and it is in that same spirit that we approached the implementation study.

Research Questions

A primary question to be addressed by the implementation study is **Research Question 1: Did the MCC achieve its goal of training one million coaches in youth development and related practices by 2026?** In addition,

the MCC implementation study is grounded in three research questions that each function at a different level within the larger youth sport system within which MCC Partners and coaches operate, as shown in Exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1. MCC Implementation Study Research Questions



Methods

The implementation study employed a mixed-methods approach and leverages multiple methods and data sources. Between 2021 and 2026, 12 MCC Partners contributed data to the implementation study: (1) CHJS, (2) Girls on the Run International, (3) How to Coach Kids, (4) Laureus Sport for Good Foundation USA, (5) LiFE*sports* at The Ohio State University (OSU) and in partnership with the Ohio High School Athletic Association, (6) Little League, (7) multiple sport NGBs, (8) NRPA, (9) PCA, (10) UW CLA, (11) USOPC, and (12) the U.S. Soccer Foundation. In 2025 and 2026, CHJS and PCA also contributed data on behalf of the California Governor's Advisory Council on Physical Fitness and Mental Well-being, and the OSU team shared data from the MCC State Learning Cohort (Indiana, Kansas, and Maryland).

All MCC Partners shared **coach training participation and demographic data** with AIR every 6 months to document the number of coaches trained and, when available, demographic information. AIR also worked with all Partners to disseminate a twice-yearly **coach perception survey** to coaches trained within the past 6 months. The perception survey explored whether and how coach participation in Partner training influences coach knowledge, skills, confidence, and practice. AIR conducted **annual interviews with all MCC Partners** to learn more about their approaches to training development and implementation, measurement and evaluation, communication, policy and advocacy, and coalition building. Finally, AIR conducted a **comprehensive document review** of training materials from 10[1] Partners to understand the training content, with a specific emphasis on elevating coach practices in youth development and related areas. AIR also attended monthly MCC Partner virtual meetings and annual in-person gatherings to support the initiative. Attendance in group meetings provided valuable context and insight into the findings elevated through formal study data-collection activities. As shown in Exhibit 2, each method addressed at least one research question.

[1] Laureus Sport for Good Foundation USA, NRPA, the MCC State Learning Cohort, and the California Governor's Advisory Council on Physical Fitness and Mental Well-being collaborated with other MCC Partners to deliver training; therefore, they did not submit their own training materials.

Exhibit 2. Overview of Implementation Study Research Questions and Methods Alignment

	Coach training participation and demographic data	MCC Partner interviews	Document review	Coach perception survey
Research Question 1: Did the MCC achieve its goal of training one million coaches in youth development and related practices by 2026?	●			
Research Question 2: What do MCC Partners identify as important contextual factors in the field of coaching and youth sport?		●	●	
Research Question 3: How do MCC Partners integrate youth development principles and practices into coach training?		●	●	
Research Question 4: How do coaches perceive the influence of MCC Partner trainings on their knowledge, skills, confidence, and practice? Do coaches perceive an influence from their participation in training on youth outcomes?				●

Our approach to the quantitative data was largely descriptive and focused on identifying patterns in the data, where possible. The qualitative methods drew on thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) and analytic strategies from grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz & Bryant, 2011; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). We used thematic analysis and grounded theory techniques in our coding of qualitative data because they enabled us to approach coding systematically while also preserving the voices of the MCC Partners and coaches who participated in the study.

About This Report and Other MCC Publications

We begin this report with coach training participation and demographic data analysis (Chapter 2) to set the stage by describing how many coaches were trained and sharing more information about their characteristics. Next, in Chapter 3, which focuses on findings from our annual interviews, we provide insights from the MCC Partners into the MCC journey and the state of the field. In Chapter 4, we dive deeper into the training content through the document review. And, in Chapter 5, we explore coach perceptions of these trainings through analysis of the coach perception survey. Each methods chapter is structured to provide an overview of the method, an explanation of findings, a summary of limitations, and a discussion of the main takeaways in response to the research questions. In Chapters 6 and 7, we draw on findings across methods to elevate key takeaways, implications, and recommendations for research, policy, and practice.

Additional Resources From the MCC

- The MCC Partners released a Belief Statement in 2023 that summarizes what is driving the work of the MCC Partners.
- The MCC Partners released an Impact Statement in 2024 that draws on MCC Partner program evaluation data to provide examples of the potential outcomes that are possible through coach training in youth development.
- AIR released a brief with preliminary findings from the MCC implementation study in 2025 that highlights early lessons learned.
- AIR released a coach practice guide on behalf of the MCC that elevates 12 core coaching strategies to support positive youth development, drawing from the MCC Partner trainings.
- The MCC Partners released a Calls to Action statement that identifies systemic barriers to quality coaching in youth sport and offers pathways forward.

To access these resources and more, please visit millioncoaches.org.

Chapter 2: Analyzing Coach Training Participation and Demographic Data to Measure Progress to One Million

Research Question 1: Did the MCC achieve its goal of training one million coaches in youth development and related practices by 2026?

Methods

- AIR collected training participation and coach demographic data for all MCC Partners about coaches who participated in trainings provided as part of the MCC. Partners shared data during established data transfer periods in 6-month intervals.
- AIR cleaned the data and conducted descriptive analyses to determine the number of coaches trained for each Partner; this number was then verified with each Partner. We then conducted descriptive analyses of the available demographic data (*n* = 265,909) to determine the frequency of coaches for each demographic item of interest.
- All Partners collected training participation and demographic information for the coaches they trained; however, the data collected, how data were reported, and overall level of completeness varied significantly.

Findings

- Between the official launch of the MCC on July 1, 2021, and December 31, 2025, MCC Partners collectively trained 1,173,354 coaches.
- We received demographic data for a subset of coaches trained (265,909 coaches, or 22.7%, of the 1,173,354 coaches trained across the 12 Partner organizations that shared data with us). The majority of those coaches trained during the MCC for whom we have data
  - identified as White (62.7%, *n* = 121,211);
  - identified as female (57.9%, *n* = 115,960);
  - were between the ages of 18 and 50, split across three different age brackets: 18–30 years old (31.6%, *n* = 40,454), 31–40 years old (27.0%, *n* = 34,507), and 41–50 years old (24.7%, *n* = 31,564); and
  - coached baseball or softball (28.3%, *n* = 75,345) or running (28.7%, *n* = 76,201) as their primary sport.
- We received location data for 608,997 United States–based coaches (51.9%) trained during the MCC. Those coaches were located across the country, with a greater concentration of coaches trained on the east and west coasts and in the south. Rural states in the Midwest and central United States had lower levels of coaches trained—a trend that was maintained when controlling for youth-level population density.

Chapter 2: Analyzing Coach Training Participation and Demographic Data to Measure Progress to One Million

The goal of the MCC is first and foremost to train one million coaches in youth development and related practices. As such, the first research question to be addressed by the implementation study is whether the MCC achieved its goal. In addition, we sought to understand the characteristics of coaches who were trained and where they were located. Although each MCC Partner had mechanisms in place to count the *number* of coaches the Partner trained, not all Partners captured or were able to report on demographic information in a way that would allow for a comprehensive systematic analysis. As such, the findings presented in this report are limited to data that were available from each MCC Partner. However, because the MCC is the first initiative to gather and systematically analyze and map these kinds of data across multiple training providers, the findings from our analyses may serve as a useful baseline for future work to reach more coaches across the country and around the world.

Methods

AIR collected coach training participation and demographic data from all MCC Partners about coaches who participated in trainings provided as part of the MCC. AIR requested the following information for each coach who completed training: training date, age or birth date, gender, race and ethnicity, and location (e.g., city and state, ZIP Code, and/or county). AIR requested data from Partners at six time points, as shown in Exhibit 3.

Exhibit 3. Coach Data Transfer Windows

Data transfer period	Coach training dates
March 15–30, 2023	July 1, 2021–February 28, 2023
August 15–30, 2023	March 1, 2023–August 14, 2023
March 15–30, 2024	August 15, 2023–March 14, 2024
August 15–30, 2024	March 15, 2024–August 14, 2024
January 2–10, 2025	August 15, 2024–December 31, 2024
January 2–9, 2026	January 1, 2025–December 31, 2025

Although all Partners collected training participation and demographic information for the coaches they trained, the data collected, how the data were reported, and overall level of completeness varied significantly. This variation was typically due to how the information was collected originally and how it was archived, managed, and shared by the Partner.

Analysis

After receiving coach data from Partners, an AIR analyst used Stata quantitative analysis software to prepare individual data files for analysis. We cleaned the data to remove duplicate coaches from the records; recoded demographic data, when needed, to obtain consistent variables (e.g., recoded gender reported as “F” or “female”

or “fem” to “Female”); and examined the data for outliers or unusual data (e.g., an age of 130 years old). Next, we conducted descriptive analyses to determine the number of coaches trained for each Partner. We then verified training numbers with each Partner. Finally, we conducted descriptive analyses of the demographic information to determine the frequency of coaches for each demographic item of interest.

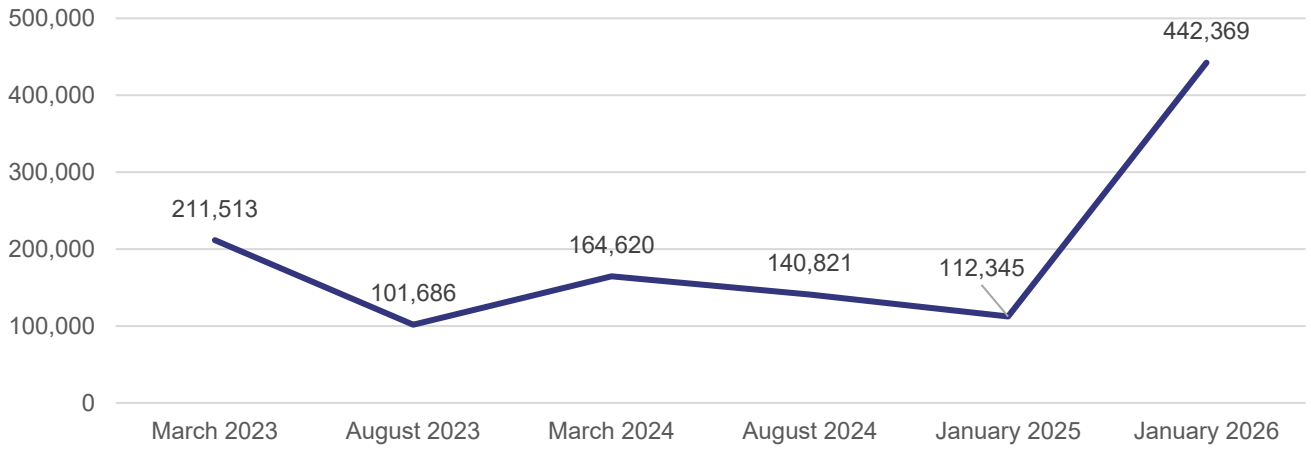
We prepared a final data set that reflected the information for each Partner and the MCC comprehensively. In addition, a team of researchers used this information in the ArcGIS geographic information system (GIS) software to examine the location of coaches and create GIS maps for internal learning and external reporting purposes.

Findings

Number of Coaches Trained

Between the official launch of the MCC on July 1, 2021, and its close on December 31, 2025, MCC Partners collectively trained 1,173,354 coaches. An overview of the number of coaches trained by data transfer period is presented in Exhibit 4. We did not begin collecting coach training participation data until more than 1 year into the MCC because Partners were developing and launching their trainings at different rates; thus, a greater number of coaches were trained during the first data transfer to account for all coaches who had been trained up until that date. We also adjusted some data transfer dates, when needed, to align with other MCC efforts underway that required time and attention. In 2025, we shifted data transfers from 6-month periods to 12-month periods to minimize the burden on MCC Partners as they neared their shared goal of training one million coaches.

Exhibit 4. Coaches Trained, by Data Transfer Period



Coach Characteristics

As noted previously, the quality and completeness of coach demographic information varied across Partners. Thus, the findings presented herein about coach characteristics should be interpreted with caution. These findings reflect a subset of Partner data—generally representing 265,909 of the 1,173,354 coaches trained across the 12 Partner organizations that shared data with us. The majority of the coaches trained during the MCC

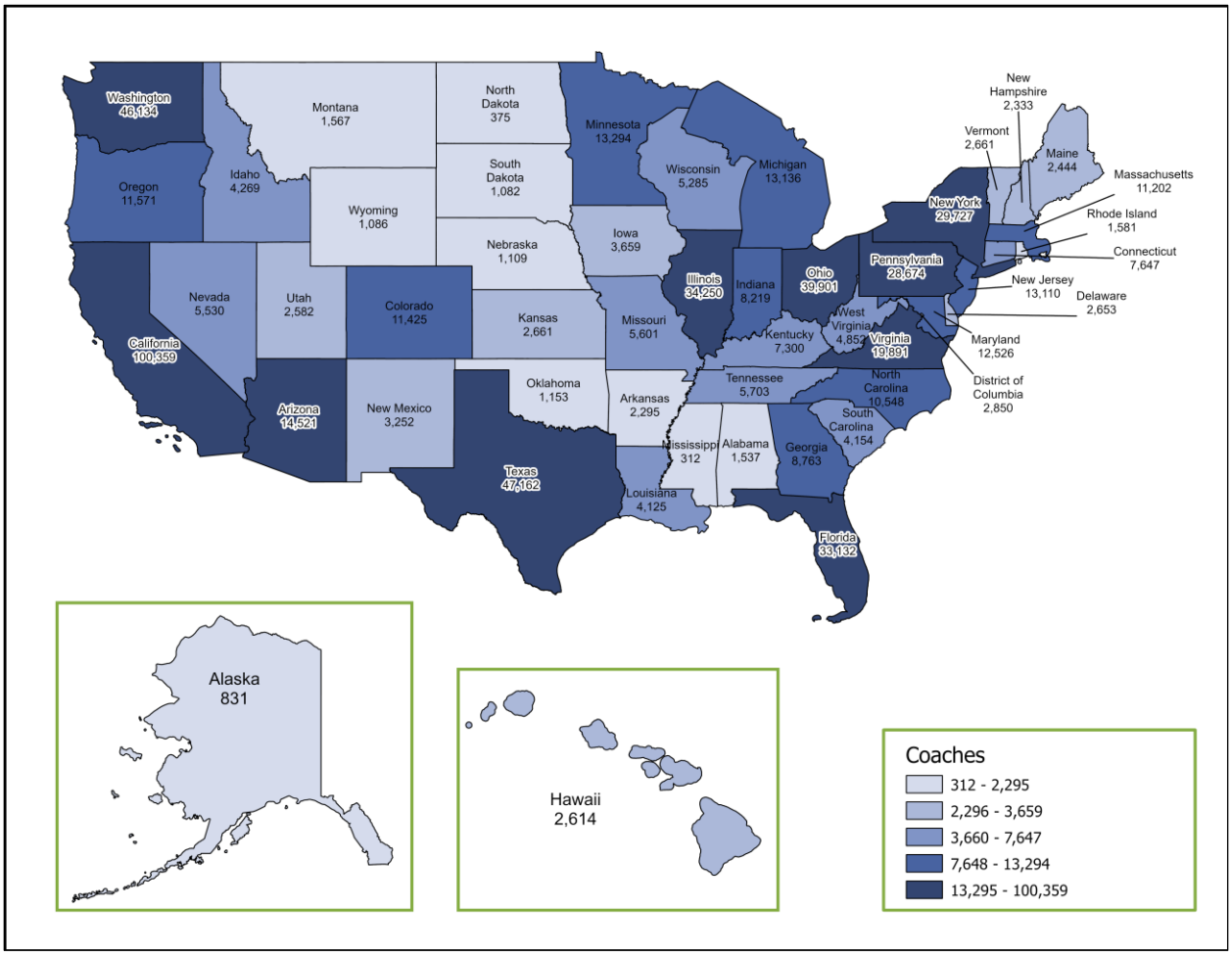
- identified as White (62.7%, *n* = 121,211);
- identified as female (57.9%, *n* = 115,960);
- were between the ages of 18 and 50, split across three different age brackets: 18–30 years old (31.6%, *n* = 40,454), 31–40 years old (27.0%, *n* = 34,507), and 41–50 years old (24.7%, *n* = 31,564); and
- coached baseball or softball (28.3%, *n* = 75,345) or running (28.7%, *n* = 76,201) as their primary sport.

In considering these findings, it is important to note that the variation in demographic information and sport coached is, in some part, due to the focal areas for some Partners. For example, Little League trains its baseball and softball coaches and Girls on the Run comprises primarily female athletes and coaches focused on running. An expanded summary of coach characteristics is provided in Appendix A.

Coach Location

The MCC Partners provided location data for 608,997 coaches (51.9% of the total coaches trained). We used data from this subsample of coaches to map coach location and found that the number of coaches trained varied by state and region. As shown in Exhibit 5, the state with the most coaches trained, to date, is California (*n* = 100,359), followed by Texas (*n* = 47,162), Washington (*n* = 46,134), Ohio (*n* = 39,901), and Illinois (*n* = 34,250). It is important to note that the variation in coaches trained is, in some part, due to where some Partners are located or if they have a specific geographic focus. UW CLA has focused on Washington, for example, and LiFE*sports* at The Ohio State University is working in partnership with the Ohio High School Athletic Association.

Exhibit 5. Mapping Coaches Trained Through the MCC

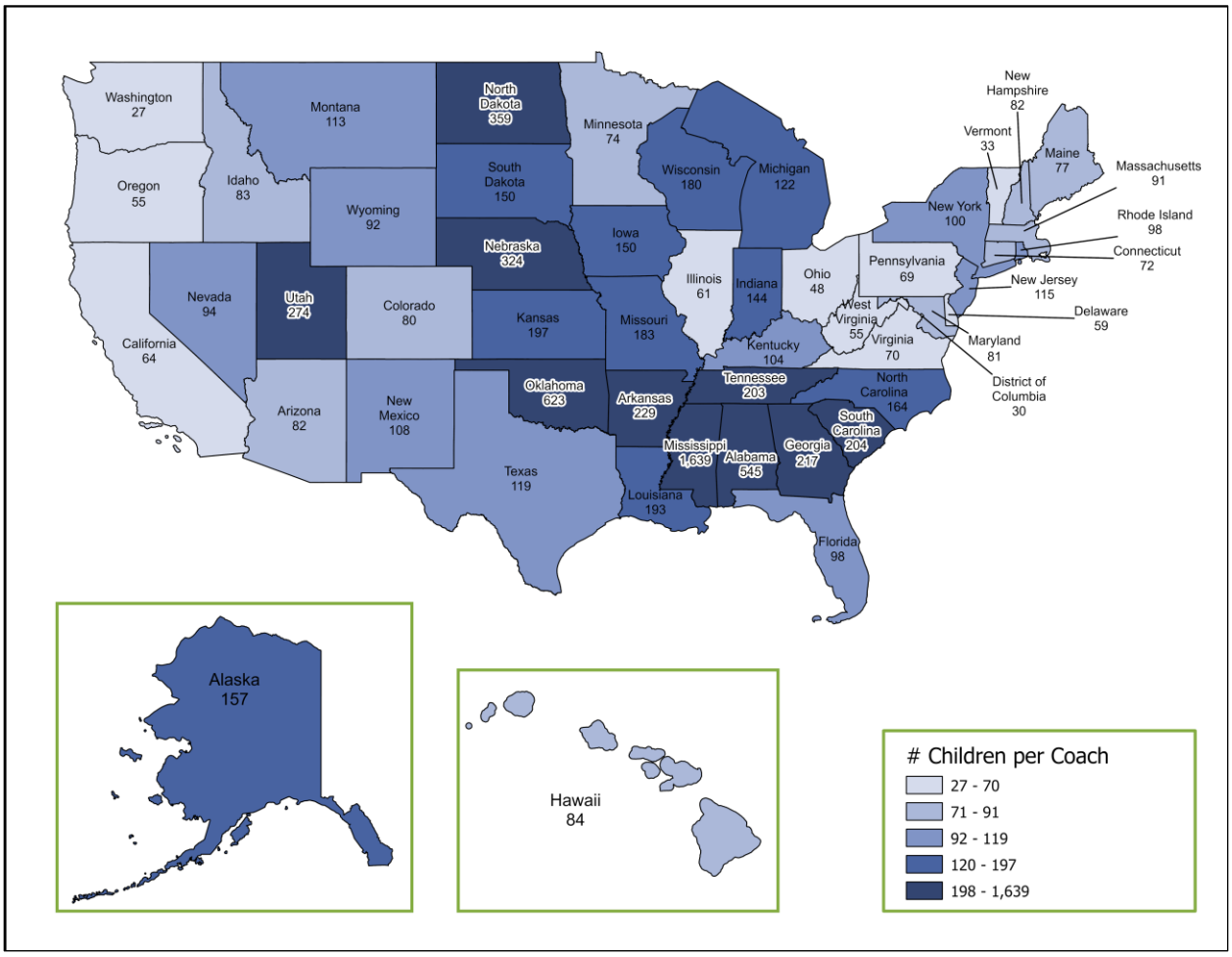


Note. *n* = 608,997.

Within this subsample of coaches, rural states had fewer coaches trained. In Mississippi (*n* = 312), North Dakota (*n* = 375), and Alaska (*n* = 831), for example, the total number of coaches trained is a fraction of the number of coaches trained in states that have a greater number of urban and suburban areas. Many of the states located in the northern Midwest region of the United States had lower numbers of coaches trained relative to states on the east, west, and southern coasts. Here, we also considered that population density may have been a factor in the overall number of coaches trained per state. We used the 5-year estimates from the 2024 American Community Survey (Table ID S0101) to determine the number of young people between the ages of 5 and 17 in each state. We then analyzed the coach location data with the number of youth in each state to determine the number of youth per MCC-trained coach in each state (*n* = 608,997).

As shown in Exhibit 6, when considering population density in this way, we observed a similar trend with rural states in the middle of the country, in that fewer coaches were trained compared to coastal states with larger urban and suburban areas.

Exhibit 6. Mapping Total Coaches Trained, Accounting for Population Density, Total Number of Youth Ages 5–17, per State

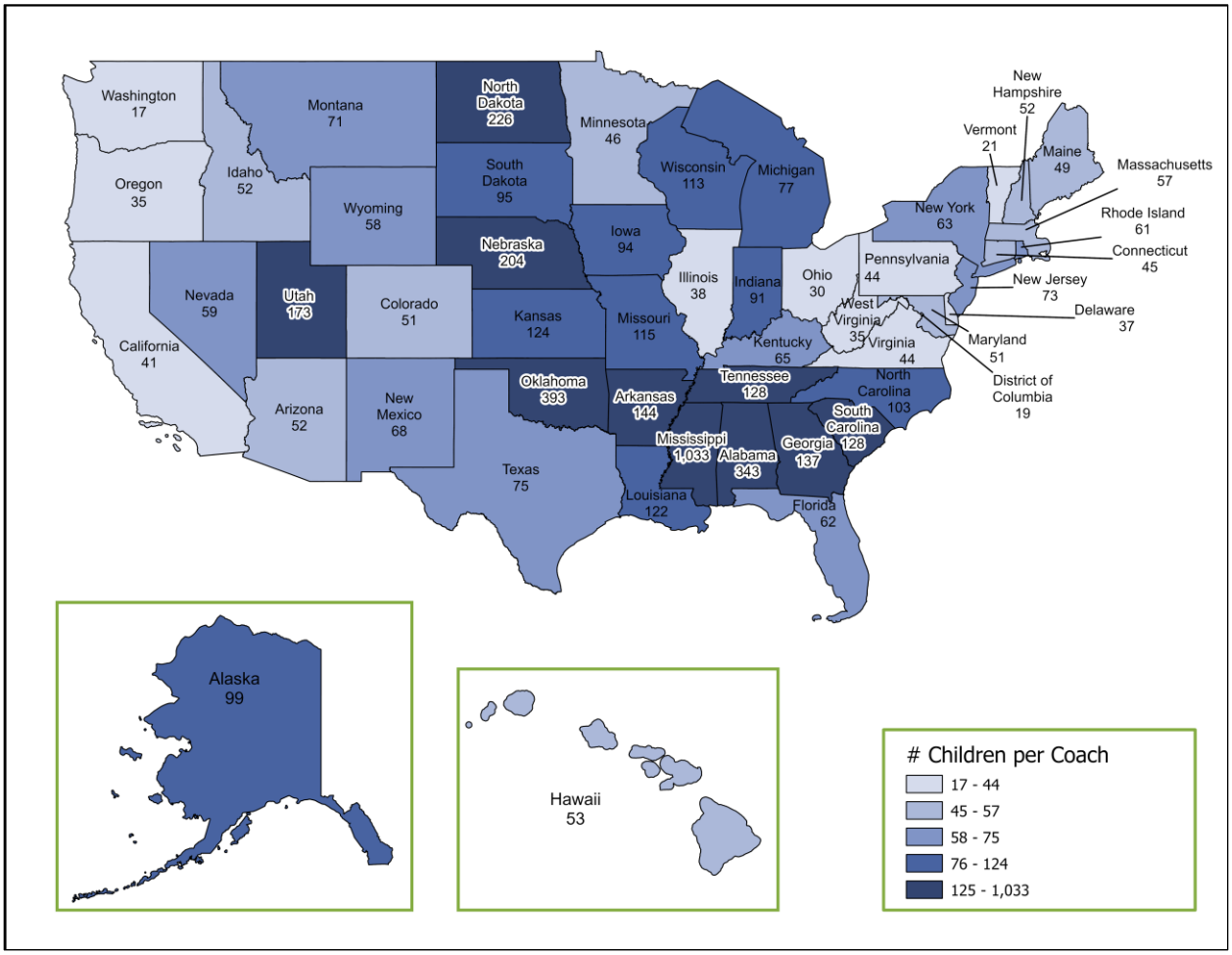


Note. *n* = 608,997.

Specifically, findings suggest that states would range from 27 to 1,639 young people for every one coach trained through the MCC that we had location data for (*n* = 608,997). Two factors are important to consider when looking at these data:

- Not all young people will play sports. However, if we take into consideration the Aspen Institute's 63x30 vision, which aligns with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion Healthy People 2030 objective that 63% of young people will participate in sports by 2030, the data suggest that states would range from 17 to 1,033 young people for every one coach trained through the MCC that we had location data for (*n* = 608,997; Exhibit 7).
- We have location data for only 608,997 coaches; yet, the MCC trained 1,173,354 coaches, and many more coaches are involved in youth sport but are not part of the MCC. For this reason, although it is illustrative to consider these maps and the story they tell, we urge caution when interpreting these findings or drawing conclusions about the athlete-to-coach ratio in each state.

Exhibit 7. Mapping Total Coaches Trained, Accounting for Population Density, 63% of Youth Ages 5–17, per State



Note. *n* = 608,997.

As a field, we do not have a reliable and comprehensive estimate of the number of youth sport coaches or coaches trained in youth development and related practices; however, these findings echo sentiments expressed by MCC Partners during our interviews (Chapter 3) regarding the need to recruit more coaches and train them in youth development and related practices. The data presented herein reflects an important step in beginning to gather this information, but more work is needed to understand where coaches are and what they have been trained in.

While these data are useful in helping to understand where there are coaches trained and where more work is needed, the numbers also elevate a larger issue for consideration: there still are not enough trained coaches to meet the number of young people who could be playing sports. The MCC has made a substantial contribution not only in training coaches but in making youth development content accessible, but more work is needed. Although our analyses only account for the number of United States–based coaches trained through the MCC – and there are many coaches across the country not reflected in the implementation study data – these findings illustrate anecdotal gaps in the field and they echo sentiments expressed by the MCC Partners during our interviews (Chapter 3) regarding the need to recruit and train more coaches in youth development and related practices.

Limitations

Our analysis of coach training participation and demographic data has limitations that are important to acknowledge. First, it is important to make clear the decision to remove duplicate coaches from the data sets to stay aligned with the goal of training one million coaches, regardless of whether some coaches participate in multiple trainings. Future analyses may provide additional insight into which coaches participate in multiple trainings, and additional learning will be possible. Second, we acknowledge that we were likely not able to fully remove all duplicate coaches, given the inconsistency of the data we received, the different approaches to distinguishing coaches taken by each Partner, and the fact that some Partners were not able to share individualized coach data with us and reported only in aggregate; thus, these data were not subject to our data-cleaning processes.

Another limitation lies in the inconsistency and completeness of the data shared with us, which limits our ability to draw inferences from the data at this time. Findings related to coach location are significantly limited by missing data. Of the 1,173,354 coaches trained, we received location data for only 608,997 coaches (51.9%), so we caution drawing conclusions from the data at this time. Relatedly, we note that, although all Partners collected location information, location could have been where the coach lives, where the coach coaches, or where the coach participated in the training. For this reason, we made the decision to report location at the state level, which we assumed would be the same regardless; however, this may not have always been the case (e.g., coach home, school, training location) and the type of location data (e.g., city, state, ZIP Code).

Chapter 3: Partner Interviews

Research Question 2: What do MCC Partners identify as important contextual factors that influence the field of coaching and youth sport?

Methods

- We conducted a series of virtual, semi-structured interviews with 12 MCC Partners at three time points: fall 2021, summer 2023, and summer 2024.
- The interviews focused on each Partner's MCC journey across four areas—training development and implementation, measurement and evaluation, communications, and policy-related efforts—and explored contextual factors and issues that influence their work in the field.
- A team of qualitative analysts engaged in thematic analysis during coding and elevated themes from the data. We engaged in meaning making with Partners to refine the findings.

Findings

- Partners elevated a number of factors and issues in the field, including the absence of a formal or structured youth sport system in the United States, individual coach and organizational capacity issues, lack of buy-in to youth development and related ideas, a dominant culture and mindset that sport is about winning, and a general lack of agreement about what the priorities in the field of youth sport are.
- In the second half of the MCC, Partners grappled with what it means to be a "quality" coach, what it means to be a "trained" coach, the relationship between the two, and the barriers to achieving these goals. Partners agreed that a "trained" coach is one who is trained in the practices that make them a "quality" coach, specifically
    - having the knowledge and practices to help youth build sport-specific, social, and/or personal skills;
    - creating safe spaces;
    - meeting athletes "where they are";
    - prioritizing their own personal growth and well-being;
    - showing up as caring adults;
    - making sport fun and enjoyable;
    - supporting the whole athlete; and
    - prioritizing relationship building.
- Partners engaged in the MCC in a variety of ways but shared similar experiences with training, measurement, communications, and policy during their MCC journey. Their experiences were influenced by the contextual factors and issues in the field.

Chapter 3: Partner Interviews

The work of the MCC Partners is paramount to their collective ability to train one million coaches; however, that work does not happen in a vacuum. Rather, it happens in context—locally on the ground with coaches and nationally within the larger youth sport and coaching fields in the United States. Each Partner's MCC journey was different. The Partners began the MCC with different histories, purposes, goals, connections to coaches, and roles in the field. Our goal in conducting an implementation study of the MCC was therefore to understand each Partner's individual journey and to look across their work collectively to understand and elevate their insights about the field.

Methods

We conducted a series of virtual interviews with representatives from 12 MCC Partner organizations at three time points: fall 2021, summer 2023, and summer 2024.[2] All protocols are available in Appendix C.

Measure

We developed a semi-structured interview protocol that would enable two goals: (1) understanding Partners' MCC journeys and (2) elevating contextual factors and issues in the field. In developing the base for the initial protocol, we identified three constructs that would need to be covered to inform the MCC implementation study design and methodology—training development and implementation, measurement and evaluation, and communications—and determined that, within those constructs, we would ask about process, successes, challenges, and lessons learned. The interview protocol was designed for 60 minutes.

After conducting the initial set of interviews, we refined the protocol to reflect where Partners were in the process of the MCC. Specifically, we adjusted the questions to ask for updates on the three primary constructs, and we incorporated a fourth construct—policy-related efforts—to reflect ongoing conversations and efforts we had learned about anecdotally from Partners. We adjusted the third and final interview protocol significantly, based on questions elevated within the MCC (by Partner organizations and the coordinating partner team). Specifically, we designed the protocol with two discrete sections. The first section was intended to be shorter and focused on updates in the four construct areas. The second section focused on the following series of questions that the MCC was grappling with:

- What does it mean to be a "quality" (good)[3] coach?
- What does it mean to be a "trained" coach?
- What is the relationship between quality and training?
- What are the barriers to "quality" and "trained" coaches?

[2] During winter 2021 and again in fall 2022, AIR met with each Partner for one-on-one conversations related to training implementation and measurement and evaluation practices; however, these conversations were focused on receiving updates to inform the implementation study methodology and design and, as such, are not represented herein.
[3] We originally wrote the protocol with the term "quality" which many Partners challenged, given that there are "quality" frameworks that have an explicit meaning that would have made our question more specific than we intended. As such, during the interviews, we invited Partners to "fill in the blank" when we asked "What makes a _____ coach?" Partners used terms, including but not limited to "quality," "good," "effective," and "successful."

Participants

AIR invited Partners to bring together a small team of no more than four key staff who were actively involved in the MCC. Interviews included between one and four staff members from each Partner organization. Participants represented a variety of roles and departments, from strategy and development to marketing to communications, measurement and evaluation, program operations, education and innovation, and more.

Analysis

All interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom and recorded using Zoom's recording capabilities. An independent transcription company transcribed the interviews using the Zoom recordings, and we reviewed the transcriptions for accuracy. A team of qualitative analysts then engaged in thematic analysis of the interview transcripts (Braun & Clark, 2006). The team reviewed the interview transcripts after the first interview and created a codebook based on themes observed in the data. The codebook guided analysis during subsequent interviews, and we expanded the codebook, where needed, to reflect changes to the protocol and subsequent conversations. The team members met frequently to establish agreement in their coding and to discuss emerging or evolving themes that were not yet represented in the codebook.

Meaning Making

After the third interview, AIR shared select findings from the document review (Chapter 4) and the second section of the third interview (What makes a quality or good coach?) with approximately 23 members of MCC Partner organizations and the coordinating partner group for discussion during two rounds of interactive meaning making. We also shared the full interview transcript and highlighted the portion of the interview that would be covered during meaning making. The meaning-making sessions were designed to accomplish two goals. First, the sessions served as a "member check" for some of the qualitative data that we collectively agreed needed to be co-interpreted and refined (Birt et al., 2016). Member checking enables us to increase trustworthiness and credibility of the MCC implementation study (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Tracey, 2010). Second, the sessions were structured to foster additional conversation that would support internal MCC planning efforts related to the group's work in the final year of the MCC.

During the meaning-making session, we shared themes from our analysis and invited Partners to react using Mentimeter, a live data-collection tool, and to engage in additional dialogue. Upon conclusion of the meaning-making sessions, the research team revisited the themes based on Partner feedback and made revisions, as appropriate.

Findings

In conducting annual interviews with Partners, we documented their approach to the work—what we refer to as their MCC journey—across four key areas: (a) training development and implementation, (b) measurement and evaluation, (c) communications, and (d) policy-related efforts. Throughout the interviews, Partners often elevated contextual factors in the field that influenced their work and, as Partners grappled with those issues as a group, those conversations spread more intentionally into our interviews as well, informing what questions we asked and decisions we made together about how best to use the interview data so that Partners could move the work forward. In the sections that follow, we begin by describing key themes related to contextual factors and issues in the field that influence the Partners' work and the coaching field more broadly. We then provide an overview of the MCC Partners' journeys. We elevate themes that came up frequently across Partners' interviews. For each theme, we report the number of Partners (not individual respondents) who provided a response that we coded within that theme.

Contextual Factors and Issues in the Field

In sharing their journeys, Partners described the challenges they experienced related to training development, measurement and evaluation, communications, and policy, many of which were related to or caused by larger

issues in the field. Specifically, Partners elevated barriers to the work that result from the lack of a system (and subsequent fragmentation and silos in the field) and lack of individual and organizational capacity, for example. Partners also grappled with the question of what it means to be a "quality" coach, what it means to be a "trained" coach, how those ideas fit together, and what that means in the context of these larger issues in the field. We unpack the themes from these conversations in the sections that follow. Partners also offered strategies to address these issues, and we have integrated their ideas into the recommendations presented in Chapter 7.

Barriers That Influence the Field of Youth Sport and Coach Training

Almost all Partners (*n* = 11) highlighted the **absence of a formal or structured youth sport system in the United States**, which has led to various challenges in the field. Most Partners (*n* = 8) pointed out the difficulty in identifying or utilizing mechanisms (e.g., policies, minimum standards) to increase the number of trained coaches, which is compounded by the lack of oversight or accountability to promote training, both generally and in areas prioritized by the MCC and its partner organizations. The lack of a system has resulted in a field that is characterized by siloes and fragmentation (*n* = 5). Partners shared that the lack of a system has inadvertently created an informal system that is now more challenging to reform. Some Partners (*n* = 4) also highlighted how variation in local and state policies governing coaches present significant challenges for national organizations. These differing policies lead to a lack of alignment in requirements, creating redundancies in some areas and gaps in others, thereby exacerbating individual and organizational capacity issues.

Almost all Partners (*n* = 11) spoke to **individual and organizational capacity issues** during the interviews. When asked to describe barriers to coach training broadly and in youth development (and related areas) specifically, most Partners quickly responded "time and money" before providing a more comprehensive answer. Capacity issues present a significant challenge in the realm of coach training because the time and commitment required are often substantial. Nearly half of Partners (*n* = 5) noted that this lack of capacity is particularly challenging when considering the field of youth sport is largely volunteer based (*n* = 4) and that the field lacks pathways and professionalization (*n* = 3). This sentiment aligns with findings from the National Coach Survey, which highlighted the large number of survey respondents (41%) who were volunteers (Anderson-Butcher & Bates, 2022). Capacity issues are further exacerbated by the lack of a formal system, which means that volunteers may need to undergo separate training for different sports even when much of the training content overlaps (Atkinson et al., 2022). Additionally, Partners highlighted how financial constraints play a crucial role (*n* = 8), with the cost of training and the absence of dedicated funding streams for this work posing significant barriers. Organizationally, a small group of Partners (*n* = 3) also highlighted coaching shortages in the field, noting it is difficult enough to find coaches without the added requirement of training. Ultimately, without sufficient capacity, sustaining and expanding training programs becomes increasingly difficult, further limiting the ability to develop coaches.

> "Until we start paying coaches who can start making a living and incentivizing them to receive more training so that they're prepared to keep achieving and have that growth mindset, we're going to still run into these time and money barriers . . ."

Half of Partners also spoke to **issues of buy-in** (*n* = 6), which create challenges in the field in a variety of ways. Some Partners highlighted the lack of buy-in to coach training more broadly and cited that the field lacks demand for trained coaches, for example. Other Partners focused on the need to generate a "groundswell" of buy-in related to youth development and related practices so that more people (coaches, families, young people) demand this as a standard part of coaching practice.

> "You parent the way you were parented, you teach the way you were taught . . . [Coaches] sort of say, 'I had a coach who screamed at me and then we won a championship.'. . . I think that's a really big challenge that we [face with] coaches and their perception of what it means to look like, act like, and be a good coach."

Issues of buy-in may stem from or exacerbate another challenge elevated by Partners related to the **dominant culture and mindset that sport is about winning** (*n* = 6) and a general **lack of agreement about what the priorities in the field of youth sport are** (*n* = 4). Some Partners noted that parents, not athletes, are the primary consumers and that parents are focused on elite pathways, winning, and competition and may therefore not see the value in youth development practices. Partners also spoke to what are seen as "priorities" in the field, with an emphasis on training in youth safety, for example, but not training in youth development should be seen as equally important. Partners noted that, when time and money are limited, there is a tendency to focus only on "what matters" (currently: safety) and that training in youth development matters as well. Some Partners also spoke to the unspoken priorities that permeate youth sport. For example, one Partner noted that there is a lack of a spotlight on the "good" coaches and positive coaching moments yet there is significant media attention to the negative strategies. Similarly, another Partner noted that some systems are set up to punish a coach's "bad behavior" but there is very little in place to incentivize their "good behavior."

> "I would say it goes back to culture and the culture of sport is driven by winning competition. That's how folks are coming into the picture. And I think that's a very hard to come in as a coach and be the disruptor to that traditional model of sport, even at the youngest levels."

What It Means to be a "Quality" Coach[4]

Partners elevated a number of barriers in the broader field that largely stem from the lack of a system and shared agreement about coaching. These issues relate to a bigger question of what it means to be a "quality" coach were such a system in place, what it means to be "trained" and how these terms are related. As the Partners coalesced regarding different ideas and strategies to advance the field, they grappled with what, if anything, the MCC should say about what it means to be a "quality" and a "trained" coach. In light of the other contextual issues the group had raised about the perceived lack of consensus and absence of a larger system, this issue has and continues to receive significant attention from the Partner group.

As such, in the third interview, we asked each Partner to unpack their ideas about what it means to be a "quality" or "good" or "effective" coach. We asked the question at this high level (a) to understand where and how PYD fits into the framing and (b) because we heard from Partners that PYD should be part of the conversation but was not necessarily *the* conversation and framing it as such could be detrimental to the work the MCC aims to do. The following themes were elevated by at least four Partners and are presented in order of frequency:

Coaches should have the knowledge and practices to help youth build sport-specific, social, and/or personal skills (*n* = 12). This includes having knowledge of what it means to coach; understanding pedagogy

[4] We addressed this question in the third and final Partner interview. We originally wrote the protocol with the term "quality," which many Partners challenged, given that there are "quality" frameworks that have an explicit meaning that extends beyond our question. As such, during the interviews, we invited Partners to "fill in the blank" when we asked, "What makes a _____ coach?" Partners used terms including but not limited to "quality," "good," "effective," and "successful."

and how to teach sport; and creating an "athlete-centric" environment by working with athletes to set goals and work toward them, differentiating coaching and instruction to appropriately challenge athletes, and recognizing improvements and using that information to motivate youth, for example.

Coaches should create safe spaces (*n* = 10). This includes both physical and emotional and psychological safety for athletes, ensuring not only that athletes *are* safe but that they *feel* safe and supported as well. It also means creating conditions for belonging and inclusion among athletes, which contribute to emotional and psychological safety.

Coaches should meet athletes "where they are" (*n* = 10). This includes ensuring coaching practice is culturally and contextually relevant, aligning development and athlete ability, aligning coach knowledge and expectations with youth ability, and ensuring sport is athlete centered rather than coach centered.

Coaches should prioritize personal growth and well-being (*n* = 8). Coaches take steps to gather feedback for improvement and they continue learning and growing their practice so that they keep getting better. In addition, coaches maintain their own well-being and practice ongoing self-reflection.

Coaches should show up as caring adults (*n* = 6). In other words, coaches have the interpersonal skills to communicate, empathize, and engage with youth. Coaches should be able to connect with athletes in positive ways and show that they care.

Coaches should make sport fun and enjoyable (*n* = 6). This means that coaches provide a fun, positive environment for athletes that keeps athletes enjoying the sport and encourages them to keep participating.

Coaches should support the whole athlete (*n* = 5). This means that coaches support young people as individuals, beyond being an athlete. They take a holistic view of youth, and they understand that youth have their own unique backgrounds, strengths, and needs.

Coaches should prioritize relationship building (*n* = 4). This includes whether and how coaches build relationships with the athletes they coach and how coaches support athletes in fostering relationships with each other.

In addition to Partners elevating these themes, one or two different Partners offered many, more focused ideas. These ideas, although different in their specifications, spoke to the ideas that a "good" coach prioritizes athlete well-being, fosters growth, and builds a positive, engaging culture. Coaches lead by example, embrace a growth mindset, and use sport as a vehicle for youth development. With strong planning, consistency, and a deep understanding of both sport and psychology, coaches empower athletes to grow on and off the field.

What It Means to Be a "Trained" Coach

All Partners expressed a similar idea: Simply completing a training is not enough, and engaging in a training for an established number of minutes does not make one a trained coach. Partners shared their views about what it means to be a "trained" coach, often in relation to what it means to be a "quality" or "good" coach.

Most Partners (*n* = 8) acknowledged that, although it would be easy to say that completing a training would make one a "trained" coach, the key differentiators are (a) if they are trained in the practices that make a coach a "quality or good" one and (b) that they then implement what they have been trained to do. One Partner summarized their views: "I think a trained coach is someone who has been prepared with the knowledge, skills, abilities, and practices to be able to do all of the things that we just described [makes a "good" coach]." Another Partner framed the distinction: "You can have all the badges, all the licenses, the highest license possible and still be a very not good coach. This person has a licensure, but maybe they're doing all the wrong things [with youth]."

Ultimately, almost all Partners agreed that a trained coach does not make a "good" coach but a "good" coach is (typically) a trained coach. A small group of Partners (*n* = 4) acknowledged that some coaches come to the sport without training but with a natural or innate ability to engage in effective pedagogy, create safe spaces, and foster relationships with young people while building skills—but Partners agreed this is rare.

In discussing the concept of a "trained" coach, all Partners elevated the idea that training alone is insufficient to foster practice change and provide the long-term support coaches need. One Partner described, "Training is not *the* answer—it is the start of the answer." As such, Partners expanded the ideas of what makes a "trained" coach, stating that coaches should *also* have opportunities for experiential learning and ongoing support for their practice (*n* = 8); have a mentor or community of practice so that they can learn from others (*n* = 8); or find opportunities for ongoing learning, in general (*n* = 4).

Opportunities for experiential learning extend beyond formal courses or workshops. Rather, coaches need to be provided with opportunities to practice what they have learned in the "real world." One MCC partner shared, for example,

> We sometimes talk about this rehearse, reflect, refine piece . . . So I'm going to rehearse it, I'm going to try it, and I'm going to take a period of time, and I'm going to reflect on how that went, and then I'm going to refine my practice and I'm going to try again.

Partners also indicated that the opportunity to engage in experiential learning also exposes coaches to athletes and fellow coaches who can provide feedback on their practices.

Relatedly, partners agreed that trained coaches would benefit from opportunities for collaborative learning, resources after training to support practice, and a supportive coaching environment.

- Partners (*n* = 8) shared that, although coaches would benefit from engaging in collaborative learning with their peers, coaches may not always have the resources, support, or access to do so. Partners described strategies for such learning, including participation in coach learning communities, apprenticeship models, and models that pair assistant coaches with head coach mentors.
- A small group of Partners (*n* = 4) noted that coaches should have access to additional learning resources *after* participating in training. Partners shared that coaches would benefit from accessible resources that include "actionable tips and tricks" and from reference information they can have "on hand" to help them implement best practices in the field.
- A subset of Partners (*n* = 6) emphasized that coaches need a supportive environment. Having a network of coaches to turn to for advice is an essential resource for coaches. Partners noted that a community of coaches, athletic directors, league administrators, or other colleagues could help prevent burnout due to stress and a lack of support.

> "[Coaches] are working in systems that don't value or don't support them, so [training alone] doesn't matter. They're going to burn out. They're going to drop out . . . We cannot talk about [training] without thinking about the ecosystem around [coaches] and what those critical support mechanisms look like systemically for them to be successful and to become quality trained coaches."

MCC Partner Journeys

Training Development and Implementation

Because the focus of the MCC was on training development (or revision or expansion) and the subsequent training of coaches in those trainings, we considered training development and implementation to be critical elements of each Partner's MCC journey. As such, we began each of the three interviews with a focus on training development and implementation. Across the three interviews, all Partners (*n* = 12) shared information about what went into their training development and implementation efforts.

The journey. About half of Partners joined the MCC with established trainings regarding youth development and related practices in place, and half of Partners joined the MCC with the goal of developing trainings. Most Partners reported that their training development work involved various stakeholders or consultants and was grounded in research and best practice in the field. A subset of Partners (*n* = 3) highlighted their efforts to keep the experiences of coaches at the forefront. For example, one Partner that piloted the trainings with coaches and gathered evaluation and feedback shared that the training was "driven by input from [athletic directors] and coaches." Another Partner included coaches in their development work by hosting a "series of focus groups" and having "opportunities to check with coaches on their thoughts about [the training] along the way." Relatedly, some Partners (*n* = 4) offered advice and lessons learned related to training development, highlighting the importance of keeping the trainings focused and aligned to stakeholder needs and goals.

Some Partners (*n* = 4) worked with consultants to develop their training. The type of consultants varied: some Partners engaged content developers with expertise in specific topics (e.g., trauma-sensitive approaches), and others facilitated advisory groups or brought in experts in adult learning or online course development. Consultants primarily served two purposes: (a) informing content development and/or (b) building a digital platform for online courses.

Most Partners also emphasized the role of research in their training development process. A subset of Partners (*n* = 4) spoke about grounding their training in research on youth development and social and emotional learning, for example. One Partner described making use of "existing frameworks that are out there for youth development" and "[figuring] out where sport was a good fit for those [practices]" based on what the Partner was already seeing in their organization.

Partners took different approaches to the how trainings were delivered—in person, virtual, online asynchronous courses; hybrid, fellowship model. Most Partners (*n* = 9) offered trainings that were facilitated either in person or live virtually (e.g., via Zoom), with a smaller group of Partners (*n* = 3) offering asynchronous online courses. A small group of Partners (*n* = 4) worked with cohorts of coaches, offered a hybrid approach, or provided opportunities for follow-up support in different ways. For example, one Partner created a fellowship model designed as a "facilitated community of practice over 6 months," and another Partner offered "office hours and opportunities to come back for feedback loops."

Partners highlighted the different advantages and disadvantages to their approaches; however, few Partners provided a rationale for offering trainings live and in person, likely because these approaches are considered the "norm" for coach education in the United States. When considering online and virtual modalities, however, Partners shared different strategies, benefits, and drawbacks. For example, virtual facilitated (i.e., live) training enables Partners to reach coaches in a different and potentially more accessible way and maintains the feeling of a live training; however, some Partners felt that their methods were somewhat muted in the virtual setting. Other Partners shared that asynchronous online courses or recorded webinars were beneficial because they allowed coaches to learn at their own pace and "view and refresh themselves on training any time." Some Partners also

highlighted the benefit of online or virtual training content being shorter or "chunked" into "bite-sized" components, which can be easier for coaches to take in on their own time.

A small group of Partners used a hybrid design for their trainings, and this group indicated potential success from coaches having the ability to gain knowledge in a more structured, didactic setting online, which was followed up by live, person-to-person engagement. We note that, for some Partners, COVID influenced their training delivery decisions and propelled their use of virtual trainings during the MCC. Partners shared lessons learned related to online or virtual training delivery. A small group of Partners (n = 3) shared that, although virtual options can expand an organization's reach, there are many technology considerations. One Partner shared that it is important to "do your research and make sure you are ready to work within those [virtual] systems" (e.g., selecting different content management or learning management systems, developing storyboards, designing for end-user experience). Likewise, another Partner noted that not all coaches are tech savvy and may have additional barriers when trying to access the training. Finally, it is important to note that a potential benefit to the development of online asynchronous courses is that they enable the sharing and connecting of different organizations and entities around the same training. For example, some Partners developed online courses and then shared them with other, similar organizations that were able to make small branding changes and disseminate access quickly. As the field looks to increased consistency in the area of coach training, online modalities may create a mechanism for doing so.

Challenges. Partners reported experiencing a variety of challenges during the development process—from content creation to marketing to building buy-in. Many of these challenges speak to larger, contextual issues addressed in the next section (Measurement and Evaluation). For example, some partners (n = 3) were faced with the challenge of designing training to fit within various policy contexts or regulations. These Partners, who often worked with state associations, for example, highlighted different policy constraints from state to state. The challenges these Partners experienced align with findings from recent research by Atkinson and colleagues (2022, 2024), which reviewed state policies for school-based coaches and found significant variation from state to state.

Some Partners (n = 5) elevated challenges related to brand identity, messaging, and logistics-related decisions, for example. One partner described challenges related to what branding to use and how, whereas other Partners (n = 3) highlighted decisions related to messaging and marketing the training to coaches. Other Partners (n = 3) highlighted logistical challenges with managing different vendors, particularly when developing asynchronous online courses and thinking through delivering live virtual trainings. These challenges mirror conversations Partners reported having across the field and with non-MCC organizations that are also taking steps to bring training online.

In addition, Partners focused on building buy-in to the trainings once they were launched. The process of building buy-in was different for each Partner; whereas some Partners experienced success, other Partners faced challenges. For example, one Partner highlighted that they prioritized building buy-in at the leadership level, collaborating across headquarters to ensure they were reaching all levels within their organization, which was seen as a success. Some Partners reported difficulties with buy-in, which sometimes resulted in challenges meeting their coach-training goals. Some Partners reported that they had lower numbers of coaches show up to training than expected, for example, or they highlighted challenges in getting organizations to "make [training] a part of their time and professional development."

Successes. Many Partners shared successes related to training development and implementation. Some Partners (n = 5) highlighted their development process and final products as something they were proud of. Partners spoke to "wins" related to flexibility of training options, quality of content delivery, messaging, and positive feedback from training participants. A smaller group of Partners (n = 2) described training more coaches than they had anticipated.

Another area of success is evident in the ongoing development and evolution of Partner trainings. In the final interview, for example, most Partners (*n* = 8) highlighted their continuous improvement efforts, including making improvements to existing trainings and/or developing new training offerings. These Partners described the new trainings as part of their efforts to be responsive to coach needs, for example, and to what they were hearing was a priority in the field. Some Partners developed training in new content areas (e.g., coaching girls, mental well-being, running practices and tryouts) and other Partners have focused on making improvements to their offerings—translating their trainings into other languages or creating supporting tools and resources, for example. Partners have also refined how trainings are offered, with some Partners working on hybrid approaches and other Partners providing opportunities to spend more time going deeper into content. Many Partners (*n* = 6) also reported making changes to improve the overall user experience—be it shortening trainings, adding interactive elements, or adjusting the interface for asynchronous online courses.

Partners also highlighted the formation of new partnerships in and across the field as a success. Establishing partnerships has helped many Partners reach more coaches, both in and outside the MCC. Within the MCC, the addition of NRPA, for example, established a partnership with four additional MCC Partners: How to Coach Kids, the CHJS, PCA, and the U.S. Soccer Foundation. The California Governor's Advisory Council on Physical Fitness and Mental Well-Being's launch of 25×25: The California Coaches Challenge provided partnership opportunities for PCA and CHJS, for example. Relatedly, some Partners (*n* = 5) also highlighted the collaboration with and learning from MCC Partners as a success and exemplar for the field, demonstrating what is possible when organizations work together—rather than in siloes—to achieve a shared goal.

Measurement and Evaluation

MCC Partners shared information about their measurement and evaluation efforts with us early in the implementation study to inform the overall study design and methodology. During these initial conversations, it became clear that these efforts were varied and typically received a lot of attention due to funding requirements and pressure. In later observations of MCC Partner meetings, we noted a desire to continue the measurement conversation as a growing area of need in the field. As such, we considered measurement and evaluation to be an important element of each Partner's MCC journey and provided opportunities for reflection on the topic during the interviews. Across the three interviews, all 12 Partners shared information about their measurement and evaluation efforts.

The journey. All Partners collect data related to coach training participation. In addition, most Partners (*n* = 10) reported that they primarily collect administrative and survey data. Administrative data include coach training participation and demographic information, such location, sport coached, and other demographic variables (e.g., gender, race and ethnicity), for example. Two Partners shared their challenges with surveying coaches but expressed an interest in developing survey measures to better understand the impact of coach training.

Most Partners (*n* = 10) reported that they also administered surveys to coaches. Some Partners used surveys to gather more information about their satisfaction with trainings (*n* = 6) and/or to learn more about coach attitudes and beliefs (*n* = 8). One Partner described their multipronged approach to measurement:

> We have a basic quality survey that we do for trainings just to get [coaches'] take on whether it was beneficial and did they enjoy it, how much expertise did their trainer have, perceived expertise, et cetera. And then we have more of your [coach] outcomes-based measurement, one of which was around more like the confidence, perceived areas of growth, things of that nature, and then we have a specific trauma tool as well that is particular to that content that we cover in [some] trainings.

Some Partners (*n* = 4) also reported that they collect information on youth outcomes; however, this is less common and more challenging. One Partner described that youth surveys can be difficult because "it's hard to separate a kid's experience based [only] on the [coach participating in] training."

As the MCC progressed, many Partners (*n* = 8) reported that they had made improvements to their data-collection approaches. For example, a few MCC Partners (*n* = 3) described changes to their learning management system or training registration procedures to collect more demographic information about coaches who participated in training. Partners (*n* = 2) also described gathering participant feedback about their trainings and developing new survey and observation tools.

When asked about whether and how they were *using* data, Partners shared that they use data to make improvements to their training and to communicate findings to stakeholders**.** Most Partners (*n* = 9) reported that they use findings from their evaluations to make improvements to their trainings. Specifically, Partners described using participant feedback to learn more about which aspects of the training are well received by participants and areas of training that should be revised or expanded. Additionally, a small group of Partners (*n* = 3) described using data to learn about whether and how the training was having an influence on coaches.

Nearly half of Partners (*n* = 5) shared that they use data to communicate findings to coaches and athletic directors, parents, funders, and partner organizations. Partners described using positive findings for "marketing material" to share with funders (*n* = 1) or in their efforts to describe the benefits of training to coaches (*n* = 2), parents (*n* = 1), and other organizations (*n* = 1). One Partner shared,

> We're largely using [data] at this point for storytelling to be able to put a narrative behind the training, the impact of the training, how it's received, and who it is that's completing the training. As we continue to roll this out and have more coaches engaged, we want to be able to tell the story as well to parents about how this training is going to equip coaches . . . to make it a better experience for their children.

Challenges. Nearly half of Partners (*n* = 5) reported challenges with achieving high response rates for their surveys, (whereas two Partners noted response rates as an area of success). Partners described challenges with training participants completing post-training surveys, especially if the surveys were optional. One Partner shared, "People love saying, 'This [training] is so great, this is so awesome, so helpful.' But how do we actually get people to fill out the surveys and actually fill out the information that we can capture it?"

Successes. About half of Partners (*n* = 7) highlighted successes they have achieved in their data-collection and evaluation measures. These Partners shared that they thought they had developed good survey measures, highlighting the validity and brevity of their instrument (*n* = 2), successful survey administration procedures that included sharing QR codes with the survey link at trainings and general communications regarding the survey (*n* = 3), and high response rates on their surveys (*n* = 2). One Partner shared,

> What works well is when the actual trainer who is part of the training is like, "Okay, now we're going to take 5–10 minutes to fill out the survey." And everyone does it on-site . . . Building that into the actual agenda has been successful in getting the results back.

Some additional successes identified by Partners include creating robust evaluation plans (*n* = 3) and effectively summarizing evaluation findings (*n* = 2).

Communication

Through early and informal conversations with Partners and based on our observations during MCC Partner meetings, we noted that efforts to communicate about Partner work—on the MCC and more broadly—were

underway. We explored these efforts during interviews as one element of each Partner's MCC journey. Across the three interviews, all Partners shared information about their communication efforts.

The journey. The topics Partners communicated about and with whom varied, and topics changed during the course of the MCC. In the earlier interviews, a small group of Partners (*n* = 4) shared that getting the message out about training opportunities was one of the largest topics covered in their communications with their networks. Some Partners aimed to highlight that free training was available, whereas other Partners used messaging to keep coaches engaged throughout and after the training process or to let them know about resources related to upcoming sporting events. Relatedly, all Partners reported that they targeted a variety of audiences in their messaging—from coaches to parents; funders; and, in some cases, the general public—and that they used different communication channels. About half of Partners shared that they had a newsletter to share information (*n* = 7) and/or that they used social media (*n* = 5).

As the MCC progressed, we observed a shift in communication efforts in a smaller group of Partners. Some Partners (*n* = 4) made a deliberate "push" to spread the word about the training opportunities, for example, or to target specific groups of coaches. A smaller group of Partners (*n* = 2) shared that they wanted to reframe some of their messaging. For example, one Partner worked to "shift the narrative about coach training from it being a requirement [coaches] have to do" to focus more on the "impact for [coaches]." Similarly, another Partner shifted its messaging to emphasize the value the course will bring to both coaches and athletes.

Challenges. A small group of Partners (*n* = 4) described logistical issues related to communication. These Partners described issues related to branding and content creation, for example. Some Partners also highlighted logistical challenges that relate to data issues, such as having accurate data on coaches and using that information for communication purposes.

Successes. Given the variation in communication efforts, Partners each highlighted different areas of success that were unique to their organizations and specific communication strategies. For example, Partners highlighted

- communicating effectively with coaches (*n* = 2),
- growing their audiences (*n* = 2), and
- keeping coaches well informed and in "real time" (*n* = 2).

Policy-Related Efforts

Although policy-related efforts were not originally an area of focus for the implementation study, early interviews and ongoing discussion during MCC Partner meetings indicated that some Partners were doing work in this area. As such, we began to make space for Partners to share more information about these efforts in the second and third interviews. In many cases, this section of the interview focused on (a) policy issues that Partners were encountering in the field and (b) specific policy-related work that Partners were (or were not) doing. All Partners shared insights into policy issues they were encountering, and nine Partners spoke to policy-related work that they were actively engaged in.

The journey. All MCC partners (*n* = 12) elevated policy issues that they were encountering in the field of youth sport, including mandating training in the larger field of youth sport (*n* = 4). In their responses, some Partners (*n* = 3) reported that their experiences have shown them that local councils or clubs, rather than national organizations, have had success in mandating coach training. One partner explained,

> There's definitely a difference in perception locally if it's a league or a local organization that's saying, "We're doing this because we care and it's our community" versus "[A larger organization] is telling us we have to do this" . . . The more we can get local organizations to do some of that on their own and have that local buy-in, the better off we are.

A small group of Partners (*n* = 2) highlighted a need to direct funding to the development, provision, and advocacy of coach training and youth sport, in general, and other Partners (*n* = 2) described how the policies regarding training and clearance requirements differ by state.

Many Partners (*n* = 9) also described taking action to advance policy change in a number of ways. During the interviews, we aimed to differentiate between "Big P Policy," in other words, formal, legislated policies, and "little p policy." meaning informal, organizational, or practice-based policies (drawing on Lipsky's 1980 work on *street-level bureaucracy*; Mayo et al., 2019). A small group of Partners (*n* = 3) described evolving "Big P Policy" efforts. Early in the MCC, Partners shared their approaches to policy change that included serving as a consultant or thought partner (*n* = 2) and working with governments at all levels (*n* = 1). Once the MCC was underway, Partners described their expanding involvement in policy issues, which largely focused on promoting coach training. Some Partners (*n* = 3) described policies that they have supported at the state level, such as working with state government officials to mandate training on athlete mental health, promoting the importance of youth sport at the state level, and advocating for funding for programs with high-quality coaching models. One Partner shared,

> One of our goals in the grant was to ideally embed mental health training into the already existing training requirements for coaches [at the state level] . . . Can we take out one of the three times that cardiac arrest is covered and put in mental health? Ideally, we were trying to re-engineer the training requirements so that there would be less redundancy and [adding mental health] in.

Partners also elevated "little p policy" efforts, including work to mandate coach training in their own organizations or local contexts (*n* = 4), make efforts to enforce training compliance (*n* = 1), and hold trainings at existing events to reduce burden on coaches (*n* = 1). For example, one partner shared,

> We have tons of courts and fields and spaces, and a lot of the pay-to-play leagues don't have facilities . . . When we're thinking about coach training and institutionalizing or formalizing that commitment, we have talked a lot to our agencies around using the power of the permit to require some of these trainings. And we see already that they do that for things like injury prevention or concussion training, but we would love to push them to a place of saying, "You can't use this field unless your coaches have been through [these types of] trainings."

A few Partners highlighted successes related to these efforts, with one Partner sharing that, although they were worried about the negative impact of requiring training for some coaches (which could have led to coach attrition), the requirements appear to have yielded a positive outcome, with many coaches opting in to the training voluntarily.

Successes. Much of the policy-related work described by Partners was in the early stages; however, a small group of Partners (*n* = 4) shared successes in their policy change efforts. Two Partners highlighted successes related to their partnerships with other organizations (e.g., training coaches, being a thought partner). In addition, two Partners described changes they made within their organizations or local communities. For example, one Partner noted that their reports have influenced districts to change their policies related to the number of hours that athletes spend at practice and how parents can support their children's well-being.

Challenges. Half of Partners (*n* = 6) elevated challenges that speak to larger contextual issues in the field broadly (described in the next section), particularly related to navigating different local contexts and policies. For example, some Partners (*n* = 3) specifically emphasized that, because the field does not have a standardized training model or framework or requirements regarding coach training, their work to develop and implement coach training across contexts is challenging.

Limitations

We elevate several limitations to the themes presented in this section. First, in consideration of the method (interviews), we note that the responses shared by Partners represent only the viewpoints of those individuals who participated and not necessarily the viewpoints of the larger Partner organization. Each interview was limited to four team members, which means we may have missed insights from other members of the organization.

Additionally, the topics discussed during the interviews may not capture the full spectrum of opinions held by Partners. Conversations often focused on particular topics that were at the forefront of the participants' minds, potentially leaving out other important ideas and perspectives. We encourage the reader to reflect on the Partners' ideas rather than on *n* sizes, which are typically not fully representative of all Partners' agreements or disagreements with the idea.

Finally, we note that, because some Partners joined the MCC late, they participated in only one interview rather than in the full set of three interviews. Although their interviews covered the same topics as other interviews, we may not have gathered as many details about their journeys compared to Partners that had been involved with the MCC since its inception.

Chapter 4: Document Review

Research Question 3: How do MCC Partners integrate youth development principles and practices into coach training?

Methods

- We reviewed training materials (PowerPoint slides, facilitator scripts, and support materials for trainings delivered live in person or online, and access to online asynchronous courses) for 33 trainings submitted by 10 MCC Partners to date (with additional reviews planned).
- A team of reviewers used a pre-established document review form to take notes, often verbatim, from training content. We coded each form using analytic strategies from constructivist-grounded theory and elevated themes in the data. We engaged in meaning making with Partners to refine the findings.

Findings

- MCC Partner trainings varied in terms of delivery mode (live in person, live virtual, asynchronous online, hybrid), length of time (ranging from 20 minutes to 9 hours), and content covered.
- Partners used many adult learning strategies in their trainings, including but not limited to making the content relevant to coaching and making it personal to the learner; making the trainings interactive, including mechanisms to apply learning during the training; and providing resources for coaches to use following the training.
- The training content focused almost exclusively on coach practice (i.e., what coaches should do when engaging with athletes).
- We identified 12 core practice themes that at least seven Partners included in one of their trainings: (1) building trust and developing relationships; (2) how coaches "show up" with consistency, empathy, full attention, and care; (3) mastery climate; (4) athlete empowerment and agency; (5) belonging and inclusion; (6) coach modeling and accountability; (7) coaching and instruction; (8) athlete safety; (9) coach regulation; (10) coach personal growth; (11) running practices and scrimmages; and (12) use of rituals. These practice themes align with prior theory and research on PYD in sport, as well as with widely disseminated coaching resources available in the field.
- Trainings were often grounded in different approaches or focal areas that were more implicit than explicit. We identified three cross-cutting thematic clusters that underpinned training content: (a) mental health and trauma-sensitive approaches, (b) creating a mastery climate, (c) coaches and coaching matters.

Chapter 4: Document Review

A central component of the MCC is the design and delivery of training content by MCC Partners to coaches across the country. We conducted a comprehensive and systematic document review of all Partner training materials—a first-of-its-kind effort—to address our third research question that was designed to explore how MCC Partners approached the integration of principles and practices grounded in youth development and other related areas (e.g., social and emotional learning, mental wellness, positive climate). In many ways, our ability to address this third research question also addresses elements of the second research question about what MCC Partners identify as important factors in the field of coaching and youth sport. The findings from this review shed light on the content of Partner trainings and elevate where similarities and gaps exist, particularly in the area of coach practice, across Partners, and to what extent MCC Partner training content aligns with foundational research on PYD and SBYD.

Using the Implementation Study to Develop a Practice Guide for Coaches

Findings from this document review also served as the empirical foundation for the MCC Coach Practice Guide, released in 2025. While this technical report retains research-oriented terminology and analytic distinctions, the practice guide intentionally adapted the naming and framing of practices to be more accessible and actionable for coaches and practitioners in the field. As a result, some practices may appear under different labels across the two documents, even though they reflect the same underlying constructs.

Methods

Initial Scan of Partner Training Materials

The first step of the document review involved an initial scan of the training materials provided by MCC Partners. These materials included PowerPoint slides, facilitator scripts, and support materials for trainings delivered live in person or online and access to online asynchronous courses. The purpose of the scan was to gain familiarity with the available resources and the types of content covered by the Partners in each training. During the initial scan, we observed that Partners were approaching the trainings differently in terms of goals and objectives, structure of the learning session, length of time, mechanisms for participant engagement, modality, and more. Additionally, we noted the presence of what Kelley (1927) described as the jingle-jangle fallacy wherein different terms were used to mean the same thing, while the same terms were used to mean different things, an issue that is common in the behavioral and social sciences when discussing competencies and practices (Durlak et al., 2022; Newman & Moroney, 2024). From the initial scan, we were able to refine a nuanced subset of questions to be addressed by this task and determined a need for a systematic document review form to be used by reviewers for each training.

Development of Document Review Form

We developed a document review form for data extraction during the training review process. Developing the document review form involved several iterations: developing the form, testing it, adjusting it, and testing it again until we finalized the form. The form was designed to capture reviewer details and basic information about the trainings. It was also designed to answer the following questions:

- What adult learning strategies are employed throughout the training?

- What coach and athlete competencies and practices are covered in the training?
- Does the training explicitly reference research literature or frameworks and, if so, which ones?

A copy of the document review form is available in Appendix D.

Document Review Process

The goal of the document review process was to capture information from the trainings as systematically as possible, preserving the training language through a process that more closely resembled transcription rather than documenting our own notes and ideas or substituting our own words. This aspect of the review process is particularly important because we aim, in this study, to preserve the ideas and voices of the MCC Partners such that we may represent their hard work as accurately as possible.

The document review was completed by two researchers, with support from a third researcher and a number of reviewers and advisors who weighed in during the initial stages of completing the review form and while establishing reliability in documentation. Because learning is a human process and individuals receive information differently, it was important to establish norms for completing the document review form to ensure that all reviewers captured the same information, at the same level of depth. This process proved to be challenging. After repeated attempts of the two reviewers using the full form to preserve the same type and level of detail from the full training, the team made the decision to divide up the review form such that each reviewer would focus on addressing only specific sections across all trainings. Reviewers were then able to confer with each other about the sections they did not code to make sure there was agreement. The team reviewed a total of 34 discrete trainings from 10 MCC Partners. Additional reviews are planned for 2025. A list of the trainings we reviewed is available in Appendix D.

Coding and Analysis

After completing the document reviews, we engaged in coding, using analytic strategies from constructivist-grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz & Bryant, 2011; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). We utilized NVivo qualitative data analysis software to facilitate this process. We began with open coding, conducting line-by-line analysis *in vivo* (meaning that we used the same words from the training rather than applying our own language for the initial set of codes) and using gerunds when possible (Charmaz, 2006). We aimed to code at the "smallest grain size" in an effort to preserve the competencies and practices that were included in the trainings rather than the umbrella terms that may have been used, which could mask the underlying constructs. For example, if a training focused on the topic of "coach emotion regulation" and detailed strategies such as "being aware of emotions," "taking deep breaths," and "engaging in conversations calmly," we coded at the level of the strategy because those are the specific practices that coaches are engaging in. We approached this task with the understanding that we could always aggregate codes later but would have had a harder time disaggregating codes. As a result, the initial open-coding process generated more than 600 codes.

Next, we engaged in axial coding and focused on making connections between codes, using the constant comparison approach (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This method enabled us to eventually elevate themes and draw meaningful insights from the data while preserving the voices of the MCC Partners to the extent possible. As a final step, we engaged in exploratory theoretical coding to examine whether, how, and to what extent the final practice themes aligned with existing theory and widely disseminated coach resources in the field.

Throughout the process, we maintained a codebook to keep track of decisions we made and relied on the codebook more extensively later in the process of axial coding. It is important to note that there is significant overlap in youth development and related constructs, and this overlap is present in the materials we reviewed. In

some cases, we “double coded” or copied codes when a practice or strategy was used in multiple ways by the trainer; however, we tried to limit this practice when possible.

Meaning Making

AIR presented early findings from the document review with Partners during an in-person meeting in May 2024. Although we did not explicitly request feedback at that time, many Partners shared reactions and feedback informally with the AIR team, and we used this feedback to inform our work. We then shared select findings from the document review and the second section of the third interview (What makes a quality or good coach?) with approximately 23 members of MCC Partner organizations and the facilitation partner group during an interactive meaning-making session held in October 2024. The meaning-making session served as a “member check” for some of the qualitative data that we collectively agreed needed to be co-interpreted and refined (Birt et al., 2016).

During the meaning-making session, we shared themes from our analysis, and Partners were invited to react, using Mentimeter, a live data-collection tool, and to engage in additional dialogue. Upon conclusion of the meaning-making sessions, the research team revisited the themes based on Partner feedback and made revisions, as appropriate.

Findings

In the sections that follow, we present the themes from the document review, with an emphasis on those themes that were most common across MCC Partners. We made decisions about what to elevate using frequencies (i.e., counts) at the Partner level in addition to the level of each discrete training. We chose this approach because some Partners developed one training, and other Partners developed two or five or nine trainings. Some trainings were designed to stand alone and were potentially more comprehensive than other trainings, which were designed to scaffold with each other and may have been more focused. In these sections, we also present information about the number of Partners and the number of trainings whenever possible.

Training “Basics”

AIR reviewed 33 discrete trainings from 10[5] MCC Partners. Five Partners offered their trainings through multiple modalities (n = 22), meaning that the trainings could be delivered live in person and/or live online (e.g., via Zoom). These Partners provided PowerPoint slide decks with facilitator guides or notes. Five Partners developed and provided access to asynchronous online courses (n = 11).

Because the trainings had different purposes and modalities, they varied significantly in length. For example, some Partners are responsible for training their coaching corps to deliver a specific sport program, and these trainings tended to be longer, often spread across multiple sessions or offered through a hybrid approach (online synchronous course followed by in-person training). Other Partners work with different leagues, schools, or governing bodies to deliver training to coaches and tend to offer shorter, topical trainings. As such, the trainings ranged in the length, from approximately 20 minutes to 9 hours for each training.

Four Partners provided a single training that was meant to stand alone, and six Partners provided trainings that were part of a larger series that could be combined for a more comprehensive training but could also stand alone.

[5] Two Partners—Laureus Sport for Good Foundation USA and NRPA—are collaborating with other MCC Partners to deliver training and, as such, did not submit their own training materials.

Adult Learning Strategies

We reviewed the trainings to identify not only what content was delivered but *how* it was delivered. Specifically, we identified a set of research-based learning strategies in literature on coach education (e.g., Leduc et al., 2012; McCullick et al., 2005; Nelson et al., 2013; Webb & Leeder, 2022) and teacher development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone, 2011) and took notes on whether those learning strategies were or were not present in each training. We adjusted and expanded the list of learning strategies during the document review process as we noted the presence of strategies that were not listed originally. This section of the review was not intended to be evaluative. In other words, we had no expectation that these strategies should be present, rather we were interested in the extent to which the trainings were designed to incorporate strategies that facilitate learning and in what ways.

As shown in Exhibit 8, we found that many Partners employed a similar set of strategies across the trainings they offered. All Partners developed trainings that were interactive and ensured active learning on the part of the coach, and all Partners integrated content, questions, and discussion prompts that made the training content relevant to coaches and coaching. Likewise, all Partners provided additional resources for coaches; however, those resources varied, including, for example, practical tools that coaches could use after the training to a list of research papers that had informed the training (e.g., a reference list). Most Partners integrated mechanisms to apply learning during the training, and many trainings made the content personal to coaches as individuals, as well as relevant for their role as a coach. For example, trainings encouraged coaches to reflect on whether and how they apply strategies in their personal lives or to think back to a time in their lives when they were in a similar situation to what was being covered during the training.

Exhibit 8. Summary of Adult Learning Strategies and Inclusion by Partners

Adult learning strategy	Definition	Example	Number of Partners	Number of trainings
Structures learning to be active and/or interactive	Training involves the participants; participants are not simply receiving content (e.g., only watching a video or reading and listening to lecture).	Coaches watch a video and take a short quiz to apply content based on a real-world scenario.	10	32
Makes content relevant to coaching	Training provides examples of how content could be used in future coaching practices.	Coaches are encouraged to think about a time when an event happened in their own coaching career and reflect on that event.	10	32
Provides additional resources	Additional resources are referenced and provided during training.	Additional resources, such as research literature, handbooks, curriculum, or practice guides, are available for coaches.	10	28

Adult learning strategy	Definition	Example	Number of Partners	Number of trainings
Makes content personally relevant to the learners	Training uses examples that could be prevalent in learners' coaching journeys.	Training includes video testimonials about training from personal stories, celebrities, and coach testimonials.	9	24
Incorporates strategies to apply learning during training	Training provides opportunity for participants to practice lessons during training.	Pair discussions throughout training sections. Role play scenarios in groups.	8	27
Is self-paced	Participants complete training at their own pace.	Online training is not timed, and participants can complete the training at their own pace.	7	14
Contains summaries of content covered	Training includes a summary (or summaries) of key points.	After each training section, a video is played to summarize the section.	7	21
Provides time for reflection	Training provides dedicated time for participants to reflect on training practices.	Training includes time for group discussion and self-reflection after each section.	7	25
Takes an action orientation to next steps for coaches	Training provides actionable steps to complete after training is complete or gives participants time to plan actions they will take.	After training, coaches develop action steps to take and create a plan to grow and develop as a coach.	7	15
Is self-guided	Training allows the learner to follow different learning paths or explore content on their own (as opposed to following a set progression).	Training content is navigated through clickable sections. Coach can choose which section to click through.	4	8
Incorporates icebreakers or structures to build community among coaches	Training provides a way for participants to get to know each other.	Participants pair up with a partner to discuss what makes a good coach and share their coaching superpower.	4	15

Adult learning strategy	Definition	Example	Number of Partners	Number of trainings
Establishes group agreements or norms	Training establishes or enables participants to co-create agreements for how they will learn together.	Facilitator shares three norms for how coaches will work together during the training.	2	5

We did not find significant variation in the use of adult learning strategies by training modality; however, we did find one notable exception in that asynchronous online courses did not incorporate icebreaker-type activities or establish group norms. This makes sense, given the individualized nature of an online, asynchronous course. In addition, we did not notice variation by training length of time (duration). In fact, almost all short trainings (fewer than 45 minutes) incorporated the same learning strategies as the longer trainings did. It would appear that the inclusion of adult learning strategies is largely a function of overall training design and decisions made by the Partner.

Coach Practices

Findings from our document review suggest that the MCC Partner trainings focused heavily on coach practice. We identified a set of 12 core practices that were present in at least one of each Partner's trainings across the majority of Partners (at least 7 of the 10), as well as supporting practices that were less common. There was significant overlap in the constructs we identified, and there are many connections and areas of alignment and support across the themes. For the purposes of our analyses and the writing of this report, we have parsed the practice themes to a smaller grain size; however, many of these practices complement and build from each other.

The MCC Partner trainings focused almost exclusively on coach practice—that is, what coaches should *do* when engaging with athletes. The trainings typically focused on building coach knowledge about what the practice was, why it was important, and how to enact the practice. Many trainings described focused and specific practices that coaches could enact regardless of context—in other words, the practices were rarely sport or age specific and did not require additional resources for implementation.

The core practice themes, listed in order of most to least prevalent, included building trust and developing relationships; how coaches "show up"; mastery climate; athlete voice, choice, leadership, and autonomy; belonging and inclusion; coach modeling and accountability; coaching and instruction; physical and emotional safety; coach regulation; coach learning, getting feedback, being open and adaptable; practices and scrimmages; and rituals.

Building trust and developing relationships (10 Partners; 20 trainings) is seen by most if not all Partners as foundational to the work of coaching (see Chapter 3, Partner Interviews, for additional insight). Trainings often took three different approaches in framing relationships. Some trainings simply highlighted the importance of relationships or provided a general set of approaches or ingredients for healthy relationships. Other trainings described how to foster strong relationships between coaches and athletes and/or among the athletes they coach.

How coaches "show up" (10 Partners; 21 trainings) is a broad category we created that encompasses four practice themes that encourage coaches to (a) be predictable and consistent, (b) have empathy and validate athlete emotions and expressions, (c) give athletes their full attention and be present, and (d) show athletes they are valued and cared for. These practice themes generally describe an overall approach or way of being that coaches who strive to support PYD should embody. In the context of trainings, these practices were often

described as laying a foundation for many other practices. For example, when coaches have empathy, they are better able to build trust and develop relationships.

Mastery climate (10 Partners; 14 trainings) is a motivational environment created by coaches and athletes that emphasizes improvement, effort, and skill development rather than focusing on winning. Trainings typically introduced the concept of mastery climate and/or provided strategies for creating a mastery climate, such as focusing on personal records, recognizing improvement and effort, framing mistakes as opportunities to learn, and taking an overall approach that emphasizes process instead of outcomes.

Athlete empowerment and agency (9 Partners; 14 trainings) is a category we created that brings together multiple constructs related to athlete voice, choice, leadership, and autonomy. Trainings introduced the concepts of elevating or making space for athlete ideas, giving athletes opportunities to make choices, and making space or sharing power in a way that enables athletes to lead or take ownership. In general, strategies provided through these trainings were designed to encourage coaches to foster greater athlete autonomy and agency during practices, games, and competitions.

Belonging and inclusion (8 Partners; 12 trainings) is a theme that is closely related to the themes of relationships and emotional safety, but training materials often talked about belonging and inclusion separately, so we decided to elevate it as a separate theme. Many trainings described what belonging and inclusion was and highlighted the importance of belonging and inclusion. Trainings also provided strategies for fostering belonging, ensuring all athletes felt included and/or creating an environment in which athletes feel like they belong. In addition to framing belonging and inclusion generally, some trainings highlighted belonging and inclusion for specific populations, such as girls and youth with disabilities.

Coach modeling and accountability (8 Partners; 12 trainings) involves adopting an approach wherein coaches hold themselves accountable to the athletes and/or work to model the behavior that they expect from the athletes. Trainings often reminded coaches that athletes are “always watching,” for example, or that they should own their mistakes or demonstrate how they are practicing self-care.

Coaching and instruction (8 Partners; 18 trainings) is a broad category that we created to describe the myriad ways trainings provided guidance to coaches about how to coach or provide instruction to athletes. Some trainings provided strategies for coaches about how to provide instruction in general, whereas other trainings focused on how to coach in specific situations (e.g., high pressure). Trainings also provided strategies for managing athlete behavior. Some trainings highlighted the role of pedagogy broadly; however, most trainings that emphasized pedagogy did so in specific ways, elevating specific pedagogical strategies that have been coded specifically to that theme.

Athlete safety (7 Partners; 14 trainings) is inclusive of physical and emotional and psychological safety. Trainings that covered physical safety described strategies such as checking equipment, providing enough rest time, or understanding what is and is not developmentally appropriate, for example. Trainings that described emotional and psychological safety described the importance of creating safe and protected spaces for athletes filled with positivity and empathy. Most trainings discussed safety in a holistic way that emphasized both types of safety rather than one over the other. A smaller number of trainings discussed the importance of safety generally, without providing specific knowledge or practices.

Coach regulation (7 Partners; 10 trainings) broadly refers to the myriad ways in which coaches were encouraged to self-manage and consider their own mental health and well-being. Many trainings highlighted the importance of managing stress and pressure as a coach and provided emotional regulation, self-care, and mental wellness strategies for doing so. Trainings also described behavioral regulation strategies, often specific to how coaches communicate with athletes, families, and officials. Some trainings highlighted the importance of managing

emotions and behaviors as a coach, often referencing this practice in relation to other practice themes, such as building trust, coach accountability, and athlete safety, for example.

Coach personal growth (7 Partners; 9 trainings) is a broad theme that we created to describe the different ways in which trainings encouraged coaches to continue learning, seek and implement feedback, and be open and adaptable.

Running practices and scrimmages (6 Partners; 9 trainings) is a theme that is related to coaching and instruction; but, because the trainings framed the strategies specifically for practices and scrimmages, we elevated it as a separate theme. Trainings typically highlighted *how* to structure practices or scrimmages; described the importance of having a plan for practice; or provided specific strategies to use during practices, including, for example, making sure practices balance fun with challenge and competition, having specific practice rituals, and practicing under pressure.

Rituals (6 Partners; 9 trainings) may be put into place and used by coaches and/or athletes for a variety of purposes during practice, scrimmages, games, or competition—the key is having one ritual (or a few). The rituals theme is unique in that the specific strategies were originally coded to the practice theme that most closely related to their content and were later elevated during the constant comparison process as a separate theme about the importance of having rituals in sport. For example, some trainings highlighted the importance of having opening and closing rituals at the beginning and end of practice to build trust and relationships or athletes having a "mistake ritual," which acknowledges mistakes are how they learn within the broader context of a mastery climate. Having rituals also relates to the practice theme about coaches "showing up" with consistency and predictability.

In addition to the 12 core practice themes, we identified a set of nine practice themes that a smaller number of Partners (at least two) employed in at least one training:

- **Coach communication** (6 Partners; 11 trainings): Strategies and practices that describe generally the importance of communicating effectively; provide concrete communication techniques, such as making eye contact; or describe how to communicate in certain situations or with certain individuals
- **Intentionally connecting sport and youth development** (6 Partners; 7 trainings): Training content that names the importance of intentionally and explicitly teaching life skills and lessons, social and emotional learning, and so forth or specific strategies and practices that coaches should use to intentionally teach skills
- **Reflection** (5 Partners; 5 trainings): Strategies and practices that describe how coaches can integrate time for reflection individually, in pairs, and as a team
- **Goal setting** (5 Partners; 6 trainings): Strategies and practices that describe how coaches should set goals or work with athletes to set goals; sometimes described within the context of creating a mastery climate
- **Making connections** (4 Partners; 4 trainings): Strategies and practices that coaches can use to align with and/or connect to schools, families, the community, and other coaches
- **Team culture** (4 Partners; 10 trainings): Strategies and practices that coaches can use to create a team culture that is unique and engages all athletes
- **Making sport fun** (3 Partners; 5 trainings): Encouragement or emphasis for coaches to remember that sport should be fun for athletes
- **Conflicts and repairing relationships** (3 Partners; 3 trainings): Strategies and practices that emphasize what coaches should do to manage conflicts and repair relationships
- **Supporting mental health and employing a trauma-informed approach** (2 Partners; 2 trainings): Strategies and practices that coaches can use to support mental health and wellness with athletes and for themselves

Additional Cross-Cutting Training Themes

Our approach to coding the training content focused on knowledge, practices, and strategies that were stated explicitly for coaches. Therefore, we coded content that clearly outlined what coaches should know and be able to do. This process, while useful in capturing the explicit coaching practices and strategies, did not account for what was implicit in the training—the rationale for the training, the underlying foundation or premise for the training, or the evidence base for presenting the training content in the way it was presented, for example. During our reviews, we noticed cross-cutting themes that were not stated as explicit practices or strategies but underpinned the training content and practices, almost like a lens that frames the training itself.

In following analytic strategies from grounded theory, we engaged in the constant comparative process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and elevated three implicit thematic clusters: (a) mental health and trauma-sensitive approaches, (b) creating a mastery climate, and (c) coaches and coaching matters.

Mental health and trauma-sensitive approaches. Eight Partners (14 different trainings) framed their trainings or included content related to mental health (for coaches and/or for athletes), trauma-responsive approaches to learning and coaching, adverse childhood experiences, and/or stress and stress management. Many of these trainings leveraged evidence across the different science disciplines (e.g., neuroscience, learning sciences, biology, physiology) to further explain how young people learn and what coaches should know as they consider their coaching practice in general and as it relates to PYD specifically. It is important to note this distinction of coding for implicit and explicit content in the trainings. Although we only noted a small group of Partners and trainings that covered explicit coach practices related to mental health and trauma-responsive coaching (Chapter 4), almost all Partners and nearly half of trainings brought this lens to the work.

Creating a mastery climate. Eight Partners (13 different trainings) framed their trainings to emphasize the importance of moving beyond wins and losses, having a growth mindset, and focusing on improvement, all of which are related to coaching with a mastery focus. We noted the presence of many explicit strategies specifically related to mastery (Chapter 4); however it is also important to elevate this overarching lens for the work because many trainings framed their explicit practices and strategies (which may have been coded under other themes) *in relation to* the overarching goal of creating a mastery climate.

Coaches and coaching matters. Seven Partners (14 different trainings) incorporated content into their training that spoke to the role that coaches play and aimed to build a sense of camaraderie among participants in relation to their shared role as a coach. During the trainings, facilitators may use a number of strategies—such as having coaches reflect on a great coach for inspiration, naming their "why" for coaching, or asking coaches to name what their athletes will remember about them—to demonstrate to coaches that what they are doing matters for athletes and youth development. In addition, facilitators were noted as tying training content back to ideas such as "we are all in this together" and "coaches are the foundation."

Training Alignment With Existing Theory and Widely Disseminated Coach Resources in the Field

There exists a robust research and evidence base that documents practices that promote PYD and SBYD. Also, widely disseminated resources (e.g., standards, frameworks, tools) are available in the field that build from the scholarly literature and practical insights. The MCC implementation study is not evaluative, and it is beyond the scope of the study to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the extent to which Partner trainings aligned with or "measured up" to existing research. We did engage, however, in exploratory theoretical coding as a final phase of the document review to consider the extent to which the final practice themes aligned with a selection of some of the more widely accepted pieces of literature and resources.

We reviewed a seminal piece of literature on SBYD by Perkins and Noam (2007), which builds from the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2002) work that elevates eight features of settings that foster PYD, largely considered foundational to PYD practice. Perkins and Noam highlight 13 features of SBYD programs and settings, including the following:

- "**Physical and psychological safety**: The sports program provides a safe haven physically and emotionally. The space for play is free of health and safety hazards;
- **Appropriate structure**: An appropriate structure has clear communication, developmentally appropriate flow and pace of sessions, and unambiguous rules and expectations;
- **Supportive relationships**: The sports program has caring adults involved in the program's activities and events. Through these activities and events, adults and youth are able to establish trusted connections;
- **Opportunities to belong**: The sports program provides activities and events that foster friendships and provide youth with a positive group experience. Thus, peer relationships are inclusive, and there is a lack of small cliques within the sports program;
- **Positive social norms**: The sports program's culture (for example, habits and expectations) that governs behavior and daily interactions involves conventionally positive social norms and good sportsmanship;
- **Support for efficacy and mattering**: In terms of efficacy, sports programs emphasize a youth's improvements in their athletic abilities rather than focusing on a youth's superior abilities as compared to those of peers;
- **Opportunities for skill-building**: The sports program develops skills and competencies through its activities and team-building experiences. It provides youth the opportunity to build both sports-related skills and life skills;
- **Opportunities to foster cultural competence**: Sports-based youth development programs are sensitive to the cultural context surrounding their program;
- **Active learning**: The sports program provides interactive and reflective learning opportunities that engage multiple learning styles;
- **Opportunities for recognition**: Youth are sincerely acknowledged for their contributions to a sport and their team;
- **Strengths-based focus**: Sports-based youth development programs are strength based because they draw on individuals' strengths and assets to develop new skills or refine existing skills;
- **Ecological and holistic programs**: Effective and successful sports-based youth development programs address multiple facets of the physical and social environments; and
- **Integration of family, school, and community:** The sports program coordinates its efforts and communicates regularly with families and schools to ensure similar norms and expectations across settings" (2007, pp. 87–82).

We found that the 12 core practices elevated from the document review closely aligned with the 13 features identified by Perkins and Noam (2007), with a few notable exceptions. There were two SBYD practices identified by Perkins and Noam (2007) that were not explicitly evident in the coach practice themes we identified—opportunities to foster cultural competence and ecological and holistic programs—and we noted a weak connection to the strengths-based focus construct. The last construct, "integration of family, school, and community" was evident in the practice themes we generated ("making connections beyond the team"); however, we did not include this theme as a core practice because only four Partners covered this theme in trainings. In addition, some practice themes that we identified extended beyond the features identified by Perkins and Noam.

Specifically, we were not able to explicitly and meaningfully connect themes directly related to coach modeling and accountability and coach regulation, which likely reflect a more nuanced view of what coaches should know and be able to do.

We also reviewed the following widely disseminated coaching resources:

- National Standards for Sport Coaches, developed by SHAPE America
- International Sport Coaching Framework, developed by the International Council for Coaching Excellence (ICCE) and partners
- Quality Coaching Framework, developed by the USOPC
- American Development Model, developed by the USOPC
- Calls for Coaches, developed by Project Play at the Aspen Institute

Each of these resources provides a unique perspective on coaching practices, with overlapping themes that emphasize athlete development, ethical conduct, and continuous improvement. **SHAPE America's National Standards for Sport Coaches** establishes a structured framework that outlines essential coaching responsibilities, including technical instruction, ethical leadership, and administrative management. **ICCE's International Sport Coaching Framework** builds on this framework by emphasizing coaching competencies, professional development, and the ability to adapt across different coaching contexts. Similarly, the **USOPC Quality Coaching Framework** prioritizes athlete well-being, inclusivity, and the importance of continuous learning for coaches to refine their methods and create positive sporting environments. The **American Development Model** takes a long-term athlete development approach, promoting age-appropriate training and multisport participation and ensuring that sport remains fun and engaging at all levels. Finally, the **Aspen Institute's Calls for Coaches** highlights the relational and cultural aspects of coaching, encouraging a holistic, athlete-centered approach that fosters personal growth, team culture, and lifelong participation in sport.

We found that the practice themes we identified were largely aligned with these resources. Alignment was particularly evident in that our set of practice themes and the constructs from the resources emphasize taking an athlete-centered approach to coaching, mastery over outcomes, safe and supportive environments, building trust and relationships, and coach continuous growth. The practice themes identified by the implementation study expanded beyond what was covered in the resources in two notable ways, however. First is the emphasis within trainings about how coaches "show up." In other words, Partner trainings placed a greater emphasis on strategies that ensure consistency, predictability, and presence than the resources do. In addition, the Partner trainings place emphasis—explicitly and implicitly—on athlete stress, trauma, and mental health and well-being. Finally, we note the trainings we reviewed did not explicitly address some elements of the resources, including the following:

- Ethical Standards and Integrity
- Resource Management
- Strategic Planning
- Compliance With Rules and Regulations
- Evaluation and Assessment
- Program Development and Delivery
- Community and Stakeholder Engagement

These differences are likely due to the purpose, goals, and focus of the MCC Partner trainings because most of these constructs were outside the scope of the MCC. A detailed crosswalk of the theoretical and widely disseminated literature is available in Appendix D.

References to Research Literature and Frameworks

We noted in our preliminary scan of training documents that, although many trainings included a list of references (i.e., research), some trainings also highlighted one or two specific pieces of research literature or frameworks as the foundation or grounding for the training. Partners varied in terms of whether they referenced this grounding at all and, if so, which literature and frameworks they used and how many. Two Partners did not reference grounding literature or frameworks in any of their trainings. The eight Partners that *did* reference grounding literature or frameworks in at least one training primarily used the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning framework (3 Partners; 7 trainings) and the Quality Coaching Framework (2 Partners; 6 trainings). In addition, the following research and frameworks were each used by a different Partner in one of their trainings:

- Ambitious Coaching Framework (UW CLA, n.d.)
- Call for Coaches (Aspen Institute, 2019)
- Hart's Ladder of Participation (Hart, 1992)
- PYD theory (Lerner et al., 2009)
- Whole School, Whole Child, Whole Community model (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014)

Limitations

Our work on the document review has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, our analysis of the synchronous trainings was based solely on the review of hard materials, such as PowerPoint slides, facilitator scripts, and support materials. We did not actively participate in the training sessions, which may have limited our understanding of the content covered. This reliance on available materials meant that our focus was on what was explicitly stated, potentially overlooking implicit or nuanced aspects of the training. Our analysis does not account for training facilitator knowledge, behaviors, and additional commentary that expands on the content in the slides.

Relatedly, because we coded training materials content explicitly and used strategies from grounded theory, we recognize that we might have "missed the forest for the trees." Some themes or "lenses" that we, as reviewers, *felt* during our review did not emerge as prominently in the coding. This realization prompted us to revisit the training materials to check for any missed content. We found that we did not miscode the data; rather, some cross-cutting themes were more *implicit* than *explicit*. As a result, we revisited our coding to ensure a more comprehensive analysis; however, a deeper examination of implicit content would be beneficial. We anticipate that additional insights and likely new findings will be shared when the final implementation study technical report is released in 2026.

Chapter 5: Coach Perception Survey

Research Question 4: How do coaches perceive the influence of MCC Partner trainings on their knowledge, skills, confidence, and practice? Do coaches perceive an influence from their participation in training on youth outcomes?

Methods

- AIR developed and administered the *MCC Coach Perception Survey* to coaches trained by MCC Partners. The survey explores coach perceptions of their own outcomes and athlete outcomes in areas such as social and emotional development, relationship building, supporting mental health and well-being, joy, success in and outside of sport, and retention.
- We analyzed multiple choice and Likert-type items descriptively by determining the frequencies of respondents who selected each response option for a given survey question. A team of qualitative analysts engaged in thematic analysis of the open-ended response items.
- We administered the survey across six waves of trained coaches. AIR and MCC Partners collectively invited more than 262,981 coaches to complete the survey, and 13,807 coaches participated in the survey(approximate survey participation rate is 5.3%).

Findings

- Coaches reflected on the extent to which their participation in training led to the development of knowledge, skills, confidence, and practice change in five areas: (a) supporting athlete social and emotional learning, (b) creating an environment where all athletes feel safe to be themselves, (c) fostering positive relationships with the athletes they coach, (d) supporting athletes in developing relationships with each other, and (e) supporting athlete mental health in relation to their participation in sport.
- The majority of coaches (~88%) agreed or strongly agreed that the training had an influence on building their confidence, followed by the development of new knowledge and skills. This finding was consistent across the five coach practice areas, although it was slightly lower in relation to supporting athletes' mental health.
- Slightly more than half of coaches (56.7%) reported that their participation in the training positively influenced their plans to continue coaching. Nearly 42% of coaches reported that the training did not influence their plans to continue coaching.
- Eighty-eight percent of coaches reported that they believe participating in the training made them a better coach. Coaches shared that they learned valuable information or skills from the training, had positive experiences with the training or MCC Partner organization, and learned how to better support athletes.
- Many coaches perceived that their participation in training had already led to observable youth outcomes, with coaches reporting that they had observed athletes experiencing more joy in their sport (66.0%) and athletes developing stronger relationships with other athletes (62.1%), for example.
- Nearly 72% of coaches believed that their participation in training positively influenced athlete retention and made athletes more likely to return overall.

Chapter 5: Coach Perception Survey

Understanding how MCC Partners developed their trainings (Chapter 3) and diving deep into the training content (Chapter 4) illuminates pieces of the bigger picture when it comes to understanding how to foster PYD through sport. Capturing coach perceptions is necessary, however, in understanding whether, how, and to what extent these trainings may influence coach knowledge; skills; confidence; and, ultimately, their practice. The *MCC Coach Perception Survey* was developed and administered with coaches who participated in at least one MCC Partner training during the implementation study. The survey findings highlight the many ways in which participation in training may support coaches in their roles and in what ways they believe their practice is changing as a result of their training participation.

Methods

Measure

AIR began work on the *MCC Coach Perception Survey* in the second full year of the MCC, once the majority of Partners had developed or refined and began implementing their trainings. Our goal was to administer a perception survey that aligned closely with the Partner training content such that one survey could be administered across all Partners and still be relevant to most coaches.

The survey development process was iterative and included an early review of training materials and input from MCC Partners, which elevated five key areas to explore through the survey: (a) supporting athlete social and emotional learning, (b) creating an environment where all athletes feel safe, (c) fostering positive relationships with athletes, (d) supporting athletes in developing relationships with each other, and (e) supporting athlete mental health in relation to their participation in sport. We then reviewed existing, available, and relevant measures in the field to see if they could be used or adapted for use in this study. Based on our review, we decided to develop a survey that was unique to the MCC.

We developed survey items to align with a set of core practices identified in the Partner trainings and incorporated additional practices and outcomes based on our interviews with Partners. We incorporated feedback and administered a beta version of the survey in the spring and fall of 2023 (Survey Administration Waves 1 and 2). We also gathered feedback about the survey to inform potential revisions. We administered a revised survey in the spring and fall of 2024 (Survey Administration Waves 3 and 4). In 2025, we became aware of additional wording issues related to key terms (e.g., social and emotional learning) that were influencing how coaches were responding to the survey. We made additional adjustments to a select set of items for the fifth and sixth waves of the survey. We present an aggregated set of findings from the most current version of the survey (and prior versions where it was possible to append survey data) in the sections that follow.

Most of the *MCC Coach Perception Survey* consisted of questions with Likert-type rating scales or multiple choice response options. Some items were open-ended to capture more detail in follow-up to select questions. Survey constructs included the following: demographics, training participation details, perceived coach outcomes, and coach perceptions of athlete outcomes.

Survey Administration Procedure

AIR administered the *MCC Coach Perception Survey* every 6 months—once in the spring and once in the fall. We administered the survey across six waves, with each wave lasting 4–7 weeks. Because not all Partners had started offering trainings, some Partners did not participate in earlier rounds of survey administration.

AIR administered the survey directly on behalf of five MCC Partners, and six Partners disseminated the survey directly to coaches they trained. During survey administration periods, AIR and MCC Partners invited coaches to complete the survey via email. Coaches received weekly survey reminders to encourage participation. To encourage participation in the survey, AIR raffled off one gift card per Partner during each week of the survey administration window to coaches who completed the survey.

Respondent Inclusion Criteria and Participation

Each wave of survey administration was open to coaches trained in the 6-month window that preceded the survey. Coaches who were trained at least 5 weeks prior to the survey launch date were eligible to participate in the survey. Additionally, coaches were only eligible to complete the full survey if they were at least 18 years of age, trained by an MCC Partner and had coached a sport in the past 6 months and we had an email address on file post-training. Across all six waves, AIR and MCC Partners collectively invited more than 262,981 coaches to complete the survey.[6] A total of 21,911 coaches responded to the survey and 13,807 coaches met the eligibility criteria to participate in the survey, for an approximate survey participation rate of 5.3%.

Analysis

We analyzed the multiple choice and Likert-type items descriptively by determining the frequencies of respondents who selected each response option for a given survey question. A second quantitative analyst replicated the results to ensure accurate reporting. We present the findings from these items as a percentage of the total responses to that particular item.

A team of qualitative analysts engaged in thematic analysis of the open-ended items (Braun & Clark, 2006). The team reviewed survey responses during the beta version administration and created a codebook based on themes observed in the data; the codebook guided analysis during subsequent waves of the survey. The team met frequently to establish agreement in their coding and to discuss emerging or evolving themes that were not yet represented in the codebook.

A detailed summary of the survey development, revision, and administration processes is available in Appendix F.

Survey Participants

Most respondents to the *MCC Coach Perception Survey* identified as White (65.2%, n = 7,022), with Hispanic (11.1%, n = 1,196) and Black or African American (10.0%, n = 1,075) rounding out the three most common responses. Most respondents were between 30 and 60 years old, with about half of

[6] Because some Partners disseminated the *MCC Coach Perception Survey* directly and were bound by privacy restrictions, they did not report the number of coaches they disseminated the survey to.

respondents indicating that they were 30–45 years old (48.3%, *n* = 5,234), and 30.0% of respondents (*n* = 3,252) indicating they were 46–60 years old. Respondents were split by gender: Half of respondents (51.7%, *n* = 5,595) identified as male, and about half of respondents (46.4%, *n* = 5,026) identified as female.

In addition, about a quarter of respondents indicated that they were first-year coaches (24.6%, *n* = 2,676), with another quarter of respondents (25.0%, *n* = 2,718) indicating they were in Years 2–4 of coaching. Slightly more than half of respondents (52.6%, *n* = 5,679) were in their first year of being involved with the MCC Partner that provided the training. A detailed summary of survey participant characteristics is provided in Appendix G.

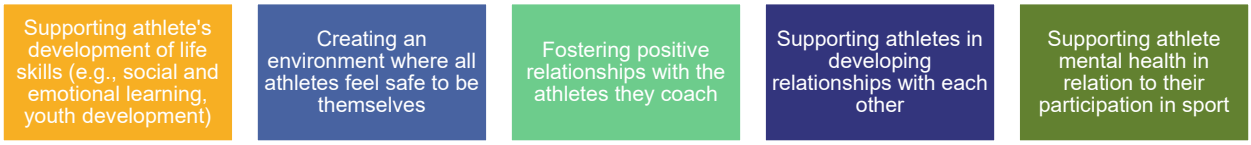
Findings

Perceived Coach Outcomes

Research on coach education suggests that training and education courses may contribute to the development of coach knowledge and skills (Falcão et al., 2012; Weiss & Williams 2004), increased confidence (Anderson-Butcher & Bates, 2022), and eventual changes in behavior and practice (Li et al., 2025). We have observed, in practice, that these outcomes may build from each other—developing knowledge and skills builds confidence, which leads to behavior change.

Therefore, the *MCC Coach Perception Survey* explored the extent to which these outcomes were being realized by coaches as a result of their participation in the training. Specifically, we gathered coach perceptions about these outcomes across five practice areas, as shown in Exhibit 9. We also explored the extent to which coaches perceived the training to influence their retention.

Exhibit 9. The Five Practice Areas of the Coach Perception Survey

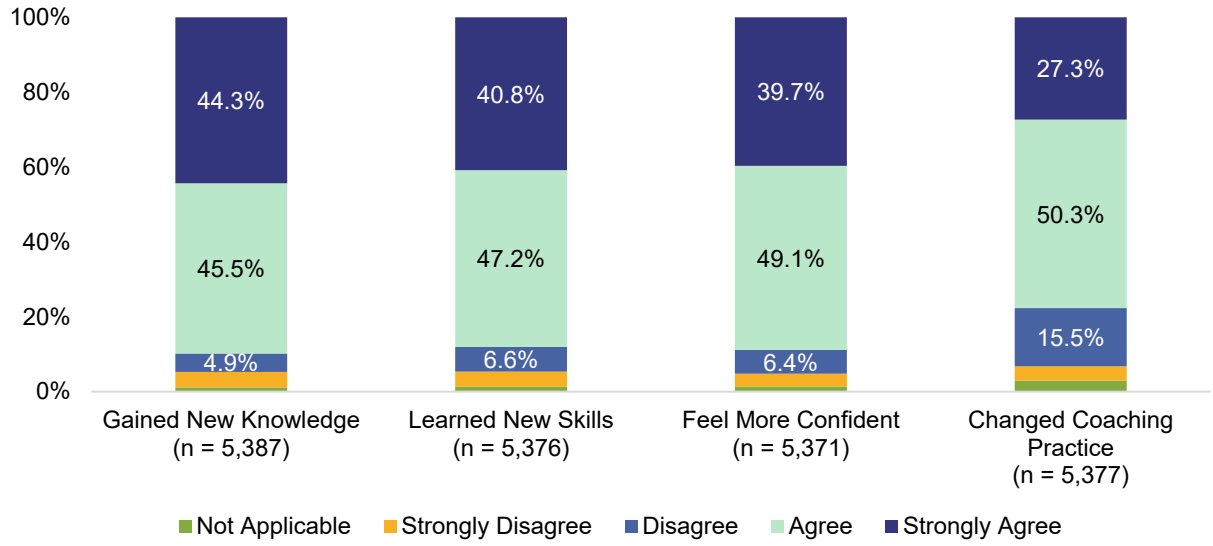


Coach Perceptions of Confidence, Knowledge, Skills, and Self-Reported Practice Change

We found that coach perceptions of outcomes were largely the same across all five practice areas. Findings from the beta version of the survey (Survey Administration Waves 1–2; in which coaches could select one outcome along a continuum, from knowledge to skills to practice change) revealed that coaches most frequently reported a gain in knowledge related to each practice area, followed by the development of skills and then practice change. The current version of the survey (Survey Administration Waves 3–6) provided coaches with the opportunity to rate their agreement with statements about whether the training resulted in helping them gain new knowledge, learn new skills, build their confidence, or lead them to change their practice. Findings from the current survey reveal a pattern similar to the beta version **The key takeaway from our exploration of perceived coach outcomes is that coaches reported the trainings primarily built their confidence and supported the development of new knowledge and skills.**

Using sport to support athletes' development of life skills. As shown in Exhibit 10, coaches perceived that participation in the training had the greatest influence on coaches gaining new knowledge from the training, with 89.8% of coaches either agreeing or strongly agreeing that they gained new knowledge about how to support athletes' development of life skills, followed by 88.8% of coaches who agreed or strongly agreed that they felt more confident in their ability to support athletes in developing life skills.

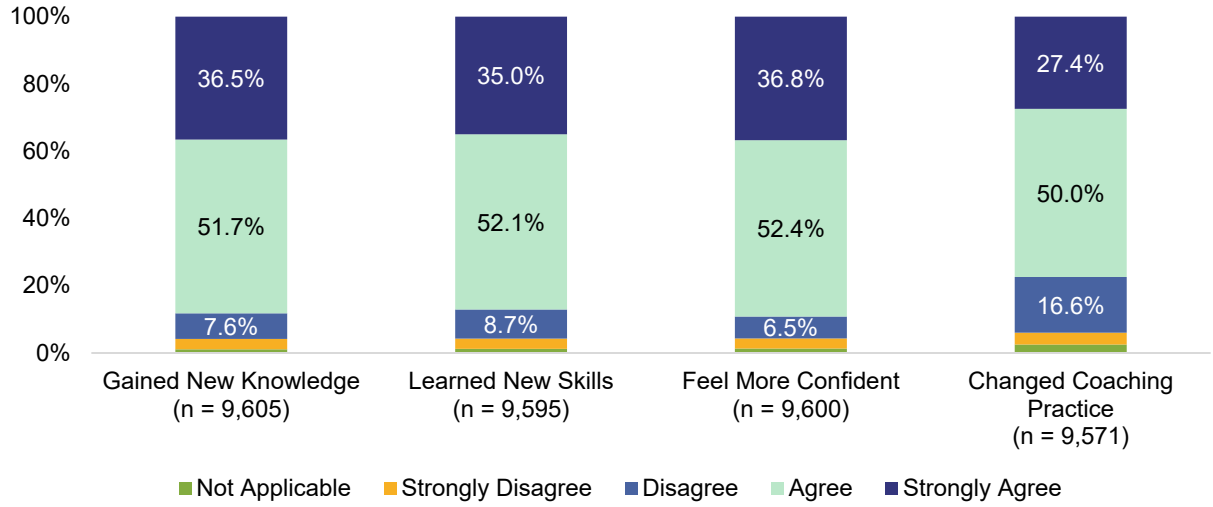
Exhibit 9. Using Sport to Support Athlete's Development of Life Skills



Note. Respondents answered some items and skipped others; N = 5,371–5,387. These data are from the fifth and sixth waves of survey administration only because wording changes prohibited the research team from appending data from Waves 1–4 of the survey. The findings from these waves align with findings from prior iterations. Additional analyses from prior iterations are presented in the technical appendices.

Creating an environment where all athletes feel safe. As shown in Exhibit 11, coaches perceived that participation in the training had the greatest influence on coach confidence, with 89.1% of coaches either agreeing or strongly agreeing that they feel more confident in their ability to create an environment where all athletes feel safe to be themselves, followed by 88.2% of coaches who agreed or strongly agreed that they gained new knowledge from the training.

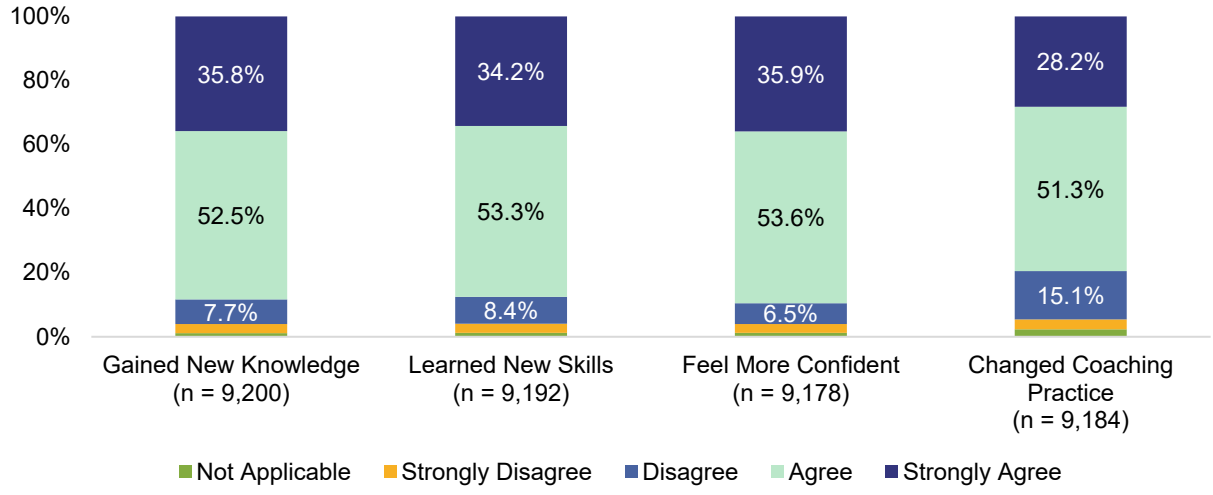
Exhibit 10. Creating an Environment Where All Athletes Feel Safe



Note. Respondents answered some items and skipped others; *N* = 9,571–9,605. These data are from waves 36 of survey administration only because wording changes prohibited the research team from appending data from Waves 1–2 of the survey.

Fostering positive relationships with athletes. As shown in Exhibit 12, coaches perceived that participation in the training had the greatest influence on coach confidence, with 89.5% of coaches either agreeing or strongly agreeing that they felt more confident in their ability to foster positive relationships with the athletes they coached, followed by 88.3% of coaches who agreed or strongly agreed that they had gained new knowledge from the training. This practice area was the second greatest report of practice change by coaches.

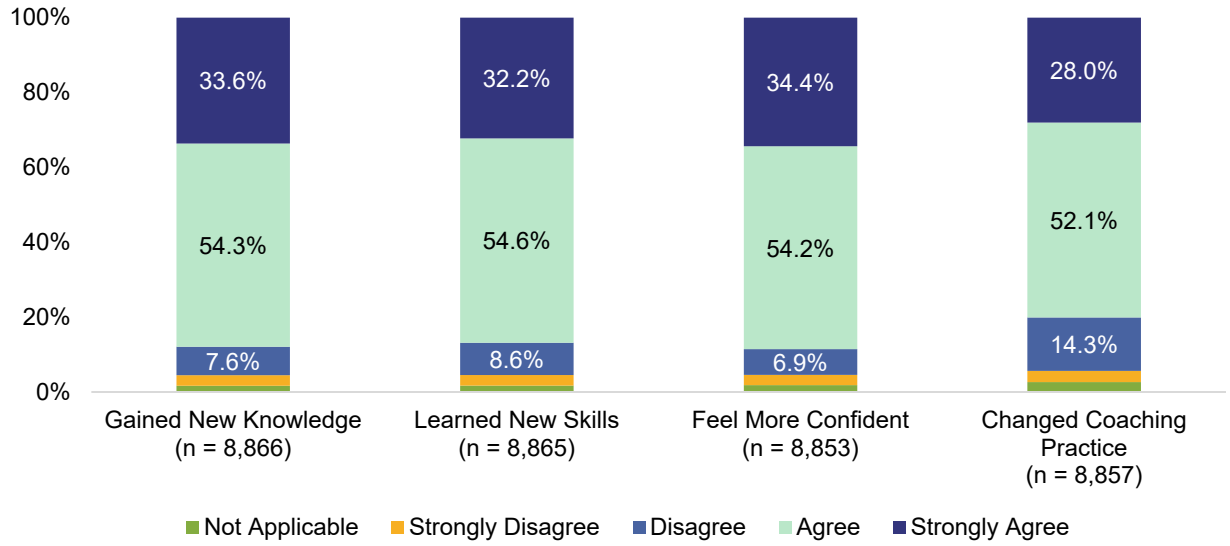
Exhibit 11. Fostering Positive Relationships With Athletes



Note. Respondents answered some items and skipped others; *N* = 9,178–9,200. These data are from Waves 3–6 of survey administration only because wording changes prohibited the research team from appending data from Waves 1–2 of the survey.

Supporting athletes in developing relationships with each other. As shown in Exhibit 13, coaches perceived that participation in the training had the greatest influence on coach confidence, with 88.6% of coaches either agreeing or strongly agreeing that they felt more confident in their ability to support athletes in developing relationships with other athletes, followed by 87.9% of coaches who agreed or strongly agreed that they had gained new knowledge from the training. This was also the greatest area of self-reported practice change.

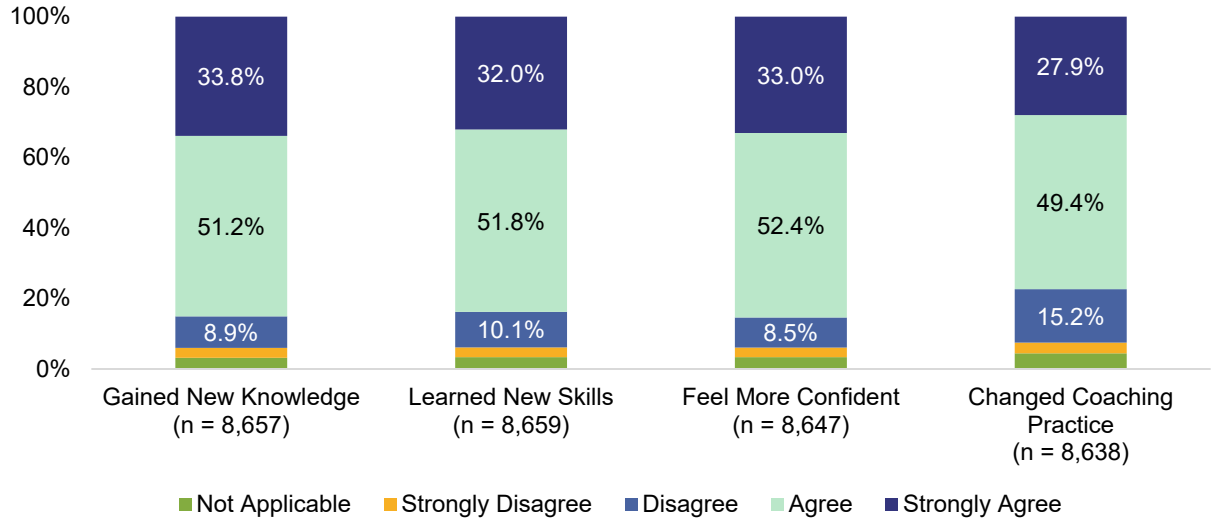
Exhibit 12. Supporting Athlete Relationships



Note. Respondents answered some items and skipped others; *N* = 8,853–8,866. These data are from Waves 3–6 of survey administration only because wording changes prohibited the research team from appending data from Waves 1–2 of the survey.

Supporting athlete mental health. As shown in Exhibit 14, coaches perceived that participation in the training had the greatest influence on coach confidence, with 85.4% of coaches either agreeing or strongly agreeing that they felt more confident in their ability to support athletes' mental health in relation to their participation in the sport, followed by 85.1% of coaches who agreed or strongly agreed that they gained new knowledge from the training. Although coach reports were slightly lower in this area, it is important to note that not all trainings covered mental health explicitly.

Exhibit 13. Supporting Athlete Mental Health

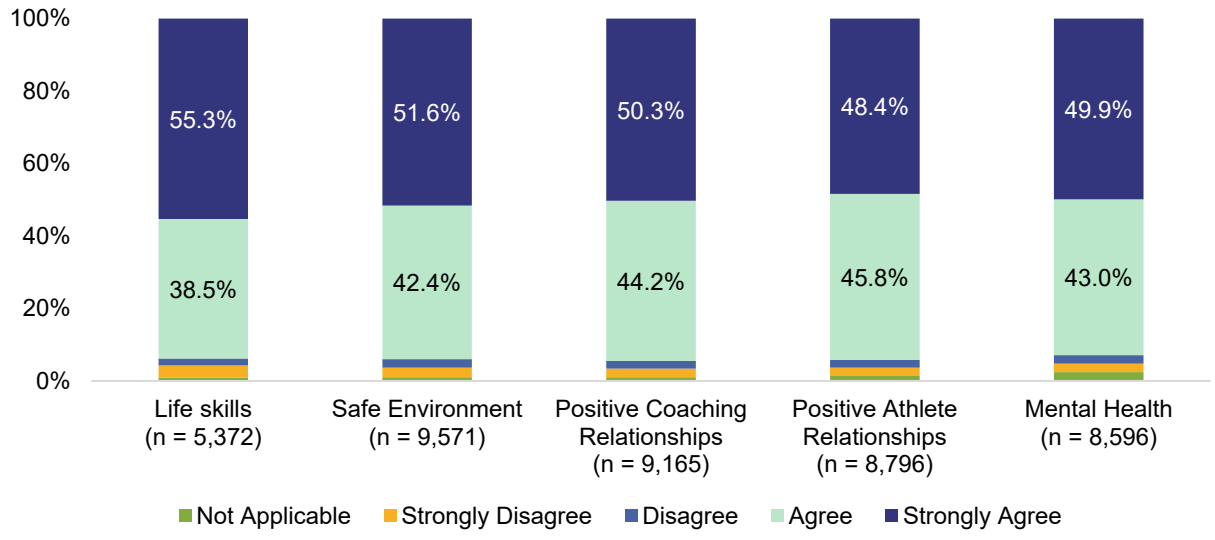


Note. Respondents answered some items and skipped others; *N* = 8,638–8,659. These data are from Waves 3–6 of survey administration only because wording changes prohibited the research team from appending data from Waves 1–2 of the survey.

Perceptions That Coaches Would Benefit From Knowledge in These Practice Areas

We also asked coaches to rate the extent to which they thought coaches would benefit from having the foundational knowledge and skills in the five practice areas. As shown in Exhibit 15, the majority of coaches either agreed or strongly agreed that all coaches would benefit from knowledge and skills across all five practice areas.

Exhibit 14. Coach Perceptions That All Coaches Would Benefit From Knowledge and Skills



Note. Respondents answered some items and skipped others; *N* = 5,732–9,571. This item was added to the survey beginning in Wave 3 of survey administration.

Insight From Coaches Who Reported They Have Changed Their Practice

When respondents reported they had already changed their coaching practice, they also had the opportunity to share more about how they had changed their practice and why. We elevate themes from our qualitative analyses where more than 5% of the 4,961 respondents provided responses that aligned with that theme. The themes are presented in the order of the frequency with which they were mentioned (greatest to least).

Recognizing different athlete backgrounds and contexts. Respondents described having and using knowledge of athletes' individual backgrounds, skills, and needs; for example, being "flexible" with their coaching and modifying their approach to meet athletes "where they are." One respondent explained,

> I have been able to learn different ways to engage with participants and realize that not all participants respond to the program in the same way. Also, I learned that not all participants open up at the same pace and it is important to be patient throughout the process with them.

Respondents also described having a greater understanding of how athletes' personal lives, abilities, age, gender, and other characteristics may impact their sport experience. For example, one respondent shared, "I learned children are not young adults. They have different coping and learning methods than adults or even teens do. Therefore, I've adopted a different teaching/coaching method when coaching young children."

> "'Participation looks different for some.' That quote I learned speaks volumes when you're working with kids who don't want to jump into every drill or game you set up. Of course, you want a majority to be in it, otherwise your drills are not fun, but if someone needs to take more time easing in, don't take it personally as a coach. Instead meet them where they are at."

Connecting with athletes on a personal level. Respondents shared that they built relationships with individual athletes to get to know them better. Respondents described dedicating time to get to know individual athletes' personal lives and interests. For example, one respondent said, "I try to make sure that every girl is validated. I greet every girl by name. I try to remember something that was shared (e.g., going to a water park) and asking about the activity." Another respondent described how they "ask players one question a day" and reported, "It is honestly working really well. I have learned a lot about my players, and I think I have better rapport with them because of it."

Providing positive encouragement to athletes. Respondents highlighted the importance of encouraging athletes' efforts in the sport and helping them move past mistakes. For example, one respondent shared,

> A lot of girls put so much pressure on themselves and I do too when I play. I try to make them forget the mistakes they do and move forward. It's hard but it got better the more we practiced it. When I help the kids, I also help myself because I struggle with it too. I don't think the kids will listen to what I'm saying if I don't even do it.

Respondents also described using positive reinforcement, encouraging athletes to try and challenge themselves, and helping athletes set realistic goals. For example, one respondent shared, “I focused on encouraging all boys regardless of skill level, tried to compliment the things they did right and tell them ‘Keep doing that’ and ‘More of that’ and tried to reiterate when they got back on the bench.”

Listening to athletes and asking questions. Respondents highlighted the importance of being accessible and approachable to athletes and fostering open communication. Respondents also shared that they allowed more space for athletes to share their thoughts—they asked athletes questions in order to encourage dialogue, they listened to what athletes had to say, and generally created an open-door communication policy. One respondent explained, “I welcome and encourage open dialogue, a kind of Q & A between myself and the athletes, and from athlete to athlete, after each practice. This usually lasts roughly 10 minutes and occurs after cooldown.”

Creating a positive environment for youth. Respondents reported creating a positive team environment where athletes can enjoy themselves. For example, one respondent shared,

> I was always focused on preparation for the next game. However, after my [training] I implemented a weekly competitive Ultimate Football game. This allowed the players to have fun and be free from coaching, technique, and fundamentals. It turned out to be a great team builder and a way to have fun at practice while still working on game-like skills.

Respondents also shared approaches that they use to create a positive environment, such as focusing on creating a safe and welcoming space, encouraging youth to be themselves, and using empowering and positive language. One respondent described one of their team rituals: “I end practice with the players sharing something positive about another person that happened during practice.”

> “I took this training last summer and was really impacted by what I learned about how important it is for young people to feel loved and welcomed when they come into a space. It caused me to be way more intentional to greet students and truly focus on them as soon as they enter our building, and to put down whatever task I’m working on to be with them and show gladness that they are there.”

Changes in communication with athletes. Respondents shared that they had made changes in the ways they talk to athletes, noting changes in the words and phrases that they use. For example, one respondent said,

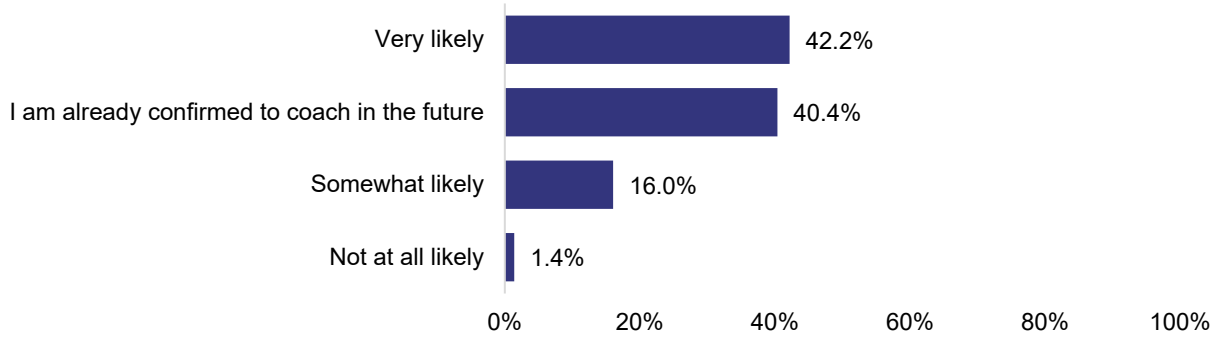
> I am a tennis coach, and I am more aware of my language choice on the court. Tennis is male dominated in coaching. I have started using phrases like “kings and queens” instead of “king of the court” for example.

Respondents also mentioned making fewer negative comments and being mindful of how to talk to athletes when they make a mistake. One respondent explained, “I changed the tone of how I talked to my players and the way I phrased my criticism, adding positive with the negative and keeping a light tone and positive attitude during games to keep players comfortable.”

Coach Retention

Another potential outcome we aimed to explore was whether participation in training influenced coach retention—that is, if coaches planned to continue coaching in the future, generally, and because of their participation in the training, specifically. As shown in Exhibit 16, the majority of respondents indicated that coaching in the future was very likely (42.2%, *n* = 4,727) or certain (40.4%, *n* = 4,526). Several respondents (16.0%, *n* = 1,798) indicated that they were somewhat likely to coach in the future. Only 1.4% (*n* = 157) of respondents believed they were unlikely to coach in the future.

Exhibit 15. Coach Response to the Question, "How likely are you to continue coaching in the future?"



Note. *N* = 11,208.

When asked if their participation in training influenced their plans to continue coaching, more than half of respondents (56.7%, *n* = 6,326) indicated that the training positively influenced their future coaching plans. Slightly less than half of respondents (41.9%, *n* = 4,671) indicated that the training did not influence future coaching plans, and only 1.4% of respondents (*n* = 152) indicated that the training had negatively impacted their future coaching plans, as shown in Exhibit 17.

Exhibit 16. Coach Response to the Question, "To what extent has your completion of the course contributed to your plans to continue coaching in the future?"

Note. *N* = 11,149.

Respondents who reported their participation in the training positively influenced them to continue coaching had the opportunity to share more about how or why the training positively influenced them. We elevate themes from our qualitative analyses where more than 5% of the 3,697 respondents provided responses that aligned with that theme. The themes are presented in the order of the frequency with which they were mentioned (greatest to least).

Coaches want to be a positive influence on youth and the community. Respondents shared that the training helped them understand positive impact they can have on athletes and communities. They expressed wanting to be a positive influence and role model for athletes. One respondent shared,

> As a coach, we need the reminder that our influence goes way beyond winning and losing. We are life influencers, and everything thing we say or do matters. The training helped guide me to being a better mentor and role model to the youth.

Coaches shared positive feedback about the training, curriculum, or athletic program in which they coach. Respondents often highlighted specific training facilitators or instructional design elements in the training that were helpful to them. One respondent shared,

> The trainings were incredibly detailed, well organized, and very informative. I appreciated all of the videos to show me what a lesson should look like in the online portion and the opportunity to practice a lesson during the in-person training.

In addition, some respondents shared their appreciation for the MCC Partner and their mission as a reason they would like to continue coaching. One respondent said, “I agree with the mission of the organization, and it aligns with my personal views about interacting with and empowering young people positively.”

Respondents want to help athletes develop in positive ways. Respondents reported having a desire to help athletes learn and grow in different ways. Respondents described an interest in supporting athletes develop as people beyond their sport. Respondents shared that, in addition to helping athletes with skill development, they wanted to help athletes develop life skills, improve their confidence, develop positive attitudes and behaviors, and build relationships. One respondent explained,

> [Coaching] allows me to empower young girls, helping them to build confidence and emotional resilience through teamwork and physical activity. The program’s focus on social-emotional growth aligns with my passion for supporting students in developing healthy relationships, communication skills, and a strong sense of self.

The training provided coaches with new ideas, resources, and tools for coaching. Respondents shared that the training provided strategies, resources, and tools to improve their own practice. Respondents also reported that the training provided them with different perspectives about coaching. One respondent shared,

> The training provides valuable tips and resources for me to better myself as a coach so that student athletes receive deserved excellence in coaching instruction. I want to be a valuable outlet for student athletes so they can achieve their individual and team goals.

Coaches reported feeling confident or prepared to be a coach. Respondents indicated that participating in the training made them feel more prepared to continue coaching in the future. Respondents often described a new sense of confidence in their ability to coach and support the athletes.

For example, one respondent said, “I formerly coached girls lacrosse and didn’t feel confident in my ability to coach running. The training helped me see the value I could offer the girls that was way [beyond] running techniques.”

Coaches reported having excitement or passion for coaching. Respondents noted that they plan to continue coaching because of their passion for coaching, which the training served to increase or remind them of. Respondents described a long-standing love for coaching and excitement to continue it in the future. For example, one respondent said,

> I have always loved coaching and have such a passion for sports and health and well-being mentoring, and now, after my training, I know that it is definitely a passion that I will carry my entire life. The importance of being able to make a difference and have a positive impact on the next generation.

Coaches reported having a better understanding of the youth they coach. Respondents shared that the training helped them understand the athletes and the challenges they face. Respondents described having an understanding of how athletes come from different backgrounds and may have individualized needs. Some respondents specifically mentioned understanding that athletes may need support with their mental health and that training helps them to recognize how they can provide support. One respondent shared that, while they may not be a mental health expert, the training helped them to see how important it was for coaches to be open and inclusive because “what [coaches] say matters.”

> “Overall, this training helped me understand the youth I am working with… and has given me many new tools to serve them well… I had a student last year who would have strong emotional outbursts, and I had no idea how to respond to her (and often responded in a negative way that made things worse). This training helped me understand this student better and helped me to remain regulated when responding to her this year—and it has helped so much! She trusts me more, and I had tools to help her become regulated. This has given me hope and confidence that I am able to have a positive influence in the lives of the youth I work with.”

The training reinforced why respondents coach. Respondents shared that the training reinforced their motivation or inspired them to continue coaching. Respondents also indicated that the training helped them recognize or remember the important role they play as a coach for athletes and provided them with tools to continue to build their confidence and skills as a coach. One respondent said,

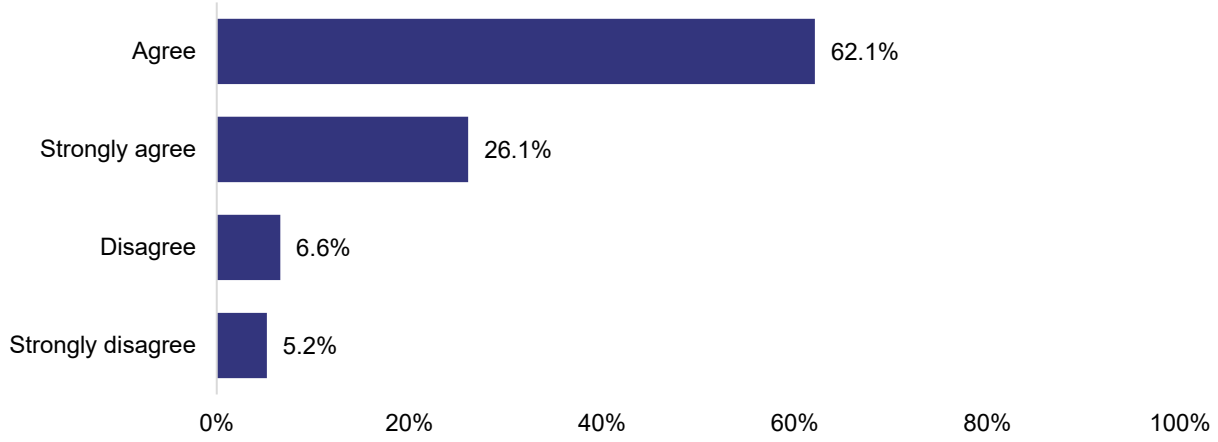
> The training helped reassure me that I was on the right path with my approach to coaching. I learned many great strategies that I applied while coaching with my softball girls . . . There is still a lot to learn to be the best coach I possibly can, but I know that the training videos will guide me through this journey.”

> "Being able to engage athletes in conversations about mental health and collaborate with them in identifying regulation strategies is something I am hopeful will have lasting positive impacts on not only their athletic career (if they continue playing) but more importantly on their overall well-being. As much as I love competing and staying involved in the sport… this training really highlights how coaching can be a vessel for growth and healing… and makes me want to continue coaching."

Coach Perceptions That the Training Made Them a Better Coach

As shown in Exhibit 18, 88% of coaches either agreed (62.1%, *n* = 6,958) or strongly agreed (26.1%, *n* = 2,925) that participating in the training made them a better coach.

Exhibit 17. Coach Perceptions That Training Made Them a Better Coach



Note. *N* = 11,205.

In 2024, we added a question to the survey to capture more information from coaches about how or why they thought participating in training made them a better coach. Respondents shared the following:

- **Learned valuable information or skills from the training.** Respondents reported that they were a better coach because they learned new information or skills at the training. Respondents mentioned having "tools" or "resources" that they could use in their coaching. For example, one respondent said, "It increased my tool set, improved my skills through required practice, and helped me look at life through the lens of a coach." Respondents also described hearing different perspectives and learning from examples and scenarios presented during the training. One respondent explained, "It has given me the opportunity to think of coaching from different perspectives. The most important [perspective] has been from the player's point of view. It has allowed me to connect with players."
- **Had positive experiences with the training or MCC Partner organization.** Respondents shared positive comments about the training they received through the MCC Partner. In their comments, respondents highlighted specific training facilitators or instructional design elements that were helpful to them. When describing their training facilitator, one respondent shared, "I am always fascinated

with things he says and his ability to build a culture of trust, love, and team." Another respondent said, "[The training] was very detailed and covered many applicable topics to the age group we coached. I think the manual was very educational and useful for coaches." Some respondents shared their appreciation for the MCC Partner itself or coaching resources (e.g., curriculum, lesson plans) that are available outside of the training. One respondent said, "It was the first time I had supportive materials that went with the practices that I ran."

- **Learned how to build better relationships with athletes.** Respondents reported that they are a better coach because they have learned how to make deeper connections with athletes. In their comments, respondents described the importance of the relationship between coach and athlete. One respondent said, "It makes me a better coach as I understand more about the emotional aspects of coaching and student–coach relationship." Respondents also noted that relationships build a sense of trust within the team. For example, one respondent shared, "I feel like I have built more coach-to-youth connections and feel like they can come and talk to me about anything that's in their head."

Coach Perceptions of Athlete Outcomes

Coach outcomes are often a primary or explicit goal of coach training and education courses; however, they are not the only goal. Ultimately, the MCC Partners aim to improve sport for young people and to foster coaching practices that contribute to athletes' positive development within and outside of sport. We therefore invited coaches to report their perceptions of athlete personal and social outcomes, as well as athlete retention.

Athlete Personal and Social Outcomes

Extensive research documents the influence of coach training on a variety of athlete outcomes in and outside of sport, including but not limited to improved social skills, stronger relationships, greater enjoyment of sport, improved mental health, reduced athlete burnout, and increased athlete retention (Anderson-Butcher, 2019; Bean & Forneris, 2016; Gould & Carson, 2008; Li et al., 2025; Super et al., 2017). As such, we invited coaches to reflect on whether they thought their participation in coach training contributed to five specific athlete outcomes—aligned with the five practice areas (coach outcomes) described previously.

Specifically, coaches reported outcomes in the following areas: (a) improved athlete social and emotional skills, (b) athletes developing stronger relationships with other athletes, (c) improved athlete mental health, (d) athletes experiencing more joy in their sport, (e) athletes experiencing greater success in their sport, and (f) athletes experiencing greater success in life outside of sport. We invited coaches to report their perceptions of outcomes based on whether they had already observed the outcome, if they had not yet observed the outcome but thought it would happen eventually, or if they did not think the outcome would happen as a result of their participation in the training.

Coaches reported the following perceived outcomes:

- The greatest number of respondents (66.0%, *n* = 7,008) indicated that they observed athletes **experiencing more joy in their sport**.
- Nearly two thirds of respondents (62.1%, *n* = 6,636) perceived that athletes were already **developing stronger relationships with other athletes**.

- More than half of respondents (55.2%, *n* = 5,860) indicated that they have observed athletes experiencing **greater success in their sport overall**.
- Respondents were split when asked about athletes' **improved life skills**: Almost half of respondents (49.7%, *n* = 5,378) indicated they had observed improved life skills in their athletes, and almost half of respondents (44.7%, *n* = 4,839) thought that athletes would eventually see an improvement in their life skills.
- Respondents were split in their perceptions of **improved athlete mental health**: Almost half of respondents (49.9%, *n* = 5,322) thought that athletes would eventually see an improvement in their mental health, and almost half of respondents (44.1%, *n* = 4,697) indicated they had observed improved athlete mental health.
- Respondents were split when asked about athletes experiencing **greater success in life outside of sport**, with slightly less than half of respondents (40.9%, *n* = 4,330) indicating that they had already observed this outcome, and more than half of respondents (54.1%, *n* = 5,728) indicating that they believed that athletes would *eventually* experience greater success in life outside their sport.

Insight From Coaches Who Reported They Have Observed Athlete Outcomes

When respondents reported they had already observed athlete outcomes, they also had the opportunity to share more about what they had observed. We elevate themes from our qualitative analyses where more than 5% of the 4,442 respondents provided responses that aligned with that theme.

Building friendships. Respondents shared that they observed athletes building friendships inside and outside of their sport. For example, one respondent shared,

> By mixing up the partnerships at practice with kids who don't typically spend time together or partner up together, they get to know others more in depth. I have seen multiple new friendships grow between kids who wouldn't normally partner up and are even friends now in school.

Enjoying the sport. Respondents reported observing athletes showing greater joy and excitement about their sport. One respondent said, "I have multiple athletes that enjoy their sport more now that they look at the journey of their mastery and not as much on the scoreline." Respondents also shared that they have observed athletes having fun at practices or games. One respondent shared, "Girls get excited about coming to practice and participating in the activities. It is not only about running but about bonding, learning, and playing."

Exhibiting confidence. Respondents shared they have seen athletes exhibit confidence in themselves and their sport. One respondent shared,

> I had a player who regularly talked negative about her shot and another who told herself she couldn't do things. By helping them change the way they talked to themselves, they started believing in themselves more, and I believe that impacts their mental health outside the court as well.

Respondents indicated that athletes now exhibit confidence in their sport skills, willingness to express themselves, and willingness to connect with others. For example, one respondent shared, "Girls that typically wouldn't speak up at the first couple meetings seemed to become more comfortable with us and the other girls. They would eventually share during our talking times."

Wanting to continue the sport. Respondents reported that they have observed athlete retention in the sport. For example, respondents noted that they have seen athletes continue to participate in the sport year after year. One respondent explained,

> We have an umpire-in-training role at our complex. We use this to allow our players, after they move on to high school ball, to come back to our fields and umpire the games they used to play. We have never had as many umpires in all our years. Since these kids have been coached by several of us still there, you are providing the young umpires with a safe place to continue to [grow] their love for the game, at the complex in which they grew up playing in.

Additionally, respondents described athletes' excitement to return to the sport next season. One respondent said,

> During the start of this new school year, my former athletes are already asking when our basketball program will begin. It seems they took a lot out of the experience and enjoyed it so much that they are eager to come back and continue developing all those skills in that sport.

Offering each other positive encouragement. Respondents shared that athletes provided more positive support, encouragement, and reinforcement to each other. For example, respondents observed athletes cheering each other along and supporting teammates in trying out new skills. One respondent shared, "We talk about being more vocal in support of their teammates—both in successful and unsuccessful situations—and the players have responded to this and have put it into practice without prompting." Respondents also indicated that athletes support each other even when experiencing disappointing results at practices or games. For example, one respondent shared, "Everyone is positively supporting each other and, even if we didn't win a game, the girls walk away pointing out the positive things they did and how they can learn from the game they just played."

Exhibiting more joy. Respondents reported seeing athletes exhibit more joy, in general. Respondents described indicators of athlete joy, such as noticing laughter and smiles and observing athletes having fun and seeming happier. One survey respondent explained,

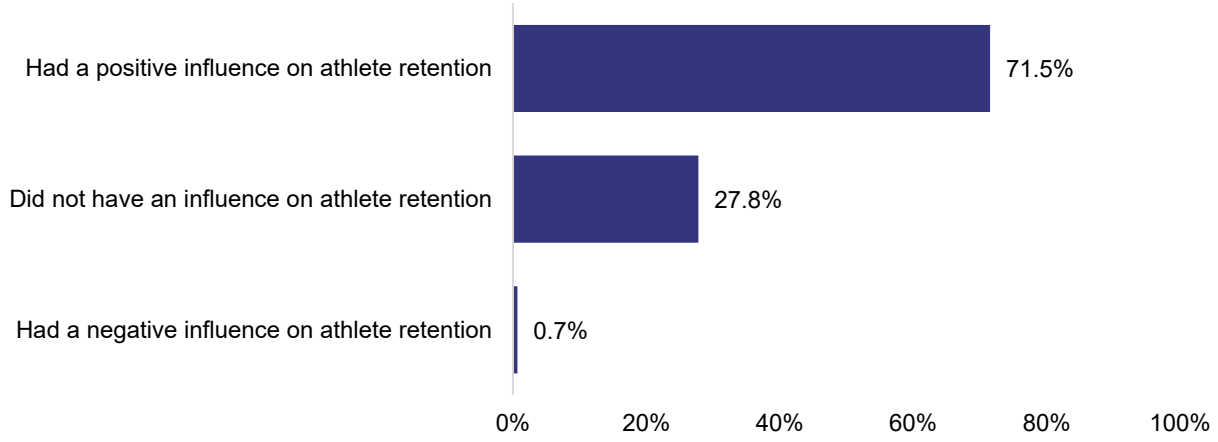
> I can tell my team is having more fun during games because we are taking the pressure off and doing more things to bring everyone together. I hear laughing and see them dancing and becoming friends with each other, and it's great!

Exhibiting a positive attitude. Respondents noted that athletes have a more positive outlook on the sport and themselves. Respondents shared that they had observed athletes having a more positive attitude during practices and games, even during times of failure. For example, one respondent shared, "Strikeout tantrums are down considerably. My players' attitudes toward opponents and umpires is great. They expect failures as part of the game, and this outlook allows them to navigate them much more easily." Another respondent said, "When a loss happened, it was still a win because of the efforts displaced. After the game was over, the kids were more encouraging and hopeful than before, when they would walk away with their heads down." Additionally, respondents observed athletes exhibiting positive attitudes about themselves and their teammates. One respondent explained, "[The sport] has built a small group of girls with a positive attitude that has slowly spread to recess and [physical education]. These girls have also changed their attitudes during practice and made lasting relationships with all of us that coach."

Athlete Retention

Research also suggests that coach participation in training may improve athlete retention (Fawver et al., 2020). As such, we were interested in exploring whether and to what extent coaches perceived there to be an influence on athlete retention as a result of the coaches' participation in the training. As shown in Exhibit 19, most respondents (71.5%, *n* = 7,724) believed that the training positively influenced athlete retention and made athletes more likely to return overall. In contrast, 27.8% of respondents (*n* = 3,003) did not believe the training had influenced athlete retention. Less than 1% of respondents (0.7%, *n* = 72) thought the training had a negative effect on athlete retention.

Exhibit 18. Coach Training Participation Influence on Athlete Retention



Note. *N* = 10,799.

Exploring Subgroup Differences

We also explored the extent to which there were differences in coach perceptions by different coach characteristics (coach age, gender identity, race/ethnicity, years of coaching experience) and training format. We ran a series of analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests on these survey items and coach demographics from the coach survey and compared the average levels of agreement for each subgroup. We also estimated effect sizes for each ANOVA using eta-squared (η^2). Although we noted statistically significant relationships across all demographic variables and questions, the effect sizes were typically negligible, with a few exceptions:

- First-year coaches (M = 2.84, SD = 0.75) were less likely than coaches with more years of experience to report that they were likely to continue coaching in the future, especially compared to coaches with 20 or more years of experience (M = 3.46, SD = 0.69), $F(4, 10{,}789) = 291.71$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.10$.
- Coaches who disagreed that training made them a better coach also tended to disagree that athletes experienced positive outcomes as a result of their participation in coach training. This finding emerged for all athlete outcomes presented in the survey:
  - Improvement in life skills (M = 1.94, SD = 0.78), $F(3, 10{,}736) = 409.66$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.10$,

- Development of stronger relationships with other athletes (M = 2.05, SD = 0.83), F(3, 10,602) = 380.40, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.10$,
- Improved mental health (M = 1.90, SD = 0.76), F(3, 10,578) = 331.91, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.09$,
- More joy in their sport (M = 2.06, SD = 0.83), F(3, 10,535) = 432.57, $p < 0.001$), $\eta^2 = 0.11$,
- Greater success in their sport overall (M = 1.98, SD = 0.79), F(3, 10,529) = 371.72, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.10$,
- Greater success in their lives outside of sport (M = 1.91, SD = 0.74), F(3, 10,518) = 331.12, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.09$, and
- Athlete retention (M = 2.15, SD = 0.42), F(3, 10,718) = 581.71, $p < 0.001$), $\eta^2 = 0.14$.

Limitations

Although the *MCC Coach Perception Survey* yields illuminating results, there are limitations to consider when interpreting findings about how MCC Partners' trainings influenced coach and athlete outcomes. First, the survey only captures coaches' *perceptions* of ways in which they or their athletes have been influenced by training. We did not measure outcomes directly. Relatedly, the findings do not reflect the perspectives of athletes, parents or guardians, or other members of the sport community. The findings rely on coaches' subjective self-reports and may be positively skewed due to a social desirability bias.

A second limitation is related to the timing of the survey. We administered the survey in waves at set time points that were not tied to or necessarily aligned with coach completion of a training. Some coaches completed the survey 5–6 months after the training. The purpose of the delayed administration window was twofold: (a) to align survey administration across all MCC Partners, operating on their own schedules, and (b) to provide ample time for coaches to use the knowledge and skills they had acquired during training. However, this delay in survey administration may have led to difficulties with coaches recalling their training experiences and attributing outcomes to the training.

Finally, the findings represent responses from a very small proportion of the total coaches trained during the MCC (13,807 coaches of 1,173,354 total coaches trained; 1.2% of coaches trained). The low participation rate is due to several factors: missing email addresses for training participants; the gap between training participation and survey administration; lack of familiarity with the survey sender (the Partner or AIR); and lack of willingness, time, and resources to participate in a survey (i.e., "survey fatigue"). During survey administration, we (AIR) and the MCC Partners took many steps to ensure the survey sample for each MCC Partner aligned with the overall representation of MCC Partners in the initiative. Despite these efforts, the proportion of survey respondents by partner did not fully mirror Partners' shares of total coaches trained. Some Partners were overrepresented (Girls on the Run, Little League) and some Partners were underrepresented (How to Coach Kids, Positive Coaching Alliance, LiFE*sports*, and the UW CLA) relative to the total number of coaches they trained.

Chapter 6: Takeaways From the MCC Implementation Study

The MCC implementation study was designed to track coaches trained throughout the challenge and elevate lessons learned by MCC Partners who were doing the work. The study was grounded in four research questions, which we aimed to address in Chapters 2–5. In this chapter, we bring the methods and findings together to elevate preliminary takeaways from the study.

To address our first research question, we explored the **MCC's progress toward achieving its goal of training one million coaches in youth development and related practices by 2026**. As of December 31, 2025, the MCC Partners collectively trained 1,173,354 coaches.

Coaches trained to date primarily identified as White (62.7%, *n* = 121,211) and female (57.9%, *n* = 115,960), indicating opportunities to reach more and different coaches across the country. Relatedly, there appear to be geographical areas of need—rural areas, particularly in the northern Midwest states—where relatively few coaches have been trained compared to states along the east, west, and southern coasts and relative to the number of youth between the ages of 5 and 17. We noted, however, that it is important to interpret these demographic data with caution, given the issues with inconsistent and missing data. The data limitations we experienced through the implementation study highlight an important need to improve data-collection norms and processes to gain better insight into the coaching population more broadly.

Our second question was designed to elevate **important contextual factors that influence the field of coaching and youth sport**. MCC Partners elevated several persistent challenges that currently limit the effectiveness of youth sport coaching and the broader youth sport ecosystem in the United States. A key barrier, highlighted by nearly all partners, is the absence of a formal or structured youth sport system. Unlike in other countries where youth sport systems are often organized through national or regional ministries and credentialing systems, the United States operates a largely fragmented system, leading to inconsistent standards for coach development and the lack of a unified vision for youth sport. The absence of structure contributes to significant variability in coaching quality, inadequate resources for coach education, and inequitable access to sport opportunities. Almost all Partners also emphasized challenges related to individual and organizational capacity. Coaches—many of whom are volunteers—often coach within organizations that lack the necessary infrastructure, such as staff, funding, and resources, to properly support coach training and development.

The MCC Partner organizations, recognizing the context in which they aim to bolster coach training in support of PYD, also grappled with what it means to be a quality coach or a trained coach and to what extent they should take on this issue in the field. What we found, however, is that Partners already *are* taking on this issue through the development and implementation of trainings that prioritize youth development and related areas. Although Partners agreed that training alone is not *the* answer and that simply taking any training is not sufficient to make one a quality coach, they recognized that trainings like the ones propelled by the MCC are an important start to a larger conversation in the field. Partners emphasized the importance of participating in trainings that build a coach's knowledge, skills, and confidence in key areas, including

building athlete skills, creating safe spaces, coaching with an athlete-centered approach, supporting athlete mental health, making sport fun and enjoyable, and fostering relationships.

Given these considerations, our third question required a deep examination of **how MCC Partners integrate youth development principles and practices into their coach training**—in other words, how these key areas come to life through training and what the MCC Partners, as a collective, are training coaches to do. The trainings we reviewed covered many different topics but also had a great deal in common. Specifically, the Partner trainings were explicitly designed to enable coaches to achieve the following:

- Build trust and develop relationships with and among athletes.
- Show up in ways that are predictable, consistent, empathic, present, and indicative to athletes that they are valued and cared for.
- Create a mastery climate for athletes that emphasizes progress over perfection.
- Empower athletes and foster their autonomy and agency.
- Create safe spaces where athletes feel like they belong and are included.
- Regulate their own behavior and prioritize their own well-being.
- Prioritize self-growth and continuous improvement.
- Model these practices and remain accountable to the athletes they coach.

We also observed, in our review, that the trainings sometimes took a stance or used a lens to frame the content of the training. We identified three cross-cutting thematic clusters that underpinned training content: (a) mental health and trauma-sensitive approaches; (b) creating a mastery climate, and (c) coaches and coaching matters. The findings from the document review align with interview findings about what it means to be a quality coach in that both Partners and training content emphasized practices such as prioritizing athlete personal growth and mastery climate, fostering athlete belonging and inclusion, and building relationships to foster safe and supportive sport environments.

Yet the MCC Partner perspective—captured through interviews and in our document review—is only one element of the bigger picture. As such, our fourth research question was designed to explore whether and how coaches thought their participation in training led to outcomes for them as coaches and for the athletes they coach. Specifically, we explored coaches' **perceived influence of trainings on their knowledge, skills, confidence, and practice**. We also asked coaches about their **perceptions of athlete outcomes**.

Findings from the coach survey align with prior research that has established a link between coach education and shifts in coach knowledge and behaviors (Falcão et al., 2012; Li et al., 2025, Weiss & Williams, 2004). These findings also align with Partner perspectives that (a) it is important to train coaches in what makes them "quality" coaches, but (b) training alone is likely not enough to lead to behavior change, which was confirmed by survey results showing that a smaller group of coaches reported that they had already changed their behavior as a result of participating in the training. The findings are promising, however, particularly in light of a fractured youth sport system and what many Partners articulated as a need for a "narrative change" regarding youth sport more broadly. Findings from the survey suggest that coaches think the training is building their knowledge, skills, and confidence, and these are critical first steps for longer term practice change.

For those coaches who reported that they had already changed their practice and described what they are doing, their insights into those changes align with the coach practices outlined in the trainings we reviewed. Coaches reported applying practices such as creating positive environments, building better relationships with athletes, and recognizing athlete backgrounds, for example. The strong training focus in the trainings on relationship building and athlete empowerment is visible in reported practice changes, for example, coach descriptions of how they are connecting with athletes on a personal level and providing positive encouragement.

Research links these coach practices with important athlete outcomes. A recent meta-analysis by Li and colleagues (2025), for example, reveals that positive outcomes for athletes and coaches were indicated 78% of the time, particularly as it relates to autonomy-supportive coaching practices in relation to stronger connections between athletes and their coaches, improved cognitive skills, increased physical activity, and greater enjoyment in sport. This aligns with our survey findings about coach-reported athlete outcomes, such as improved social and emotional skills and greater enjoyment of the sport. Likewise, the overall athlete-centered approach emphasized through the trainings is reflected in coach reports of improved athlete relationships and increased joy in their sport.

Finally, it is important to note that we also saw evidence of the influence of the training for those coaches who reported the training positively influenced their decision to continue coaching. Coaches indicated that understanding youth better and feeling more prepared and confident due to training were key reasons for their decision to continue coaching—both of which align with the relationship-focused and growth-oriented training content we reviewed. Because our focus for the study was on implementation, we did not directly measure coach and athlete outcomes, thus limiting our ability to infer a causal relationship between training participation and subsequent outcomes. As we discuss in the next section, the findings presented herein are promising and indicative that more research is needed.

Chapter 7: Implications and Recommendations for Research, Practice, and Policy

The MCC implementation study highlights the complex landscape of youth sport, coaching, and coach training in the United States, revealing significant barriers to progress while also presenting opportunities for growth and improvement. In our interviews and MCC Partner meetings, the Partners elevated a number of strategies, goals, and important action steps for the field moving forward. In the sections that follow, we bring those ideas to bear by highlighting the implications of the study findings and making recommendations in three areas: research, practice, and policy. It is crucial, however, to recognize the interconnectedness of research, practice, and policy. Although we present the recommendations as separate, in reality, they are deeply interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Research informs practice, practice drives policy changes, and policy provides the structural support necessary for effective practice and subsequent research. Addressing the opportunities and challenges identified in this study requires coordinated efforts across all three areas.

Alignment With MCC Calls to Action

During the latter phase of the Million Coaches Challenge, MCC Partners engaged in a parallel effort to synthesize lessons from the initiative and articulate priorities for the field through the development of MCC Calls to Action. That process was informed by Partners' lived experience implementing trainings, collective reflection across the initiative, and emerging evidence generated through the MCC implementation study.

The implementation study both contributed to and drew from this broader learning process. Study findings presented in this chapter are grounded in AIR's independent, systematic analysis of implementation study data, including interviews with MCC Partners, review of training materials, and coach survey responses. At the same time, many of the patterns elevated by the study reflect the same challenges, opportunities, and points of convergence that Partners were grappling with as they developed the Calls to Action.

As a result, there is intentional alignment between the implications and recommendations presented in this chapter and the priorities articulated through MCC Calls to Action. This alignment does not indicate duplication, but rather a shared evidence base and iterative learning process across the initiative. This chapter remains focused on interpreting what the implementation study findings suggest for research, practice, and policy in the youth sport and coaching landscape while situating those interpretations within the broader field-level conversations catalyzed by the MCC.

Research

Define and operationalize what it means to be a quality coach in the United States. The study elevated the challenge of a lack of consensus on what constitutes a good coach in the field of youth sport, with Partners highlighting philosophical and cultural divides about coaching priorities in the field. To address this barrier, research should focus on testing the shared understanding of what it means to be a good coach, which includes defining a holistic set of core competencies that all coaches should possess, with a focus on youth development rather than just competitive success. Researchers should work with practitioners to operationalize these competencies within specific contexts, similar to how quality standards and frameworks have been developed in fields such as early childhood education (e.g., National Association for the Education of Young Children Program Standards, Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales), K–12 education (state learning standards, the Danielson Framework for Teaching), and out-of-school time (National Afterschool Association Core Knowledge, Skills & Competencies, statewide afterschool network quality standards). Strong research–practice partnerships will provide a foundation for effective training programs and policy reforms that align with the broader goals of youth sport.

Explore the design, implementation, and effects of online and virtual training modalities. The use of online and virtual training platforms is rapidly expanding in the field of youth sport coaching, with some emerging evidence to indicate that online trainings can be effective. Li and colleagues (2025) suggest, for example, that online training and "technology-enhanced learning" may promote collaborative learning, critical thinking, and self-reflection among coaches. Findings like this are promising, yet additional research is needed to understand how, why, and under what conditions positive coach outcomes occur. Likewise, it will be important to understand how different training goals and intended outcomes align with different modalities, as online and virtual training may be more and less useful for specific purposes.

Interviews with the MCC Partners elevated decisions related to their choice to offer training online—being able to reach more coaches, having the ability to break down content into smaller "bite-size" pieces, providing coaches with the flexibility to take a training with the time they have—however, some Partners noted benefits and drawbacks to the approach. Interestingly, some Partners used a hybrid design for their trainings and, although there were only a small number of Partners who did so, they indicated potential success from having the ability to gain knowledge in a more structured, didactic setting online followed up by live, person-to-person engagement. This approach aligns with themes in the Partner interviews about the need for follow-up supports for coaches to extend beyond the initial training.

As the field increasingly turns to virtual solutions to scale training and reach more coaches, particularly in geographic areas where access to training is limited, it will be critical to systematically investigate which online training formats, delivery methods, and content types are most effective in enhancing coach knowledge, skills, and practices. Research should focus on evaluating how virtual training compares to in-person formats in terms of engagement, retention of information, and behavior change. Additionally, studies should explore best practices for online training design, such as interactive elements, assessments, and ongoing support, ensuring that virtual learning experiences can deliver the same quality outcomes as traditional, face-to-face programs. Research in this area has the potential to provide valuable insights to optimize the use of online platforms and ensure they are viable and effective tools for coach development at scale.

Develop a shared research agenda to drive aligned and systematic research and evaluation efforts in the field. It will be important to prioritize systematic, shared measurement and evaluation efforts to understand the coaching landscape and document coach development and effectiveness. All Partners elevated different challenges related to their measurement and evaluation efforts. These issues were underscored during the implementation study as we worked to manage data-quality issues and account for missing data, given the variation in Partner measurement systems. To address these challenges, more work is needed to strengthen data-collection efforts such that organizations collect data on coaches systematically. Research should do the following:

- Examine the broader youth sport workforce, including volunteer and part-time coaches, to better understand their professional identities, needs, and challenges. This research can help inform workforce development strategies and ensure that coaches receive the necessary training and support to succeed in their roles.
- Develop and implement robust tools to evaluate the effectiveness of coach training programs, which includes examining the content, dosage, and support mechanisms that contribute to positive outcomes for coaches and youth participants. Research should extend beyond self-reported data from coaches and incorporate objective measures of coach practice, as well as longitudinal studies to track how improvements in coach practice translate to athlete outcomes.

Through the implementation study, we identified common areas of interest across organizations that train coaches; however, more work is needed to explore the implementation of such practices and aligned outcomes rigorously and in context.

Practice

Review trainings available in the field to ensure they are comprehensive and reflective of what it means to be a "quality" and "trained" coach. Findings from the document review indicate that many available trainings cover some but typically not all of the practice areas that Partners indicated make one a quality coach. Without a minimum standard or framework for coaching practice that aligns with the youth development practices described herein, it will be challenging for coach developers (e.g., the MCC Partners) to make decisions about coaching content or for coaches to determine what they need training and support in. For that reason, it becomes necessary for coach developers and decision makers to work together in support of comprehensive coach education.

That said, we note that most of the trainings were typically time limited and did not provide the sustained learning opportunities that Partners reported that coaches need. We did not observe that the MCC trainings provided many opportunities for ongoing experiential learning and support, mentorship, communities of practice, or feedback loops, for example, although there were some exceptions. For instance, USA Weightlifting engaged coaches in a fellowship model that brought together training and group work. Likewise, the Girls on the Run model is comprehensive and brings coaches together around structured coach training, an aligned curriculum, and opportunities for community-building among coaches within local chapters. The larger number of time-bound training opportunities makes sense, however, given the goals and scope of what the MCC was designed to do. Yet, the Partners have acknowledged that more could be done to support coaches, and those efforts could build from the foundation the MCC Partners have already created. Practitioners (and researchers) would benefit from working together to develop a deeper understanding of what effective coach training and education looks

like and under what conditions. The youth sport field may consider models used in other fields (e.g., teacher preparation), including but not limited to establishing widely accepted coach competencies or a minimum standard for practice and aligning certification, credentialing, and continuing education systems.

Expand access to high-quality, comprehensive training. The MCC was launched to increase the quality of and access to coach training in PYD and related areas. The MCC Partners are on their way to achieving this goal; however, Partners agree that this work is only the beginning. Future efforts should continue to focus on increasing access to high-quality training programs that emphasize athlete-centered, youth development–focused, holistic coaching.

In addition, we note that there may be issues of access to coach training, particularly for coaches of color and coaches in rural areas. To increase access, organizations that train coaches may explore leveraging online platforms, offering flexible and affordable training options, and ensuring that training is available in communities with limited resources. As noted previously, training programs should be grounded in research on what constitutes effective coach development and designed to meet coaches at various levels of experience and expertise across the myriad sport contexts.

Change the narrative regarding youth sport coaching. Preliminary findings from the implementation study revealed a dominant cultural mindset in youth sport that prioritizes winning over holistic development, which can contribute to a lack of buy-in from coaches and other stakeholders and challenge norms about who can be a coach and what the purpose of coaching is. To address these narrative issues, efforts should focus on changing the narrative regarding coaching, reframing the role as one that contributes to the personal, social, and emotional development of young athletes, not just to their competitive success. This shift in perspective could improve recruitment, retention, and overall satisfaction among coaches. Changing the narrative may then lay a foundation to articulate clear, sustainable pathways for coaches to advance in their careers, which could include professional development, leadership opportunities, and recognition for their contributions to youth development.

Professionalize coaching. Partners agree that the absence of clear, nationally recognized pathways for coaching and aligned training and professional development creates challenges when developing and implementing coach training in support of PYD. To address these pathway issues, there is a need to consider creating new (or refining existing) systems and pathways for youth sport coaches that could help professionalize the field, make coaching a more attractive and sustainable career option, and provide a clear pathway for coaches' career advancement. One such opportunity is the development of formal coaching credentials or certifications that are widely recognized and that signal to coaches, parents, and youth sport organizations the importance of quality coaching, for example. We note, however, that these systems could not function in isolation. Rather, they would need to be supported through policy, funding, and other resources that are currently lacking in the field.

Policy

Adopt a minimum standard or framework for coaching quality. As described previously, findings from the implementation study highlight how the lack of a formal and structured system for youth sport coaching in the United States contributes to the variability and inconsistency of coaching quality. It is therefore important to explore whether and how a unified national minimum standard or framework for youth sport coaching could provide consistent standards, aligned training, and resources across the country. We note that this is a big recommendation that begins with determining who would be

responsible for developing and upholding such a standard. Without a system or coordination at the state or national level, implementing a minimum standard at scale would be challenging; however, coalescing around an agreed-upon set of priorities could help ensure that coaches in all communities, regardless of geographic location or socioeconomic status, have access to the training and support they need to be effective in their roles. Adopting a minimum standard or framework could also create a more equitable system of youth sport, where all children have access to high-quality coaching and development opportunities.

Invest in coaches vis-à-vis capacity building for policy implementation. Preliminary findings from the study suggest that policy changes are needed to create a more supportive and cohesive environment for coaches. Policy makers should recognize the critical role of coaches in youth development and allocate resources to strengthen the coaching workforce, for example, by offering tax incentives or stipends for volunteer coaches, funding for comprehensive coach training programs, and support for local and national initiatives that promote quality coaching.

Likewise, the study noted that current policies governing youth sport are often inconsistent, and the capacity to implement policy changes is lacking. To address these challenges, policy makers must invest in the capacity needed to support the implementation of new policies, including providing funding for training programs, resources for local organizations, and professional development opportunities for individuals responsible for overseeing youth sport programs. Building capacity at the local level will ensure that national- or state-level policies are not just adopted but are effectively implemented.

The recommendations provided in this report aim to address the barriers identified in the study in service of creating a more cohesive, effective, and sustainable youth sport coaching system in the United States. Aligning research, practice, and policy and taking action to advance the field may contribute to the evolution of a new system that supports coaches, improves youth sport experiences, and promotes positive outcomes for young athletes. The path forward will require continued collaboration among researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and communities, all working together to ensure that youth sport can achieve its full potential as a force for youth development.

References

Anderson-Butcher, D. (2019). Youth sport as a vehicle for social development. *Kinesiology Review*, *8*(30), 180–187.

Anderson-Butcher, D., & Bates, S. (2021). Social work and youth sport. *Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal*, *38*, 359–365. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-021-00777-6

Anderson-Butcher, D., & Bates, S. (2022). *National Coach Survey final report.* The Ohio State University LiFE*sports* Initiative.

Anderson-Butcher, D., Bates, S., Amorose, A., Wade-Mdivanian, R., & Lower-Hoppe, L. (2021). Social-emotional learning interventions in youth sport: What matters in design? *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, *38*, 367–379. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-021-00773-w

Anderson-Butcher, D., Bates, S., & Lo, M.-T. (2024). Coach training participation and athlete life skill development: Findings from the US National Coach Survey. *Quest*. https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2024.2407140

Aspen Institute. (2019). *Calls for coaches*. Project Play. https://projectplay.org/calls-for-coaches

Aspen Institute. (2023). *State of play 2024: Coaching trends*.

Atkinson, O., Bates, S., & Anderson-Butcher, D. (2024). *2024 policy update: Mapping of school-based coach education and training requirements in the United States*. Sport and Society Program, The Aspen Institute.

Atkinson, O., Bates, S., Anderson-Butcher, D., Mack, S., & Goodway, J. (2022). Mapping school-based coach education requirements in the United States. *International Sport Coaching Journal, 10*(2), 276–288. https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2022-0032

Bean, C., & Forneris, T. (2016). Examining the importance of intentionally structuring the youth sport context to facilitate positive youth development. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, *28*(4), 410–425. https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2016.1164764

Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C., & Walter, F. (2016). Member checking: A tool to enhance trustworthiness or merely a nod to validation? *Qualitative Health Research, 26*(13), 1802–1811.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (2006). The bioecological model of human development. In R. M. Lerner (Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 1. Theoretical models of human development* (6th ed., pp. 793–828). Wiley.

Camiré, M., & Santos, F. (2019). Promoting positive youth development and life skills in youth sport: Challenges and opportunities amidst increased professionalization. *Journal of Sport Pedagogy and Research*, *5*(1), 27–34.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2014). *Whole school, whole community, whole child (WSCC) model*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://archive.cdc.gov/#/details?url=https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/wscc/index.htm

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory*. Sage.

Charmaz, K., & Bryant, A. (2011). Grounded theory and credibility. *Qualitative Research, 3*, 291–309.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2015). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (4th ed.). Sage.

Côté, J., & Gilbert, W. (2009). An integrative definition of coaching effectiveness and expertise. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching, 4*(3), 307–323. https://doi.org/10.1260/174795409789623892

Cushion, C., Armour, K., & Jones, R. (2003). Coaching education and continuing professional development: Experience and learning to coach. *Quest, 55*(3), 215–230. https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2003.10491800

Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E.,& Gardner, M. (2017*). Effective teacher professional development.* Learning Policy Institute.

Desimone, L. (2011). A primer on effective professional development. *Kappan*, *92*(6), 68–71.

Durlak, J. A., Mahoney, J. L., & Boyle, A. E. (2022). What we know, and what we need to find out about universal, school-based social and emotional learning programs for children and adolescents: A review of meta-analyses and directions for future research. *Psychological Bulletin, 148*(11–12), 765–782. https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000383

Eccles, J. S., & Barber, B. L. (1999). Student council, volunteering, basketball, or marching band: What kind of extracurricular involvement matters? *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *14*(1), 10–43. https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558499141003

Eccles, J. S., Barber, B. L., Stone, M., & Hunt, J. (2003). Extracurricular activities and adolescent development. *Journal of Social Issues, 59*(4), 865–889. https://doi.org/10.1046/j.0022-4537.2003.00095.x

Ewing, M. E., Seefeldt, V. D., & Brown, T. P. (1996). Role of organized sport in the education and health of American children and youth. In A. Poinsett (Ed.), *The role of sports in youth development* (pp. 1–157). Carnegie Corporation.

Falcão, W. R., Bloom, G. A., & Gilbert, W. D. (2012). Coaches' perceptions of a coach training program designed to promote youth developmental outcomes. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, *24*(4), 429–444.

Falcão, W. R., Bloom, G. A., & Sabiston, C. M. (2020). The impact of humanistic coach training on youth athletes' development through sport. *International Journal of Sports Science and Coaching, 15*(5–6), 610–620. https://doi.org/10.1177/1747954120933975

Fawver, B., Beatty, G. F., Roman, J. T., & Kurtz, K. (2020). The status of youth coach training in the United States: Existing programs and room for improvement. *International Sport Coaching Journal, 7*(2), 239–251. https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2019-0017

Glaser B. G., & Strauss A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Aldine.

Gould, D., & Carson, S. (2008). Life skills development through sport: Current status and future directions. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology, 1*(1), 58–78. https://doi.org/10.1080/17509840701834573

Hart, R. A. (1992). *Children's participation: From tokenism to citizenship*. UNICEF International Child Development Centre.

Hedlund, D. P., Fletcher, C. A., & Pack, S. M. (2018). The education of sport coaches: What should they learn and when should they learn it? *International Sport Coaching Journal, 5*(2), 192–199. https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2017-0110

Holt, N. L., Neely, K. C., Slater, L. G., Camiré, M., Côté, J., Fraser-Thomas, J., MacDonald, D., Strachan, L., & Tamminen, K. A. (2017). A grounded theory of positive youth development through sport based on results from a qualitative meta-study. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology, 10*(1), 1–49. https://doi.org/10.1080/1750984X.2016.1180704

Jones, G. J., Edwards, M. B., Bocarro, J. N., Bunds, K. S., & Smith, J. W. (2017). An integrative review of sport-based youth development literature. *Sport in Society, 20*(1), 161–179. https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2015.1124569

Kelley, T. L. (1927). *Interpretation of educational measurements*. World Book.

Leduc, M., Culver, D. M., & Werthner, P. (2012). Following a coach education programme: Coaches' perception and reported actions. *Sports Coaching Review, 1*(2), 135–150. https://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2013.797752

Lerner, R. M. (2009). The positive youth development perspective: Theoretical and empirical bases of a strength-based approach to adolescent development. In C. R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of positive psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 149–163). Oxford University Press.

Li, L., Olson, H. O., Tereschenko, I., Wang, A., & McCleery, J. (2025). Impact of coach education on coaching effectiveness in youth sport: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, *20*(1), 340–356. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/17479541241283442

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1986). But is it rigorous? Trustworthiness and authenticity in naturalistic evaluation. In D.D. Williams (Ed.), *Naturalistic evaluation.* Jossey-Bass.

Mayo, R., Moroney, D. A., & Huff, B. (2019). Practical guidance for policy and practice: Strategies and tools for assessing and building readiness and for launching local efforts. In D. Osher, K. Kendziora, R. Jagers, L. Wood, & M. Mayer (Eds.), *Keeping students safe and helping them thrive: A collaborative handbook for education, safety, and justice professionals, families, and communities* (Volume 2, Chapter 21). Praeger.

McCullick, B. A., Belcher, D., & Schempp, P. G. (2005). What works in coaching and sport instructor certification programs? The participants' view. *Physical Education & Sport Pedagogy, 10*(2), 121–137. https://doi.org/10.1080/17408980500105015

National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. (2002). *Community programs to promote youth development.* The National Academies Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/10022

Nelson, L., Cushion, C., & Potrac, P. (2013). Enhancing the provision of coach education: The recommendations of UK coaching practitioners. *Physical Education & Sport Pedagogy, 18*(2), 204–218. https://doi.org/10.1080/17408989.2011.649725

Newman, J. Z. & Moroney, D. A. (2024). SEL in out-of-school time and community. In J. A. Durlak, C. E. Domitrovich, & J. L. Mahoney (Eds.), *Handbook of social and emotional learning* (2nd ed., pp. 311-323). Guilford.

Newman, T. J., Lower-Hoppe, L. M., Burch, M., & Paluta, L. M. (2021). Advancing positive youth development-focused coach education: Contextual factors of youth sport and youth sport leader perceptions. *Managing Sport and Leisure, 26*(4), 326–340. https://doi.org/10.1080/23750472.2020.1766760

Perkins, D. F., & Noam, G. G. (2007). Characteristics of sports-based youth development programs. *New directions for youth development*, *2007*(115), 75–84. https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.224

Petitpas, A., Cornelius, A., Van Raalte, J., & Jones, T. (2005). A framework for planning youth sport programs that foster psychosocial development. *The Sport Psychologist, 19*(1), 63–80. http://dx.doi.org/10.1123/tsp.19.1.63

Riley, A., Anderson-Butcher, D., Logan, J., Newman, T., & Davis, J. (2017). Staff practices and social skill outcomes in a sport-based youth program. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 29*(1), 59–74. https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2016.1179700

Santos, F., Camiré, M., MacDonald, D. J., Campos, H., Conceição, M., & Silva, P. (2017). Youth sport coaches' perspective on positive youth development and its worth in mainstream coach education courses. *International Sport Coaching Journal, 4*(1), 38–46. https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2016-0092

SHAPE America—Society of Health and Physical Educators. (2019). *National standards for sport coaches: Quality coaches, quality sports* (3rd ed.). https://www.shapeamerica.org/MemberPortal/standards/coaching/default.aspx

Smith, R. E., & Smoll, F. L. (2002). Youth sports as a behavior setting for psychological interventions. In J. L. Van Raalte & B. W. Brewer (Eds.), *Exploring sport and exercise psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 341–371). American Psychological Association.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research*. Sage.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Sage.

Super, S., Wentink, C. Q., Verkooijen, K. T., & Koelen, M. A. (2017). Exploring the sports experiences of socially vulnerable youth. *Social Inclusion, 5*(2), 198–209.

Tracey, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight "big-tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 16*(10), 837–851. https://doi.org/0.1177/1077800410383121

United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee. (2020). *Quality coaching framework*. Retrieved from https://www.usopc.org/quality-coaching-framework

University of Washington College of Education. (n.d.). *Ambitious coaching framework*. University of Washington, Coaching Leading and Learning Alliance (CLA). https://uwcla.uw.edu/coach/coaching-research-resources/ambitious-coaching-2/

Webb, K., & Leeder, T. M. (2022). Dispositions and coaching theories: Understanding the impact of coach education on novice coaches' learning. *Sport, Education and Society, 27*(5), 618–631. https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2021.1887846

Weiss, M. R., & Williams, L. (2004). The why of youth sport involvement: A developmental perspective on motivational processes. In M. R. Weiss (Ed.), *Developmental sport and exercise psychology: A lifespan perspective* (pp. 223–268). Fitness Information Technology.

Whitley, M., Massey, W., Camiré, M., Boutet, M., & Borbee, A. (2019). Sport-based youth development interventions in the United States: A systematic review. *BMC Public Health, 19*(1), 89. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-019-6387-z

MILLION COACHES CHALLENGE