

PRACTICE-BASED COACHING TO SUPPORT PLAY-BASED LEARNING IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

This brief summarizes how New Hampshire is using funds from the Preschool Development Grant (PDG) to provide educators practice-based coaching with a focus on play-based learning strategies.

PRACTICE-BASED COACHING

Practice-based coaching is an individualized form of professional development. [Practice-based coaching](#) is a structured and cyclical process in which coaches collaborate one-on-one with practitioners to plan goals and action steps, engage in focused observation, and reflect on feedback. The goal of practice-based coaching is to enhance the skills, knowledge, and performance of practitioners through this targeted support and guidance. Practice-based coaching is used in many disciplines, including education.

Research shows practice-based coaching leads to positive outcomes for educators and children. Studies of practice-based coaching highlight [positive outcomes for educators](#) and [improved outcomes for children](#).

PLAY-BASED LEARNING

Play-based learning centers on creating educational opportunities that are active and engaging, meaningful, iterative, and joyful for children. The core components of play-based learning can be summarized by [the 6 C's](#): collaboration, communication, content, critical thinking, creative innovation, and confidence. Research shows that these strategies have positive implications for child outcomes. This includes positive outcomes related to [social-emotional, cognitive, language, and self-regulation skills](#).

In 2018, New Hampshire amended the state's Adequate Education law to mandate play-based learning in kindergarten. The amendment called for educators to "create a learning environment that fosters high quality, child-directed experiences."

NH PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT GRANT

The NH Preschool Development Grant (PDG) allowed UNH Early Learning Coaches to establish a partnership with the Manchester School District. This partnership focuses on embedding practice-based coaching for play-based learning during the 2023-2024 school year. The coaching team collaborates with district administrators and teachers to develop plans for implementing a schedule block to integrate the three-part workshop model for guided play.

Coaching in 2023 builds on successful professional development efforts with previous PDG funding.

- Coaching with more than 90 teachers across 30 NH school districts.
- Hands-on workshops in more than 60% of NH's districts as well as two other states.
- Community partnerships: NH Children's Museum, local libraries, Family Resource Centers, etc.
- Presentation at national conferences (e.g., National Association for the Education of Young Children).

PDG SUCCESSES IN 2023

In Manchester, UNH Early Learning coaches:

- Conduct **two-week coaching cycles** with twenty teachers across seven schools.
- Hold monthly small group **Professional Learning Communities**, allowing teachers to reflect on the impact of play-based learning coaching and focus on shifting practices for kindergarten.
- Meet with **building teams** and support development of "Playful Learning Indicators" for Kindergarten programs.

Coaches also provide professional development to staff in other NH school districts. PDG funds have allowed UNH Early Learning Coaches to provide workshops and consult on classroom design with more than 45 participants, including early childhood providers. These consultations help educators create environments that support developmentally appropriate practice and authentic opportunities for guided play.

