

Early Childhood Council Impact Brief: Workforce Supports

October 2022



Colorado's early care and education workforce is vital to supporting our economy and the wellbeing of children and families in our communities. Our system of child care ensures caregivers can work and also provides safe and supportive spaces for children to learn and grow. But our child care system has never experienced the sustainable investments needed to ensure it can fully meet the needs of our children and families. Families are paying a significant amount of their income for child care, and yet the costs of providing high-quality care are unsustainable for many providers. Across Colorado many child care centers and family homes are functioning at 50 percent capacity due to not being able to fully staff classrooms. In many cases, center directors are filling in gaps themselves in classrooms.

Colorado's Early Childhood Councils have never stopped stepping up to the challenge of keeping our child care system going, and there are a wide variety of solutions and innovative approaches happening across our state in ways that meet each individual community's needs. Colorado is fortunate to have agencies and foundations supporting this work and we celebrate the progress being made amidst the challenges. This brief highlights the many strategies and partnerships Early Childhood Councils are leading to strengthen the early childhood workforce across the state.

Expanding Pathways for the Workforce

The future of our child care system depends on diverse and accessible pathways for growing the field, including bringing new professionals into the field, ensuring people are able to open and grow child care businesses, and provide the best quality of care for children.

Preparing and Attracting Early Childhood Professionals

Building pathways for early childhood professionals to enter the field must begin early, and some Councils have ensured pathways begin in high school. **ECHO & Family Center Early Childhood Council (Fremont), Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County, and Early Childhood Council of La Plata County** all offer classes, connections with colleges, and other resources for high school students to learn more about becoming an early childhood professional. Additionally, **Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County** has developed partnerships with local colleges where stimulus funds have helped facilitate relationships across colleges in their region to make access points easier for students. **Pueblo Early**



Childhood Council hosts an annual Fun Fair community event to support interest in joining the early childhood field. **Triad Early Childhood Council (Clear Creek, Gilpin, Jefferson)** in Partnership with Child Care Innovations, successfully supported programs with hiring 75 providers by providing a hiring bonus.

Family Child Care Homes

Opening and sustaining a licensed child care in one's home can be a challenging endeavor logistically and financially, but Family Child Care Homes (FCCH) provide a valuable community-based space for care. Councils across the state have taken steps to keep FCCHs open and to support providers who want to open FCCHs.

Weld County's Early Childhood Council, Cheyenne, Kiowa, and Lincoln Early Childhood Council, and Mesa County Partnership for Children and Families offer FCCH providers start-up kits that include important items for health and safety and information on getting connected to the Council community. **Broomfield Early Childhood Council, Chaffee Early Childhood Council, and Early Childhood Options (Summit)** also offer periodic huddles, happy hours, and mingles where FCCH providers can connect and support one another. **Arapahoe County Early Childhood Council** makes the most of home visiting by supporting children and the provider together through Giggle and Grow, where one visitor engages children in an activity while another meets with and coaches the provider. This program will expand with the rollout of Universal Preschool in the community in 2023.

Bright Futures (San Juan Region) is partnering with Ouray County's Rural Home Early Childhood Initiative to address the child care desert in Ouray. Bright Futures has been a partner at the table to ensure child care was a part of the conversation about affordable housing for families, including making Family Child Care businesses a more viable option in these communities.

Supporting Access and Quality

Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) Child Care

FFN care is a highly utilized form of care in Colorado covering more than half of children under 6 in Colorado in need of care. FFN care is unlicensed provided through a family, friend, or neighbor. Many Councils are engaging FFN providers in their communities and supporting improvements in areas like health, safety, and social emotional capacity for providers. Councils also offer licensing pathways for FFN providers who are seeking licensure. **Weld County's Early Childhood Council** and Reading Great by 8 under United Way of Weld County is deeply engaged in PASO (Providers Advancing School Outcomes) through the PASO Institute. This curriculum allows participants to apply for their Child Development Associates (CDA) certification, where they can continue their work with the support of quality improvement and safety kits. This can also offer ways for providers to gain employment in licensed care settings.



Early Childhood Council of Boulder County offers the Early Childhood Teacher Clinic, an intensive training and support clinic for caregivers' who are working towards their Early Childhood Teacher Qualification. In response to the staffing shortage, the ECT clinics are regularly requested by local program directors to build skills of inexperienced staff, often those who are new to the field, in applying for and obtaining their ECT Qualification. The **Early Childhood Council of Logan, Phillips, Sedgwick** also supports stipends for credentials and hosts an annual conference for early childcare providers.



LENA Grow

LENA Grow is an impactful coaching tool, providing immediate feedback to teachers on the quality of their verbal interactions with children. Through the quick turnaround of being able to see the data, teachers are invested in learning how to be most effective with their interactions with children to build relationships and reduce challenging behaviors. Vangi McCoy with **Montelores Early Childhood Council (Montezuma, Delores)** loves how results are immediate. "With one LENA day a week to download devices followed by a coaching day, data shows how many conversational turns with each child.

Immediate feedback is appreciated and makes teachers aware of how they are talking with children vs. talking to them." Montelores Early Childhood Council is also implementing LENA Home (with home visitors) and LENA Start (family engagement).

Stacy Petty, Director of the **Rocky Mountain Early Childhood Council (Eagle, Lake, Garfield, Pitkin)** recommends starting small, increasing implementation as funding allows. For example, this tool first started with infant and toddler classrooms and is now being introduced in preschool classrooms.*

Teller Park Early Childhood Council hosts an annual eight-hour Adverse Childhood Experiences training, supporting providers to meet requirements for social emotional licensing.

Sustaining and Growing the Field

Business and Director Support

Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County is engaging in business coaching after learning from a pilot to improve marketing to immigrant and rural providers, who experience several barriers to starting child care businesses. Through conversations with these communities technology emerged as a barrier which could make a big impact if addressed.

Denver's Early Childhood Council hired a Business Services Coach/Consultant to focus on the Human Resources side of operating a child care business. Several trainings have been developed to strengthen this side of child care businesses, filling an important gap where providers historically have not received support.



Several Councils also provide concrete support to directors, ensuring they can receive coaching, peer support, and ongoing education. **Early Childhood Council of the San Luis Valley, Broomfield Early Childhood Council, and Arapahoe County Early Childhood Council** host periodic lunch and learns and roundtables where directors can discuss important topics and learn from one another. **Mesa County Partnership for Children and Families** supports a collaborative hybrid model where professionals can complete their Director's certificate in one year.

*Other Councils implementing LENA Grow include: Arapahoe; Cheyenne, Kiowa, Lincoln; Denver; Douglas; Huerfano, Las Animas; Logan, Phillips, Sedgwick; Grand and Jackson; Adams (LENA Start); Yuma, Washington, and Kit Carson

Through applying for an Early Milestones Workforce Innovation grant, **Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County**, **Denver's Early Childhood Council**, and **Joint Initiatives Alliance for Kids (El Paso)** were brought together to pilot their Career Navigation Project. This project's wholistic approach is focused on supporting providers in all needed quality improvement areas. PDIS is the entry point for connecting providers with a career navigator. CIRCLE grant funding is supporting the continuation of the work to expand the impact of the project along with a duplicable toolkit to support onboarding additional navigators.

Joint Initiatives Alliance for Kids (El Paso) has almost completed the Wages and Stages Pilot. Ten early care and education programs were accepted into the program intended to support leaders in creating high quality structures and positive workforce environments.



Mental Health Supports for Providers

Mental health for child care providers is an important element to overall wellbeing and supporting quality care for children. Finding and affording support is not often an option for many providers, and many providers aren't offered health insurance. **Gunnison-Hinsdale Early Childhood Council** and **Early Childhood Options (Summit)** both make mental health options available to early childhood professionals through programs offering a limited number of counseling and therapy sessions to individuals.

Emergency assistance for providers

Many early childhood professionals earn well below their community's annual median income, particularly in rural and remote communities. This, combined with increasing costs of living can mean professionals live month to month and do not have savings available for unexpected costs. **Grand Beginnings (Grand and Jackson)** piloted a one-time emergency assistance option after a successful pilot by **Triad Early Childhood Council (Jefferson, Clear Creek, Gilpin)** to child care professionals through a partnership with a local electric company, which is in its second year of funding.

"We were able to help a teacher with dental issues which was causing a lot of pain. We are able to leave parameters open so it helps with various emergencies. Everyone funded so far is still working in the early childhood field." -Katy Hale, Grand Beginnings

Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County began providing hardship funding to child care providers after a Career Navigator observed frustration from providers working to meet professional development milestones without increased compensation. Incentives are provided to celebrate the value of the providers and show appreciation.

Gunnison-Hinsdale Early Childhood Council provides emergency grants for paid sick leave for early childhood professionals. In the fall of 2020, a local community foundation offered support for emergency needs. In a time with abundant needs, the funder was looking for something unique to impact the community beyond overall workforce issues.

The Gunnison-Hinsdale Early Childhood Council illustrated how the early childhood workforce is the workforce behind the workforce. The local community foundation's funding was matched through Innovation and CIRCLE grants. Current requests to the Town of Gunnison and City of Crested Butte have been made with the goal of having ongoing funding for paid sick leave. The Gunnison-Hinsdale Early Childhood Council continues to look at other opportunities to support benefits.

"Funders see the connection of supporting the early childhood education workforce with being able to have paid sick leave which leads to having retention in the field, along with the importance of supporting the workforce behind the workforce," -Lana Athey, Co-Coordinator of the Gunnison-Hinsdale Early Childhood Council.

For more information on other activities and programs Early Childhood Councils are engaging in to support our early childhood workforce, visit the [Early Childhood Council Leadership Alliance website](#)

About ECCLA

ECCLA advocates for and strengthens the accessibility, quality, and equity of local services and supports through a responsive statewide system of Early Childhood Councils, to benefit Colorado's young children, their families, and early childhood professionals.

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