



Colorado Early Childhood Councils

*Annual Report
January 2011*



Colorado Department of Human Services
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Councils' Role in the Early Childhood Framework

Every house needs a foundation — a strong support system that insures the safety and sustainability of the rooms above it. This foundation serves the family that lives there, even though they may not think about it every day and even though it is not what the neighbors see when they walk by or come to visit.

Like the foundation for a house, the foundation for a high-quality, accessible and equitable early childhood system insures long-term sustainability and support for the rooms (or, in this case, services) resting above it. This system of opportunities must exist in every community in order to

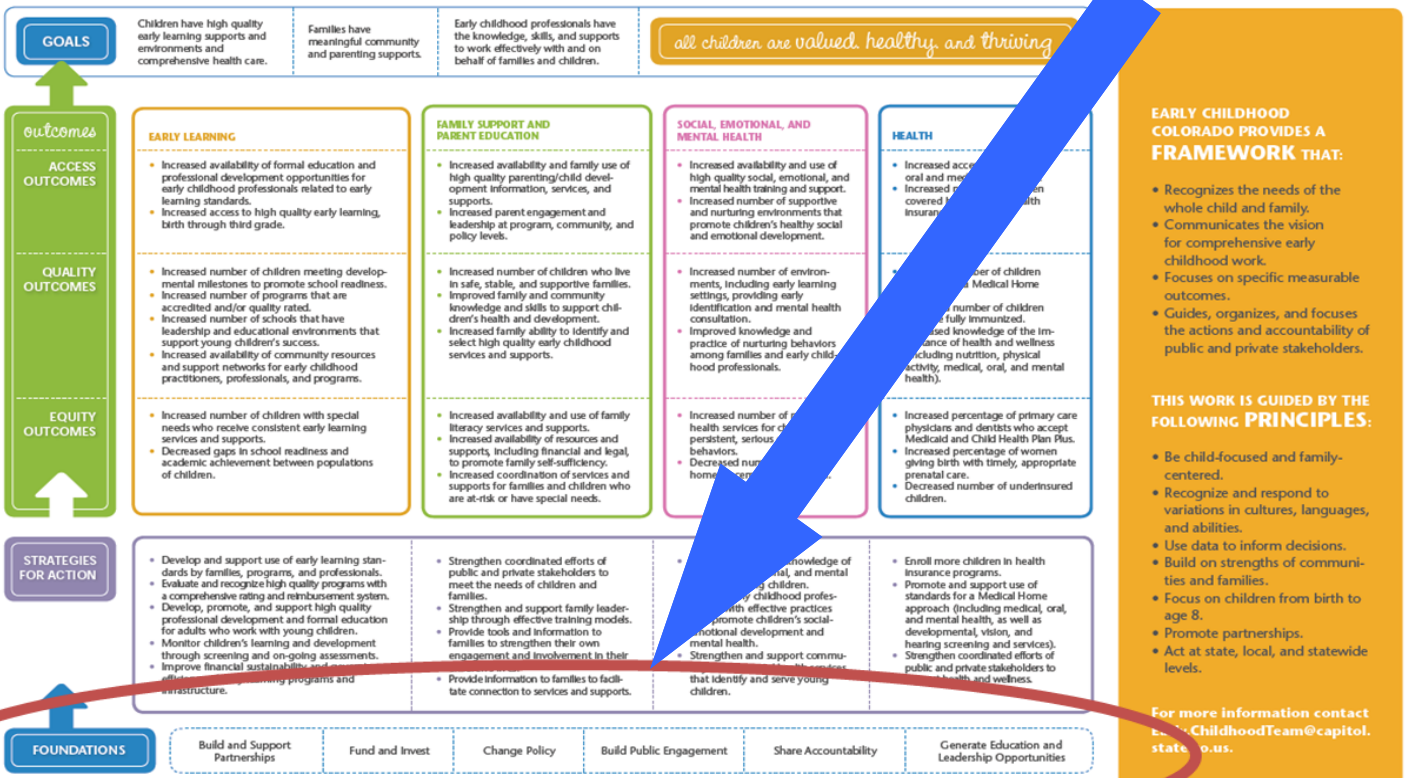
give families with young children access to quality learning, family support, health and mental health services.

Without this foundation, services start and stop with funding cycles, agencies operate in silos, decisions are based on short-term needs and redundancies are common.

However, with a strong foundation, agencies and service providers work together, efficiencies are realized throughout the system, resources are coordinated and leveraged, decisions are strategic and long-term, and services are aligned for families and children.

In Colorado, there are 30 Early Childhood Councils serving 55 counties, each providing this necessary foundation for local early childhood systems. The state invests in this foundational system to support the efficiency, quality and sustainability of the services provided to Colorado's families with young children.

The Early Childhood Colorado Framework (below) illustrates the structure of the evolving early childhood system in this state. The kinds of activities that create the foundation of the system are circled in red, and, like the foundation for a house, are an essential part of a high-functioning structure.



“It is ... in the state’s best interest to establish a comprehensive system of Early Childhood Councils to increase and sustain the availability, accessibility, capacity, and quality of early childhood services throughout the state.”

Colorado Revised Statutes 26-6.5-101

Investment Rationale

The state’s investment in Early Childhood Councils is a strategic one: it is a commitment to the development of a coordinated, intentional system of services for children in the form of Early Childhood Councils.

This investment is premised on the notion that infusing local communities with seed money for the creation of a coordinated system of services — across all four domains of early learning, health, mental health and family support — will ultimately save money, reduce duplication, and leverage additional investments into the system. While there are many valuable programs that provide services directly to

young children and their families in Colorado — examples include the Child Care Assistance Program, Child Health Plus, and the Colorado Preschool Program — the Early Childhood Councils are the sole mechanism for addressing the underlying issues that create inefficiencies and barriers for families and children needing to access services. By providing coordinated, leveraged support to direct service organizations, Early Childhood Councils promote an effective system that ultimately results in improved opportunities for young children and their families.

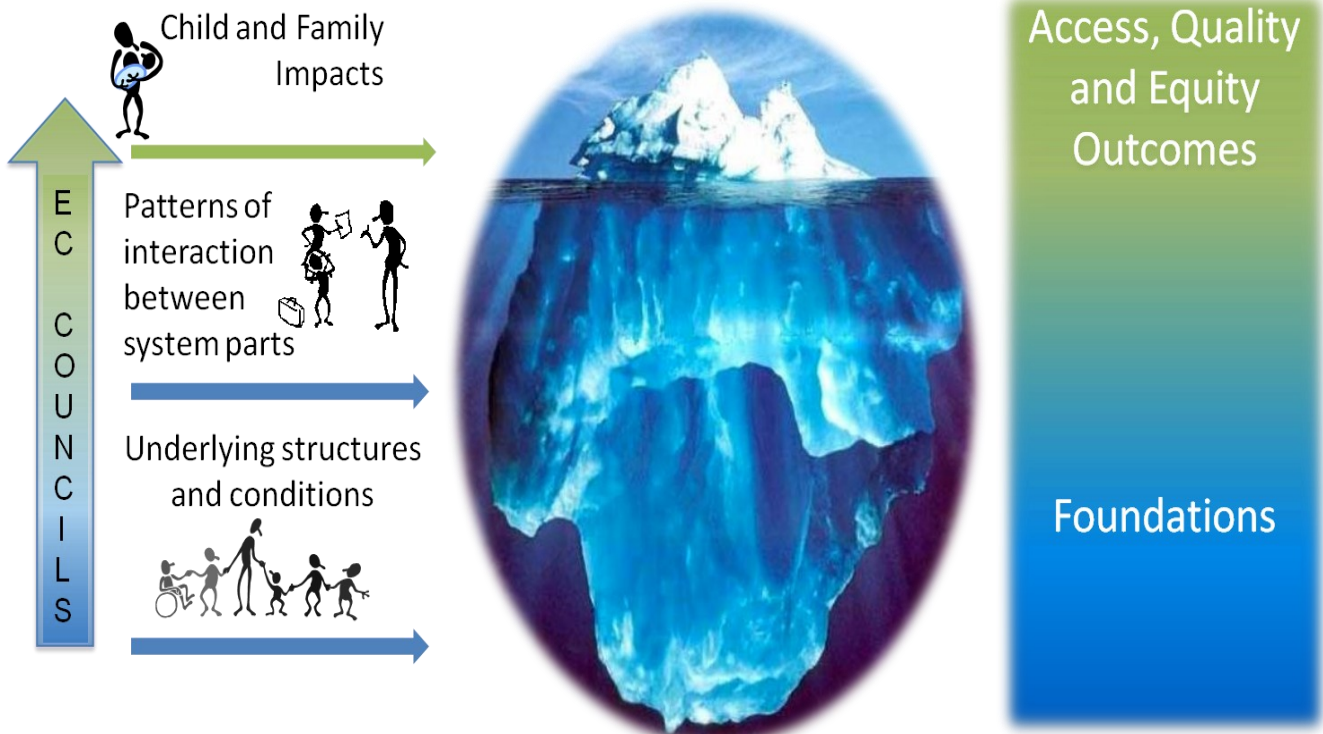
The “Systems Iceberg,” below, visually demonstrates the sphere within which the

Early Childhood Councils operate in their communities and how it is intended to impact the ultimate access, quality and equity outcomes for children. The rest of this report will demonstrate the value of the state’s investment.

Specifically there is a section that details systems indicators and “indicators in action” for each foundational factor from the Early Childhood Framework:

- Build & Support Partnerships
- Fund & Invest
- Change Policy
- Build Public Engagement
- Share Accountability
- Generate Education & Leadership Opportunities

The Systems Iceberg

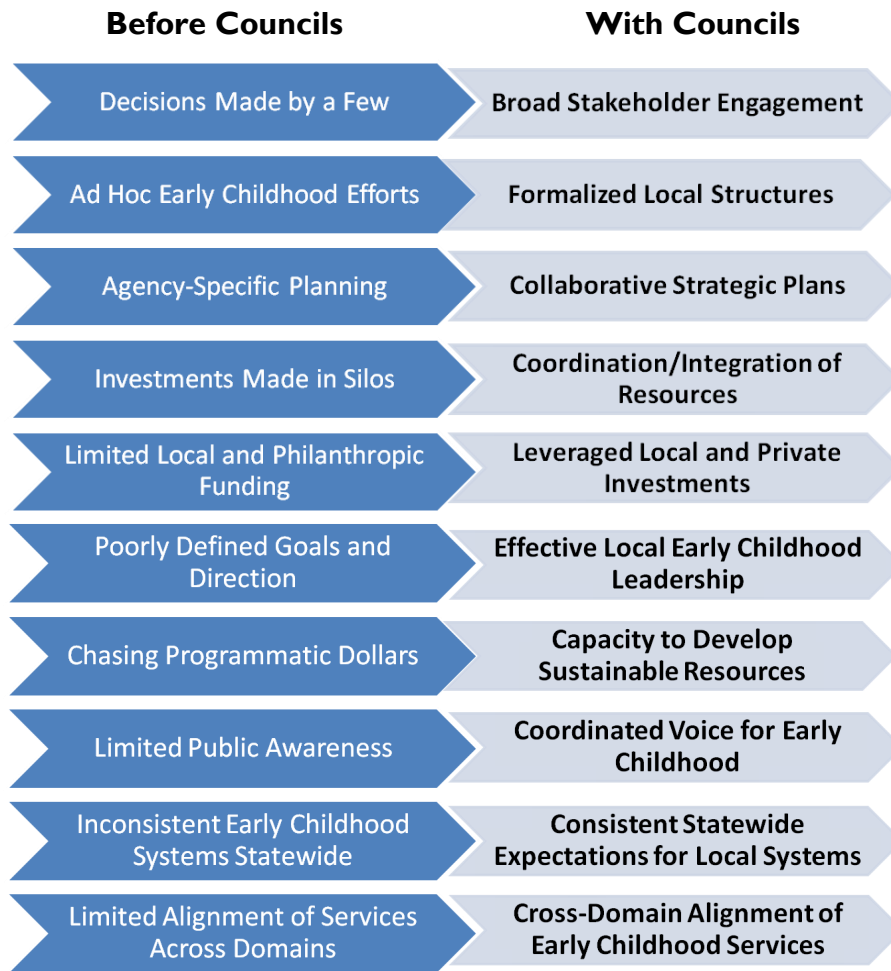


Councils — A Story of Ongoing Change

Before 1997 there were no Early Childhood Councils. Programs for young children and their families were separate and fragmented, sometimes inconsistently available and of varying quality. The creation of twelve Early Child Care Pilots (which were then expanded to 17 in 1999), began to change the face of early childhood systems across the state.

The success of these “pilots” in creating more coordinated systems of early childhood services led the legislature in 2006 to further expand the initiative to include the 30 Councils that exist today.

So, what are Councils creating now that did not exist in 1996, or indeed, before 2006 in many parts of the state? Read on!



“Partnership — the ability to meet face-to-face and network

— is critical to forming the foundational relationships upon which systems-building occurs, and essential to making changes last in the long term.”

Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County

Build and Support Partnerships

The first foundational function of Councils is to “Build and Support Partnerships” among agencies, service providers, the businesses community and local elected leaders.

Building and Supporting Partnerships:

- Reduces Duplications;
- Increases Efficiency; and
- Aligns Services

Early Childhood Councils have over 1,000 members from all four domains (early learning, health, mental health and family support) representing nearly 600 local organizations across Colorado. This is a 15 percent increase in Council membership over SFY2009.

These individuals are coming together in their local communities to collaboratively improve the quality, accessibility and equity of services for young children and

their families. For instance, during State Fiscal Year 2010 (July 1, 2009-June 30, 2010), 22 Councils reported fostering 139 different cross-system alignments. These included:

- instituting client referral processes across agencies,
- coordinating training and professional development opportunities for early childhood service providers, and

(Continued on page 4)

Partnerships Help to Align Services

“Our Council partners are in the process of creating a referral system region-wide to offer mental health services to families and children in all four counties ages birth to five.”

Bright Futures for Early Childhood and Families (Delta, Montrose, San Miguel and Ouray Counties)

(Continued from page 3)

- aligning required competencies or skill standards, and/or application and eligibility requirements.

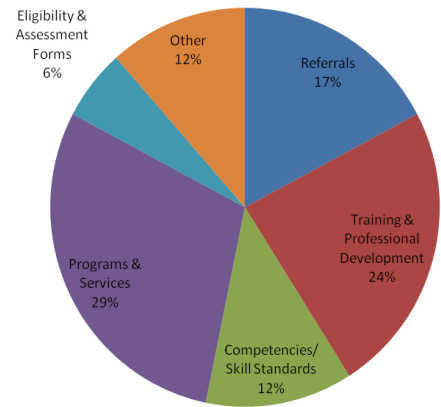
What this means for families — and in some instances for early childhood direct service professionals — is that the system is more seamless. When a family registers for CHP+ health insurance, they may also get a referral to the agency that administers the Child Care Assistance Program. When an early childhood teacher registers for a professional development opportunity, that offering may be coordinated with the Early Childhood degree program at the local community college.

The families and providers

caring for young children do not have to know how to navigate every piece of the system, because the Council has worked to coordinate the system of services behind the scenes so it is easy for family and providers to access.

The bottom line is: Early Childhood Councils play a key role in their communities to create strong partnerships between system components resulting in *more* opportunities for young

Types of Cross-System Alignments SFY2010



Breakdown of the types of cross-system alignments initiated by Early Childhood Councils in SFY2010.

children and their families, *higher quality* services, and an experience with the system that is *positive*.

Building Partnerships in Action

In the past year, Mesa County Partnership for Children and Families worked with all three local school districts to distribute public health insurance enrollment information. In particular, the Partnership for Children and Families connected with Mesa County Valley School District 51 communication and nursing departments to add a health care link on the school district’s home page. The link will connect school district students, parents and staff to a non-profit agency, Hilltop’s B4 Babies and Beyond. B4 Babies and Beyond provides health insurance application assistance, presumptive eligibility cards for Medicaid and Child Health Plan +, and access to primary health care providers.



Because parents and school personnel now have the ability to locate health insurance information on the school district Web site, the access and equity of services within the community has been strengthened as a result of local early childhood council coordination. Mesa County Partnership for Children and Families is continuing its collaboration with Mesa County Valley School District 51 and Hilltop’s B4 Babies and Beyond to increase traffic to the school district’s Web site link to ensure all children and families in Mesa County are valued, healthy and thriving.



Fund and Invest in Action

In 2008, The Colorado Trust made a commitment to invest \$5 million over five years to support Early Childhood Councils' efforts to integrate health into local systems of early childhood services. To date, 25 Councils have received three-year grants from The Colorado Trust. These grants will be used to integrate physical, oral and mental health care into their local early childhood systems. For instance, some Councils are working locally to increase the access families with young children have to health insurance and immunizations. This involves building partnerships between the different agencies and services that already work with young children and linking their families to the community's health and public insurance systems. Other Councils are improving the availability of oral health opportunities for very young children, especially in communities that otherwise have limited dental services.



Another major Colorado funder that has been supporting Early Childhood Councils for many years is the Temple Hoyne Buell Foundation. Currently, they grant over \$1.1 million to 24 Early Childhood Councils as part of their philanthropic commitment to partner with organizations that improve the systems that serve children. Their funding supports professional development for direct service workers, quality improvement efforts, as well as some general operating support.



Temple Hoyne Buell Foundation



Fund and Invest

Public funds dedicated to early childhood in Colorado are limited — and funds dedicated to strengthening the foundations of the early childhood system, such as those put into Early Childhood Councils — are even more limited.

These funding shortfalls in the system can create problems with the quality, continuity and sustainability of services for young children and their families.

Early Childhood Councils play a crucial role in working with system partners to identify the most effective ways to utilize and leverage limited resources for early childhood. Specifically, the funding and investing function of Councils is intended to:

- Create sustainability within the system;
- Coordinate resources to enhance efficiencies; and
- Leverage local and private funds to support young children and their families.

Currently, local, foundation, and private sources comprise over one-third (36 percent) of Council's budgets. This means that Councils are bringing in \$0.56 in local, foundation and private funding for every \$1.00 from state/federal sources.

Twenty-four foundations and at least eleven local government funding sources invested in Early Childhood Councils across the state during the past

fiscal year. At least two of these foundations are making investments in multiple Councils statewide as a funding strategy to advance philanthropic goals (see box, above).

In addition to the funding sources that the Council partnerships are collectively able to leverage, Early Childhood Councils serve as a forum for strategic community decisions about how to best utilize limited funding sources for young children in the community. This can take the form of braided and blended funding to support such things as early learning opportunities for children and professional development options for service providers.

**Every \$1.00
invested in
Early Childhood
Councils from
State and
Federal sources
generates
another \$0.56
in local and
private funding.**

“This year, the Council supported the review and revision of a municipal code that would change zoning to align with State definitions of types of licensed family child care homes.”

Triad Early Childhood Council (Clear Creek, Gilpin and Jefferson Counties)

Change Policy

Early Childhood Councils play an important role at the local level by bringing organizationally diverse partners together to identify local and state rules, regulations and policies that impact young children and their families.

Because Council members represent many of the different parts of the early childhood system (i.e., early learning, health, mental health and family support), as well as business and elected representatives from the community, they are uniquely positioned to identify and make recommendations on policies that might impact the quality, accessibility and equity of early childhood services.

In particular, Early Childhood Councils can:

- Educate local and state-level decision makers about the impact of rule, regulation and policy choices on young children and their families;
- Help improve public services directed at young children; and
- Promote the alignment of public and private policies with best practices for young children.

The 30 Early Childhood Councils in Colorado help inform policies related to young children in a number of ways. Sometimes, the Council will take a formal position on

proposed or existing state and local policies. In SFY2010, seven Councils reported taking 11 formal positions on policies, rules or regulations.

At other times, Councils concentrate their efforts on educating decision makers about best practices for young children so that those individuals have high quality, research-based information about what will help young children to succeed.

During the fiscal year 17 Councils reported 58 instances where they were able to educate elected officials about best practices, current research, trends and issues affecting young children and their families.

Changing Policy in Action

Good government and business policies that support Colorado’s youngest children and their families are based on strong research, sound data and evidence-based practices. The Boulder County Commissioners know this, which is why they turned to the Early Childhood Council of Boulder County (ECCBC) this past year when they needed to make some tough decisions about funding for early childhood programs and services.

To make data driven decisions, the Boulder County Commissioners asked ECCBC to work with them to assess the needs/gaps in the early childhood system in Boulder County. In June, the ECCBC’s Advisory Council released a prioritized version of their own ECCBC Framework document where they prioritized 10 programs (which fell across all four domains) out of the initial identification of 70 strategies/programs. The Boulder County Commissioners used this research over the summer when they considered increased funding support for early childhood programs and services for the fall 2010 ballot.



The result: an increased “safety net” ballot proposal that included the replacement of lost state Child Care Assistance Program funding (it passed!). In addition, the County funded the ECCBC at \$50,000 for the first time in several years on the strength of their Framework analysis.



Building Public Engagement in Action

The Arapahoe County Early Childhood Council (ACECC) knows how important it is to involve key community and business leaders in discussions about early childhood.

When they completed a new Community Assessment in January 2010, they naturally presented the results to their Board of Directors. However, they didn't stop there. They knew they needed to let their elected and business leaders know about the state of children in the county and what was being done to address early childhood needs.



In February the Council's executive director presented their Community Assessment results to the Board of County Commissioners, and included a presentation on a local initiative: the Investing in Quality Project. In March, ACECC hosted a breakfast for business leaders in the county. The event was co-sponsored by every local Chamber of Commerce, the city municipalities and the school

districts. Council members took responsibility for bringing business partners to the event, where participants heard a national expert speak about the high return on investment that can be achieved with a focus on early childhood.



Build Public Engagement

If you ask most people whether young children are valuable and important, they will likely say "yes." Or even, "absolutely!" Early Childhood Councils are charged with putting that value into action.

Building public engagement is more than generating general awareness of young children in the community, although that is sometimes a starting point. Instead, as the entities that lay the foundation for a local system of services for young children and their families, Councils work to *involve* and *engage* targeted audiences in:

- Collaborating to improve the cohesiveness, quality and accessibility of services

- Creating early childhood champions that can speak to and inform decisions that affect young children
- Educating potential funders about the value of investing in the cross-domain early childhood system.

This focus on involving and engaging potential system partners, decision makers, and funders means that public engagement for Councils can be very targeted. It may involve specific outreach to the health or mental health sectors to encourage their participation in developing a shared vision for young children in the community. It could also

include developing and communicating a common message on best practices around parent education in the early years.

Public engagement for Early Childhood Councils is also intended to collaboratively increase families' and providers' access to, and the equity and quality of, the services within the early childhood system. In these cases a Council might actively and collaboratively promote a particular quality initiative for early learning environments. Or they may communicate the availability of an immunizations fair intended to improve community access to health resources.

"Through the Council, local system partners are contributing monthly articles about early childhood issues to the local newspaper."

Early Childhood Council of Logan, Phillips and Sedgwick Counties

“We have a lot of data about early childhood professionals [and we are working to] organize and report on this data in a meaningful and consistent way.”

Rural Resort Region Early Childhood Council — Northeast (Summit & Grand Counties)

Shared Accountability

Shared accountability is at the heart of Early Childhood Councils' efforts to build the foundation of a coordinated system. Perhaps better thought of as shared ownership, it involves cross-system partners agreeing on a common vision for young children in their community and sharing the responsibility to move towards that vision. It includes planning across health, mental health, early learning and family support domains. And it is where partners collect and share data about the early childhood system and those who are served by that system.

In short, when Councils are sharing accountability, they are:

- Creating a common vision and goals
- Engaging in cross-system planning; and
- Coordinating and sharing data.

In SFY 2010, all 30 Early Childhood Councils were using community assessment data to determine the needs for young children (typically birth-eight years) in their communities. Additionally, all 30 Councils have collaboratively developed and are implementing strategic plans that guide their work across domains and silos to address ongoing gaps and needs in the system.

On average, Councils reported that 76 percent of their membership had actively participated in the development of these strategic plans. With over 1,000 members participating in Councils statewide, this means that approximately 760 individuals (representing hundreds of organizations) agreed to common visions and actions

that support young children and their families across Colorado.

And for most Councils, members say that their home organizations are actively adopting the shared goals that Councils developed and/or are developing or improving their own programs as a result of their Council participation (Early Childhood Councils Collaboration Survey, August/September 2010).

Far fewer members are currently sharing data (an average of 39% of Council partners), so this is an area for ongoing growth and opportunity. Ideally, greater data sharing and coordination can lead to higher levels of accountability for the success of the cross-domain early childhood system.

Sharing Accountability in Action

Over the past several years, the Denver Early Childhood Council (DECC) has become increasingly aware of the importance of young children's social-emotional well being and the crucial role this plays in school readiness and achievement. In 2009, the DECC began a collaborative effort to develop a better mental health system of care for Denver's young children. The end goal? To ensure children and families in Denver have ready access to prevention, early intervention and treatment services.



The DECC appointed and convened an Early Childhood Mental Health Action Alliance comprised of community leaders, parents, family advocates, child care providers, mental health providers and funders. Together, they:

- Developed a strategic action plan for early childhood mental health in Denver based on community input and best practices; and
- Are continuing to build support for the strategic action plan among community stakeholders and funders to ensure effective implementation of the plan.

This diverse group mapped existing early childhood mental health resources; researched best-practices; and identified existing gaps and needs. The end product was an early childhood mental health strategic implementation plan that has been woven into the Council's strategic plan. And included in this is a strategy to collect and evaluate related data across the system, sharing accountability for success.

Generating Leadership Opportunities in Action

In the last quarter of the 2010 state fiscal year, the Montelores Early Childhood Council (Montezuma and Delores Counties) graduated its first class of Family Leadership Training Institute (FLTI) participants. Thirteen family members graduated from the 20-week training program that gave participants skills in the following areas:

- Personal and child development
- Leadership training
- Civic literacy
- Civic engagement

Each graduate of the demanding FLTI curriculum conducted a community project and took away life-long skills in early childhood advocacy that will benefit the children of both counties now and well into the future. For example, one participant is working with the school district to develop a kindergarten transition plan for pre-schoolers, while another is creating a “healthful and sustainable food program” for child care centers in Montezuma County.



At the culmination of the of the training, one city council member who attended the graduation said that he was so impressed with what the participants learned and how involved they now were in their community that he had become a family leadership training “champion.”

Generate Education and Leadership Opportunities

Every field has leaders. And when that field has been long established, the paths to leadership tend to be clear and charted out. Think of transportation or K-12 education.

However, when the field is still young and in development, leaders and champions must be intentionally cultivated. This is the case for the early childhood field — especially when those champions need to lead in multi-domain environments that include complex systems of their own, like health, mental health, family support and early learning.

Colorado’s Early Childhood Councils are a central place in local communities where these champions and leaders can

develop their knowledge and skills.

Between July 1, 2009 and June 30, 2010, Councils reported 275 leadership building activities. These included instances where staff and/or Council members made presentations about early childhood issues, attended leadership capacity-building trainings, won leadership awards and joined committees of partner organizations to promote cross-agency collaboration.

When Councils are successful in developing these leaders, it benefits the entire system, as well as children and families.

In addition to developing early childhood leaders, many Councils also play a role in

their communities in fostering education opportunities for front-line early childhood professionals as well. For instance, across the state, Councils sponsored 125 classes in SFY2010 for early childhood professionals in the following areas:

- Expanding Quality for Infants and Toddlers
- Touchpoints
- Ounce Scale

Over 1,200 participants completed these classes between July 1, 2009-June 30, 2010.

Some Councils also conducted additional trainings not included in the above counts as part of their communities’ strategic plans to improve quality, equity or access.

“121 early childhood professionals from over 30 facilities participated in a project designed to improve workforce retention.”

Early Childhood Council
of La Plata County

COLORADO EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCILS

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We're on the web:
www.cde.state.co.us/early/ECC.htm

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The following Councils generously provided the photos in this report:

Arapahoe County Early Childhood Council

Early Childhood Council of the San Luis Valley

Mesa County Partnership for Children and Families

Community Support for Early Childhood Councils

"The Buell Foundation understands the critical need to support improvements in the system of early childhood in Colorado, both at the state and local level, as outlined in the Early Childhood Colorado Framework.

We believe the Councils are essential partners in this work because they are uniquely positioned to understand the needs and aspirations of the children, the families, and the early childhood professionals at the local level. Additionally, their collective voice has strong influence on initiatives and policies occurring at the state level.

The efforts of the Councils have been foundational in building an effective workforce, creating high-quality early childhood environments in diverse settings, and ensuring healthy children who are better prepared to enter school. We simply could not do this work without them."

Susan Steele, Executive Director
Temple Hoyne Buell Foundation

Colorado's Early Childhood Councils

- Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County
- Arapahoe County Early Childhood Council
- Early Childhood Council of Bent, Otero and Crowley Counties
- Broomfield County Early Childhood Council
- Boulder County Early Childhood Council
- Chaffee County Early Childhood Council
- Bright Futures of Delta, Montrose, Ouray and San Miguel Counties
- Denver Early Childhood Council
- Douglas County Early Childhood Council
- Rural Resort Region Early Childhood Council — Western Division (Eagle, Lake, Garfield and Pitkin Counties)
- Elbert County Early Childhood Council
- Alliance for Kids (El Paso County)
- ECHO & Family Center Early Childhood Council (Fremont County)
- Early Childhood Council of Gunnison and Hinsdale Counties
- Triad Early Childhood Council (Jefferson, Clear Creek and Gilpin Counties)
- HuLA Early Childhood Council (Huerfano and Las Animas Counties)
- Early Childhood Council of La Plata County
- Early Childhood Council of Larimer County
- Early Childhood Council of Logan, Phillips and Sedgwick Counties
- Mesa County Partnership for Children and Families
- Connections 4 Kids (Moffat and Rio Blanco Counties)
- Montelores Early Childhood Council (Montezuma and Dolores Counties)
- Morgan County Early Childhood Council
- Pueblo Early Childhood Council
- First Impressions of Routt County
- Rural Resort Region Early Childhood Council — Northeast Division (Summit and Grand Counties)
- Early Childhood Council of the San Luis Valley (Alamosa, Conejos, Costilla, Mineral, Rio Grande, and Saguache Counties)
- Teller/Park Early Childhood Council
- Promises for Children of Weld County
- Early Childhood Council of Yuma, Washington and Kit Carson Counties



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