

Colorado Early Childhood Councils Initiative

First Quarter SFY2012

Collaboration for Systems Change



February 2012

Theory of Change

Colorado's 30 Early Childhood Councils were legislatively established to provide a collaborative, cross-domain mechanism at the local level to increase and/or improve:

- the **availability** of early childhood services;
- the **quality** of those services;
- the **capacity** of the early childhood system to provide services; and
- the **accessibility** of early childhood services to all families.

According to HB07-1062, the overarching goal of

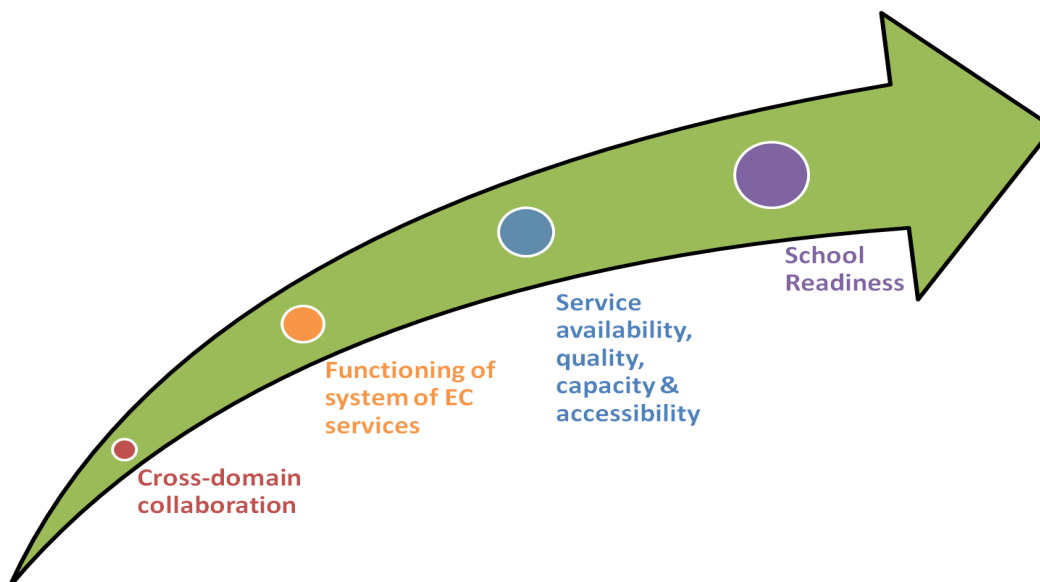
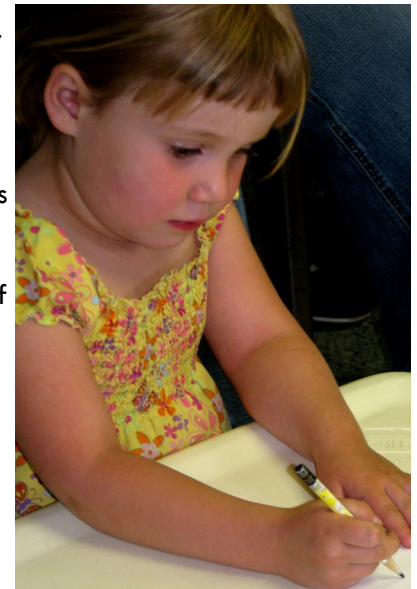
the EC Councils is to improve the **school readiness** of Colorado's young children age birth-5 years.

The State's investment in Early Childhood Councils is based on the theory of change outlined by the graphic in Figure 1, below. This theory holds that **collaboration** among local early childhood stakeholders and service providers will improve the way the **system** of early childhood services are organized, coordinated and delivered. This improved system of services will support the goals of improved **availability, quality,**

capacity, and accessibility, which, in turn, will improve children's **school readiness.**

This issue explores what is happening in Colorado's Early Childhood Councils related to the first step of this change process: cross-system, cross-domain collaboration.

Future issues will look at how the statewide initiative is using Local Systems Assessments and common indicators to assess the subsequent steps of system functioning, service quality, availability, capacity, and access, and, ultimately how all of this relates to child outcomes.



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Figure 1: EC Councils Theory of Change

Colorado Early Childhood Councils Initiative

Collaboration by the Numbers

As of September 30, 2011, the Early Childhood Councils reported 887 active

members statewide. This membership represents the four domains of the early childhood system (early learning, health, mental health, and family support), as well as other community partners such as business representatives and elected officials.

The state's investment in Early Childhood Councils is premised on the theory that collaboration among the various stakeholders and entities that make up a local early childhood system will result in better services and, ultimately, better outcomes for young children. To help examine the extent to which Councils are able to

establish this kind of effective collaboration, the State began utilizing an online collaboration survey of Council members in 2010.

Collaboration Survey

The survey combines two

separate collaboration assessment tools developed by Professors Darrin Hicks and Carl Larson of the University of Denver. The *Process Quality* and *Working Together* tools have been used successfully in past research to assess the health and strength of collaborations and to tie those factors to related goals and outcomes for the coalitions.

The *Process Quality* survey explores four factors related to collaborative practice:

- Structural Integrity
- Authenticity
- Equity
- Treatment

Structural integrity refers to the extent to which procedures of the collaborative are perceived as fair, while authenticity

examines the openness and sincerity of group processes. Similarly, equity and treatment measure the extent to which people feel outcomes are distributed fairly and people are treated with respect.

The *Working Together* portion of the survey explores the collaboration context, structure, membership, processes, and results.

Statewide Results

Participation in the 2011 survey, which totaled 757 respondents, was fairly representative of Council membership statewide. See Figure 2 for a comparison of the domain distribution of Council responses in 2011 to the statewide distribution of Council membership.

(Continued on page 3)

Domain Distribution

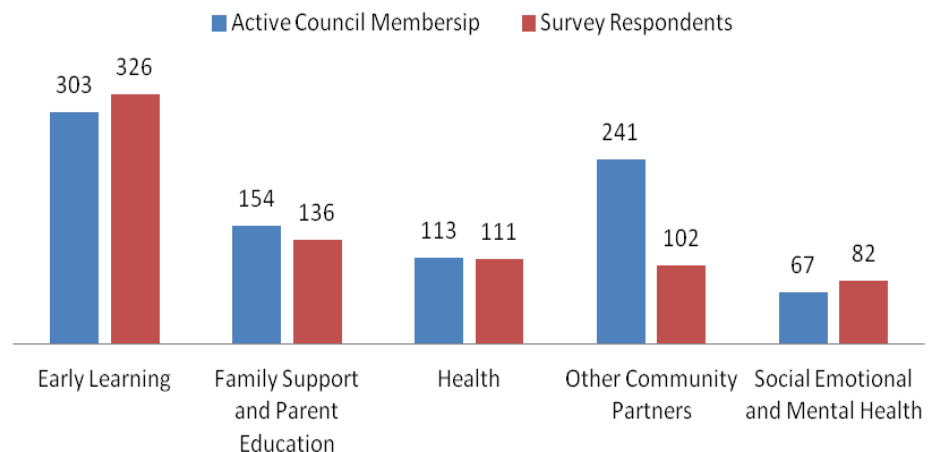


Figure 2: Survey respondents may exceed Council membership due to participation of committee members in survey who may not also be Council members.

Collaboration Results

(Continued from page 2)

Aggregate statewide results from this year's survey are similar to the those from the first year of data collection. Collectively, the EC Councils collaboration scores were above criterion cut-points established by the survey authors on all but one out of 43 survey items. This suggests that positive and effective collaboration is occurring among local early childhood stakeholders via the EC Councils infrastructure.

The one item on which nearly all Councils have scored below the cut-point for the past two years is in the "authenticity" category and asks respondents whether "Decisions are often made in advance and simply confirmed by the process." Further analysis is warranted to explore this result in greater depth. Most EC Councils have intentionally put executive or steering committees in place as part of their organizational structure as a mechanism for leadership development and efficient decision making between meetings. It is unclear from this

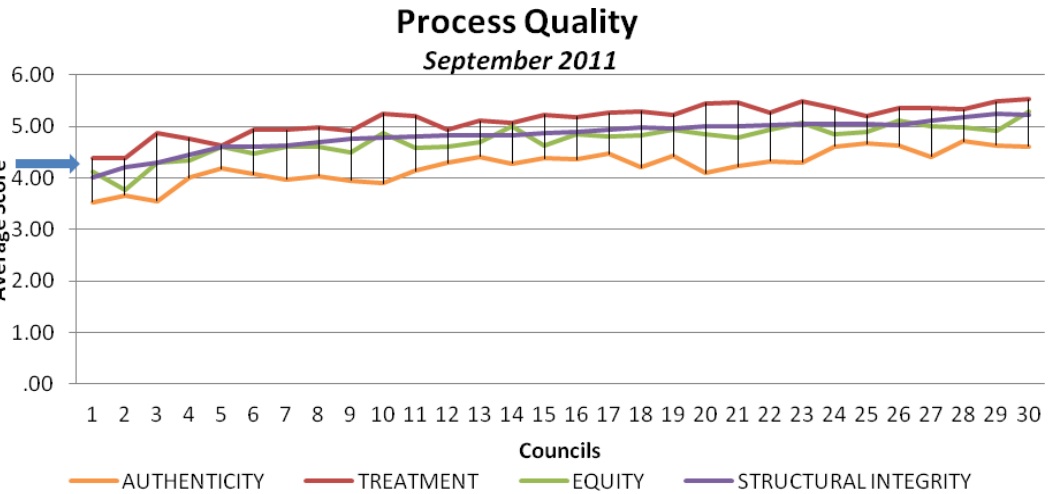


Figure 3: Councils' "Process Quality" results by factor (authenticity, treatment, equity and structural integrity). The blue arrow shows target criterion of 4.25.

survey data alone whether respondents are troubled by the fact that "decisions are often made in advance and confirmed by the process" or whether this is an intentional part of their processes on which they rely for fast and flexible decision making.

Variations in Results

In addition to aggregate collaboration scores from across the state, the data also demonstrate variations that exist across Councils as well. Figure 3, above, displays scores for all thirty EC Councils on the *Process Quality* section of the collaboration survey. Council scores for each "factor" or category (e.g., authenticity, structural integrity) are graphed with a separate

line. Individual councils are represented with numbers (1-30), rather than names, and are displayed across the bottom of the chart.

For most, if not all process quality factors, Councils' scores are above the criterion of 4.25 (visualized by the blue arrow on the left-hand side of the chart). However, some Councils' scores did fall below this level. Caution should be exercised in drawing broad conclusions about any one data source. The best use of this information is for the local Councils themselves to examine and make sense of their own data, data trends, and responses relative to statewide results.

REASONS STAKEHOLDERS PARTICIPATE IN COUNCILS

- **Genuine commitment to common goals for young children**
- **Opportunity to network; share and gather information**
- **Ability to influence decisions and advocate for constituents**
- **Development of positive relationships across domains and opportunities to partner**

— THEMES FROM NARRATIVE
QUESTIONS ON 2011
COLLABORATION SURVEY

Collaboration in Action

**“THE EFFORTS OF THE
GROUP TRANSLATE INTO
MEANINGFUL
IMPROVEMENTS IN
CHILDREN’S LIVES.”**

**“EVERYONE
CONTRIBUTES, WHICH IS
CONSISTENT WITH HOW
OUR COMMUNITY
APPROACHES CHILDREN’S
HEALTH AND RELATED
ISSUES.”**

— QUOTES FROM NARRATIVE
QUESTIONS ON 2011
COLLABORATION SURVEY

Collaboration is not a goal in itself for Colorado’s Early Childhood Councils. Instead, it is a mechanism that Early Childhood Councils utilize in an effort to achieve a high quality, accessible system of services for young children and families (refer back to the Theory of Change visual on page 1 for more information).

To help assess the extent to which participation in their local Early Childhood Councils is impacting members’ service practices back at their home organizations, the

collaboration survey asks respondents to rate two specific statements on a 4-point level-of-agreement scale:

- As a result of participating in this collaboration, my home organization has adopted shared

goals developed by the Council; and

- My home organization has developed or improved programs or services it delivers as a result of participation in the collaboration.

The distribution of Councils’ average scores from these two items are displayed in Figure 4, below. Scores at or above a criterion of 3.00 reflect strong scores regarding respondents’ perceptions of effective service impacts as a result of Council participation. In fact, average

scores for these two items in 2011 were above the 3.00 criterion for 24 of the 30 EC Councils. And for seven Councils across the state, respondents’ average combined ratings for these items fell between 3.36 to 4.00.

In practice, these scores translate into more effective local services that reflect shared community goals for young children. Early Childhood Councils report quarterly with data and qualitative information about these kinds of activities and successes.

Frequency Distribution Service Impact

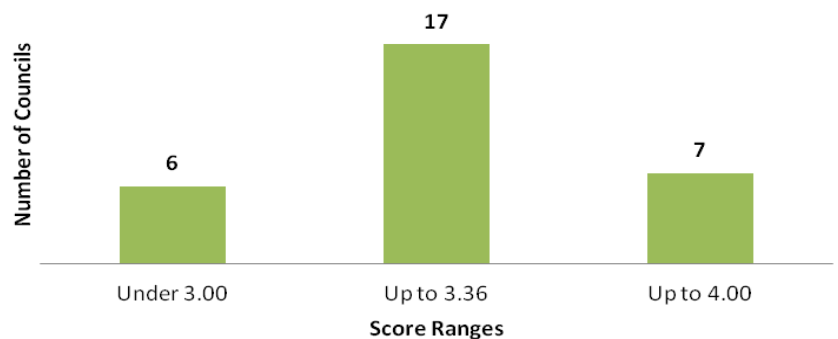


Figure 4: Respondents in 24 of 30 Councils report changed goals, programs or services in their home organizations because of their Council participation.

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web at:
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early/ECC.htm](http://www.cde.state.co.us/early/ECC.htm)

Colorado’s Early Childhood Councils integrate services delivered through a comprehensive early childhood system that includes early learning, family support, health and mental health programs. Authorizing legislation calls on the Councils “To develop and ultimately implement a comprehensive system of early childhood services to ensure the school readiness of children five years of age or younger.” (HB 07-1062)

The Early Childhood Councils initiative is funded by Child Care Development Block Grant/Child Care Development Funds and is administered at the state level by a partnership between the Colorado Department of Human Services and the Colorado Department of Education.

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