

ECLC

Early Childhood Leadership Commission

Annual Report 2023



PRESENTED TO:

Governor Jared Polis, The Colorado General Assembly, Senate Education Committee, Senate Health & Human Services Committee, House Education Committee, House Health & Human Services Committee

Letter from the Governor



COLORADO
Governor Jared Polis

Dear Early Childhood Stakeholders,

What a momentous year for Early Childhood Education! Over the past year, we have made great strides toward ensuring that Colorado is the best place to raise a family. With the hard work and dedication of the early childhood community, we have continued to build a strong system of support for young children and their families that serves as an example to the rest of the nation.

This year, we celebrated the first full year of the Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC) and the launch of the Colorado Universal Preschool program. Over 38,000 families enrolled in Universal Preschool in its first year, well above projections, which equates to over \$150 million in savings for Colorado families. The passage of [Proposition II](#) further guarantees that we will be able to continue to increase access, including offering additional hours for more families. Beyond this, CDEC also continued to administer over \$700 million in stimulus funds to support families and help the state build back stronger.

In addition to increasing access to high quality early learning, we have also taken steps to increase economic well-being for families in the state. In the fall special legislative session, we passed [SB23B-002](#) which will provide children with access to healthy foods in summer months through the Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer Program as well as [HB23B-1001](#): Emergency Rental Assistance Grant Program and [HB23B-1003](#): Property Task Force both aimed at lowering the cost of living and helping families stay in their homes.

The Early Childhood Leadership Commission has served as a key partner in advancing this work. The newly refreshed *Early Childhood Colorado Framework* offers a bold vision for a strong, comprehensive early childhood system to support Colorado's families. I am eager to partner with ECLC and early childhood organizations from across the state to continue this work in 2024.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jared Polis".

Jared Polis
Governor

Letter from the ECLC Co-Chairs

Dear Governor Polis, Lt. Governor Primavera, Cabinet Members, and Colorado General Assembly:

The Early Childhood Leadership Commission (ECLC) is pleased to present our twelfth annual report. The ECLC serves as Colorado's federally-authorized state advisory council and works in partnership with our statewide early childhood community to ensure successful outcomes for young children and their families by advancing the alignment, coordination, and efficiency of early childhood programs and services across the state.

With the one year anniversary of the creation of the Colorado Department of Early Childhood, the launch of the Colorado Universal Preschool program, and the end of the federal COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, 2023 was a year for celebration and reflection. The ECLC has taken these milestones as a chance to consider the lessons learned and develop strategies to build upon the momentum of recent years to create an even stronger early childhood system to support Colorado's children and families.

In order to articulate the role the ECLC will play in the coming years, we created the [ECLC 10-Year Strategic Plan](#), which defines ECLC's key functions of accountability, alignment, and advocacy and outlines the results that we aim to achieve: an aligned, accessible system of support for children and families; a diverse, qualified, and supported workforce; and the data and funding needed to put best practices into place. The strategies and activities included in the plan will serve as a map for how the ECLC can support the state to become a place where all children are valued, healthy, and thriving.

Since 2008, the state's early childhood community has embraced the [Early Childhood Colorado Framework](#) as a guiding tool to build a strong and equitable early childhood system. In 2023, the ECLC led a robust public engagement effort to update the Framework to ensure it continues to serve as a pathway for collaboration for all of our state partners. The refreshed Framework defines a strong early childhood system as one that addresses whole person health and well-being, learning and development, family support and education, and economic mobility for children and families. It also highlights the essential role that the early childhood workforce plays in the strength of that system and reaffirms our commitment to core guiding principles with equity as a key driver toward our shared vision.

In 2024, we will continue to build on these efforts to create a strong, aligned early childhood system by finalizing and beginning to implement a Statewide Comprehensive Strategic Plan and a Comprehensive Workforce Plan. Both of these efforts will provide partners from across the state and within all domains of the early childhood system a roadmap to work together in a collaborative and coordinated way.

We are grateful to Governor Polis, Lt. Governor Primavera, the General Assembly, our state agency partners, early childhood service providers, and the many early childhood advocates for your collaboration on our shared goals. We look forward to continuing our partnership in the years to come. And lastly, we extend our deep appreciation to the early childhood professionals working everyday to support children and families across Colorado.

Sincerely,



Adeeb Khan
ECLC Co-Chair



Sue Renner
ECLC Co-Chair



Susan Steele
ECLC Co-Chair



About the Early Childhood Leadership Commission

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The ECLC was originally established by the Colorado Legislature in 2010 and was re-authorized until 2025 through HB22-1295. The Commission is comprised of 21 individuals representing a full spectrum of early childhood champions, advocates, and leaders. It includes parents, early childhood professionals, Head Start, school districts, local municipalities, foundations, nonprofits, businesses, and six state departments: Early Childhood, Education, Health Care Policy & Financing, Higher Education, Human Services, and Public Health and Environment. As Colorado's federally authorized state advisory council for early childhood, the role of the Commission is to be a statewide leader, subject matter expert, and advocate for best and promising practices throughout the state.

THE ECLC IS STATUTORILY CHARGED TO:

- Assist and monitor efforts to enhance alignment across programs and agencies that support young children and their families including collaboration among six state departments;
- Advise and make recommendations to the Governor's Office, the General Assembly, and state departments; and
- Develop strategies and monitor efforts to increase the access, quality, and equity of services and supports on behalf of pregnant women and children birth through age 8.

2023 ECLC Accomplishments

- Worked with more than **100 partners** including businesses, nonprofits, advocacy organizations, early childhood councils, government agencies and philanthropic partners to align and strengthen Colorado's early childhood systems on behalf of **pregnant women, children birth to eight, and their families**
- Supported the **Colorado Department of Early Childhood** during its first full year of implementation, including the launch of **Universal Preschool**, in alignment with the [Department of Early Childhood Transition Plan](#) and [Colorado Universal Preschool Recommendation](#)
- Coordinated and aligned efforts across a wide array of early childhood efforts through **ECLC Subcommittees and Working Groups**
- Led a robust public engagement process to refresh the [Early Childhood Colorado Framework](#) that provides a shared vision to guide Colorado's early childhood community toward outcomes of access, quality, and alignment
- Committed to ensuring that **equity, diversity, and inclusion** are central to the work of the Commission and its Subcommittees
- Continued to implement the **Early Childhood Workforce 2020 Plan**, Colorado's early childhood professional development plan, while also advising on the creation of a new comprehensive statewide workforce plan to guide efforts in the future
- Advanced the strategies of the state's **Preschool Development Grant Birth Through Five – Planning Grant**, including supporting a statewide needs assessment and developing a statewide comprehensive strategic plan
- Worked with the Office of Governor Jared Polis, the Colorado General Assembly, and early childhood advocacy organizations to promote **best and promising practices related to early childhood policy**
- Served as the **Federally Authorized State Advisory Council** that advised and provided guidance on sustaining a robust early childhood system

Early Childhood Colorado Framework 2023

The state of Colorado has demonstrated a deep understanding that when children and families have access to enriching early childhood experiences and environments, everyone thrives. With that understanding at the forefront, the state has made a strong commitment to building systems of support and services uniquely designed to ensure all children get the strong start they deserve.

Since 2008, the *Early Childhood Colorado Framework* has served as a guiding tool to build a strong and equitable early childhood system designed to provide a comprehensive range of high-quality supports during this most critical time of life. In 2023, the Early Childhood Leadership Commission led a process to refresh the *Early Childhood Colorado Framework* in order to ensure that it includes the most up-to-date research and reflects the most recent advances, as well as the ongoing challenges, in the state.

The newly refreshed Framework offers a bold shared vision for the future of early childhood in Colorado that invites new partners to the table and serves as a roadmap for ongoing collaboration to provide comprehensive services for children prenatal through age eight and their families across Colorado.

The Refresh Process

More than 600 people engaged in the process to refresh the Framework by offering insights, providing feedback, and serving as community experts and thought partners. Families and caregivers, child care providers, educators, health care professionals, community advocates, business leaders, policy makers, funders, and a diverse range of early childhood leaders brought their stories, hopes, and wisdom to the important work of helping to set the course toward a brighter future for Colorado's young children and families.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS AT-A-GLANCE

- 602** Coloradans from 49 counties across the state directly contributed to the process of gathering information and informing changes and updates
- 256** committed families, providers, community members, decision-makers and others participated in listening sessions to share perspectives and experiences that deepened understanding of what it takes to support young children and families in Colorado today
- 11** partners provided in-depth perspectives through 1-to-1 interviews designed to gather stories and more detailed reflections on where Colorado has been and preferred directions for the future
- 340** respondents to a statewide survey that cast a wide net in order to hear from as many concerned and committed partners as possible

Listening to and learning from the early childhood community represented a cornerstone of the refresh process. Success was measured by the extent to which the process authentically captured their voices and accurately reflected their lived experiences, hopes, and aspirations. To that end, all revisions or additions to the Framework were based on the insights and guidance from early childhood leaders across the state, a deep community engagement process, and key findings from research and the current landscape.

What's New?

The new Framework offers expanded information in order to draw in new partners, clarify shared terminology, and ensure that the information is accessible to a wide audience. The central feature is a highly visual **theory of change** designed to support more accessibility and engagement, as well as to clarify how all the components of the Framework are leading toward the vision. Beyond the theory of change, the full Framework includes expanded explanations, definitions, and examples in order to allow for further learning and deeper conversations.

In alignment with previous efforts to define the principles that guide early childhood work, the new Framework lists and defines **key shared principles** for the early childhood community. At the top of the list of

principles, it highlights equity as the core value that will drive work throughout the rest of the system, which will support its integration throughout all following actions and outcomes.

While previous iterations of the Framework defined the domains of the early childhood system, this refresh refines and expands definitions of the components that create a strong system. It illustrates a strong system as one centered on children and families and includes a focus on **four domains**: whole person health and well-being, learning and development, family support and education, and economic mobility. The new Framework also highlights the essential role of the early childhood **workforce** to all of the domains and includes the **infrastructure** elements needed to support a strong system.

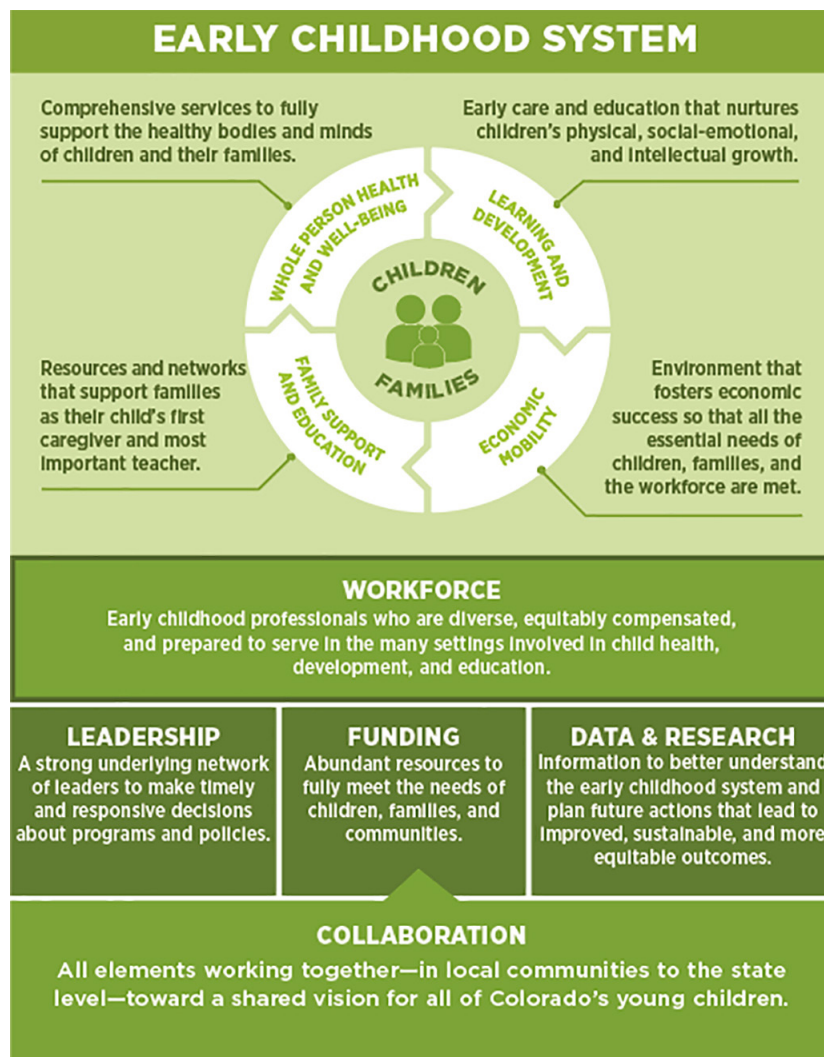
One thing that remained consistent in the new Framework is the shared vision that all children are valued, healthy, and thriving. It was clear from public

engagement that this statement offers a clear, concise, and bold vision to guide our shared efforts to support the state's children and families.

Moving Forward

Every Coloradan has a role to play in making our state the best place for children to grow and learn. No single person, organization, or agency holds the resources or capacity to achieve the state's shared vision alone. Instead, success will require everyone to roll up their sleeves and take action in some way. Considering the significance of the early years, there is no time to waste. The Framework is an important step and provides a unifying model to envision what the future will look like when **all of Colorado's children are valued, healthy, and thriving**.

To learn more about the new Framework and access resources, visit earlychildhoodframework.org



Early Childhood Leadership Commission Strategic Plan

The ECLC 10-Year Strategic Plan was created in 2023 to reflect the recent changes in Colorado's early childhood system and guide the Commission's work in the coming years.

The plan includes the guiding principles, core functions, strategies, levers for change, and desired results that the Commission will use to support the state in achieving its shared vision that **all children are valued, healthy, and thriving.**

Along with broad, long-term strategies, the ECLC also created a work plan for 2023-2025 that is guiding the work of the full Commission as well as the ECLC's Subcommittees and Working Groups.

To access the full Strategic Plan and Work Plan visit www.earlychildhoodcolorado.org/eclc-strategic-plan

Milestones Achieved in 2023

- A1.3 - Annually review relevant early childhood plans and progress to identify policy and system change recommendations (e.g. UPK, ECCS, PDG)
- A1.3.2 - Provide guidance and recommendations to inform the Universal Preschool quality standards development
- A1.4 - Review and provide feedback on new state plans as they are being developed
- A2.1.1 - Provide feedback and guidance on the workforce plan development
- A3.1 - Review plans to address any gaps when federal stimulus funding sunsets

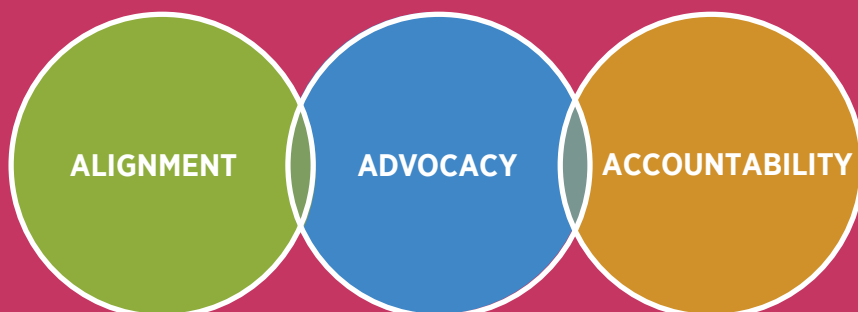


ECLC Strategic Plan

Guiding Principles



Core Functions



Desired Results



Colorado is successful in administering a system of comprehensive early childhood care, education, and support so that all families can easily identify, navigate and access services for their children.



Colorado recruits, retains, and equitably compensates a diverse and qualified early childhood workforce that provides quality care, education, and support to children and their families.



Colorado's early childhood system has the data needed to make evidence-based decisions and the funding resources to put best practices and plans into place, so all communities have what is needed to best support children and families.



Highlights from the ECLC Subcommittees

► COMMUNICATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE

Co-Chairs: Andrew Keating and Tom Massey

In 2023, the Early Childhood Leadership Commission made the decision to sunset the Communications Subcommittee. This decision was made based on the priorities in the new ECLC 10-Year Strategic Plan. Going forward, each Subcommittee will consider how to incorporate communications efforts into their work to advance the results of the Strategic Plan.

The Communications Subcommittee made lasting contributions to the work of the ECLC and the early childhood community in Colorado. The [Early Childhood Communication Efforts in Colorado](#) report and the [Communications Guidelines for Engaging Parents & Caregivers](#) continue to serve as valuable resources for communicating our efforts throughout the state.

The ECLC extends a sincere appreciation to everyone who served on the Communications Subcommittee over the years.

► DATA SUBCOMMITTEE

Co-Chairs: Whitney LeBoeuf and Susan Steele

The Data Subcommittee is charged to monitor progress across early childhood systems, support continued collection of data, use data to center equity, and evaluate progress on the ECLC's strategic priorities in order to leverage and connect existing data efforts and encourage effective data use in decision-making. In 2023, the Data Subcommittee supported the data needs of the new Colorado Department of Early Childhood, cross-sector access to data to support decision-making across all domains of the Early Childhood System, and the design of statewide initiatives to include accountability measures and a plan to evaluate impact.

The Data Subcommittee supports Result 3 from the ECLC Strategic Plan:

Colorado's early childhood system has the data needed to make evidence-based decisions and the funding resources to put best practices and plans into place, so all communities have what is needed to best support young children and families.

In 2023, the Subcommittee supported this goal through the following:

ALIGNMENT

- Advised on cross-sector data and evaluation projects such as the Statewide Needs Assessment, the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program evaluation, Heath eMoms survey, and the CDEC Comprehensive Analysis to determine data efforts
- Provided input on the alignment between Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten Assessments

ADVOCACY

- Advised on data efforts at the new Colorado Department of Early Childhood, including contributing to early stage discussions on creating an early childhood integrated data ecosystem and a common application for services
- Advocated for the collection, availability, and use of data for the Colorado Universal Preschool program

ACCOUNTABILITY

- Supported the development of Key Performance Indicators for the Statewide Comprehensive Strategic Plan
- Shared data and evaluation tools with cross-sector partners. Data sources shared include the Early Childhood Workforce Dashboard, the Preschool Development 2022 Survey, the Children's Campaign KIDS COUNT report, TEACH Colorado Community Engagement Findings, and Stimulus Funded Activities evidence briefs

Future Priorities

In 2024, the Data Subcommittee will:

- Identify existing family and provider satisfaction and engagement surveys to bring that data forward to inform ECLC committees and work groups (Strategic Plan A1.2)
- Make recommendations and support the implementation of a comprehensive Universal Preschool evaluation system to ensure legislative intent for an equitable statewide mixed delivery system that results in positive outcomes for children and families (Strategic Plan A3.2)
- Assess existing data sets and make recommendations on action needed to address gaps in longitudinal child, family, and workforce outcomes data and public facing reports (Strategic Plan A3.3)
- Support access to necessary data from public and private partners that can inform policy recommendations across the four domains of the *Early Childhood Colorado Framework*

► PROGRAM QUALITY & ALIGNMENT SUBCOMMITTEE

Co-Chairs: Floyd Cobb, Anna Jo Haynes, and Jeanne McQueeney

The Program Quality and Alignment (PQA) Subcommittee is charged with identifying opportunities for, and barriers to, the alignment of standards, rules, policies, and procedures across programs and agencies that support young children and to enhance the alignment of services and supports for young children. In 2023, the Subcommittee brought together partners from across the domains of the early childhood system to share program goals and results, discuss methods for alignment, and advise on the creation of statewide early childhood efforts focused on quality and access.

The PQA Subcommittee supports Result 1 from the ECLC Strategic Plan:

Colorado is successful in administering a system of comprehensive early childhood care, education, and supports so that all families can easily identify, navigate, and access services for their children.

In 2023, the Subcommittee supported this goal through the following:

ALIGNMENT

- Reviewed program reports and shared results with cross-sectors partners. Reports shared included the Preschool Development Grant Annual Report, results of the Whole Child Consultative Roles Conference, updates on the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Grant projects, and progress on Employee Based Child Care Development efforts
- Provided input on the development of the statewide Colorado Birth through Five 2023 Needs Assessment

ADVOCACY

- Guided the process to refresh the *Early Childhood Colorado Framework* and create a new Statewide Comprehensive Strategic Plan
- Advised on cross-sector program development including the CDEC Emergency and Disaster Plan and programs focused on early childhood math instruction

ACCOUNTABILITY

- Provided a platform for partners to share legislative priorities and updates throughout the legislative session and to request support and collaboration from cross-sectors partners
- Through the process of creating the Statewide Comprehensive Strategic Plan, convened a cross-sector work group to develop inclusive terms and definitions to be used in a variety of statewide efforts
- Provided input on CDEC's 2024 Regulatory Agenda

Future Priorities

In 2024, the PQA Subcommittee will:

- Create a process to request and review state agency plans and goals related to children and families (Strategic Plan A1.5)
- Regularly connect with existing early childhood forums to gather family and provider experience, satisfaction, and need so policy recommendations are informed by on-the-ground experiences (Strategic Plan A1.1)
- Elevate recommendations for increased alignment across state agency plans and goals on a regular basis (Strategic Plan A1.5.1) and elevate innovative policy strategies that support statewide access to high quality early childhood services (Strategic Plan A1.3.1)
- Support the dissemination and implementation of the Early Childhood Colorado Framework and Statewide Comprehensive Strategic Plan
- Expand the focus of the Subcommittee to include increasing access. This includes changing the name of the Subcommittee to Program Quality Alignment and Access (PQAA)

► PROGRAM QUALITY AND ALIGNMENT WORKING GROUPS

EARLY CHILDHOOD COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEMS (ECCS) WORKING GROUP

The [ECCS Working Group](#) guides the implementation of the Colorado Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Grant: Health Integration Prenatal-to-Three Program (CO-ECCS). This project works to advance the infrastructure, capacity, equity, and sustainability of Colorado's maternal and early childhood systems of care.

Key highlights from 2023 include:

- The **Coordinated Intake and Referral Systems (CIRS) Implementation Team** completed a [Family Engagement Checklist](#) and supported the creation of [Use Case Personas](#) to explore how families access Early Intervention services. Going forward, the CIRS team will use these tools to create recommendations to understand family needs in referral systems across the state.
- The **Early Childhood and Health Care Partnerships Implementation Team** contributed to the statewide early childhood Strategic Planning process, explored many different policy changes across the state, and is working to finalize a [Policy Spreadsheet](#) that will inform the implementation team's focus and advocacy in the new year.
- The **Equity Implementation Team** conducted focus groups and surveys for a statewide Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis of the state's early childhood and maternal health spaces. This SWOT by the Equity Implementation Team will be instrumental in the team's work to create an Equity Action Plan in 2024.

HOME VISITING INVESTMENT TASK FORCE

The Home Visiting Investment Task Force guides the implementation of the [Home Visiting Investment Plan](#) to expand the continuum of home visiting services in Colorado and inform planning for state budget requests, partnership with government agencies, solicitation of new federal funding, and alignment with philanthropic funding. 2023 highlights include:

- The **Availability, Collaboration, and Innovations Working Group** created a process for collecting and aggregating volume data on home visiting services and continued to promote the 2022 report on innovations and best practices in adopting virtual service delivery methods.
- The **Finance and Funding Opportunities Working Group** developed fact sheets on the use of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and Every Student Succeeds Act funds and monitored the development of Colorado's Health Services Initiative to determine potential support of home visiting services.
- The **Qualified Workforce Working Group** supported the creation of the PDG Planning Grant application which included support for the home visiting mileage and apprenticeship pilots. The group used data from the 2022 Home Visiting Survey to identify mechanisms to support the workforce.
- The **Outreach and Advocacy Working Group** completed a scan of home visiting messaging campaigns, began working to develop a shared home visiting messaging platform and toolkit, and supported the successful reauthorization of the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) grant, which will double the total funding of the grant over five years.



► EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SUBCOMMITTEE

Co-Chairs: Heather Craiglow, Jennifer O'Brien, Diana Schaack, and Paula Smith

The Early Childhood Workforce Development (ECWD) Subcommittee leverages comprehensive, collaborative, and responsive leadership to champion a diverse early childhood workforce by promoting equitable opportunities for preparation and compensation, professional development, and educational and training pathways for early childhood professionals in all settings. In 2023, the ECWD Subcommittee continued to guide the implementation of [Colorado's Early Childhood Workforce 2020 Plan](#) while also supporting the creation of a new Statewide Comprehensive Early Childhood Workforce Plan aimed at aligning statewide workforce efforts, outlining strategies to advance support for the cross-sector workforce, and sharing information about the multifaceted nature of the comprehensive early childhood workforce.

The ECWD Subcommittee supports Result 2 from the ECLC Strategic Plan:

Colorado recruits, retains, and equitably compensates a diverse and qualified early childhood workforce that provides quality care, education, and support to children and their families.

In 2023, the Subcommittee supported this goal through the following:

ALIGNMENT

- Provided a platform for partners to share workforce efforts, including those related specifically to the Workforce 2020 Plan activities, and to discuss collaboration and alignment. Projects shared include information on the Early Childhood Professional Credential 3.0 and the associated tax credit, Early Intervention Workforce Investment Committee efforts, Home Visiting Investment Task Force efforts, CIRCLE Grant programs focused on the workforce, higher education funding through HB23-1246, and CDEC stimulus efforts
- Advised on the creation of Universal Preschool teacher qualification requirements
- Supported and advised the new Workforce Division within the Colorado Department of Early Childhood

ADVOCACY

- Supported the creation of the Comprehensive Early Childhood Workforce Plan which will be finalized in 2024
- Supported the creation of and promotion of the Compensation and Benefits Task Force Report which includes advocacy tools to support the improvement of compensation and benefits for the early childhood workforce
- Provided input on workforce strategies to be included in the Statewide Comprehensive Strategic Plan

ACCOUNTABILITY

- Provided input on the needs of the workforce to inform Colorado's Birth through Five 2023 Needs Assessment
- Monitored the advancement of the goals included in the Workforce 2020 Plan and considered how progress on the plan should inform the creation of the new Statewide Comprehensive Workforce Plan

Future Priorities

In 2024, the Workforce Development Subcommittee will:

- Guide the finalization of the new Statewide Comprehensive Early Childhood Workforce Recommendations and select priority recommendations to create an implementation plan
- Develop an outcome map for priority strategies and work with ECLC Data Subcommittee to monitor progress toward implementation outcomes
- Create infrastructure for a landscape analysis showing scaled investments toward initiatives related to the Statewide Comprehensive Early Childhood Workforce Plan recommendations
- Advocate for innovative policy strategies and funding needed to advance the Statewide Comprehensive Early Childhood Workforce Plan (A2.3.1) and monitor current investments in early childhood to ensure that strategies can be achieved

The ECLC Partners with State Agencies to Support Young Children and Their Families

Colorado Department of Health Care Policy & Financing (HCPF)

HCPF administers Health First Colorado (Colorado's Medicaid program), Child Health Plan *Plus* (CHP+), and other health coverage programs for Coloradans who qualify.

HCPF's mission is to improve health care equity, access, and outcomes for the people we serve while saving Coloradans money on health care and driving value for Colorado.

Health First Colorado is HCPF's largest program, covering approximately 1.7 million Coloradans. Children comprise approximately 40% of Health First Colorado members. Most Health First Colorado members are enrolled in the Accountable Care Collaborative, which seeks to improve

member health and experience while improving health care affordability. CHP+, which includes children and pregnant people, covered approximately 49,000 Coloradans in calendar year 2023.

Approximately 43% of all babies born in Colorado in calendar year 2022 were born to Health First Colorado or CHP+ members. HCPF also works closely with other state agencies, stakeholders, and partners to improve the health and well-being of children in Colorado with a focus on the social determinants of health and maternal health.

LEARN MORE ABOUT HCPF AT [HCPF.COLORADO.GOV](https://hcpf.colorado.gov)

Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment (CDPHE)

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's mission is to advance Colorado's health and protect the places where we live, learn, work, and play. This year's early childhood highlights include:

• HEALTHY EATING ACTIVE LIVING

Colorado child care center licensing regulations include 21 high-impact obesity prevention standards and require that all ECE centers follow CACFP meal patterns. Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) includes one or more obesity prevention standards, and Colorado Shines Professional Development Information System (PDIS) offers obesity prevention training for credit. With support from [Healthy Eating Active Living in Early Childhood](#) partners, Colorado's overall score improved from 42 in 2010 to 76 in 2022.

• CHILD AND ADULT CARE FOOD PROGRAM (CACFP)

CACFP eligibility expanded to qualified exempt home providers that participate in the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program in June 2023 (also known as CCCAP QE providers). As of December 2023, CDEC had 114 CCCAP QE providers, and 22 CCCAP QE providers were participating in CACFP. In collaboration with CDEC, CDPHE, and nutrition and early childhood advocates, family child care home sponsoring organizations continue to implement outreach strategies to raise awareness about the benefits of the program.

• TAX CREDIT OUTREACH

CDPHE's Economic Mobility Team led the creation of a Colorado-specific data product to monitor progress on expanding access to tax credits via the [Earned Income](#)

[Tax Credit \(EITC\) and Poverty Measures Dashboard](#).

Specific to Colorado's Expanded EITC, claims went from 3,000 in 2020 to 4,500 in 2021 to almost 16,000 in 2022. The [Volunteer Income Tax Assistance evaluation summary](#) for the 2023 tax season showed 53 VITA locations participated in the initiative serving 20,361 clients. This included 3,844 clients who claimed CTC and/or EITC resulting in \$12 million going back into the pockets of Coloradans.

• [COLORADOORALHEALTH.ORG](https://coloradooralhealth.org) HAS LAUNCHED!

The Colorado Oral Health website now hosts the Cavity Free at Three program, School-based Oral Health resources (Smart Mouths, Smart Kids), dental integration initiatives, community water fluoridation, and much more. The website is also a hub for oral health initiatives, supporting partners to plan individual efforts within the *Framework to Advance Oral Health Equity in Colorado*, offering shared data, resources, and updated information on oral public health strategies.

• DEVELOPMENTAL SCREENING AND REFERRAL E-REFERRAL PILOT

The e-referral project enables electronic closed loop communication between families, health care providers, and Early Intervention Colorado to expand access to early childhood developmental services and supports. Phase Two of the pilot has included onboarding Children's Hospital Colorado. The volume of referrals is anticipated to be four times of the original pilot.

LEARN MORE ABOUT CDPHE AT [COLORADO.GOV/CDPHE](https://colorado.gov/cdphe)

Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE)

The Colorado Department of Higher Education's mission is to support students, advocate and develop policies to maximize higher education opportunities for all. The Department is committed to partnering with institutions of higher education, state agencies, and stakeholders to recruit, prepare, and support a thriving early childhood workforce.

Highlights from the past year include:

- CDHE partnered with CDEC to distribute more than \$5 million in scholarships for students pursuing an Early Childhood Education certificate or degree and almost \$3 million toward students completing ECE 1011 and ECE 1031 and provided almost 300 ECE teachers with funds for student loan forgiveness.
- CDHE continued participation in strategic planning for the Universal Preschool program workforce with CDEC, CDE, and the Governor's Office.
- Per Senate Bill 22-192 Opportunities for Credential Attainment, CDHE convened the Education Stackable Credential Pathways Leadership Team and developed two stackable credential pathways in education, which were approved by the Colorado Commission on Higher Education.
 - **Pathway 1: Early Childhood Education to Degree + Licensure Birth to Age Eight** - This pathway illustrates

how to navigate the various training options and workforce requirements to advance in early childhood careers. The pathway highlights the child development associate non-degree credential and the associated three credits for prior learning toward the associate teacher, teacher, infant supervisor, and director stackable certificates as well as the associate degree that stacks to ECE bachelor's plus licensure resulting in increased pay.

- **Pathway 2: Early Childhood Apprenticeship to Degree** - In this new pathway, the learner can begin an ECE registered apprenticeship program partnered with an institution of higher education and work as a teacher assistant or paraeducator. The learner receives credit for prior learning for apprenticeship work-based experience to complete an associate degree. They can later transfer to a four-year university to continue and obtain licensure upon completion of a bachelor's degree in early childhood, which results in increased pay.
- More than 200 licensure credentials in early childhood were completed at four-year programs during the 2022-2023 school year, including 26 in Early Childhood Special Education, 17 in Early Childhood Special Education Specialist, and 159 in Early Childhood Education (birth to age eight).

LEARN MORE ABOUT CDHE AT [CDHE.COLORADO.GOV](https://cdhe.colorado.gov)

Colorado Department of Education (CDE)

The Colorado Department of Education's Elementary Literacy and School Readiness Office works together to support comprehensive early childhood alignment within the department.

Highlights for the year include:

- Supporting the initial implementation of state funded preschool in partnership with CDEC to ensure access and participation of preschoolers with disabilities.
- Providing support to 176 school districts that administered the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) in its final year. CPP graduates are less likely to be identified with a significant reading deficiency and more likely to graduate from high school on time than peers who did not participate in CPP. The CPP program served more than 500,000 children over its 34-year history.
- Continuing to be nationally recognized as the state with the highest rate of preschoolers with an Individualized Education Program served in inclusive early childhood programs. More than 92% of preschoolers receive their special education and related services in classrooms with a majority of typically developing students.

- Continuing to administer the Comprehensive Literacy State Development grant, a five-year, \$16 million federal grant that supports literacy birth to grade 12. Funds help districts develop and implement local literacy plans to improve student learning outcomes by expanding early literacy initiatives for children birth to 5 years old.
- Providing no cost evidence-based training in teaching reading to Colorado's kindergarten through third grade teachers in support of the READ Act. Over 27,000 teachers have enrolled in and 6,000 have completed the training.
- Began administering a no cost evidence-based training in teaching of literacy to administrators and principals.
- Provided career navigation information to over 1,200 individuals.
- Provided international transcript evaluation to 50 individuals from 23 countries.

LEARN MORE ABOUT CDE AT [CDE.STATE.CO.US](https://cde.state.co.us)



Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS)

The vision of the Colorado Department of Human Services is to serve Coloradans through bold and innovative health and human services.

Early childhood highlights from 2023 include:

OFFICE OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

- Assisted in the passage of the Code of Colorado Regulations administrative rules for SB23-082. “Fostering Opportunities” has been initiated in two new school districts and has expanded access to locally available services for transition-age foster youth in Colorado to include the whole of the San Luis Valley.
- Assisted with the significant expansion of specialized foster care (treatment, therapeutic, and professional) beds through child placement agencies, CDHS contracts, and counties.
- Assisted with two kinship-related bills to support kinship caregivers in Colorado and advanced efforts to support counties and families with Family Time changes to support parents who have children or youth in out-of-home care. Additional legislation passed provides more support for parents who are incarcerated.
- Supported additional counties with implementing Differential Response which increased our state’s expansion of this family-engaged child welfare practice - 63 counties currently practice or are in the process of implementing Differential Response.
- Revised the Code of Colorado Regulations administrative rule in partnership with county departments, stakeholders, and community providers to ensure the majority of youth found to be responsible for incidents

of minor and moderate levels of abuse and/or neglect no longer receive a founded administrative finding which can impact employment opportunities later in life.

OFFICE OF ECONOMIC SECURITY

- The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) helps Coloradans with lower income to access healthy food through a monthly cash-like benefit. Colorado’s SNAP program supported an average of 569,246 participants (301,803 households) each month with an average of \$114,007,218 in cash-like benefits to increase access to nutritious foods. This is a historic high for Colorado’s SNAP participation. 42% of Colorado SNAP households have at least one child in the home.
- In its final year, Colorado’s Pandemic EBT program provided more than \$44 million to roughly 410,000 school-aged children to support their nutritional needs when school was not in session.
- SNAP-Education is SNAP’s nutrition education and obesity prevention arm. SNAP-Ed’s goals are to teach Coloradans how to buy and prepare healthy foods on a budget; motivate people to increase their physical activity; introduce kids to fruits and vegetables through nutrition classes, school gardens, and healthier school lunchrooms; and make positive and healthy changes in the environments where our families live. Through partnership with statewide nutrition education organizations, SNAP-Ed reached 20,711 individuals with direct nutrition education, of whom 15,823 were youth, in 2023.

LEARN MORE ABOUT CDHS AT [CDHS.COLORADO.GOV](https://cdhs.colorado.gov)

Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC)

CDEC's mission is to ensure the delivery of an inclusive, community-centered, data-driven, high-quality, and equitable early childhood system that supports the care, education, and well-being of Colorado's young children, their caregivers, and early childhood professionals in all settings. The department spent the last year improving access to high-quality education, supporting the early childhood workforce, and expanding family programs across the state.

Highlights from the year include:

- Through feedback from the Rules Advisory Council (RAC), promulgated rules concerning the Colorado School Readiness Quality Improvement Program, Early Intervention Colorado Program, Universal Preschool, Early Childhood Councils, CCCAP, General Licensing, Child Care Licensing, Family Child Care Homes, and more.
- Worked with 32 Local Coordinating Organizations (LCOs) to support local access and equitable delivery of early childhood and family support programs throughout the state, including Universal Preschool.
- Enrolled over 39,100 four year olds, and over 9,500 three year olds, in high-quality preschool through the Colorado Universal Preschool program.
- Partnered with over 1,800 preschool providers across school-district, community-center, and family-home contexts.
- Drafted Preschool Quality Standards with input from over 700 stakeholders that build on the strengths of past state investments, promote new national, regional, and local partnerships, support multiple pathways toward quality, and open new solutions for addressing challenges across the early childhood sector.
- Awarded \$5.4 million to 750 providers in 53 counties for health and mental health support.
- Awarded \$15.4 million in grants across 17 counties – and created over 2,300 childcare slots – through the Employer-Based Child Care Grant Program. This also created an estimated 288 teacher positions.
- Distributed over \$214 million to over 3,800 childcare providers in all 64 counties through our Child Care Operations Stabilization Grant Program.
- Awarded funds to 170 providers to expand current program capacity or open new child care programs through our Emerging and Expanding Grant Program. This resulted in the creation of over 1,800 new infant and toddler slots across the state.
- Oversaw an unprecedented 11.6% increase in the early childhood workforce in one year – from 21,617 qualified early childhood professionals in July 2022 to 24,151 by June 30, 2023 – through strategies that focused on expanding access to professional development opportunities; reducing financial hardship through loan forgiveness and scholarships; and strengthening work environments through peer mentoring, coaching, and apprenticeship opportunities.
- Addressed the financial challenges providers face in offering care to CCCAP families by developing an alternative rate methodology for CCCAP providers that aligns reimbursement rates with the true cost of providing quality care and lowered the maximum family co-pay for CCCAP services from 14% to 10%, helping keep money in the pockets of low-income working families.
- Implemented a Teacher Compensation Pilot to attract and retain early childhood staff.
- Launched the Friend, Family, and Neighbor (FFN) Advisory Council, which advises the Department, legislators, and partners about the needs of FFN providers and how we can make changes to benefit this community.

LEARN MORE ABOUT CDE AT CDEC.COLORADO.GOV



Looking Forward

In the coming years, the ECLC will utilize the 10-Year Strategic Plan and the *Early Childhood Colorado Framework* to guide its work toward achieving the stated results. Through continued collaboration with state and local partners, the Commission will push forward toward ensuring that Colorado is a state where **all children are valued, healthy, and thriving**.

In 2024, the Commission will:

- Promote alignment across all domains of the early childhood system; support the development of accountability measures to ensure program quality and access; and advocate for the data, funding, and policies needed to advance the state's shared vision
- Continue to support and advise the Colorado Department of Early Childhood
- Support the continuous improvement of the Colorado Universal Preschool program through public engagement and evaluation efforts
- Champion partner uptake and implementation of the *Early Childhood Colorado Framework* so it continues to guide Colorado's early childhood system
- Finalize and champion a new comprehensive early childhood workforce development plan
- Support the creation of a new statewide comprehensive strategic plan and develop mechanisms to encourage shared ownership and accountability for the plan's strategies
- Serve as stewards of equity and stand united and steadfast with the early childhood community to promote diversity and inclusion
- Review plans to address gaps when federal stimulus funding sunsets and develop recommendations in collaboration with the CDEC
- Champion the use of reliable, relevant, and secure data to inform and guide future priorities and investments
- Develop stronger connections and collaborations across prenatal-to-3 services to ensure alignment of Colorado's early childhood and maternal and child health systems



In the coming year, we look forward to working alongside the Governor, Colorado General Assembly, state agencies, early childhood partners, parents, and families to build a stronger early childhood system that addresses whole person health and well-being, family support and education, learning and development, and economic mobility for Colorado's young children and families.

2024 Early Childhood Leadership Commission

Co-Chairs

Adeeb Khan - Executive Director of Denver Economic Development and Opportunity, City of Denver

Sue Renner - Vice President of Philanthropy, Merage Foundations

Susan Steele - Former President & CEO, Buell Foundation

Tamara Hiler - Special Advisor for Early Childhood and K-12 Policy for Governor Jared Polis (former Co-Chair)

Commissioners

Lucinda Burns - Executive Director, Early Childhood Options

Minna Castillo Cohen - Director, Office of Children, Youth and Families, Colorado Department of Human Services

Floyd Cobb, Ph.D - Associate Commissioner, Student Learning, Colorado Department of Education

Heather Craiglow - Head Start Collaboration Director, Colorado Department of Early Childhood

Pamela Harris, Ph.D - President & CEO, Mile High Early Learning

Happy Haynes - Executive Director, Denver Parks and Recreation, City and County of Denver

Rachel Hutson - Children, Youth and Families Branch Director, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

Whitney LeBoeuf, Ph.D - Director of Data Integration and Analytics, Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab

Jeanne McQueeney - County Commissioner, Eagle County

Leslie Nichols, Ed.D. - Superintendent, Gunnison Watershed School District

Jasmin Ramirez - Parent Representative & School Board Member, Roaring Fork School District

Sondra Ranum - Director, ECE Workforce Policy, Colorado Department of Higher Education

Nicole Riehl - President & CEO, Executives Partnering to Invest in Children (EPIC)

Maria Tarajano Rodman - Executive Director, Valley Settlement

Lisa Roy, Ed.D - Executive Director, Colorado Department of Early Childhood

Robert Werthwein, Ph.D - Senior Advisor for Behavioral Health, Colorado Department of Health Care Policy & Financing (ex-officio member)

Jake Williams - Executive Director, Healthier Colorado

New Commissioners in 2023

Sam Fogleman - Interim Director of Educator Preparation Pathways, Colorado Department of Higher Education

Glenn Robinson - Deputy Executive Director, Adams County Human Services Department

Staff

Shannon Wilson - ECLC Administrator

Kristina Heyl - State and Community Partnerships Manager

ECLC Annual Report Acronym Guide

ACC: Accountable Care Collaborative

CCCAP: Colorado Child Care Assistance Program

CDE: Colorado Department of Education

CDEC: Colorado Department of Early Childhood

CDHE: Colorado Department of Higher Education

CDHS: Colorado Department of Human Services

CDPHE: Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

CHP+: Child Health Plan Plus

CSB: Colorado Shines Brighter

ECCS: Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems

ECE: Early Care and Education

ECLC: Early Childhood Leadership Commission

ECWD: Early Childhood Workforce Development Subcommittee

HCPF: Health Care Policy & Financing

MIECHV: Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting

OEC: Office of Early Childhood

PDIS: Professional Development Information System

PDG: Preschool Development Grant

PQA: Program Quality and Alignment Subcommittee

QRIS: Quality Rating and Improvement System

Thank you to all of the early childhood professionals, stakeholders, and champions who work every day to ensure all children are valued, healthy, and thriving!



**VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR
ECLC RESOURCES &
PAST NOTABLE WORK**

earlychildhoodcolorado.org

- [ECLC 10-Year Strategic Plan and Work Plan](#)
- [Universal Preschool Policy Discussion Guide](#)
- [ECLC Equity Statement](#)
- [Senate Bill 19-063 Infant and Family Child Care Home Action Plan Report](#)
- [Early Childhood Colorado Framework Website](#)
- [Past ECLC Annual Reports, 2012 - 2022](#)
- [ECLC Early Childhood Communication Efforts in Colorado](#)
- [Member List](#)
- [Organizational Chart](#)
- [ECLC Bylaws](#)
- [Enabling Legislation](#)

Early Childhood Colorado Framework



ECLC
Early Childhood Leadership Commission

For questions relating to the ECLC, please visit earlychildhoodcolorado.org