

# Colorado Early Learning Partnership

A COMMON VOICE FOR OUR CHILDREN FROM THOSE WORKING IN  
EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES ACROSS COLORADO

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Colorado has a long history of caring about the well being of its youngest citizens. Over the course of nearly three decades, Colorado pursued an agenda that created a state-supported preschool program for the state's most high-risk young children, developed a quality rating system for early childhood care and education programs, and developed a comprehensive set of indicators to measure the readiness of children, their families, the communities in which they live, and the schools they will attend. During that same timeframe, a network of local early childhood councils was established aimed at utilizing the varied resources at the local level to improve outcomes for young children. In many ways, the outlook for young children in Colorado has improved considerably.

Despite having been a pioneer in many arenas, Colorado has not exerted the public and political will necessary to institutionalize, sustain and take these efforts to scale. Significant barriers have included political will, fiscal restraints on the state general fund and the lack of a statewide coordinated effort to agree on a priority and movement to get it done.



### Regions Visited by CELP Director:

- Adams
- Arapahoe
- Broomfield
- Boulder
- Chaffee
- Douglas
- Gunnison & Hinsdale
- Kit Carson, Washington, & Yuma
- Las Animas & Huerfano
- La Plata
- Larimer
- Logan, Phillips, & Sedgwick
- Mesa
- Montezuma & Dolores
- Morgan
- Pueblo
- Routt
- Summit
- Grand
- San Luis Valley
- Weld

A new Governor, Lt Governor, and legislators took office in January 2011. In anticipation of the political transitions ahead and the need to further engage rural communities, Colorado Early Learning Partnership (CELP) was established in August 2010. Along with helping to lead the early learning community through a significant political transition, it's purpose was to promote cross-sector thinking and action in early childhood, including connecting leaders at different levels of the system while staying focused on the early learning domain of the Early Childhood Colorado Framework. Coordination and integration of thought leaders invested in early learning with a common agenda that promoted children's well-being from birth to age eight was a priority for CELP. Through a series of listening tours and participation in state early learning initiatives best practices and resources were shared from local communities and the dots of a difficult puzzle began to be connected at both the state and the local levels.

The CELP director met with 444 stakeholders (including individuals and groups) in 31 counties to bring together partners from every sector of the community including business leaders, state government, local government, early childhood councils, elected officials, school districts, and child care centers, just to name a few. CELP synthesized the successes, challenges, concerns, and needs heard around the state and is encouraging communities to carry the following recommendations forward with a united voice for our kids. This effort will help preserve the progress made through the extensive stakeholder meeting process and to build from the foundational work done in the past.

## Top Recommendations to Improve Early Learning in Colorado

### *Additional Resources Needed at the Local Level*

**Recommendation** – Develop and distribute a tool kit on how to proceed with a local ballot initiative. Stakeholders understand the constitutional and budget constraints the state faces but are unclear what to do about it.

### *Availability and Affordability of Quality Infant and Toddler Care*

**Recommendation** – The state needs to partner with the private sector to develop a long-term strategic plan for addressing the training, funding, and availability of quality infant and toddler care. Licensed programs have room for 19 % of Colorado’s infants and toddlers. In some counties, capacity is lower.

### *Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP)*

**Recommendation** – The state should take control of CCCAP. Seek statutory or regulatory change as necessary to standardize eligibility requirements. Re-evaluate the county designation formula and consider using cost-of-living data to group the counties by regions. Re-design the Child Care Automated Tracking System (CHATS).

### *Transitions between Pre-K and the Public Schools*

**Recommendation** – Develop a mechanism to connect early childhood program professionals (Head Start, private preschools, child care centers, child care home providers, etc.) to the local school/district to ensure smooth transitions and reduce duplication.

### *Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) Funding and Council Requirements*

**Recommendation** – Funding should be increased incrementally in the School Finance Act to serve more at-risk children each year. When the economy recovers and dollars are available, fully fund CPP slots with a 3/4 PPR. Encourage local school districts to merge their CPP Councils with the local early childhood council where appropriate and desired.

### *Governance at the State Level for Early Childhood Programs*

**Recommendation** – Create a coherent state department of early childhood or, at a minimum, an Office of Early Childhood in the Colorado Department of Human Services in collaboration with the Colorado Department of Education and other state departments administering early childhood programs. The state can learn from the local early childhood council communities who have proven successful in collaboration, coordination, streamlining of services, and reducing red tape than the state has accomplished on its own and this is a necessary step

### *Other Prominent Themes from the Communities:*

- Creation of Full Day Kindergarten for all
- Access to trainings and consolidation of required conferences by state agencies in Denver
- Early childhood councils fully funded and expanded to serve all 64 counties
- Market and grow “Expanded Learning Opportunities” (ELOs)
- Early Childhood teacher effectiveness and professional development opportunities must be strengthened and expanded

In Colorado, we value our diverse communities and understand that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to providing high quality early education to our kids. At the same time, the CELP process allowed us to see that there are common needs that would help address some of the primary barriers facing our communities. CELP is an essential starting point. It has given a common voice to the communities and it is now the job of the foundations, communities, state agencies and early childhood stakeholders to carry these messages forward into action. We are the advocates for our children – Colorado’s future generations.

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