IMPROVE ACCESS TO HIGH QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION FOR ALL FAMILIES

High quality early care and education environments provide a stable place for children to grow and thrive, allowing them to build the strong foundation of cognitive and social-emotional skills they need to be prepared to succeed in school and develop life-long positive outcomes. Unfortunately, the availability of high quality services is severely lacking and poses a significant expense to families. Additional investments are needed to deliver services through a combination of programs, providers and settings, including licensed family and center-based child care programs, public schools, informal family/friend/ neighbor care and other community-based organizations. This mixed delivery system provides early childhood care and education options that ensure wherever children are cared for, they are in high quality, supportive environments. Particular attention should be paid to infant and toddler care, which is significantly more difficult for families to access and afford.

OUTCOMES: WHAT WE WANT TO SEE

A supported, funded mixed-delivery system exists to meet family needs.

Adults understand and support children's learning and development, including social and emotional.

Early care and education options meet the needs, expectations of families.

- Families, including those with high needs, experience timely and coordinated services and supports.
- Families have affordable child care options.

Family engagement and leadership opportunities exist within programs, schools, and communities.

- Families advocate for high quality comprehensive services and supports that lead to future success.

MEASURING PROGRESS

Accessibility

1. % of eligible children age three to five who were able to participate in Head Start or Colorado Preschool Program by region (CDE)
2. # licensed child care slots compared to Colorado children up to 12 months, 1-2 year olds, 3-5 year olds by region (include child care deserts map) (CDHS)

Affordability

3. % children in low income homes able to participate in CCCAP (CDHS)

Meeting Needs

4. % of families that quit a job, did not take a job, or changed a job because of problems with child care (DOLE)

Quality

5. % of licensed providers attaining a level 3-5 in Colorado Shines (CDHS)

ELEVATE THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE TO ENSURE COORDINATED CAREER PATHWAYS AND APPROPRIATE COMPENSATION

Early childhood educators provide the critical foundation for children in out-of-home care to develop the literacy and social-emotional skills they need to succeed in school. The early care and education sector is a cornerstone of local and state economic health, enabling parents to work and provide for their families while employing a large workforce of educators. However, as professional development opportunities and expectations for these educators have increased, compensation lags behind most other industries, and communities throughout Colorado are facing significant challenges recruiting and retaining a stable early childhood workforce. Ensuring that Colorado has a qualified, consistent and diverse early childhood workforce is critical to supporting the healthy development of children and maintaining a thriving economy.

OUTCOMES: WHAT WE WANT TO SEE

Early care and learning providers have higher compensation across all early childhood settings.

Early childhood educators obtain higher levels of training and professional development, measured through formal education and the PDIS.

- Education, coaching and ongoing training exist for caregivers, teachers and other professionals (aligned with Colorado's early childhood competencies).
- Clear, consistent qualifications and career pathways exist for individuals in the early childhood profession.

ECE providers of color and of diverse cultures are actively recruited/encouraged/incentivized to become ECE professionals.

Turnover rates among early learning and education providers across all formal care settings are reduced.

MEASURING PROGRESS

Compensation

1. % of ECE professionals earning a living wage by region, sector, setting (PDIS/DOLE)
2. % of ECE professionals who received public benefits for low income families (CO Workforce Survey)

Diversity

3. ECE worker diversity compared to children in care OR Diversity in providers across settings (ACS, Colorado Workforce Survey, Kids Count)

SUPPORT IMPROVED FAMILY HEALTH AND ECONOMIC SECURITY THROUGH A TWO-GENERATION APPROACH

Parents are their children's first and most important teachers. Ensuring that parents have the health and economic supports they need to provide a nurturing home environment and meet their children's basic needs is essential for a child's healthy development. Children who are cared for in stable environments with access to health services, nutritious foods, safe water, stable housing and high quality learning environments are better able to develop the skills they need to succeed in school and thrive in their communities. Unfortunately, many children are living in environments without these basic supports, which research suggests can lead to poor mental and physical health, less success at school and work, and lower socioeconomic status in adulthood. Colorado should continue to support family health and economic security through state and local programs and ensure that interventions provide opportunities for both children and caregivers.

OUTCOMES: WHAT WE WANT TO SEE

Family engagement and leadership opportunities exist within programs, schools, and communities.
- Family knowledge and capacity support children's healthy development and learning.
- Families advocate for high quality comprehensive services and supports that lead to future success.

Education, employment, housing, financial and legal supports contribute to family economic security.
- Families, including those with high needs, experience timely and coordinated services and supports.
- Family-friendly policies and practices exist in the workplace.
- Economic policies impacting families are enhanced or maintained (e.g. EITC).

Services and supports promote the well-being and resiliency of parents and caregivers (and children):
- Settings and practices promote strong relationships, social and emotional development, appropriate nutrition and physical activity.

MEASURING PROGRESS

Opportunity Index
- Economy
- Education
- Health
- Community

Process/Qualitative Measures TBD