

# COLORADO *Shines* BRIGHTER



**Birth Through Five**  
Strategic Plan 2020-2025



## Acknowledgements

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***For more information visit: [www.ColoradoOfficeOfEarlyChildhood.com](http://www.ColoradoOfficeOfEarlyChildhood.com)***

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## ► Background

Positive and nurturing experiences in the earliest years of life set the foundation for children’s cognitive development, social-emotional development and even their life-long physical health. That’s because during the first few years, children’s brains are developing fast. In fact, more than one million new brain connections form every second.<sup>1</sup> Because of this, the experiences and relationships that young children have in the early years can impact them for life.<sup>2</sup>

To maximize young children’s school readiness and life-long success, parents and caregivers often need access to programs, services and financial assistance within their community. These resources promote children’s health and well-being, learning and development, and support parents and caregivers in their role as their child’s first teacher.

In Colorado, the need for a coordinated system of programs and services is essential for all children, but it is especially critical for addressing the needs of a substantial number of our state’s youngest children. Colorado is home to approximately 399,800 children under 6, almost a fifth of whom (17.4%) are living in poverty,<sup>3</sup> while 12.5% live in rural areas or rural centers,<sup>4</sup> and 20.7% are living in households that speak a language other than English at home.<sup>5</sup> The 2019 birth through five needs assessment, *Colorado Shines Brighter: Opportunities for Colorado’s Early Childhood System*, indicates many of these children and their families would benefit from more equitable access to high-quality early childhood programs.

Colorado has a long history of supporting children from birth through kindergarten entry and beyond. The architecture of the current early childhood system dates back at least three decades. Policy and structural decisions of the late 1980 and early 1990s linked and integrated the multiple systems serving families with young children.<sup>6</sup> Colorado’s early childhood system of programs, services and funding are led at the state-level by the following entities:

### ***Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS)***

In 2012, Colorado brought together 23 funding streams administered through five state agencies into the CDHS Office of Early Childhood (OEC) to more efficiently and effectively support young children ages birth through eight and their families.

### ***Colorado Department of Education (CDE)***

In 2018, CDE brought together early childhood programs into the Preschool through Third Grade (P-3) Office to partner with educators and leaders to create seamless high-quality early learning environments.

### ***Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE)***

CDPHE works towards keeping all children safe and healthy using evidence-based prevention strategies.

### ***Colorado Department of Health Care Policy & Financing (HCPF)***

HCPF administers Health First Colorado (Colorado’s Medicaid Program), Child Health Plan Plus (CHP+) and other programs for Coloradans who qualify.

### ***Early Childhood Leadership Commission (ECLC)***

The ECLC is Colorado’s federally authorized state advisory council for early childhood. The ECLC supports coordination and collaboration across the early childhood system to increase the access, quality and equity of services and supports on behalf of pregnant people and children birth through eight and their families.

Since 2008, Colorado’s early childhood system has been guided by the Early Childhood Colorado Framework (Framework) (Figure 1), which promotes a shared vision that Colorado is a place where all children are valued, healthy and thriving. The Framework provides an opportunity for communities to better integrate and align efforts across learning and development, health and well-being, and family support and education. The Framework is used by state and local early childhood stakeholders as a resource to identify needs, guide planning and decision-making, and build partnerships that support access, quality and equity across the early childhood system.



The responsibility of caring for Colorado’s youngest children is shared between parents, caregivers, early childhood professionals, program administrators, policymakers, advocates and other stakeholders across public and private organizations and agencies at the state and local levels. The Colorado Shines Brighter Strategic Plan was developed in partnership with these stakeholders and aligns with the Early Childhood Colorado Framework (Figure 1) to support aligned and coordinated efforts to ensure all children are valued, healthy and thriving. The strategic plan is endorsed by the ECLC as the statewide birth through five systems strategic plan. Implementation and ongoing support of this strategic plan is described in detail in Governance (see page 24).

**Figure 1: Early Childhood Colorado Framework**





## ► Strategic Planning Process

In 2018, the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS), Office of Early Childhood (OEC) was awarded a Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families and the U.S. Department of Education. The initial grant was designed to support states to analyze the current landscape of their early childhood mixed-delivery system and implement changes to the system that maximize the availability of high-quality early care and education (ECE) options for low-income and disadvantaged families across providers and partners, improve the quality of care, streamline administrative infrastructure, and improve state-level early care and education funding efficiencies.

Colorado Shines Brighter, the state's PDG B-5 initiative, contributes to the state's shared vision that all children are ready for school when entering kindergarten. Colorado Shines Brighter adopted the following mission for the state's birth through five early childhood system:

- ⋮ 1. Colorado families have meaningful and equitable access to quality formal early care and education settings of their choosing which best meet the needs of their child and family, especially those who are vulnerable and infants and toddlers.
- ⋮ 2. Informal early care and education environments (parental, friend, family, and neighbor care) are enhanced to enrich and support children's physical, social, emotional and cognitive development.
- ⋮ 3. Colorado's birth through five early childhood state system is coordinated and aligned to enhance the resources available to families and to improve the quality of relationships among families, caregivers, and children.

To achieve the statewide vision of ensuring all Colorado children are ready for school when entering kindergarten, Colorado Shines Brighter identified six goals:

### GOAL 1: Align and Coordinate Systems

Colorado's birth through five early childhood system is coordinated and aligned to enhance resources available to families and to improve the quality of relationships between families and providers.

### GOAL 2: Innovate Service Delivery

Early care and education providers practice trauma-informed care, use practices informed by early childhood mental health, and incorporate inclusive practices as part of their service delivery.

### GOAL 3: Maximize Family Knowledge and Engagement

Children and families that enter the system through one program are offered meaningful and relevant services throughout the system.

### GOAL 4: Increase Meaningful and Equitable Access

The amount of early care and education programs available matches the demand for programs in age, type, specialized supports, and place.

### GOAL 5: Strengthen Business Practices

Colorado's mixed-delivery system is supported by strong and sustainable business models.



## GOAL 6: Improve the Quality of Early Care and Education Environments and the Workforce

Formal early care and education providers are rated Colorado Shines Levels 3-5, using a quality rating system based on the most recent research to reflect outcomes. Colorado recruits and retains a qualified and diverse early childhood workforce. Informal early care and education providers and families have access to professional development, training, and other resources to provide appropriate, responsive care that supports optimal child development and social emotional growth.

In 2019, Colorado conducted a birth through five needs assessment to better understand the strengths and opportunities that exist within the state's early childhood system. The resultant report, *Colorado Shines Brighter: Opportunities for Colorado's Early Childhood System*, was used to identify key strategies the state can employ to build upon its history of successful investments and to achieve the goals of Colorado Shines Brighter.

The OEC contracted with Child Trends to develop the strategic plan. Child Trends, in turn, partnered with Early Milestones Colorado and Marzano Research (strategic planning team) to conduct stakeholder outreach and engagement, review and align existing state and local strategic plans, and coordinate with the needs assessment vendor, Colorado Health Institute (CHI).

Collectively, the needs assessment and strategic planning activities resulted in input from more than 6,000 Coloradans, including over 5,000 parents and caregivers of children birth through five, to identify impactful strategies to increase their engagement in the state's early childhood system.

Throughout 2019, the OEC and the strategic planning team engaged the 57-member Program Quality and Alignment (PQA) Subcommittee of the Early Childhood Leadership Commission (ECLC) to guide Colorado Shines Brighter planning, data collection, data synthesis, and reporting (see Appendix Table 1).

## Strategic Plan Data Collection and Analysis Activities

The strategic planning team worked with the Colorado Health Institute to coordinate complementary data collection processes that engaged parents, caregivers, and key stakeholders across Colorado (see Appendix Table 2). This coordination was essential to ensuring geographic representation as well as participation by hard-to-reach populations such as immigrant and refugee families, families experiencing homelessness, Tribal families, and informal (friend, family and neighbor) child care providers.

### *Family Outreach*

Colorado Shines Brighter prioritized parent engagement throughout the strategic planning process. Parents and caregivers of children ages birth through five participated in surveys and focus groups, providing information on how families enter into the birth through five state system, what parents know (or do not know) about the services available to them, the information parents need in order to maximize their knowledge and choices within the mixed-delivery system, and the most effective modalities to inform and engage parents.

The parent survey resulted in 1,276 responses. The survey was available in both English and Spanish languages, and was administered online using the SurveyGizmo tool. The survey was primarily deployed using the Colorado-based non-profit Bright by Three's (BB3) text subscriber database, boasting 12,000 Colorado parents and caregivers of children birth through five. The survey was also distributed to the Child Care Resource and Referral parent contact list and the PQA Subcommittee member list.



Twenty five focus groups were conducted across the state to gather in-depth information from families about accessing early childhood programs and services. More than 100 individuals participated in focus groups conducted in partnership with the OEC and other partner organizations. Focus groups were especially helpful for engaging underrepresented populations.

**Table 1. Strategic Planning Focus Group Participants**

Family Stakeholder Group	Participants
Immigrant/Refugee	10
Spanish speaking	11
Immigrant/Refugee	8
Teen Parents	15
Immigrant/Refugee	17
Spanish/Special Needs	12
Low-income/Low-resource	8
American Indian	6
Special Needs	3
American Indian	7
Working and Student	7
Military	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>

**Table 2. Strategic Planning Survey and Focus Group Participant Race**

Race	Survey	Focus Group
White	60%	31%
Hispanic/Latinx	20%	49%
Black/African American	4%	13%
Asian	2%	6%
Other	6%	1%
Preferred Not to Answer	9%	NA




**Table 3. Strategic Planning Survey and Focus Group Participant Characteristics**

Characteristics	Survey	Focus Group
Irregular Employment	28%	-
Receiving Aid	23%	-
Single Parent	17%	-
Special Needs Child - Development	14%	9%
English Not Primary Language	12%	48%
Special Needs Child - Health	12%	-
Foster Care/Welfare	4%	3%
Without Stable Housing	4%	5%
Seasonal or Temporary Employment	2%	3%
Without Stable Access to Food	2%	3%
Military	1%	13%
Teen Parent	1%	22%
Tribal Member	1%	11%
Refugee/Immigrant	-	25%
Family Trauma	-	13%
First Generation	-	13%
Child with Trauma	-	9%
LGBTQ	-	3%

## Early Childhood Stakeholder Outreach

The strategic planning team engaged numerous early childhood stakeholders including formal licensed early care and education providers, informal (license-exempt) child care providers, program administrators, early childhood professionals, policy makers, and advocates (see Appendix Tables 2 and 3). Stakeholders participated in 13 focus groups, 18 stakeholder interviews, and a survey. Stakeholders shared:

- strategies or initiatives their entity or organization has in place that are aligned with the Colorado Shines Brighter vision, mission and goals;
- reflections on strengths and opportunities for improving Colorado’s early childhood system;
- perspectives on priorities for the Colorado Shines Brighter strategic plan; and
- thoughts about how the entity or organization they represent may envision staying involved in the implementation of the strategic plan.



Information gathered from stakeholder interviews and focus groups shaped the draft objectives for the strategic plan. The same stakeholders were asked to complete a survey to validate the strategic plan goals and draft objectives. The survey was also distributed to the OEC's Colorado Shines Brighter newsletter list, resulting in 227 stakeholders responses. Their responses guided the final strategic plan objectives and supported refinements to the strategic plan priorities.

## *State, Regional and Local Strategic Plan Content and Alignment Analysis*

Organizations across Colorado currently utilize a number of strategic plans to support Colorado's vision that all children are valued, healthy and thriving and ensure all children are ready for school when entering kindergarten. The strategic planning team conducted content and alignment analyses of 38 existing state, regional and local strategic plans to develop a landscape of current or planned efforts that may align to the strategic plan. These plans were reviewed and analyzed using the Early Childhood Colorado Framework and the six goals of Colorado Shines Brighter. Appendix Table 4 presents the full list of state level organizations and documents included in the analyses. Regional and local documents were submitted by early childhood councils, school districts, county agencies and local advocacy organizations. Regional and local level documents included in the analysis are listed in Appendix Table 5.

## ► Twelve Opportunities for Colorado's Birth through Five System

While Colorado has made investments to strengthen its mixed-delivery system, children and families have multi-faceted needs that require a collaborative, comprehensive approach spanning across programs and services at the state and local level. To improve the efficiency and effectiveness of programs and services, and to determine which services are needed for whom and how those services should be coordinated, program administrators and policymakers require current data on the extent to which current programs and services meet those needs.

Until recently, Colorado's exploration of sufficient supply of early childhood programs and services was largely limited to assessments of the eligible population compared to the numbers served statewide. The 2019 needs assessment, *Colorado Shines Brighter: Opportunities for Colorado's Early Childhood System*, incorporated the voices of parents and caregivers to capture the difference between what currently exists within Colorado's early childhood system, and what would be needed to meet families preferences, especially for vulnerable and underserved populations. This data helped to inform Colorado's strategies for action to sustain successful efforts across the state and bolster new and innovative approaches to meeting the needs of all children and their families.

More than 6,000 Colorado parents, caregivers, early childhood professionals, program administrators and policymakers shaped the efforts of Colorado Shines Brighter in 2019 by sharing their experiences through focus groups, interviews and surveys (see Appendix Table 3).<sup>7</sup> This outreach, paired with additional data collected for the needs assessment and strategic plan, led to the identification of 12 equally pressing needs Colorado must address in order to increase the quality of, and equitable access to, the state's early childhood system.

### OPPORTUNITY 1: Increase Availability of Affordable, Convenient, and Quality Care, Especially for Infants and Toddlers

It is increasingly difficult for parents and caregivers to locate one or more child care arrangements that meet the needs of the family's composition, schedule and budget. As demand for licensed child care programs grows, it is becoming more challenging to locate a single child care provider who is accepting new enrollments, especially for families seeking infant and toddler care. Moreover, most licensed child care facilities keep hours that accommodate a traditional 9-to-5 work schedule, leaving parents who work nights and weekends with few



options. In addition, affordability is a significant issue, particularly for families experiencing homelessness and/or families who do not have the resources to meet their basic needs.

### OPPORTUNITY 2: Provide More Equitable and Culturally Relevant Care

Parents and caregivers identified inequitable access to licensed child care for typically underserved populations in Colorado who include recent immigrants, dual language learners, children from a diversity of racial and ethnic backgrounds, and children from refugee or tribal families. While more can be learned about the needs of these populations, Colorado should foster more inclusive and culturally relevant care settings.

### OPPORTUNITY 3: Increase Inclusivity and Access for Children with Special Needs

Challenges locating, securing and paying for child cares are compounded for parents and caregivers of children with special needs. It is difficult for families to identify appropriately prepared care environments, making child care even harder to locate for these families. Investments in training, facilities and programs that promote inclusivity are required to continue to create an early care and education (ECE) system that is inclusive for all children, especially children with developmental delays or disabilities.

### OPPORTUNITY 4: Continue Investing in Quality-Enhancing Professional Development Opportunities and Workforce Recruitment and Retention Across the Early Care and Education Landscape

Colorado's ECE system would benefit from consistent training requirements that support child care quality, as well as efforts to recruit and retain a qualified workforce. ECE professionals often leave the sector to secure better pay and more stable, less demanding positions. High turnover of ECE professionals negatively impacts Colorado's children and families, as well as child care programs that cannot provide services due to staff shortages or vacancies. Difficulty in retaining qualified early childhood providers also limits the number of available high-quality ECE programs in Colorado.

### OPPORTUNITY 5: Continue to Develop a Diverse Early Childhood Workforce

Focus groups in Colorado indicated that early childhood professionals do not always represent the diverse children they serve. A more representative workforce would serve children and families more effectively. This is particularly relevant as the state's demographics continue to shift and change.

### OPPORTUNITY 6: Increase Knowledge and Supports Around Child Care Licensing, and Offer Essential Business Supports to Child Care Providers

Efforts aimed at supporting both new and continuing licensed child care providers in navigating layered, and sometimes competing regulations is imperative to meeting the state's current child care demands. Reducing this burden may allow providers to more efficiently maintain their license and lower barriers to other providers becoming licensed. Child care facility owners, whether center- or home-based, would also benefit from strengthened business supports and technical assistance.

### OPPORTUNITY 7: Centralize and Increase Parent and Caregiver Access to Early Childhood Information

Increasing parents' and caregivers' knowledge of the programs, services and financial assistance available to them – from knowing the quality and availability of local licensed child care programs to understanding funding available to pay for child care, especially for families with lower incomes – would empower families to make informed choices in Colorado's mixed-delivery system. Systematic investment in outreach efforts



should hold equity at the forefront when aligning initiatives with the needs of families from diverse backgrounds, cultures, races and ethnicities, which includes transcending outreach tools in languages responsive to Colorado's populations.

### OPPORTUNITY 8: Increase Transition Knowledge and Associated Supports

Colorado lacks a system-level approach to planning and providing support to parents, ECE providers, K-12 educators and other professionals to support children's successful transitions. This is especially true regarding children's transitions into kindergarten. Increased coordination between sending and receiving environments is necessary to facilitate systematic investment into the development and communication of transition plans, provider-to-provider data sharing, and activities that encourage families to share information about their child's strengths and challenges across ECE environments.

### OPPORTUNITY 9: Expand Access to Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMHC) is a prevention and promotion approach that places mental health professionals in ECE settings to assist child care providers in creating environments and interactions that foster social-emotional competence for all children from birth through age eight. While consultation services are available at the child-, classroom-, and program-level, ECMHC services are largely embraced for child-level guidance to reduce challenging behaviors, suspensions and expulsions. With constraints on both funding and available ECMHC workforce, much of Colorado is not receiving this free, quality enhancing service. Demand is growing for ECMHC, but convenient and timely access to services continues to be a barrier to receiving care statewide.

### OPPORTUNITY 10: Invest in Rural Outreach

Rural service delivery presents a perennial challenge. Offering early childhood programs and services that focus on specific subpopulations are especially difficult to implement in rural settings because of both reach and scale. The recruitment and retention of rural early childhood service providers, including licensed child care providers, ECHMC professionals and others will benefit from increased access to training and technical assistance through more effective outreach.

### OPPORTUNITY 11: Integrate Disparate Data Sources

Current data systems cannot provide unduplicated counts of children or parents participating in early childhood programs or receiving services. Additionally, these systems cannot assess additive benefits derived from engagement in multiple services at the child- or family-level or assess long-term outcomes for children and families. With a unique identifier, systems could have more precise counts of children or parents that may be connecting to more than one service allowing local providers, program administrators and policymakers to better understand the degree to which children and families are – or are not – served.

### OPPORTUNITY 12: Enhance Cross-sector Collaboration to Build Data Systems that Support Coordinated Care and Capture Long Term Outcomes

Currently, it is not possible to determine whether a family has had one or multiple connections to ECE programs and family and community support programs or services, nor whether their engagement in programs and services improved school readiness or long-term family well-being. Longitudinal data that follows children through age 5 – and potentially beyond (e.g., prenatal through third grade) – would allow program administrators and policymakers to assess and invest in the programs and services that improve child and family outcomes across the entire system. Additionally, supports to children and families could be better coordinated and leveraged across programs during important transitions.



## Alignment Between Colorado Shines Brighter Goals and Needs Assessment Findings

Addressing the 12 opportunities for Colorado's birth through five system will increase the quality of, and equitable access to, early childhood programs, services and funding to ensure all children are ready for school when entering kindergarten. To ensure the 12 opportunities are prioritized and addressed within the strategic plan, the needs assessment findings have been aligned with each of the Colorado Shines Brighter goals (Table 4).

**Table 4. Colorado Shines Brighter Goals**

12 Opportunities for Colorado's Birth through Five System	1. Align and Coordinate Systems	2. Innovate Service Delivery	3. Maximize Family Knowledge/Engagement	4. Increase Meaningful and Equitable Access	5. Strengthen Business Practices	6. Improve the Quality of ECE Environments and the Workforce
1. Increase Availability of Affordable, Convenient, and Quality Care, Especially for Infants and Toddlers	X					X
2. Engage Stakeholders to Provide More Equitable and Culturally Relevant Care		X		X		X
3. Increase Inclusivity and Access for Children with Special Needs				X		
4. Continue Investing in Quality Enhancing Professional Development Opportunities and Supports Across the Early Care and Education Landscape, including Workforce Recruitment and Retention						X
5. Continue to Engage Stakeholders in the Development of a Diverse Workforce					X	X
6. Increase Provider Supports and Knowledge Around Child Care Licensing, and Develop and Provide Essential Business Supports for Child Care Providers		X			x	
7. Centralize and Increase Parent Access to Early Childhood Information	X		X			
8. Increase Transition Knowledge and Associated Supports			X	X		
9. Expand Access to Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Services		X	X	X		X
10. Invest in Rural Outreach		X		X	X	
11. Integrate Disparate Data Sources	X					
12. Enhance Cross-sector Collaboration to Build Data Systems that Support Coordinated Care and Capture Long Term Outcomes	X					



# ► Colorado Shines Brighter Statewide Birth through Five Strategic Plan

The Colorado Shines Brighter Strategic Plan goals, objectives and strategies were informed by the 12 key findings of the needs assessment, Colorado Shines Brighter: Opportunities for Colorado's Early Childhood System, and data collected by the strategic planning team.

## Colorado Shines Brighter Goals

To achieve the statewide vision of ensuring all Colorado children are ready for school when entering kindergarten, Colorado Shines Brighter identified six goals:

### GOAL 1: Align and Coordinate Systems

Colorado's birth through five early childhood system is coordinated and aligned to enhance resources available to families and to improve the quality of relationships between families and providers.

### GOAL 2: Innovate Service Delivery

Early care and education providers practice trauma-informed care, use practices informed by early childhood mental health, and incorporate inclusive practice as part of their service delivery.

### GOAL 3: Maximize Family Knowledge and Engagement

Children and families that enter the system through one program are offered meaningful and relevant services throughout the system.

### GOAL 4: Increase Meaningful and Equitable Access

The amount of early care and education programs available matches the demand for programs in age, type, specialized supports and place.

### GOAL 5: Strengthen Business Practices

Colorado's mixed-delivery system is supported by strong and sustainable business models.

### GOAL 6: Improve the Quality of Early Care and Education Environments and the Workforce

Formal early care and education providers are rated Colorado Shines Levels 3-5, using a quality rating system based on the most recent research to reflect outcomes. Colorado recruits and retains a qualified and diverse early childhood workforce. Informal early care and education providers and families have access to professional development, training and other resources to provide appropriate, responsive care that supports optimal child development and social emotional growth.

These goals provide the framework for the Colorado Shines Brighter Strategic Plan, clearly stating the intent of the work to be completed.





## Evaluation and Progress Monitoring

The Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) provides resources to evaluate the state's progress towards each goal of the strategic plan. The PDG B-5 evaluation plan articulates how Colorado will measure its progress towards outcomes, specifically focusing on progress that can reasonably be tied to the Colorado Shines Brighter Strategic Plan during the PDG B-5 renewal grant period of 2020-2022. Key progress indicators and data sources to evaluate each goal are noted within each goal of the strategic plan.

### ORGANIZATION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The Colorado Shines Brighter Strategic Plan includes goals, objectives and strategies. For the purposes of this plan, goals are defined as concise statements that clearly state the intent of the work to be completed. Objectives lead to strategies that define measurable and achievable results and are aligned with the Early Childhood Colorado Framework (Framework). Strategies, or action steps, are specific, measurable conditions that must be attained in order to accomplish a particular project objective and ultimately the project goal.

The strategic plan includes strategies that will be implemented under the state's three-year Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) renewal grant. These strategies are indicated by the  symbol.

The strategic plan also includes strategies that were identified by the needs assessment and stakeholder outreach that are critical components of a robust early childhood system. These strategies are indicated by the  symbol. These strategies will not be addressed by the PDG B-5 renewal grant, and will need to be implemented in partnership with the Early Childhood Leadership Commission and other state and local organizations.

As noted above, the objectives and goals of the strategic plan are aligned with the Framework. This alignment is indicated by the following Framework system icons:



*State and Local Systems*



*Environment*



*Relationships*





## Goal 1:







# ALIGN AND COORDINATE SYSTEMS

Colorado's birth through five early childhood system is coordinated and aligned to enhance resources available to families and to improve the quality of relationships between families and providers.







Framework:





### OBJECTIVE 1.1: Make Data Informed Decisions

- 
**1.1.1 IT Solutions Roadmap.** Implement the Office of Early Childhood's (OEC) Information Technology (IT) Solutions Roadmap through a multi-phase plan that: supports collaboration and communication; standardizes design for accessibility and usability; and provides transparency and security for publicly available data.
- 
**1.1.2 Data-Driven Decision Making.** Build a public-facing dashboard to support community-level information on the state of the local early childhood system and data-driven decisions.
- 
**1.1.3 Workforce Data System Modernization.** Embark on data system modernization planning to address OEC business needs including stakeholder input, identification of needed improvements, quality assurance analyses, and the development of specific requirements for enhancement.
- 
**1.1.4 ECE Workforce LINC Project.** Use connected data from the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS), the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE), and the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE) through the Linked Information Network of Colorado (LINC) to gain a comprehensive picture of the early care and education (ECE) workforce. Develop a model to provide timely information on workforce demographics, turnover, wages, and educational pathways and disseminate to relevant local and state stakeholders.
- 
**1.1.5 Unique Child Identifier.** Explore barriers and strategies to implementing a unique child identifier (per Colorado House Bill 08-1364) to enable data informed decisions concerning child outcomes. Utilize the upcoming school readiness data pilot program with local school districts to explore existing or needed technologies and data sharing agreements and unique child identifier implementation challenges.
- 
**1.1.6 Early Childhood Workforce Support.** Identify current and new opportunities to better support the broader early childhood workforce including home visitors, coaches, child health consultants, and mental health consultants.

## OBJECTIVE 1.2: Ensure Coordinated Services

-  **1.2.1 Coordinated Application & Local Navigation.** Research existing national and local models of coordinated enrollment/application and service navigation and identify recommendations for local implementation.
-  **1.2.2 Medicaid Billing Manual.** Develop a Medicaid billing process manual for Healthy Steps, Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMHC) and home visiting programs. Provide training and technical assistance to support utilization.
-  **1.2.3 Health Promotion.** Promote integrated and preventative maternal and child physical, behavioral, oral, and environmental health services. Explore current models including Head Start and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's (CDPHE) maternal and child health priorities such as increasing prosocial connection and social emotional well-being.
-  **1.2.4 Local Organizational Capacity.** Review the 2019 Early Childhood Council (ECC) and Family Resource Center (FRC) organizational capacity study. Through stakeholder workgroups identify, prioritize, and implement recommendations to increase the capacity of ECCs and FRCs to enable the provision of ECE and wraparound services to more underserved children and families. Expand the ECC triennial evaluation to include a cost analysis of the resources needed to fully fund the local system.
-  **1.2.5 Core Local Services.** Determine the core early childhood and family and community support services to be made available in each county and create a plan to address local service gaps.
-  **1.2.6 State Organizational Alignment.** Enhance ongoing coordination and collaboration across state agencies including CDHS, CDPHE, Colorado Department of Education (CDE), and Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing (HCPF). Identify opportunities to address systems and administrative barriers.

## OBJECTIVE 1.3: Promote and Share Knowledge

-  **1.3.1 Transitions Toolkit & Marketplace.** Create a transition plan toolkit and online marketplace for early childhood professionals to communicate with families. Engage parents and caregivers to determine appropriate communication strategies for families.
-  **1.3.2 Transitions Roadmap.** The OEC and the CDE Preschool through Third Grade (P-3) Office will develop a birth through five (B-5) transitions roadmap and identify the needed local training and tools for implementation. The roadmap will encompass support for children, including those with special health or developmental needs, their families, and ECE and K-3 professionals, as well as home visitors, early intervention, child health, and ECMH professionals.

## ALIGN AND COORDINATE SYSTEMS

To what extent do state and local systems partners align and coordinate their services?

Evaluation Questions	Progress Indicators	Data Source(s)
To what extent do local and state system partners understand how alignment and coordination will improve equitable access to services for families?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of partners who indicated an understanding of alignment and coordination practices</li> <li>• % of partners who indicated an understanding of access and system gaps</li> </ul>	Survey and interviews of local and state system partners
To what extent are local and state system partners aware of viable opportunities for alignment and coordination?	% of partners who indicated an awareness of alignment and coordination opportunities	Survey and interviews of local and state system partners
To what extent do local and state system partners know where and how to access data for decision-making?	% of partners who indicated an awareness of data access opportunities and processes	Survey and interviews of local and state system partners
To what extent do local and state system partners implement strategies to align and coordinate services?	#, type, quality, and extent of service alignment/ coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PARTNER© survey</li> <li>• Survey and interviews of local and state system partners</li> <li>• Administrative data to be tracked by funded partners</li> </ul>
To what extent do local school districts coordinate with community-based programs to foster a mixed delivery system?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of school districts that coordinate with community-based programs</li> <li>• Type and level of coordination between local school districts and community-based programs</li> <li>• Facilitators and barriers to school district and community-based program coordination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrative data to be tracked by CDE and school district partners</li> <li>• Survey of local system partners and ECE programs</li> <li>• Interviews of local system partners</li> </ul>
To what extent do local and state system partners use data to make decisions?	• Extent of data use and types of decisions based on data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey and interviews of local and state system partners</li> <li>• Administrative data to be tracked by funded partners</li> </ul>
How do local and state system partners demonstrate improve system efficiency and efficacy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nature of system efficiency and efficacy improvements</li> <li>• % of system partners rating improved efficiencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews of local and state system partners</li> <li>• Survey of local and state system partners</li> </ul>

## Goal 2:




# INNOVATE SERVICE DELIVERY

Early care and education (ECE) providers practice trauma-informed care, use practices informed by early childhood mental health, and incorporate inclusive practice as part of their service delivery.



*Framework:*



### OBJECTIVE 2.1: Promote Mental Health and Well-Being Through Early Identification and Consultation

- 
**2.1.1 Trauma-informed Care Training.** Offer Roots™, Branches and Seedlings trauma-informed training to Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMHC) professionals, community support providers, ECE providers, and families.
- 
**2.1.2 Home Visiting for ECE Home Providers.** Continue the Home Visiting for Child Care Homes Pilot Program through 2020. Evaluate outcomes to inform practice and future expansion.
- 
**2.1.3 ECMHC Practices.** Complete an ECMHC service delivery model evaluation to inform workforce standards, model-development and quality improvement.

### OBJECTIVE 2.2: Promote Strong Relationships, Social and Emotional Development, Appropriate Nutrition and Physical Activity

- 
**2.2.1 Quality Nutrition in ECE Settings.** Coordinate with CDHS, CDPHE and CDE to increase ECE provider participation in the Child and Adult Care Food Program and the National School Lunch Program.
- 
**2.2.2 ECMHC Warmline & Telehealth.** Create an ECMHC warm-line and explore telehealth options for both families and early childhood education providers in rural communities.

## INNOVATE SERVICE DELIVERY

To what extent do service providers deliver innovative services that further best practices in the field?

Evaluation Questions	Progress Indicators	Data Source(s)
To what extent do service providers deliver their programs with fidelity and quality?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dosage, duration, and quality of service delivery</li> <li>• Number and type of service components that adhere to service model</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrative program implementation data to be tracked by funded service providers</li> <li>• Survey of implementation fidelity administered to innovative service practitioners</li> </ul>
To what extent do service providers understand and use best practices around trauma informed care, social-emotional development, inclusivity, and developmentally appropriate learning?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of provider who have knowledge of best practices</li> <li>• Reported use of best practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey of innovative service practitioners</li> <li>• Training survey</li> </ul>
How do early childhood professionals and families perceive the value and effectiveness of innovative services they receive?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rating of service value and effectiveness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surveys of innovative service recipients (early childhood professionals or families, depending on service)</li> </ul>



## Goal 3:







# MAXIMIZE FAMILY KNOWLEDGE, ENGAGEMENT, AND SUPPORT

Children and families that enter the system through one program are offered meaningful and relevant services throughout the system.

Framework:



### OBJECTIVE 3.1: Connect and Empower Families Using Culturally Responsive Practices

- 
**3.1.1 School Readiness Handbook.** Develop a school readiness handbook for families and informal child care providers to share best practices and resources to support children's learning and development. Implement a plan for dissemination and use including online and print distribution in multiple languages.
- 
**3.1.2 Growing Readers Together.** Expand Growing Readers Together to increase quality in informal care environments and support early literacy for children not in formal (licensed) ECE programs.
- 
**3.1.3 Early Literacy Grants.** Expand the Comprehensive Early Literacy Grant Program to ensure the essential components of reading instruction are embedded into public preschool through third grade instruction including universal, targeted and intensive interventions. Increase focus on family knowledge and engagement.
- 
**3.1.4 Information Hub.** Consolidate parent-facing websites into a single online resource that will connect parents to information about ECE, developmental milestones, early screenings, and other programs and services to support young children and their families.
- 
**3.1.5 No Wrong Door Campaign.** Support the continued implementation of the no-wrong-door strategy which ensures families can access information quickly, make timely connections, and receive support regardless of their initial entry point into the early childhood system.
- 
**3.1.6 Early Learning & Development Guidelines.** Distribute the updated Colorado Early Learning & Development Guidelines print and online materials, including new videos on transitions and parents' experiences, to parents, caregivers, ECE providers, and early childhood professionals.



- 3.1.7 Family Attitudes & Decision-Making.** Explore family opinions and decision-making in the mixed-delivery system, including the influence of Colorado Shines ratings on provider selection and considerations of reputation, cost, and teacher qualifications.

### OBJECTIVE 3.2: Provide Opportunities For Education, Employment, Housing, Financial and Legal Support to Contribute to Family Economic Security



- 3.2.1 ECLC Leadership Consideration.** The Early Childhood Leadership Commission (ECLC) will consider a leadership role for specific strategies and incorporate input from families and early childhood professionals.

### OBJECTIVE 3.3. Provide Inclusive Opportunities For Family Engagement and Leadership



- 3.3.1 Parent & Stakeholder Engagement.** CDHS will continue to engage with the CDHS Family Voice Council, Head Start Collaboration Office, Colorado Head Start Association, and state and local family and caregiver networks to support ongoing family engagement and leadership.



- 3.3.2 Early Childhood Council Capacity.** Build capacity of local ECCs to engage family leaders, including consultation and engagement with local FRCs and Head Start programs to ensure families are empowered to become community leaders.

## *MAXIMIZE FAMILY KNOWLEDGE AND ENGAGEMENT*

To what extent are parents able to find, access, and engage in early care and education services, parenting supports, and transition supports?

Evaluation Questions	Progress Indicators	Data Source(s)
To what extent do families know where to find and use information on ECE services, parenting supports, transitions, and financial resources for accessing those services?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of families who have knowledge of where and how to access ECE, parenting, transition, and financial support information</li> <li>• # and type of unique requests for information</li> <li>• # and type of services, supports, and resources families access</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family point-of-service surveys</li> <li>• Survey of families</li> <li>• Administrative data from information delivery sources/ platforms</li> <li>• eMoms survey data</li> </ul>
To what extent do families understand how to identify and advocate for quality services?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of families who have knowledge of ECE service quality</li> <li>• % of families who have awareness of advocacy strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey of families</li> <li>• eMoms survey data</li> </ul>
To what extent do families select and advocate for high-quality programming for their children?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # of families reporting use of quality services</li> <li>• Quality ratings of selected ECE services</li> <li>• # and type of advocacy strategies families report using</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey of families</li> <li>• QRIS data</li> <li>• Resource and Referral data</li> </ul>
To what extent do families report increased quality interactions with their children?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # of families reporting quality interactions with their children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey of families</li> </ul>

## Goal 4:

# INCREASE MEANINGFUL AND EQUITABLE ACCESS

The amount of early care and education (ECE) programs available matches the demand for programs in age, type, specialized supports, and place.

Framework:



### OBJECTIVE 4.1: Build Community Capacity



**4.1.1 Developmental Screenings.** Increase the availability of developmental screenings and referral processes in appropriate settings where children are served.



**4.1.2 Inclusive ECE Environments.** Increase the ability of ECE professionals and programs to care for and educate children with developmental delays or disabilities and to connect families to supportive services. Provide ECE micro-grants to purchase adaptive materials or make facility changes to support greater inclusivity.



**4.1.3 Local Impact Study.** Study local Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) and Colorado Shines Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) policies for the impact on ECE providers and families, including how new reimbursement rate policies have impacted family participation and access to high-quality ECE programs, and implement indicated changes.



**4.1.4 Mixed-Delivery Access.** Explore opportunities to increase access to a system of mixed-delivery ECE programs with an emphasis on serving infants and toddlers.



**4.1.5 Policy Analysis Tool.** Develop a tool to analyze how programs and policies affect the availability and funding of infant and toddler child care and the equitable access for priority populations such as dual language learners, families living in poverty, families living in rural areas, and families who have children with special needs. Explore processes to ensure relevant agencies and entities participate in a policy analysis review.



**4.1.6 Regulatory & Policy Cross-training.** Explore the potential for CDHS, ECCs, local regulatory entities, the Office of Economic Development, and professional associations to cross-train on ECE regulatory and policy changes.





- 4.1.7 Business Engagement.** Engage and equip local and state business leaders and business support organizations with the resources and knowledge they need to support the availability of, and access to, ECE programs through public-private partnerships.

#### **OBJECTIVE 4.2: Support Customer Affordability**



- 4.2.1 Contracted Slots.** Develop policies and processes to support county implementation of CCCAP Contract for Slots to support an increase in local access to high-quality ECE programs.



- 4.2.2 Pre-kindergarten.** Expand and enhance affordable pre-kindergarten options for all Colorado 4-year-olds.



- 4.2.3 Access Thresholds.** Analyze eligibility and family income thresholds across multiple early childhood and family support programs to provide more consistent, equitable access.

## ***INCREASE MEANINGFUL AND EQUITABLE ACCESS***

**To what extent do state and local system partners increase meaningful and equitable access to early care and education (ECE) services, supports and resources?**

<b>Evaluation Questions</b>	<b>Progress Indicators</b>	<b>Data Source(s)</b>
To what extent do local and state system partners understand families' needs for ECE services, supports, and resources?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of partners who have knowledge of family needs for ECE services, supports and resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey of local and state system partners</li> </ul>
To what extent do local and state system partners know where the gaps exist in the system and understand how to address those gaps?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of partners who have knowledge of system and service gaps</li> <li>• % of partners who have understanding of approaches for addressing system and service gaps</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey of local and state system partners</li> </ul>
To what extent do local and state system partners increase availability of ECE services, supports, and resources?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• #, type and location of ECE services, supports, and resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrative data from local and state system partners</li> <li>• Licensing database</li> <li>• ECMH database</li> <li>• QRIS</li> </ul>
To what extent do local and state system partners support transitions between services?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # and type of transition supports</li> <li>• # and characteristics/demographics of programs/families receiving transition supports</li> <li>• % of partners who report having access to and usefulness of transition supports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrative data from local and state system partners</li> <li>• Survey of local and state system partners</li> <li>• Survey of programs receiving transition supports</li> <li>• Survey of families</li> <li>• Early Intervention data</li> </ul>
How are families with infants and toddlers and those with special needs supported to access needed services?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # and type of infant/toddler and special needs services</li> <li>• Reported access to and satisfaction with infant/toddler and special needs services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrative data from local and state system partners</li> <li>• Survey of families</li> </ul>

## Goal 5:

## STRENGTHEN BUSINESS PRACTICES

Colorado's mixed-delivery system is supported by strong and sustainable business models.

Framework:



### OBJECTIVE 5.1: Advance Sustainable Business Practices



**5.1.1 Pre-Licensing & Start-Up.** Explore challenges to ECE program pre-licensing and start-up activities, and investigate how business consultants/navigators could support start-ups through technical assistance on launching and sustaining a financially sound ECE program with livable wages.



**5.1.2 Business Practices.** Provide the “Strengthening Business Practices for Child Care Programs” training series to ECE providers to strengthen foundational knowledge of sound fiscal management and business operations. Develop a business resource toolkit to accompany the training series.



**5.1.3 Financing Strategies.** Study and implement financing strategies to incentivize weekend and off-hours services and ECE for children with special health or developmental needs.



**5.1.4 Micro-grants.** Provide ECE micro-grants to support start-up costs, targeting providers in child care deserts and those serving infants, toddlers, or children with special health or developmental needs.



**5.1.5 Integrated Financing.** Develop tools to inform and support the integration of ECE funding streams including CCCAP, Colorado Preschool Program, Head Start, and local subsidies, and provide guidance on blending and braiding funds.



**5.1.6 Local Regulations.** Study the effect of local regulations on the availability of infant and toddler child care, and family child care homes, including minimum wage thresholds.



## STRENGTHEN BUSINESS PRACTICES

To what extent do ECE programs use effective, sustainable business practices?

Evaluation Questions	Progress Indicators	Data Source(s)
To what extent do ECE programs, Family Resource Centers, Early Childhood Councils, and other system partners know what business practices are needed to ensure the viability of program operations and how to put those practices in place?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• % of system partners who have knowledge of best business practices for ECE operations</li><li>• % of system partners who indicate an understanding of what supports and operational changes are needed to adopt sustainable business practices</li></ul>	Survey of local ECE systems partners
How do Family Resource Centers, Early Childhood Councils, and other system partners support ECE programs to increase the use of sustainable business practices?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Type and level of business support activities provided to ECE programs use</li></ul>	Survey of local ECE systems partners
To what extent do ECE programs increase the use of sustainable business practices?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• # and type of business practices used or adopted</li><li>• Reported satisfaction with/ effectiveness of support with business practices</li><li>• Facilitators or barriers to adopting sustainable business practices</li></ul>	Survey of ECE programs that participated in or were exposed to efforts to strengthen business practices







**OBJECTIVE 6.2: Develop And Retain The Workforce**

- 6.2.1 Professional Development Information System.** Re-platform the Colorado Shines Professional Development Information System (PDIS) to improve user experience, enhance data collection, and enable transcreation of the site into Spanish. Add 24 eLearning course hours based on identified needs.
- 6.2.2 CDA Credential.** Provide Child Development Associate (CDA) Scholarships to 250 ECE professionals, targeting areas with known workforce shortages. Add CDA professional development specialists to support implementation.
- 6.2.3 Coaching.** Pilot a state ECE coaching model including Colorado Shines QRIS and EQIT. Increase staff to meet the needs of known coaching deserts and provide additional meetings and formal supports for coaches. Update courses, transcreate coaching materials, and explore a telehealth approach to coaching.
- 6.2.4 Reciprocity.** Explore reciprocity in credentials and licensure across states (starting with Region VIII) and countries (starting with countries with the highest migration to Colorado), and provide supports for review of transcripts and other approval processes.
- 6.2.5 ECE Competencies.** Enhance the training alignment process to increase the number of trainings aligned with Colorado Competencies for Early Childhood Educators and Administrators.
- 6.2.6 Consultative Support.** Enhance and align the roles of consultative support professionals. Train consultative support professionals to help providers make referral determinations concerning IDEA Part C or Part B-Section 619, early childhood mental health services, and other supports.
- 6.2.7 Compensation.** Explore strategies to ensure worthy and livable compensation for ECE professionals. Work to enhance compensation, including benefits, and create compensation parity across settings, sectors, and age of children served.

***IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF ECE ENVIRONMENTS AND WORKFORCE***

**To what extent do strategies improve the quality of ECE environments and the ECE workforce?**

Evaluation Questions	Progress Indicators	Data Source(s)
To what extent do early childhood professionals know what quality, inclusive care and learning looks like and how to implement it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of providers who have knowledge of quality, inclusive early care and learning practices</li> <li>• % of providers who indicate an understanding of approaches for incorporating best ECE practices into early care and learning services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey of early childhood professionals</li> <li>• Training surveys</li> </ul>
To what extent do early childhood professionals understand what supports are available to improve their practice and well-being?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of providers who have awareness of quality and well-being supports that are available to early childhood professionals, such as early childhood mental health consultation and coaching</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey of early childhood professionals</li> <li>• Training survey</li> </ul>



<p>To what extent do early childhood professionals implement quality, developmentally appropriate, responsive, and inclusive care?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• #, type, and level/extent of quality ECE practices used by providers</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Survey of early childhood professionals</li><li>• Extant CLASS ratings</li></ul>
<p>To what extent do early childhood professionals increase their use of coaching, professional development, and formal education?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• # and type of coaching, professional development, and formal education opportunities early childhood professionals access and complete</li><li>• Reported use of and satisfaction with coaching, professional development, and higher education opportunities</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• PDIS data</li><li>• ECC coaching records (Sugar)</li><li>• Survey of early childhood professionals</li></ul>
<p>To what extent do early childhood professionals stay in the field longer and report improved well-being?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• #, demographics, and job retention of providers</li><li>• Reported intent to stay in job/field</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• PDIS data</li><li>• Survey of early childhood professionals</li></ul>



## ► Governance

Implementation and oversight of the Colorado Shines Brighter Strategic Plan will be largely housed in the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS), Office of Early Childhood (OEC), in strong partnership with the Early Childhood Leadership Commission (ECLC) and state and local agencies. The plan will launch in January 2020, to align with the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) Renewal Grant. While the PDG B-5 renewal grant period is three years (2020-2022), the strategic plan will cover a five-year period (2020-2025). This allows the plan to include additional strategies identified by the needs assessment and stakeholder outreach that are critical components of a robust early childhood system and ensure sustainability of the PDG B-5 renewal grant activities. Collectively, strategies in the plan will result in a data-informed, comprehensive early childhood system that maximizes the availability of and access to high-quality early care and learning services for Colorado children and families, and that leverages all possible resources.

Strategies within the plan that are linked to the PDG B-5 renewal grant will be operationalized by the OEC in collaboration with state and local partners. These partnerships are interdisciplinary, involving multiple agencies, organizations, institutions and departments serving families and children to ensure planning, implementation and evaluation broadly engages stakeholders. The governance structure includes partnership with the ECLC and the Program and Quality Alignment Subcommittee, which allows the strategic plan to be used as a framework for improving the access, participation and engagement of children, families and providers within and across the mixed-delivery system, while also elevating the strategic plan so it can inform federal, state and local investments and statutory requirements.

The strategic plan will be reviewed and updated annually by the ECLC to reflect statewide legislative changes, changing trends identified through ongoing data collection and analysis of the needs assessment, and in response to project evaluation findings. The continuous quality improvement process will use indicator data to assess the progress and outcomes achieved through the plan. This data will be utilized by the ECLC, families, advocates, the Governor's office and other stakeholders to make decisions related to the most effective approaches, informing future allocation of resources and the refinement of strategies within the plan.

## The Role of the Early Childhood Leadership Commission

The role of the ECLC is to be a statewide leader, subject matter expert and champion of best and promising practices throughout the state. The ECLC is statutorily charged to: (1) assist public and private agencies in coordinating efforts to enhance alignment, which includes collaboration among five state departments; (2) advise and make recommendations to the OEC; and (3) develop strategies and monitor efforts to increase the access, quality and equity of services and supports on behalf of pregnant people and children birth through age eight and their families. The ECLC ascribes to a theory of change through which data gathering, policy development and community engagement improves service delivery and interagency support for Colorado children and families.

The ECLC is supported by a subcommittee structure, which includes the Program Quality and Alignment (PQA) Subcommittee (see Appendix Table 1). The purpose of the PQA Subcommittee is to identify 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 and provision of services and supports for young children. By utilizing the ECLC and the PQA Subcommittee, the state can leverage additional perspectives and resources to ensure the Colorado Shines Brighter vision is achieved.

## The Need for Ongoing Coordination and Collaboration

The creation of the Colorado Shines Brighter Strategic Plan resulted in increased coordination and collaboration across early childhood system partners, and the formation of new partnerships. For example, the ECLC's PQA Subcommittee was expanded to 57 members representing families, early childhood professionals, program



administrators, funders, researchers, and the business community. This expansion contributed to the rich stakeholder outreach and engagement activities completed through the Colorado Shines Brighter initiative. The PQA Subcommittee will support the implementation of the strategic plan, ensuring these partnerships continue to develop. Additionally, the first goal of the Colorado Shines Brighter Strategic Plan is designed to ensure that the birth through five early childhood system is coordinated and aligned to enhance resources available to children and families.

## ► Resources

In addition to the needs assessment and stakeholder feedback, the prioritization and adoption of strategies in the Colorado Shines Brighter Strategic Plan were informed by the availability of resources to implement each activity and the state's ability to sustain these investments.

Currently, Colorado is experiencing increased commitments by state and local partners, the Early Childhood Leadership Commission (ECLC), the early childhood funder community, state legislators, and the Governor's Office to invest in equitable access to high-quality early childhood programs and services. The strategic plan leverages existing federal, state, and local resources, and aligns with new or proposed initiatives. For example, Governor Jared Polis' 2019 policy agenda included the implementation of free, full-day kindergarten. In 2020, it is anticipated that the State will invest additional funds to support the recruitment and retention of a qualified early childhood education (ECE) workforce, increase available high-quality mixed-delivery options for Colorado families, and expand access to early childhood mental health consultation (ECMHC) services and home visiting programs.

In December 2019, Colorado was awarded a three-year PDG B-5 Renewal Grant. The renewal grant is designed to strengthen state and local efforts to build, develop and expand high-quality early care and education programs so that more children from low- and moderate-income families enter kindergarten ready to succeed in school. The renewal grant will be leveraged to fund a number of the strategies identified in the plan to achieve this purpose.

The Colorado Shines Brighter Strategic Plan includes strategies that extend beyond the PDG B-5 grant scope and timeline. This design establishes a foundation upon which efforts to blend funds, enhance system elements, and increase access to high-quality early childhood programs and services can continue to evolve beyond December 2022. For example, efforts will be made to integrate sustainability requirements into formal agreements with partners, to identify new opportunities for alignment and reduced duplication across funding streams, and to use the continuous quality improvement process to make data-informed decisions about the strategies that are most significantly contributing to Colorado's vision. Updating the strategic plan annually in response to new or refined needs assessment findings and evaluation outcomes provides opportunities to re-direct resources to the most effective strategies.

## ► The Charge Ahead

Taking steps to make sure Colorado's early childhood system supports equity, quality and access is essential to ensuring young children and their families are healthy, valued, and thrive. The Colorado Shines Brighter Strategic Plan provides a statewide roadmap to do just that.

Over the next five years, implementation of the goals, objectives and strategies contained within this plan will contribute to the state's shared vision that all children are ready for school when entering kindergarten. By aligning this plan with other investments, state and local organizations, the Early Childhood Leadership Commission, early childhood funders, state legislators, and the Governor's Office will make Colorado the best place in the nation for young children and their families to thrive.





<sup>1</sup> Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. "Brain Architecture." Retrieved from <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/brain-architecture/>. November 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Colorado Children's Campaign. (2016). "KIDS COUNT in Colorado!" <https://www.coloradokids.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/2016-Kids-Count-final-low-res.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2012-2016 5-Year Estimates Table B17024.

<sup>4</sup> American Community Survey, US Census Bureau. Table B17024.

<sup>5</sup> American Community Survey, US Census Bureau. Table B16007.

<sup>6</sup> Stedron, J., and G. Maloney. (2018). "Looking to the Past to Shape Colorado's Future: 30 Years of Progress for Young Children and Families." [http://earlymilestones.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/EarlyChildhood\\_FINAL.pdf](http://earlymilestones.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/EarlyChildhood_FINAL.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Colorado Department of Human Services, Office of Early Childhood. "Colorado Shines Brighter (PDG B-5), 2019 Stakeholder Outreach and Engagement Activities." Retrieved from [http://coloradoofficeofearlychildhood.force.com/oec/OEC\\_Partners?p=Partners&s=Colorado-Shines-Brighter&lang=en](http://coloradoofficeofearlychildhood.force.com/oec/OEC_Partners?p=Partners&s=Colorado-Shines-Brighter&lang=en). November 2019.



# Appendix

**Table 1. Program Quality and Alignment Subcommittee Membership, 2019**

Early Childhood Leadership Commission	Early Childhood Leadership Commission
Parents, Caregivers and/or Parent Council or Association Representatives	Colorado Interagency Coordinating Council
	Young Child Wellness Council
	Colorado Department of Human Services Family Voice Council
	Fatherhood Coalition
Early Childhood Councils	Early Childhood Council Leadership Alliance
Statewide Early Childhood Organizations	Parent Possible
	Early Childhood Colorado Partnership Steering Committee
	Colorado State Libraries, Growing Readers Together
Philanthropic Partners	Zoma Foundation
Health or Behavioral Health Subject Matter Experts	Colorado Association for Infant Mental Health
	Early Intervention Colorado
	Colorado Children's Hospital
	Clinica Family Health
Head Start	Head Start State Collaboration Office
	Colorado Head Start Association
State Agencies and Programs	Colorado Department of Education, Preschool - 3rd Grade Office
	Colorado Department of Education, Educator Talent
	Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Prevention Services
	Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Child and Adult Care Food Program
	Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing, Maternal Child Health
	Colorado Department of Human Services, Child Welfare
	Colorado Department of Human Services, Child Care Licensing
	Colorado Department of Human Services, Child Care Quality Improvement
	Colorado Department of Human Services, Colorado Child Care Assistance Program
	Colorado Department of Human Services, Early Childhood Mental Health
	Colorado Department of Human Services, Home Visiting
	Colorado Department of Human Services, Expanding Quality in Infant & Toddler Care
	Colorado Department of Human Services, Child Maltreatment Prevention
	Colorado Department of Higher Education
Family and Community Engagement Organizations	State Advisory Council for Parent Involvement in Education
	Pueblo Catholic Charities
	Family Resource Center Association



<b>Early Care and Education Organizations</b>	Colorado Association for the Education of Young Children
	Family Child Care Homes
	Early Childhood Education Association of Colorado
	Providers Advancing School Outcomes
<b>P-12 Education System</b>	Jefferson County School District
	Salida School District
	Preschool Special Education Advisory Council
<b>Research Organization/Think Tanks</b>	Marzano Research
	Colorado State University
<b>Business or Public-Private Partners</b>	Good Business Colorado
	Small Business Majority
<b>Indian Tribes, Tribal Organizations and Urban Indian Organizations</b>	Denver Indian Health Family Services
	Denver Indian Family Resource Center
<b>Policy Advocacy Organizations</b>	Colorado Children's Campaign
	Clayton Early Learning / Raise Colorado
<b>PQA Workgroups</b>	Early Childhood Professional Development Advisory Council
	Young Child Wellness Council
<b>Local Government</b>	Eagle County Commissioner
<b>Faith-Based Early Childhood Programs</b>	Colorado Nonprofit Development Center
<b>Homelessness Supports</b>	McKinney Vento Liaison
<b>Migrant Education</b>	Colorado Department of Education, Migrant Education Program

**Table 2. Tiered Approach to Stakeholder Input for the Strategic Plan**

**Survey and Ongoing Communication**

CO Department of Education, Colorado State Library
CO Department of Education, Preschool through Third Grade Office
CO Department of Health Care Policy and Financing
CO Department of Higher Education
CO Department of Human Services, Office of Behavioral Health
CO Department of Human Services, Office of Early Childhood
CO Department of Human Services, Office of Economic Security
CO Department of Labor and Employment
CO Department of Human Services, Office of Children, Youth & Families
Colorado Academy of Pediatrics
Colorado Association of Family & Children's Agencies
Colorado Association of Local Public Health Officials
Colorado Child Maltreatment Prevention Framework for Action Planning Communities
Colorado Children's Hospital



Colorado Early Childhood Screening & Referral Policy Council
Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab, University of Denver
Colorado Interagency Coordinating Council
Colorado Workforce Development Council
County Title V Directors
Denver Metro Public Health Agencies
Early Childhood Colorado Partnership
Early Childhood Funders Networks
Early Childhood Partnership Regional Accountable Entities
Family Leadership Training Institute Providers
Foster/Adoption Association
Regional Health Connectors
<b>Formal Focus Group &amp; Interview Participants</b>
Colorado Association of Infant Mental Health
Colorado Association for the Education of Young Children
Colorado Children's Campaign
Colorado Children's Trust Fund Board
Colorado Head Start Association
Colorado Home Visiting Coalition
Colorado Human Services Directors Association
Early Childhood Council Leadership Alliance
Early Childhood Leadership Commission & Program and Quality Alignment Subcommittee
Family Resource Center Association
Friend, Family and Neighbor Strategic Partnership Action Network
Governor's Office
Healthy Child Care Colorado
Invest In Kids
Licensed Early Care and Education Providers
Parent Possible
RAISE Colorado
<b>Survey &amp; Informal Focus Group/Interview Participants</b>
CO Department of Human Services, Family Voice Council
Colorado Association of Family Child Care
Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment, Maternal and Child Health
Colorado Early Childhood Education Association
Denver Indian Family Resource Center



District Advisory Council Leads
Early Childhood Mental Health Consultants
Early Childhood Workforce Innovation Grantees
Governor's Office of Information Technology Informal
License-Exempt Early Care and Education Providers
Major Latinx Service Providers
Major Refugee Service Providers
Preschool Special Education Advisory Council
Special Education Directors
Ute Mountain Ute and Southern Ute Tribes

**Table 3. Data Collection and Analysis Activities for the Needs Assessment and Strategic Plan**

Methodology	Outcomes
Formal Focus Groups for the Needs Assessment	Nineteen formal focus groups representing participants from 29 Colorado counties: 137 child care providers and other early childhood stakeholders (53% from rural communities) and 102 families, parents and guardians (36% from rural communities).
Formal Focus Groups for the Strategic Plan	Twenty-five focus groups reaching 100 family members conducted across the state targeting hard to reach populations (Tribes, families experiencing homelessness, migrant/refugee families, fathers, rural families, caregivers of children with developmental delays or disabilities).
Key Informant Interviews and Informal Focus Groups for the Needs Assessment	Six key informant interviews and six informal focus groups targeting advocates and hard to reach populations (Tribes, families experiencing homelessness, migrant/refugee families, fathers, rural families, caregivers of children with developmental delays or disabilities, Spanish-speaking informal providers).
Key Informant Interviews and Informal Focus Groups for the Strategic Plan	Eighteen key informant interviews and 13 focus groups targeting key stakeholders identified in Appendix Table 2.
Family Survey for the Needs Assessment	Online and phone survey of 3,404 primary caregivers of children ages birth through five to collect information on child care needs and preferences.
Family Text Messaging Survey and Focus Groups for the Strategic Plan	Text message survey of 1,276 family members to collect information on how they enter into the birth through five state system, what parents know (or do not know) about the services available to them, and the information parents need in order to maximize their knowledge and choices.
Review of Existing Needs Assessments	Reviewed more than 24 national, state and local needs assessments to inform research questions, methodology, and provide data.
Review of Existing Strategic Plans	Content and alignment analysis of 38 existing state, regional and local strategic plans to develop a landscape of current or planned efforts that may align to the strategic plan.
Administrative Data Collection	Analysis of 19 program data sets to assess the supply and demand of services across Colorado's early childhood system.



**Table 4. State-level Organizations/Documents Included in the Strategic Plan Content Analysis and Alignment Review**

CO Department of Human Services (2019-2021 Child Care and Development Fund State Plan)
CO Department of Human Services (2015 Early Childhood Mental Health Strategic Plan)
Bright by Three (2019-2021 Strategic Plan)
CO Association for the Education of young Children
CO Department of Education
CO Department of Public Health and Environment
CO Department of Public Health and Environment (Maternal and Child Health State Plan and Ancillary Initiatives)
CO Department of Public Health and Environment, Nutrition Services Branch
CO Home Visiting Coalition
CO Project LAUNCH (Final Report)
CO Department of Human Services, Colorado Shines Professional Development Information System
Colorado Human Services Directors Association
Early Childhood Colorado Partnership
Early Childhood Council Leadership Alliance
Early Childhood Leadership Commission (Annual Report)
Early Childhood Workforce 2020 Plan
Early Connections Learning Centers
Early Learning Ventures
Healthy Child Care Colorado
Needs Assessment of Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation in Friend, Family and Neighbor Care
Parent Possible
Project LAUNCH (Strategic Plan)
Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (Strategic Plan)
The Colorado Association of Family Child Care (Purpose Statement)



**Table 5. Regional- and Local-level Organizations Included in the Strategic Plan Content Analysis and Alignment Review**

Boulder County Housing and Human Services
Chaffee County Early Childhood Council
Community Partnership Family Resource Center
Community Partnership for Child Development
Denver Preschool Program
Early Childhood Council of Larimer County
Early Childhood Council of Logan, Phillips, Sedgwick
Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County
Huerfano-Las Animas Counties Early Childhood Council
Jeffco Public Schools
Mountain Resource Center
Rocky Mountain Early Childhood Council

# Colorado Shines Brighter

*Birth through Five Strategic Plan 2020-2025*

