



Early Childhood Transition Plan Statewide Listening Tour

Oct.11-15, 2021

Overview

Building on its longstanding commitment to early childhood care and education, Colorado is creating a new state department to oversee early childhood programs, including the development and implementation of a voter-approved universal preschool program.

As the state moves forward in designing both the department and the program, it has and will continue to seek significant engagement from families, providers, school districts, advocates, community leaders, and other stakeholders. This input will be key to ensuring success for young children and families across the state.

Today's event seeks to review key elements of the draft transition plan, answer questions about how this will affect children and families in your community, and outline next steps in the process.

A Unified Department of Early Childhood

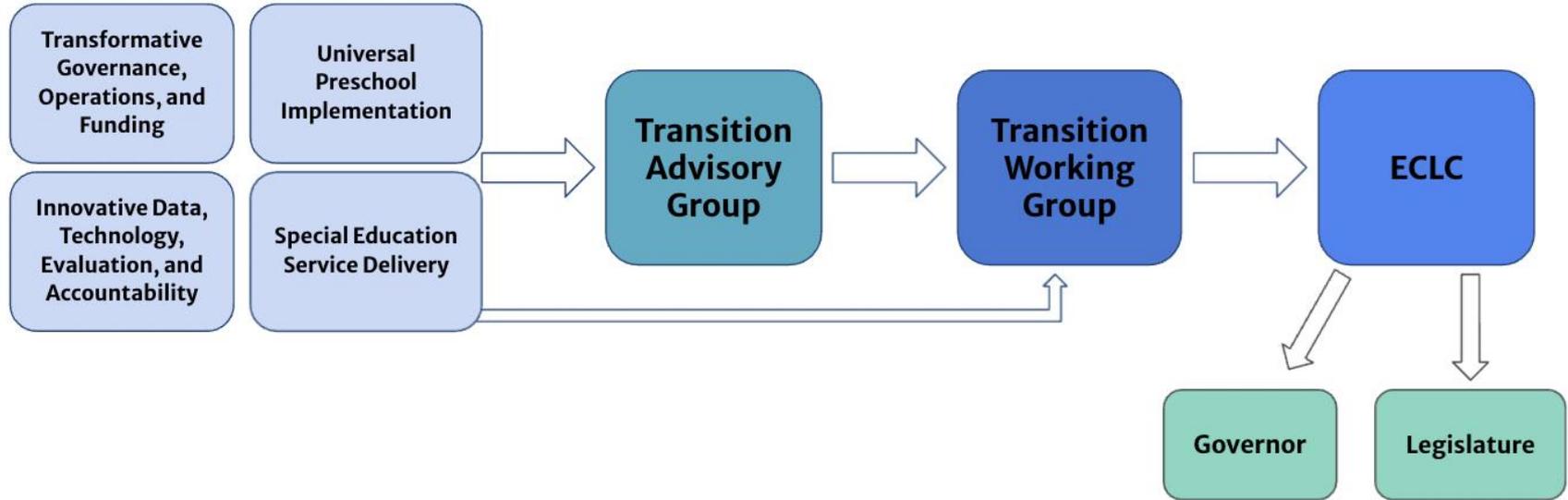
The Colorado General Assembly approved [legislation to create a new unified Department of Early Childhood](#), effective July 1, 2022. A new unified agency will:

- 1 Streamline systems, funding, and programs to increase access to early care and education for families and support providers.
- 2 Position the universal preschool program to equitably increase services for low-income children and simultaneously expand access to early care and education to all preschool-age children in Colorado.
- 3 Place a champion in the Governor's Cabinet to ensure early childhood education and care issues remain at top of the statewide agenda.
- 4 Align efforts and funding to improve quality early care and education and to bolster the workforce.
- 5 Define what high-quality, age-appropriate early care and education looks like for teachers and children.



Transition Planning Process

ECLC's Transition Planning Process



Stakeholder Engagement

This process cannot be successful without the engagement of a diverse array of stakeholders. Many thanks to the stakeholders who have played such an instrumental role in this work.

- 56 TAG members have attended 5 meetings to date
 - 4 surveys were given to TAG members to collect additional feedback
- Hundreds of individuals have attended the 32 subgroup meetings
 - 37 named members of the Special Education subgroup
- More than 300 individuals have attended ECLC listening sessions for families, providers, and the workforce
- Monthly town halls

The Role of the ECLC

The Early Childhood Leadership Commission (ECLC) is tasked with submitting a report to the Governor and the Legislature outlining detailed plans to transition to the new department and to implement the voluntary universal preschool program. The transition plan is due November 2021, and recommendations for universal voluntary preschool are due January 2022.

Stakeholders have been and will continue informing the path forward, and the ECLC has run a transition planning process that prioritizes public engagement and input.



Draft Transition Plan

Importance of Early Childhood

Research is clear: Investing in early childhood is essential to supporting child development, working families, and a prosperous economy.

The high-quality experiences children have in the first five years of their life lay the foundation for their future, resulting in:

- Gains in early reading and math
- Reduced grade retention
- Reduced placement in special education classrooms
- Increased likelihood of attending a 4 year university
- Better earnings
- Reduced crime

The opportunity to have accessible and high-quality care and learning experiences for children also empowers caregivers—especially women—to remain and re-enter the workforce, advance skills, and earn income, which boosts the economy as a whole.

The Department of Early Childhood Transition Plan is rooted in this understanding.

Recommendation #1: Adopt a Vision, Mission, and Values.

Vision

All Colorado children, families, and early childhood professionals are valued, healthy and thriving.

Mission

The Colorado Department of Early Childhood champions a comprehensive, community-informed, effective, high-quality and equitable early childhood system that supports the care, education and well-being of all Colorado's young children, their families and early childhood professionals in all settings.

Values

- We value equity across the early childhood system and are committed to utilizing an equity-focused lens to drive priorities and decision making.
- We believe formal and informal care environments can provide high-quality, developmentally appropriate care and learning.
- We respect and appreciate the diversity and strengths of all of our communities in Colorado.
- We believe accessibility to early childhood services considers affordability, cultural responsiveness, and parent choice.
- We value an innovative and expansive approach to our early childhood system.
- We value a whole-family approach.

Recommendation #2: Adopt the ECLC's Guiding Principles.

The TAG and TWG adopted the ECLC's guiding principles to further ground this plan in the ongoing work.



Recommendation #3: Build a diverse, equity-driven, expert leadership team.

The Department of Early Childhood (DEC) will require a leadership team with a diverse set of skills, a strong focus on equity, and significant expertise.

In addition, TWG recommends:

- Program delivery should be organized around functions of the early childhood system, rather than around the administration of individual programs and grants, to create more cohesion for the field.
- DEC should maintain a strong commitment to data and a strong, responsible data collection process that includes data privacy requirements, and should leverage technology to improve user experiences.

Recommendation #3 (cont): Build a diverse, equity-driven, expert leadership team.

DEC's leadership team should include:

- An expert in policy and governmental affairs.
- A finance expert who is oriented toward using their significant understanding of financial regulations to find innovative solutions that meet Colorado's funding needs.
- A program lead who is charged with improving the coherence of experience for children, families, providers, and workforce throughout the system.
- A lead who is charged with maintaining partnerships and collaborations across departments.
- An effective leader to develop a robust data collection and analysis system that is used to inform future strategies and guide decision making.

This team must focus on DEC's legislative charge to streamline and enhance the child, family, workforce, and provider experience.

Recommendation #4: Establish a Rules and Regulations Advisory Council to advise the Executive Director on rules and regulations.

To facilitate meaningful advice, consultation, and collaboration about rulemaking guidance, the TWG recommends the creation of a **Rules and Regulations Advisory Council**.

To maintain a unified and cohesive vision, TWG recommends the Executive Director hold final rulemaking authority for DEC programs, based on the advice of the Rules and Regulations Advisory Council.

Recommendation #4 (cont): Establish a Rules and Regulations Advisory Council to advise the Executive Director on rules and regulations.

The Rules and Regulations Advisory Council at a minimum should include:

- Parents or caregivers of children who are enrolled in a variety of public and private early childhood programs;
- Members of the early childhood workforce, including community and school based educators;
- Representatives of geographically and programmatically diverse community and school based public and private early childhood programs;
- Stakeholders representing historically underserved and under-resourced communities;
- County and school districts officials; and
- Representatives from foundations, businesses and advocacy organizations

Recommendations from the Rules and Regulations Advisory Council should be made by a majority vote, and the Executive Director should demonstrate the department thoroughly considers each of these recommendations.

By July 2025, DEC shall conduct an evaluation of its governance structure to determine if additional supports or structures are needed.

Recommendation #5: Maintain the advisory role of ECLC and other existing advisory groups.

As the federally authorized state advisory council, the ECLC has advised Colorado leaders on strategies to promote strong and research-backed early childhood practices across the state since its creation in 2010.

In moving to the new department, the ECLC should also serve in a key advisory role to the leadership of DEC, as well as continuing its advisory capacity to state policymakers, other departments, and the Governor's Office.

In addition to the advisory role of the ECLC, DEC should be guided by many other existing engagement structures currently advising Office of Early Childhood (OEC) and Colorado Department of Education (CDE).

Recommendation #6: Transition suggested programs and services to DEC.

TWG recommends the following programs and services begin to transition to the Department of Early Childhood **beginning in July 2022**:

- Colorado Preschool Program/Early Childhood At Risk Enhancement
- All services administered by the Early Childhood Workforce Development Team
- All programs and services administered by the Office of Early Childhood

The purpose of each of these programs aligns with the mission, vision, values, and guiding principles of DEC to create a comprehensive, community-informed, effective, high-quality, and equitable early childhood system.

TWG is also cognizant that the movement of programs will require thoughtful timing to ensure seamless access to services for children and families.

Programs Currently Housed in OEC

Programs and services administered by the Office of Early Childhood:

- Child Care Attendance Tracking System
- Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP)
- Colorado Shines Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)
- Early Childhood Councils & CCR&Rs
- Expanding Quality in Infant & Toddler Care Initiative
- Early Childhood Workforce & Professional Development (PDIS)
- Child Abuse Prevention Trust Fund
- Colorado Community Response
- Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention Program
- Early Childhood Mental Health
- Early Intervention (IDEA, Part C)
- Family Resource Centers
- Fatherhood Program
- Head Start Collab Office
- Home Visiting Programs (e.g., NFP, SafeCare, PAT, Healthy Steps, Child First, HIPPY)
- Incredible Years
- Promoting Safe and Stable Families
- Background Investigation Unit
- Child Care Licensing

Recommendation #7: Re-evaluate program movement to DEC by 2025.

Establishing and maintaining a strong Department of Early Childhood will require a cycle of continuous review and improvement. After the department is established in July 2022, stakeholders recommended an ongoing review of the programs overseen by DEC.

DEC and ECLC, along with relevant agencies, stakeholders, and experts, should re-evaluate the movement of the following programs, if federal law allows, and potentially others, by July 2025:

- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
- Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)
- IDEA Part B (Preschool Special Education)

Recommendation #8: Address feedback on preschool special education.

TWG recommends IDEA Part B (Preschool Special Education) remain at CDE.

TWG also recommends the agencies work together in close collaboration to continue stakeholder engagement and address the concerns raised by stakeholders before the new statewide, universal preschool program launches in the 2023-2024 school year.

Recommendation #9: Provide DEC with fiscal authority and regulatory power.

As programs shift to the new department, DEC should also acquire the authority and regulatory power of the funding sources tied to these programs.

During the unification process, existing rules, regulations, statute, and budget structure of these programs may need to be amended to ensure consistency in regulation across the landscape.

Recommendation #10: Address five identified funding challenges.

These five challenges and solutions regarding the blending and braiding of funds were elevated by TAG and subgroups.

Challenge 1

Regulations are not aligned.

DEC should revise and streamline existing regulations (e.g. eligibility, program standards) across funding sources to ensure families and providers have flexibility with funds and less administrative burden.

Challenge 2

Separate programs have separate funding and technology structures.

DEC should utilize one simple application for universal preschool and related slot-based programs that is easy to use for families and providers. Over time, additional programs should be added to the unified application.

Recommendation #10 (cont): Address five identified funding challenges.

Challenge 3

Different funding sources flow to different local structures with no one responsible for ensuring cohesion.

DEC should itself blend and braid dollars at the state level before allocations are released for state-controlled funds. DEC should build local capacity to blend and braid local and federal-to-local funds with state funds across programs.

Challenge 4

Each community is different with differing current levels of coordination and implementation.

DEC should structure itself to empower local communities to lead and innovate based on their context. DEC should commence a review of community readiness to determine necessary supports for successful launch of the new preschool program and alignment.

Challenge 5

There is a lack of visibility into systems statewide.

DEC should prioritize, coordinate, adequately fund, and require the collection of data on access, need, demand, and capacity by demographics and locality across all program types and in a way that does not burden providers.

Recommendation #11: Utilize technology and data to make informed decisions.

To inform decisions for children and families in Colorado, DEC should:

- Collect data that provides additional information on system capacity, including number of open or closed classrooms, number of current teachers and workforce shortages, and overall availability of slots and current vacancies.
- Implement a child count process that provides insight into the unique number of children served at every publicly-funded site, across programs and funding sources, including unique identifiers when available, to encourage seamless K-12 integration while fully respecting the privacy of every student and family.
- Ensure that the child count process captures the number of children served by Colorado Shines quality level.
- Coordinate and require the collection of data in a way that does not burden providers and families.

Recommendation #12: Address Workforce Challenges

TAG and subgroups repeatedly raised challenges faced by the early childhood workforce. The following recommendations directly address those challenges.

Challenges	Recommendations
There are not enough members across the spectrum of the early childhood workforce due to challenges with recruitment and retention.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Review qualification pathways for opportunities to reduce complexity while also maintaining a diverse workforce in all early childhood settings.● Work with higher education to develop pathways and recruitment strategies for professionals needed in the early childhood workforce, including early childhood teachers, occupational, physical, and speech therapists, mental health consultants, family support service providers, and others critical to meeting the needs of children and families.● Simplify, promote, and measure achievement using Colorado's Competencies for Early Childhood Educators and Administrators Competencies Framework for adults who work with families and children.● Support individuals to achieve these competencies through ongoing, accessible professional development.
Members of the early childhood workforce are not compensated appropriately.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Develop and elevate innovative compensation strategies for the early childhood workforce across all settings at the program, community, and state levels that are aligned with the achievement of defined competencies.
It is too hard and complex to be determined qualified to teach in licensed programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Review the process for meeting early childhood workforce entry requirements to reduce barriers, increase retention, and minimize administrative burden at all levels of the system.



Next Steps

Feedback Form

The draft transition plan is available at www.earlychildhoodcolorado.org/transition.

Stakeholders can offer written feedback on the draft plan through an online public form until **October 21**. The feedback form can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/CO-EC-Feedback>.

All of the feedback and recommendations will be considered by TWG to inform the transition plan due to the ECLC on **Nov.1, 2021**.

Department of Early
Childhood Transition Plan
DRAFT

October 2021



Universal Preschool Recommendations

Over the coming months the TAG, subgroups, and other stakeholder engagement structures will continue to meet, and discussions will focus on planning for universal preschool.

By January 1, 2022, the TWG will also be submitting recommendations on the implementation of the new statewide, voluntary, universal preschool program to the ECLC and the Legislature.



Questions?

Thank you!

Please submit your feedback on the draft plan through an online form by **October 21**. The feedback form can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/CO-EC-Feedback>.