

Colorado's Department of Early Childhood - Transition Plan

Early Childhood and School Readiness Legislative Commission (ECSRLC)

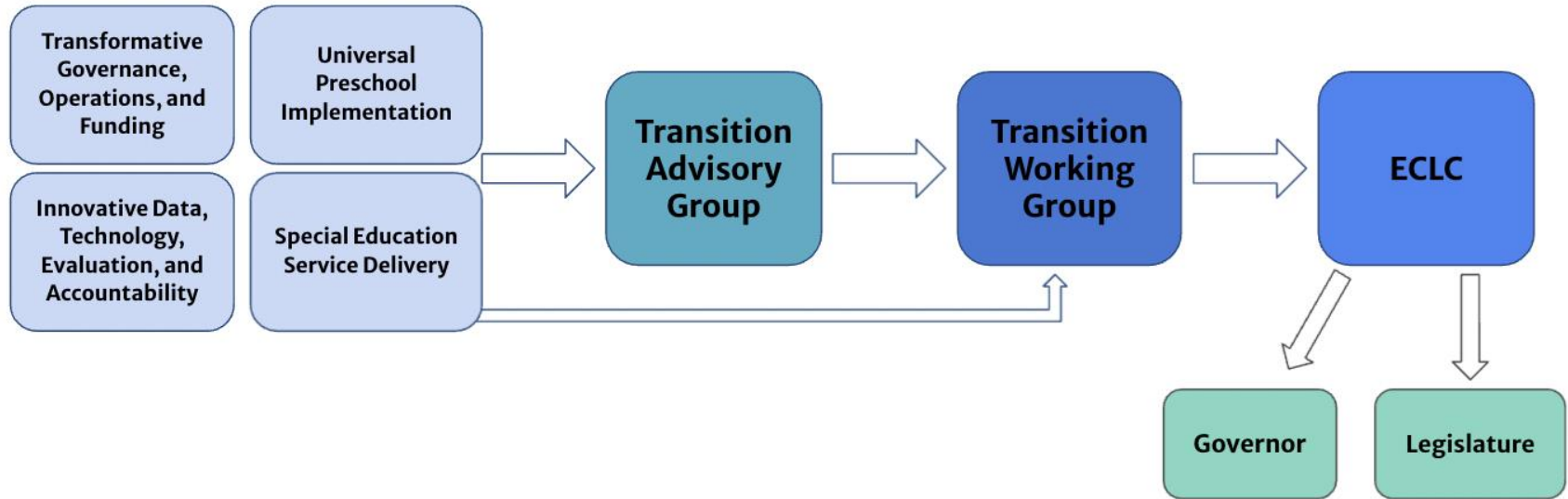
Nov 18, 2021

Introductions - Members of the Transition Working Group

- Tom Massey, Deputy Executive Director, Health Care Policy & Financing and ECLC Co-Chair
- Dr. Pamela Harris, President & CEO, Mile High Early Learning and ECLC Co-Chair
- Ben Henderson, Director of Operations and Cabinet Affairs, Office of the Governor
- Michelle Barnes, Executive Director, Dept. of Human Services
- Dr. Katy Anthes, Commissioner of Education, Dept. of Education
- Carrie Cortiglio, Division Director, Dept. of Public Health & Environment
- Susan Steele, President & CEO, Buell Foundation and ECLC Co-Chair

HB21-1304 created a new Department of Early Childhood (DEC) to coordinate a unified early childhood system and ensure the equitable distribution of resources and programming, including the new voluntary, universal preschool program.

Transition Planning Process and Stakeholder Engagement



Transition Planning Process and 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 Transition Advisory Group members have attended 7 meetings to date
 - More than half of members are parents and providers
- Hundreds of individuals have attended the 36 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 and newsletters
- Statewide listening tour to share the draft plan
 - 11 Listening Sessions with hundreds of Coloradans throughout the state
 - Over 150 people shared written feedback on the plan

Recommendation #1: Adopt a Mission, Vision, Values and Guiding Principles

Vision

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

Mission

The Colorado Department of Early Childhood ensures the delivery of a comprehensive, community-informed, data-driven, 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 #1: Adopt a Mission, Vision, Values and Guiding Principles (continued)

The Transition Advisory Group (TAG) and Transition Working Group (TWG) adopted the ECLC's guiding principles to further ground this plan in the ongoing work.



Recommendation #2: Maintain the advisory role of ECLC and other existing advisory groups.

As the federally authorized state advisory council, the Early Childhood Leadership Commission (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 #3: Establish a Rules and Regulations Advisory Council to advise the Executive Director on rules and regulations.

Additionally, as a state agency in the Executive Branch, DEC must adhere to the rulemaking process outlined in the Administrative Procedure Act or APA. The rulemaking process involves four stages:

- 1) Notice of Proposed Rulemaking;
- 2) Comment Period on Proposed Rule;
- 3) Hearing on Proposed Rule; and
- 4) Final Adoption of Proposed Rule.

Recommendation #3 (cont): Establish a Rules and Regulations Advisory Council to advise the Executive Director on rules and regulations.

Based on stakeholder feedback that the rulemaking process should be balanced, the TWG also recommends the creation of a **Rules and Regulations Advisory Council (RRAC)** to facilitate meaningful advice, consultation, and collaboration.

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

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

Recommendation #3 (cont): Establish a Rules and Regulations Advisory Council to advise the Executive Director on rules and regulations.

The DEC RRAC should have **no more than 15 members** and at a minimum should include:

- Parents, families, 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 and Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) providers;
- County and school district officials, including preschool directors and charter schools;
- Representatives from foundations, business, and advocacy organizations;
- Experts in finance and/or regulations;
- Representation from culturally and linguistically diverse communities;
- Representation from higher education; and
- Representation from health / mental health / oral care professionals.

To ensure equity is at the center of all rulemaking processes, at least 50% of the RRAC should represent stakeholders with lived experience in the early childhood system (e.g., parents, providers, members of the workforce) and/or represent historically underserved and under-resourced communities.

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.

Recommendation #4: Build a diverse, equity-driven, expert leadership team.

Under an Executive Director, with significant experience in early childhood and systems management, DEC should have a culturally diverse leadership team with a comprehensive set of skills, a strong equity focus, significant expertise, and an understanding of trauma-informed care.

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 thorough, responsible data collection process that includes data privacy requirements, and should leverage technology to improve user experiences.

Recommendation #4 (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.
- DEC should also have a team to manage the department's technology needs and systems, managed by a lead with expertise in digital transformation and adept at using technology to streamline systems.

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

Recommendation #5: 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.

Recommendation #6: 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 #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.

The Transition Plan recommends IDEA Part B (Preschool Special Education) remain at CDE.

- The Transition Plan recommends that 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.
- CDE, in partnership with DEC and stakeholders, will utilize the input from the Special Education Service Delivery Subgroup to develop a preschool special education implementation plan to support districts, administrative units, and other providers working in partnership to fulfill the requirements of IDEA and Colorado's Exceptional Children's Educational Act.

Recommendation #9: Establish close collaborations to strengthen coordination and promote alignment

- To best support children and families, collaboration is needed among higher education, health care, oral health care, mental health care, human services, and education.
- The DEC should establish cross-agency and community partnerships which extend beyond agreements and updates to foster collaboration and alignment among programs and systems located in various departments and at the local level.

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.

Historical investments in early childhood at all levels are not nearly enough to fully fund the needs of families, even when fully maximized.

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.
- Ensure the data privacy security of all data collected by all participants in early childhood systems.
- Leverage technology in innovative ways to create digital transformation in the system.

Recommendation #12: Address Workforce Challenges

- TAG and subgroups repeatedly raised challenges faced by the early childhood workforce. The following recommendations directly address those challenges.
- The early childhood workforce is an incredibly diverse field, including teachers, speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, health services providers, cooks, bus drivers, family support staff, and many others.

Challenges	Recommendations
<p>There are not enough members across the spectrum of the early childhood workforce due to challenges with recruitment and retention.</p>	<p>Early Childhood Workforce:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review qualification pathways for opportunities to reduce complexity while also maintaining a diverse workforce in all settings. • Work with higher education to develop pathways and recruitment strategies for specialists needed in the early childhood workforce, including early childhood teachers, occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech language pathologists, mental health consultants, home visitors, family service providers, and others critical to meeting the needs of children and families. • Support and increase approved pre-service and in-service training opportunities, including training on trauma-informed care. <p>Early Childhood Educators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplify, promote, and measure achievement using Colorado’s Competencies for Early Childhood Educators and Professionals (revised 2021). • Support individuals to achieve these competencies through ongoing, accessible professional development.
<p>There are not Black/Indigenous/People of Color entering the early childhood field or serving in leadership roles.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and implement strategies that recruit and retain a diverse workforce and support greater diversity in leadership positions.
<p>Members of the early childhood workforce are not compensated appropriately.</p>	<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.
<p>It is too hard and complex to be determined qualified to teach in licensed programs.</p>	<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.

Looking Ahead

What's Next?

On November 15, 2021, the DEC Transition Plan was shared with members of the Colorado Legislature. The DEC will launch July 1, 2022.

By January 1, 2022, the TWG is charged to provide recommendations for the universal preschool program and ensure they are aligned with the DEC Transition Plan. The ECLC will approve the recommendations by January 15, 2022. These recommendations must address:

- Alignment with CPP to create one state-wide preschool program
- Alignment with other EC programs to create a streamlined experience
- Process for calculating funding rates and how the rates are designed to support quality preschool programs and the process for distributing money
- Necessary interagency agreements to define the roles and responsibilities of DEC
- Special education: alignment with federal requirements, identification, & accountability in a mixed delivery environment
- Reduction of duplicative oversight

Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement is a critical component to this process. To offer updated information and gather feedback, the ECLC will continue to manage the following opportunities for public engagement:

Opportunities to provide input

- Special Education Service Delivery Subgroup (Upcoming: Dec 8)
- Universal Preschool Implementation Subgroup (Upcoming: Dec 9)
- Draft Transition Plan - Available early December
- Additional Listening Sessions for Feedback
- Feedback Form

Updates

- Monthly Transition Plan Newsletter
- Monthly Town Halls (Upcoming: Dec 7)
- Transition Website
- Join a TAG or an ECLC meeting

Questions?

Thank you!

For more information, please visit
www.earlychildhoodcolorado.org/transition