Prior to the pandemic, Colorado’s child poverty rate had fallen to its lowest level since 2000.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.
Recent years saw Colorado make remarkable progress on improving access to full-day kindergarten, but preschool access plateaued.

Full-Day Kindergarten Participation in Colorado vs. Access to the Colorado Preschool Program Among 4-Year-Olds

- 97% of kindergartners enrolled in a full-day program
- 24% of 4-year-olds served in the Colorado Preschool Program

Source: Colorado Department of Education and the National Institute for Early Education Research.
Even prior to the pandemic, capacity in Colorado’s licensed child care settings was insufficient to meet the needs of all families who likely needed care.

Source: Colorado Children’s Campaign analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey and the Colorado Office of Early Childhood.

Licensed Capacity in Child Care Settings as a Percent of Colorado Children Under 6 with All Parents in the Workforce, 2019

- 62% of 152,000 kids were able to access a licensed slot.
- 38% of 94,000 kids had no access to a licensed slot.

Source: Colorado Children’s Campaign analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey and the Colorado Office of Early Childhood.
Colorado faced longstanding child care workforce challenges before COVID, largely due to low wages.

### Median Wages in Colorado for Select Education Occupations, 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Median Wage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child care teachers</td>
<td>$29,795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool teachers</td>
<td>$33,570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten teachers</td>
<td>$49,057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary school teachers</td>
<td>$53,253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school teachers</td>
<td>$55,265</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Colorado Department of Labor and Employment.
Colorado faced longstanding child care workforce challenges before COVID, largely due to low wages.

Pre-pandemic...

Approximately 70% of Colorado child care directors report having difficulty finding teachers to fill open positions. Vacancies take an average of 2.5 months to fill.

Early Impacts of COVID-19
Child poverty data for 2020 are not yet available, but other indicators point to widespread economic struggles among families during the pandemic.

**Unemployment Rate in Colorado By Month in 2020, Seasonally Adjusted**

Throughout the pandemic, about one third of Colorado households with children have reported difficulty paying for usual household expenses.

Colorado Households with Children Reporting **Difficulty Paying for Usual Household Expenses** in Past Week

- Aug 19-Sep 14, 2020: 34%
- Sep 16-Oct 12, 2020: 30%
- Oct 14-Nov 9, 2020: 35%
- Nov 11-Dec 7, 2020: 43%
- Jan 6-Feb 1, 2021: 35%
- Feb 3-Mar 1, 2021: 32%
- Mar 3-Mar 29, 2021: 32%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey.
Families of color were disproportionately harmed by the pandemic’s economic fallout due to longstanding racial inequities in the economy.

Economic Struggles Among Colorado Households with Children, By Race/Ethnicity*:
March 3-March 29, 2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-Hispanic White</th>
<th>Two or More Races</th>
<th>Hispanic or Latino</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lost employment income</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty paying</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>usual expenses in the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>past week</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little or no confidence</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td></td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in ability to pay</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>next rent or mortgage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>payment on time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey.

*Data for racial groups other than those listed here were suppressed due to large margins of error.
The pandemic exacerbated child care challenges for families and providers across Colorado.

Nearly **1 in 10** Colorado child care providers closed during the pandemic, and total enrollment dropped by **more than half** (Early Milestones Colorado, 2020).

According to research conducted by Early Milestones Colorado, 64% of Colorado families surveyed reported having to alter their child care arrangements due to the pandemic. 33% reported not having the child care they needed when surveyed in late summer 2020.

The pandemic exacerbated child care challenges facing the early care and education workforce as well

A July 2021 survey of early childhood programs found that the struggles created by the pandemic persist, but the strategies to support the sector have been a crucial lifeline, but challenges persist:

**Positive impacts of relief efforts**

- A majority of minority-owned businesses indicated their program would have closed without help
- ~40% of child care providers have been able to reduce debt they took on during the pandemic by using relief funds.
- 63% of respondents received some increase in compensation through bonuses or an increase in baseline pay
- 80% of respondents whose programs received more funds from increased subsidy payment rates reported that educators had received increased compensation

**Ongoing challenges**

- 80% of centers are experiencing a staffing shortage and 78% identify wages as why recruitment & retention remain a challenge
- 50% are serving fewer children
- 33% cannot open new classrooms
- 25% have reduced operating hours
- More than 1/3rd are considering leaving the field or shutting down their child care programs this year and that percentage is higher for minority-owned programs

During the first two weeks of March 2020, referrals to Early Intervention fell by 63 percent. Weekly referrals remained below their 2019 levels for nearly all of 2020.

**Weekly Referrals to Early Intervention in Colorado, 2019 and 2020**

- Week of March 1, 2020: 416 referrals
- Week of March 15, 2020: 155 referrals

Source: Colorado Children’s Campaign analysis of data from the Colorado Department of Human Services.
Enrollment in school district preschool programs was down 23 percent in fall of 2020 in comparison to fall of 2019, with even larger declines for some racial and ethnic groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percent Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>-23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaskan Native</td>
<td>-32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>-27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>-24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>-23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>-21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>-20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Races</td>
<td>-17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many of Colorado’s youngest kids missed well child visits or routine immunizations due to the COVID crisis

- 19% of Colorado moms with a child between birth and age 3 reported delaying or skipping well visits for their child during the pandemic.

- 17% of Colorado moms with a child between birth and age 3 reported delaying or skipping routine vaccinations for their child during the pandemic.

Source: Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Health eMoms COVID-19 Survey.
In conclusion…

Understanding the pandemic’s full impact on Colorado’s kids and families will take years of additional data...

...but initial data from the early months of the pandemic clearly show widespread disruption to families’ economic security, child and family health, child care and other services that support the well-being of our youngest kids.
Policy strategies for the Commission to consider

- Sustainable, long-term public investments in children's early learning & development are more important than ever
- Increase support for programs that support working families’ economic opportunity while advancing children's early development such as high-quality child care and preschool
- Target funds toward areas where challenges existed before (and have been exacerbated by) the pandemic: early childhood workforce compensation, infant and toddler child care, child care affordability
- Ensure support for critical services like Early Intervention that saw disruptions, but make a tremendous impact on child development
- Recognize the vital backbone role our early childhood workforce plays in supporting children and families and make long-term, sustained investments in adequate salaries for early childhood professionals
- Invest in early elementary supports, including ensuring educators have the resources and capacity to respond to a wide range of levels of school readiness, early literacy and math skills, and levels of childhood trauma.
- Support trauma-informed approaches across early childhood settings through strategies such as expanded early childhood mental health consultation.
- Support families’ economic security with investments in income supports for families to overcome the disproportionate impact of poverty on young children.
Questions?
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COLORADO CHILDREN’S CAMPAIGN
Every Chance for Every Child