



COLORADO
Department of Early Childhood

Colorado General Assembly
200 E Colfax Avenue
Denver, CO 80203

January 21, 2025

The Honorable Kyle Mullica
Chair, Colorado General Assembly Senate Health & Human Services Committee

The Honorable Kyle Brown
Chair, Colorado General Assembly House Health & Human Services Committee

The Honorable Chris Kolker
Chair, Colorado General Assembly Senate Education Committee

The Honorable Meghan Lukens
Chair, Colorado General Assembly House Education Committee

Members of the General Assembly:

The Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC) respectfully submits the attached report in response to the requirements set forth in Section 26.5-1-112, C.R.S.,:

(2) (a) The department, in collaboration with the departments of education, higher education, human services, public health and environment, and health care policy and financing, shall prepare an annual report concerning the progress made and challenges encountered by the department of early childhood in transitioning and implementing programs and providing services and by the departments as a group in implementing cross-agency collaboration related to, at a minimum:

- (I) Administration of part C of the federal "Individuals with Disabilities Education Act", 20 U.S.C. sec. 1400 et seq., as amended, and coordination with the department of education of the transition of children from part C to part B as agreed to in the interagency operating agreement described in section 26.5-3-404 (3) between the department and the department of education;*
- (II) Implementation of the memorandum of understanding described in section 26.5-4-206 between the department and the department of education concerning administration of special education services for children prior to kindergarten, specifically implementation of part B, section 619, and part C of the federal "Individuals with Disabilities Education Act", 20 U.S.C. sec. 1400 et seq., as amended;*
- (III) Administration of the child and adult care food program in collaboration with programs administered by the department;*
- (IV) Administration of the supplemental nutrition program for women, infants, and children in collaboration with programs administered by the department;*
- (V) Operation of early childhood and family support programs and services that the department administers, including at a minimum, data concerning the children and families served and the use, availability, and capacity of programs throughout the state;*
- (VI) Interaction of early childhood care, learning, and supports with the public kindergarten and elementary education system to ensure children enter kindergarten ready to learn and are behaviorally and academically successful;*
- (VII) Alignment of the operation of early childhood programs and services with the child welfare system operated by the department of human services and local agencies; and*
- (VIII) The use of public funding to support child care.*





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(b) The department shall submit the report prepared pursuant to subsection (2)(a) of this section as part of the presentation made to a joint committee of reference pursuant to the “State Measurement for Accountable, Responsive, and Transparent (SMART) Government Act”, part 2 of article 7 of title 2, in the 2023 regular legislative session and annually thereafter. In addition, the department shall annually submit the report to the governor; the early childhood leadership commission; the public and behavioral health and human services committee and the education committee of the house of representatives, or any successor committees; and the health and human services committee and the education committee of the senate, or any successor committees. Notwithstanding the requirement in section 24-1-136 (11)(a)(I), the requirement to submit the report described in this subsection (2) continues until repealed pursuant to subsection (2)(c) of this section.

If you have any questions, please contact Shannon Schell, CDEC’s Legislative Liaison, at shannon.schell@state.co.us.

Sincerely,

Lisa R. Roy, Ed.D.

Dr. Lisa Roy
Executive Director
Colorado Department of Early Childhood





COLORADO
Department of Early Childhood

2025 Transition, Program Review, and Agency Collaboration Report



Colorado Department of Early Childhood

January 2025

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Overview of the Colorado Department of Early Childhood

The Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC) is the cabinet level agency responsible for coordinating and implementing the state's early childhood system. CDEC's mission is to deliver a comprehensive, community-informed, data-driven, high quality, and equitable system that supports the care, education, and well-being of all Colorado's young children, their families, and early childhood professionals in all settings.

CDEC operates a continuum of comprehensive programs and services for young children, families, and early childhood professionals, including:

<p>Early Learning Licensing and Administration</p>	<p>Leads in planning and implementing public child care policy in compliance with federal and state regulations. Responsible for licensing and monitoring more than 4,800 child care facilities in Colorado.</p>
<p>Community and Family Support Programs</p>	<p>Provides families and communities with the resources needed to support young children to thrive, including home visiting, early childhood mental health, early intervention, and family strengthening.</p>
<p>Colorado Child Care Assistance Program</p>	<p>Provides high quality, affordable child care while promoting household self-sufficiency.</p>
<p>Colorado Universal Preschool</p>	<p>Provides at least 15 hours of state-funded, high-quality preschool to all children in the year before kindergarten through a mixed-delivery system.</p>
<p>Early Childhood Workforce</p>	<p>Leads in honoring, professionalizing, and growing early childhood professionals to ensure we recruit and retain a diverse, well-compensated, highly competent, and thriving workforce.</p>

CDEC was created in 2021 under HB21-1304; this legislation charged CDEC to coordinate a unified early childhood system and ensure the equitable distribution of resources and programming, including the new universal, voluntary preschool program. HB22-1295 subsequently codified CDEC, as well as Colorado Universal Preschool, into law by relocating programs and funding from the Colorado Department of Human Services' (CDHS) Office of Early Childhood and the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) to CDEC, effective July 1, 2022.

With the Department now in its third year of operation, CDEC has made great strides in unifying and aligning early childhood programs and services, as well as in developing infrastructure to ensure coordination with other state agencies serving children, families, and the workforce. These achievements reflect the strength of our partnerships with families, caregivers, educators, local communities, and early childhood partners. When faced with challenges, CDEC prioritizes collaboration with these partners to develop solutions and work, together, toward common goals.

Per statute, this report outlines both the progress made and challenges encountered in implementing early childhood programs and in collaborating with state agency partners in 2024.





Implementation of Early Childhood Programs and Services

CDEC operates a continuum of comprehensive programs and services for young children, families, and early childhood professionals. In 2024, CDEC focused on improving program delivery, strengthening community partnerships, and learning from incoming data and on-the-ground experiences. This included wrapping up the first year of Colorado Universal Preschool by serving more than 43,000 children in the year before kindergarten, and beginning delivery of the second year in August 2024. CDEC advanced the experience of families, designing and implementing a services finder and the ability to check on application statuses for Universal Preschool and the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program. Additionally, CDEC has established the foundation for the Early Childhood Integrated Data System. CDEC also advanced its commitment to equity through securing ongoing funding for its Bilingual Licensing Unit, and it enhanced family experiences by launching the initial version of a Unified Family Experience, a single point of entry for families to access early childhood services.

While 2024 brought challenges, including the conclusion of stimulus funding at the end of fiscal year 2023-24 and the implementation of new federal rules for the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP), CDEC developed strategic responses to mitigate impacts and ensure continued service delivery. These strategies are detailed in the following sections.

In both its successes and obstacles in 2024, CDEC has worked in partnership with families, the early childhood workforce, and community and government partners to envision the best path forward. CDEC's cross-agency collaboration primarily occurs with the Colorado Department of Education (CDE), the Colorado Department of Health

Care Policy and Financing (HCPF), the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE), the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment (CDPHE), and the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS).

Additionally, CDEC coordinates specific services with the Colorado Behavioral Health Administration (BHA), the Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA), the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE), the Colorado Department of Revenue (DOR), the Colorado Department of Personnel and Administration (DPA), the Statewide Equity Office (SEO), the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT), and the Office of the Child Protection Ombudsman. CDEC also collaborates extensively with counties and school districts to ensure alignment at the local level.

This section of the report details the progress made and challenges encountered in administering CDEC programs this year, as well as CDEC's collaborative efforts with state agency partners in enhancing this work.

Governmental Partnerships

CDEC coordinates with other Colorado state agencies to align and enhance early childhood programs, services, and systems. The Department's governmental collaboration spans its work across operations and administration, data and technology systems, equity initiatives, and program delivery.

Operations and Administration

State Agency Agreements

Memorandums of understanding (MOUs) and interagency agreements (IAAs) guide cross-agency collaboration and outline the roles and responsibilities for the respective agencies in coordinating funding, programs, and services. CDEC is required in statute to complete MOUs with specific agencies, and CDEC has identified additional agencies with which to develop agreements. Since its launch on July 1, 2022, CDEC has executed agreements with the following agencies:

- An MOU, required pursuant to section 26.5-3-404, C.R.S., between CDEC and CDE governing the coordination of transitions of children from Part C Child Find to Part B Child Find has been established. The [Early Intervention section of this report](#) details the content and execution of this MOU.
- An MOU between CDEC and CDE governing the administration of Universal Preschool Services for students with disabilities and eligible three-year-olds.
- An IAA between CDEC and CDHS governing coordination regarding CDHS's Office of Children, Youth and Families, CDEC's Background Investigation Unit, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Child Support collection, and coordination and alignment of child abuse and neglect prevention programs and services. The [Child Welfare System Alignment](#) section of this report details the coordination regarding child abuse and neglect prevention.
- An MOU with the BHA governing coordination for the provision of behavioral health and early childhood services has been established.
- An MOU with CDPHE outlining the numerous partnerships and collaborations, as well as IAAs establishing responsibilities for the evaluation for the Maternal and Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting Program; the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems federal grant; the Colorado and Adult Child Care Food Program; and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children; and other work related to maternal and child health.
- An MOU with HCPF establishing responsibilities for Medicaid alignment with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Part C, Healthy Steps, and Nurse Family Partnerships.

In 2025, CDEC will work to develop the following agreements:

- An MOU with OEDIT regarding the implementation of business classes for child care providers and a Facilities Grant program.
- An MOU with DOLA to establish partnership opportunities with local partners, including housing projects that incorporate early childhood centers or learning spaces.
- An MOU with CDLE to outline opportunities for elevating the early childhood workforce as part of the state's overall labor and employment investment efforts. The MOU will also delineate responsibilities to support fathers in the Colorado Fatherhood Program with career support.
- An MOU with CDHE ensuring alignment in the creation of pathways for higher education early childhood credits.

Data Sharing Agreements and Data Reporting

Data sharing agreements (DSAs) outline standard practices, procedures, and guardrails for exchanging data across state agencies. DSAs enable CDEC to exchange information that is critical to service provision, continuous program improvement, and leveraging technological advancements. CDEC is actively working with CDHS data governance and program teams to execute an interagency data sharing agreement to ensure that any agreements that supported the previous CDHS Office of Early Childhood are covered under a new CDEC-specific agreement. CDEC has established interagency data sharing agreements with the Office of Information Technology (OIT), CDE, and DOR. The Department will be working toward establishing data sharing agreements with HCPF and further program-specific agreements that support collaboration with CDHS.

By June 30, 2025, CDEC will implement enhanced data sharing privacy policies and processes developed in collaboration with data governance experts from other state agencies. These policies will safeguard sensitive information while ensuring data transparency and accountability.

CDEC and CDPHE also collaborate on specific programs, such as Early Childhood Councils and Home Visiting, on planning for and implementing data collection, analysis, and reporting. CDPHE, CDEC, and broader stakeholders also collaborate on crafting the content of population-level, representative surveys such as the Baby & You Survey, the National Survey on Children's Health, and The Attitudes and Behavior Survey on Health.

Early Childhood Leadership Commission

The Early Childhood Leadership Commission (ECLC) is Colorado's federally authorized state advisory council for early childhood. The role of the ECLC is to be a statewide leader, subject matter expert, and champion of best and promising practices throughout the state. Representatives from CDE, CDHE, CDHS, CDPHE, HCPF, and CDEC, along with early childhood leaders across the state from various systems and sectors, are statutorily-designated members of the ECLC. The ECLC provides a critical forum for ongoing communication, coordination, and alignment across agencies. In addition, these agencies are involved in the various subcommittees and work groups of the ECLC, furthering communication and connection regarding specific topics or projects.

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

In alignment with [Governor Jared Polis' Executive Order \(EO\) D 2020 175](#), the Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (EDIA) Team is committed to operationalizing, prioritizing, and achieving equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility (EDIA) in every aspect of our Department. We accept responsibility for championing equity and inclusivity and are dedicated to providing accessible, culturally responsive programs, services, and resources that recognize and respect individual differences and circumstances, ensuring that families and caregivers, our community partners, early childhood professionals, and our employees have the opportunity to reach their full potential. We recognize that centering EDIA enriches our efforts and strengthens our workplace culture, while driving our vision, mission, and core values.

Our journey towards advancing EDIA is continuous, and we are dedicated to championing and bolstering our values as a newly established Department so that all Colorado children, families, and early childhood professionals are valued, healthy, and thriving.

Key efforts include:

- **Strategic Planning:** This year strategic planning has been the cornerstone of CDEC’s work to advance EDIA. The Team created a Theory of Change to establish a clear actionable roadmap and goals to guide initiatives, with aligned cross-department objectives.
- **Assessment and Evaluation:** We conducted a survey to gather valuable insights and perspectives to inform our EDIA efforts. This survey was designed to identify barriers, understand challenges, gauge perceptions, collect input from our diverse workforce, and highlight needs and priorities. This feedback has been critical in shaping our policies, strategic planning, and resource allocation.
- **Language Justice:** Our Language Justice Coordinator has championed efforts to provide infrastructure and a framework to increase accessibility to linguistically diverse communities. More specifically, a comprehensive language access plan and resources, consultations, innovative approaches to utilize technology, community engagement, and most recently we launched a collaborative network of internal multilingual staff for the purposes of fostering department community, sharing of best practices, providing mutual support, and pooling resources to advance department language justice initiatives effectively and as a result strengthen culture representation internally and externally.
- **Cross-Agency Collaboration:** CDEC actively coordinates with the Statewide Equity Office to ensure the Department’s efforts align with Colorado’s overarching vision for EDIA. In addition, CDEC participates in a community of practice with Language Justice Coordinators at sister state agencies to share resources, align strategic priorities, and share best practices. CDEC’s Tribal Liaison is also the co-chair of the CDPHE’s Health Equity Commission. Through this collaboration, CDEC is involved with health equity work across many agencies and initiatives, advocating for early childhood perspectives and preventative approaches. In partnership with the Health Equity Commission, CDEC developed a strategic plan in August 2024 to further equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility initiatives throughout the Department.

Our EDIA Team, in partnership with the People Operations Division, is committed to making bold strides working directly with CDEC Staff and community partners to ultimately impact historically marginalized and unresourced Colorado children, families, and early childhood professionals.

Tribal Liaison Collaboration

CDEC has a dedicated Tribal Liaison who serves as the point of contact for Tribal and American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN) communities statewide. CDEC’s Tribal Liaison collaborates with other state agencies through the Colorado Commission of Indian Affairs (CCIA), which is housed in the office of the Lieutenant Governor and serves as the official liaison between the State of Colorado, the Southern Ute Indian Tribe, and the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe. CDEC’s Tribal Liaison sits on the CCIA State Tribal Liaison team, along with liaisons at BHA, CDE, CDHS, CDPHE, HCPF, and other state agencies. Each agency’s Tribal Liaison builds relationships with the Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute tribes to understand tribal needs and opportunities for coordination between the State and tribes’ sovereign governments.

CDEC utilizes the CCIA collaborative forum to understand and support the health, wellness, and education needs of families with young children in the Ute Mountain Ute and Southern Ute Indian Tribes. For example, CDEC, BHA, and CDHS actively collaborate on family wellness initiatives. In the Ute Mountain Ute community, the agencies are working with the Moguan Behavioral Health Center to make sure their program has access to mental health supports and Nurturing Parenting programs to support American Indian/Alaska Native community needs.

In 2024, CDEC established the Tribal Advisory Council (TAC) to provide a dedicated forum for American Indian and Alaska Native communities to directly inform the Department’s strategic initiatives, funding priorities, rules, and program implementation. The TAC is made up of twelve representatives who hold a range of different demographics connected to the AIAN community and its young children. In 2024, the TAC contributed to CDEC’s Child Care and

Development Fund (CCDF) Plan for 2025-2027, the 2024 Preschool Development Grant Application, and CDEC's 2025 Regulatory Agenda.

In December 2024, CDEC's Tribal Liaison hosted an Indigenous Empowerment and Resilience Train the Trainer Training for CDEC's Tribal Advisory Council; agency Tribal Liaisons; key partners from the Southern Ute Tribe and the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe; and staff from CDEC, CDE, CDHS, CDPHE, CCIA, and CDHE. This training taught participants how to train other Colorado organizations to effectively collaborate with American Indian and Alaskan Native communities through centering the resilience and knowledge of these communities.

County Collaboration

CDEC collaborates with counties to enhance effective administration and alignment of programs and to gather counties' input on CDEC's policies, regulations, and operations. Avenues of CDEC's county collaborations are outlined below:

County Colorado Child Care Assistance Program MOUs

Pursuant to section 26.5-4-115, C.R.S., counties are required to enter into an annual performance contract with CDEC that identifies both parties' duties and responsibilities to work in a collaborative manner to administer, financially support, and implement the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP). This annual performance contract is in the form of a MOU, which is jointly signed by each county's Board of County Commissioners, or other elected governing body, and CDEC's Executive Director. The MOU shall be reaffirmed annually through an amendment that shall be signed by all applicable parties.

Policy Advisory Committee Co-Chair

CDEC's Chief Program Officer serves as a co-chair of the Policy Advisory Committee. Additionally co-chaired by leadership from CDHS, HCPF, and county leadership, this committee provides an opportunity for regular communication around policy and implementation of programs and to address challenges that impact county operations in a coordinated, cross-agency manner. CDHS also facilitates a weekly call with counties that CDEC participates in.

Rules Advisory Council (RAC) County Subcommittee

The Rules Advisory Council (RAC) County Subcommittee is composed of twelve representatives from geographically diverse county human service departments. The Subcommittee provides information on how proposed early childhood programs and administrative rules may potentially impact county department operations, and the Subcommittee advises CDEC on the development and implementation of proposed rules. The Subcommittee's review is built into CDEC's rulemaking process to enhance state and county alignment. Feedback received from the RAC County Subcommittee informs the Rules Advisory Council's official vote and recommendation on proposed rules, which is then considered by the Executive Director before promulgation of each proposed rule.

County Monthly Work Sessions

In order to ensure ongoing coordination and collaboration with county partners on a variety of topics, CDEC hosts a monthly CDEC and County Leadership Work Session to discuss challenges and opportunities for alignment. Topics have included alignment across Colorado Universal Preschool and CCCAP, early childhood mental health supports, and ongoing coordination around family strengthening and prevention services. In addition to these monthly work sessions led by the Economic Mobility & County Relations Liaison, CDEC leadership participates in weekly calls, alongside CDHS and HCPF, with counties to provide updates and address challenges or concerns. The County Relations Liaison also attends monthly regional meetings of county Human Services Directors.

Information Memo Series

CDEC utilizes a public-facing Memo Series to streamline and clarify CDEC policies and expectations of county partners and contracted entities.

Collaboration on Early Childhood Access, Family Strengthening, and Workforce

CDEC's five-year strategic plan guides our efforts to achieve three interconnected goals:

- **Expand Access to Early Childhood Services:** Ensure all families, regardless of their background or circumstances, have equal access to Colorado's comprehensive system of early childhood services.
- **Invest in Colorado's Early Childhood Workforce:** Recruit, support, and retain highly competent, caring, and diverse professionals across the early childhood system.
- **Strengthen Families:** Recognize the crucial role families and communities play in creating supportive and inclusive environments for early childhood development and offer knowledge and skill-building opportunities that support families around their goals of raising happy and healthy children, despite the challenges that come their way.

These strategic goals drive CDEC's cross-agency collaboration on early childhood programs and services. The table below provides a snapshot of CDEC's collaboration with state agency partners in achieving these goals. Many of these areas of collaboration are covered in-depth within the report; click on the links to read further about each area of collaboration. Any areas of collaboration which are not detailed in the report are expanded upon in the appendix.

Strategic Goal	Collaborating Agencies	Topic
Expand Access	CDE	Kindergarten Transitions
Expand Access	CDE	Colorado Universal Preschool
Expand Access	CDE	Transition from Part B to Part C
Expand Access	CDE	School Discipline Task Force
Expand Access	CDHS, CDPHE	Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP)
Expand Access	CDHS, CDPHE, Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind	Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Interagency Workgroup
Expand Access	CDPHE, CDHS, DOR	Economic Mobility and Family Well-being
Expand Access	CDPHE	Rules and Regulations Governing the Health and Sanitation of Child Care Facilities in the State of Colorado
Expand Access	CDPHE	Child Care Immunizations
Expand Access	CDPHE	Child and Adult Care Food Program
Expand Access	CDPHE	Task Force to Prioritize Grants' Target Populations
Expand Access	CDPHE	Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children
Expand Access	CDPHE	Health Equity Commission
Expand Access	DPA	Employer Based Child Care
Expand Access	CDPHE, HCPF	Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Grant
Expand Access	DOLA	Child Care Facility Development Toolkit

Expand Access, Strengthen Families	CDE, CDPHE, CDHS, DOLA, HCPF, CDLE, CDHE	Head Start
Expand Access, Strengthen Families	CDHS, HCPF	Policy Advisory Council (PAC)
Expand Access, Strengthen Families	CDE, CDHS, CDPHE, HCPF, DOI	Colorado Interagency Coordinating Council
Expand Access, Strengthen Families	CDHS, HCPF	Coordination with County Human Service Directors
Expand Access, Strengthen Families	BH, CDHE, CDHS, CDE, CDPHE, HCPF	Tribal Engagement
Strengthen Families	BHA	Children and Youth Behavioral Health
Strengthen Families	CDE, CDPHE, CDHS, CDLA, HCPF, Office of the Child Protection Ombudsman	Colorado Child Abuse Prevention Trust Fund
Strengthen Families	CDE, CDHS, CDPHE, HCPF	Home Visiting Investment Task Force
Strengthen Families	CDHS, CDLE	Fatherhood Steering Committee
Strengthen Families	CDHS, CDPHE	Colorado Strengthening Family Network
Strengthen Families	CDHS	Child Welfare Protection Task Group
Strengthen Families	CDHS, CDPHE, HCPF	Colorado Partnership for Thriving Families
Strengthen Families	CDHS	Family First Prevention Services Act Plan
Strengthen Families	CDPHE	Infant Safe Sleep Partnership
Strengthen Families	CDPHE, BHA, CDPS, Office of the Child Protection Ombudsman, CDE	Child Fatality Prevention System and Child Fatality Review Recommendation Steering Committee
Strengthen Families	CDHS	Child Fatality Review Recommendation Steering Committee
Strengthen Families	HCPF	Medicaid System of Care
Strengthen Families Invest in Workforce	BHA, CDHE, CDHS, CDE, CDPHE, HCPF	Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Advisory Council
Invest in Workforce	CDHE, CDE	Higher Education Partnerships
Invest in Workforce	DOR	Early Childhood Educator Income Tax Credit and Care Worker Tax Credit

Invest in Workforce	OEDIT	Business Training for Child Care Licensing and Business Planning Sustainability
Invest in Workforce	CDHS, CDHE, CDE, CDLE, OEDIT	Early Educator Investment Collaborative (EEIC) Grant

Early Education and Child Care Programs

CDEC utilizes public funding for three statewide child care programs: the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP), Colorado Universal Preschool, and Head Start. This slate of programs – each with a unique purpose, funding source, and eligibility criteria – provides Colorado families with financial assistance for and access to child care and education services for children age birth to 13.

Child Care Assistance Program

CDEC is the lead agency for the administration of the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP). CCCAP provides eligible households with access to high quality, affordable child care that supports healthy child development and school readiness, while simultaneously promoting household self-sufficiency and informed child care choices. In State Fiscal Year (SFY) 23-24, CCCAP served 30,124 children through 2,566 licensed providers.

CCCAP is administered by local County Departments of Human Services under the direction of CDEC. The program provides child care assistance to low-income families who are:

- income eligible and are employed, searching for employment, or are in post-secondary education or training;
- families who receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) basic cash assistance and/or state diversion and need child care services to support their efforts toward self-sufficiency; or
- at county option, families that have an open protective services child welfare case

Based on self-sufficiency standards, a county falls into one of three tiers for eligible income at 185% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines (FPG), 225% FPG, or 265% FPG. As long as they are participating in an eligible activity, families remain eligible until they reach an income that exceeds 85% of the state median income.

The funding sources for CCCAP are a mixture of federal, state, county, and family co-payment dollars. The primary funding source is federal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) dollars, which requires compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR Part 98). In addition to CCCAP, CCDF dollars fund a variety of services and programs administered by the State. Specifically, CCDF supports child care licensing, Colorado Shines (the State’s quality rating and improvement system), early childhood mental health services, and various child care quality initiatives. Additionally, CCDF funds are critical to support the maintenance of the Child Care Automated Tracking System (CHATS), which is the case management system for CCCAP, and the Attendance Tracking System (ATS), which is used to track child attendance at the provider. The State reports how CCCAP is administered every three years to the federal government through the Colorado CCDF State Plan.

In FY 2023-24, CCCAP served 30,124 unique children from 19,889 families across the state, providing crucial support for working families and promoting children's early development. Additional utilization data can be found in the [FY 2023-24 CCCAP Annual Report](#). In partnership with early childhood stakeholders, CDEC published the FY 2025-2027 State Plan, which became effective October 1, 2024.

In 2024, the federal and state government and the state legislature initiated several significant changes to CCCAP that will be implemented over the next three years.

Alternative Rate Methodology

As of October 1, 2024, CDEC began implementing a federally approved alternative rate methodology for paying providers. This new methodology accounts for cost of quality care and reflects variations by geographic location, type and category of provider, quality level of provider and age of child, as well as equity and impact on diverse populations. The goal of the alternative methodology is to ensure provider rates more accurately reflect the cost of child care rather than a family's ability to pay. CDEC leadership set a three-year timeline to transition from market-based rates to cost-based rates, with an initial year of implementation beginning October 1, 2024. The second year will begin October 1, 2025 and the third year will begin October 1, 2026. This timeline complies with federal requirements and allows the state to phase in the increased rate structure over three funding cycles.

Implementing New Colorado Legislation (HB24-1223):

The Colorado General Assembly passed HB24-1223 which creates several new provisions for the implementation of CCCAP, including changes to the application, eligibility, provider reimbursement, and parent fees. Certain provisions are mandated by new federal rules, as explained below, and are subject to available federal appropriations.

New Federal Rules

On March 1, 2024, the Biden-Harris Administration's U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), through the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), published a new federal rule entitled Improving Child Care Access, Affordability, and Stability in the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) (45 C.F.R. 98). CDEC is planning for implementation of these federal rules with a staggered implementation timeline, concluding with full implementation by August 1, 2026. Policies included in the new rule are designed to:

- Lower child care costs for families;
- Improve payments to child care providers;
- Increase child care options for families; and
- Make enrollment easier and faster for families.

The CCCAP final rule requirements are projected to require significant investment, estimated at over \$65 million annually beginning in fiscal year 2026-27, inclusive of the alternative rate methodology costs. While these changes offer the potential to strengthen the program by lowering family costs, improving provider payments, increasing workforce compensation, and streamlining enrollment, adequate federal funding is essential for successful implementation and to maintain current service levels. Without sufficient funding, projections indicate a potential 22% reduction in the number of children served due to increased per-child costs and the conclusion of stimulus funding. CDEC is actively working with federal and state partners to secure the necessary resources to fully realize the benefits of these changes while mitigating potential service disruptions. The average length of a child's enrollment in CCCAP is 35 months, which presents unique budgetary considerations for counties.

Agency, County, and Stakeholder Collaboration

Operational alignment among state, county, and provider levels is crucial for supporting CCCAP families and implementing upcoming program changes effectively. CDEC's CCCAP program collaborates with the following CDHS programs and services on a weekly operation basis to share programmatic updates between programs and ensure services are accessible to CCCAP families:

- Child Support
- Food assistance programs including the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP); Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP);
- Colorado Works (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families)
- Child Welfare

- County Liaison Office
- Audit Division

Additionally, CCCAP works closely with counties through the Colorado Human Services Directors Association, which represents the social/human services directors from across the state of Colorado, and Colorado Counties, Inc., which offers assistance to county commissioners, mayors, and council members and encourages counties to work together on common issues. Additionally, CDEC's CCCAP staff is meeting with the counties and CDHS' Child Welfare staff, Community Partnerships staff, and Colorado Works team to plan and strategize for the ripple effects the CCCAP changes will have on Child Welfare and TANF.

CDEC has continued the below opportunities for stakeholders to share critical information, inform program direction, and promote best practices in serving families participating in the program. CCCAP has created standing committees and workgroups dedicated to county and provider collaboration including:

- CCCAP Rate Setting Committee includes county and child care provider leaders who provide input and direction on rate setting for CCCAP, including both market rate and alternative methodology frameworks.
- The Universal Preschool and CCCAP Work Group discusses the alignment of the two programs for dually enrolled children. This committee represents counties, local coordinating organizations, child care providers, and early childhood leaders. The members work closely with CDEC staff toward operational and regulatory alignment of both programs.
- CCCAP Allocation Committee comprises county finance leaders who provide input on the allocation formulas utilized to determine the amount of each county's block grant.
- Monthly county work sessions, facilitated by CDEC's CCCAP team, offer guidance to all county staff who support CCCAP, as well as specialized support sessions for county staff who work with CCCAP qualified exempt providers and who support program integrity.

CDEC is reinstating the CCCAP Rule Rewrite Committee in January with representatives from counties, providers, families, Head Start, Colorado Universal Preschool, and other stakeholders to inform the rule promulgation needed for the new federal requirements. This committee will feed into the established process of review, input, and voting by members of both the Rules Advisory County Subcommittee and Rules Advisory Council (RAC).

Colorado Universal Preschool Program

The Colorado Universal Preschool Program is a state-funded, mixed-delivery preschool program administered by the Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC). Building on the successes of previous programs, Colorado Universal Preschool was created through the dedication and commitment from the State, Legislators, partners, and families to building a high-quality, accessible early childhood system. Recognizing the positive child outcomes from high-quality preschool, Colorado voters passed Proposition EE in 2020 to create a dedicated revenue stream for universal preschool services. In 2022, lawmakers passed HB22-1295 to establish CDEC and the Colorado Universal Preschool Program.

While HB22-1295 requires the Colorado Universal Preschool Program offer at least 10 hours of preschool funding to all children in their year before kindergarten, CDEC worked with families, providers, and other stakeholders to increase this minimum funding to 15 hours for both the 2023-24 and 2024-25 school years. In recognition of the longstanding commitment of the Colorado Legislature to ensure funding for preschoolers with a disability, HB22-1295 also directs the program to prioritize funding for preschool children with an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Presuming the availability of funding, the statute also prioritizes up to ten hours for three year-olds with at least one "qualifying factor" which may impact a child's future academic achievement. In School Year (SY) 2023-24, those qualifying factors included children experiencing homelessness; children in foster care; children who are dual language learners; and children with an IEP. In SY 2024-25, Colorado Universal Preschool added an additional qualifying factor for children who are in poverty, defined as having a household income less than 100% of the federal poverty guidelines.

This rule change expands the eligibility of children experiencing poverty to receive full-day preschool and is intended to increase equity and provide additional support to uplift Colorado’s most vulnerable populations.

Depending on available funding, statute then directs the program to prioritize funding for children in their year before kindergarten who are low-income (defined as household income at or below 270% of the federal poverty guidelines) and have at least one additional qualifying factor.

School Year 2023-24

Colorado Universal Preschool launched in SY 2023-24. A full report on the children served in the year before kindergarten can be accessed [here](#), and a full report on three-year-olds served can be accessed [here](#). Highlights around funding and children served are below.

Funding

In FY 2023-24, the Legislature appropriated a total of \$322 million to CDEC for the Universal Preschool Program, combining \$154.5 million in Preschool Program Cash Funds with \$167.5 million in General Funds. In FY 2023-24, the Universal Preschool Program expended a total of \$308.6 million for SY 2023-24, including \$239.4 million for four year olds and \$22.8 million for three year olds with IEPs.

To maintain the previous state General Fund investment in preschool services, statute requires general education funding previously allocated through School Finance for Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) students and preschool students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) be transferred to the Preschool Program Cash Fund (26.5-4-204(6)). In FY 2022-23, the amount transferred to the Preschool Program Cash Fund was \$139.1 million, including \$38.2 million that had previously been spent on preschool students with an IEP, which was originally budgeted as a minimum to be paid to districts to fund access to a classroom setting for preschoolers with IEPs. These funds are further augmented with Proposition EE funding sources and reside within the Preschool Program Cash Fund, whereupon expenditures are prioritized in accordance with statute. In total, the Department spent a total of \$56.2 million to serve children with IEPs in SY 2023-24.

In the first year of implementation, the legislature created a “historical allocation” that would guarantee preschool providers who previously participated in CPP, including both school districts and community-based providers, would receive at least the same amount of funding in SY 2023-24, as in the CPP in SY 2022-23. Additionally, statute requires that hold harmless funding – capped at the overall amount the State invested in educating three-year-olds via CPP in SY 2022-23 – be provided to enrolled three-year-olds with qualifying factors in perpetuity. In SY 2023-24, \$7.5 million was expended for the historical allocation, and \$38.9 million was expended for the 3 year-old historical CPP payment.

Four Year-Old Payments by Enrollment and Expenditures, School Year 2023-24

Hours	Enrollment	Expenditures
10 Hour	8,065	\$40,399,283
15 Hour	30,586	\$160,543,880
30 Hour	4,828	\$38,491,679

Total	43,479	\$239,434,843
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Payments for Students with IEPs, School Year 2023-24

	3 Year-Olds	4 Year-Olds*	Total
Expenditures	\$22,770,398	\$33,466,863	\$56,237,262

Children Served

In its first year, Colorado Universal Preschool served a total of 43,479 children in the year before kindergarten, or nearly 69% of its estimated eligible population. With this data, Colorado is projected to rank among the top states in the nation for four-year-old preschool access when data is released for SY 2023-24.

Nearly half (49%) of the four-year-olds served were low-income, defined as below 270% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines, and more than 11,000 (26%) of these children had at least one qualifying factor (English language learner, experiencing homelessness, in foster care, or having a disability). The program also served more than 5,300 dual language learners and nearly 6,000 students with disabilities.

Four-Year-Olds Served by Award to Family, School Year 2023-24

10 Hour Award	15 Hour Award	30 Hour Award	Total
8,065 (18.5%)	30,586 (70.3%)	4,828 (11.1%)	43,479

The program also served more 5,800 three-year-olds with IEPs through Preschool Program Cash Funds and more than 9,000 three-year-olds through the historical allocation funding.

Three-Year-Old Children Served, School Year 2023-24

Three-Year-Olds with IEPs Served	5,876
Three-Year-Olds Served through Historical Allocation*	9,123

*School districts reported data on children served through historical allocation funding for SY 2023-24 to CDEC in January 2025. CDEC has not yet received data from 20 small school districts. There may be some duplication between the data on three-year-olds with IEPs served and three-year-olds served through the historical allocation, if a child qualified for funding through having an IEP.

School Year 2024-25: Children Served and Appropriation

Colorado Universal Preschool enrollment for SY 2024-25 began in February 2024, with the school year starting in August. The program implemented a streamlined enrollment process, in response to feedback from families and providers in the first year. The process included a supportive enrollment pathway for children with IEPs to be placed directly through their Special Education Administrative Unit (AU), as well as a dedicated pathway for families needing continuity of care.

As of December 2024, the program is serving 41,606 children in the year before kindergarten and 3,600 three year olds with IEPs, for a total 45,206 children.

For FY 2024-25, the Legislature appropriated a total of \$344 million to CDEC for the Universal Preschool program, combining \$197.7 million in Preschool Cash Funds with \$146.3 million in General Funds. With this appropriation, the

Department believes it will be able to provide full-day preschool to all children who are low-income with another qualifying factor, including children in poverty.

For FY 2024-25, HB 24-1387 codified the Department's ability to access the Preschool Program Cash Fund reserve via a supplemental funding request but did not specify the size of the reserve. During figure setting, the JBC set the reserve for the request year to 15 percent of current year total forecasted revenues, which in FY 2024-25 is \$29.4 million; this remains unappropriated in the Preschool Program Cash Funds as a reserve.

Quality Standards

CDEC promulgated rules to establish Colorado Universal Preschool's Quality Standards in April 2024, in partnership with early childhood stakeholders throughout the state. With input from nearly 700 Colorado families, providers, school districts, early childhood councils, members of the workforce, the Rules Advisory Committee and more, the benchmarks balance 26 national and Colorado-based best-practices with the priorities of the state's early childhood community.

Select family and community engagement requirements went into effect in school year 2024-25. The majority of the requirements, including educator-to-student ratios and professional development for teachers and staff, have a multi-year phased approach. This approach supports providers with a flexible timeline to implement new requirements, while continuing to serve their communities with high-quality programming.

The standards build on decades of investments in early childhood care and education quality in Colorado. The standards also fulfill the vision of the Legislature for high-quality preschool in a unique mixed delivery system through five key areas of early childhood education:

1. Basic Eligibility
2. Teacher Quality and Workforce
3. Instructional Practice
4. Healthy Development
5. Family and Community Engagement

To further support providers as they meet the Quality Standards rules, CDEC is developing a Universal Preschool Resource Bank. The resource bank will contain tools, templates, training materials, and more for these specific areas of the rules required in new Universal Preschool Quality Standards. The Universal Preschool Resource Bank will roll out in phases, aligning with the phased implementation of the rules. The first phase is expected to launch in 2025.

Administration of Special Education Services

As mandated by statute, CDE remains the State's Lead Education Agency for special education services and administers Part B special education services for children 3 to 21 years old, while CDEC is mandated to collaborate closely to ensure all preschool children with disabilities are served equitably in the Universal Preschool Program. An MOU between CDEC and CDE regarding preschool special education services, created pursuant to section 26.5-4-206, was executed on February 1, 2023. The MOU ensures all children with disabilities are served equitably in Universal Preschool, ensures access to classrooms that meet the individual needs of children with disabilities based on their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), and ensures that preschool program providers operate in accordance with federal and state law concerning education for children with disabilities. This MOU outlines the agencies' respective responsibilities related to reporting, procedures, communications, training, data, technical assistance and guidance, legal compliance, and interagency cooperation.

CDEC and CDE continue to work closely to support preschool children with disabilities throughout the end of SY 2023-24 and the start of SY 2024-25. In collaboration, the agencies designed a dedicated enrollment pathway for students with an IEP to be placed directly by their AU, ensuring alignment between the child's IEP and Universal Preschool enrollment. CDEC and CDE have also prioritized unified and aligned communications in the second year to ensure

providers and families have the most accurate, up-to-date information throughout the enrollment process and school year.

CDEC also instituted rulemaking – with CDE’s input – further solidifying the field’s understanding of what is required by providers who service children with an IEP. The Quality Standards rules include requirements for preschool providers educating children with disabilities to ensure full compliance with IDEA and the Exceptional Children’s Educational Act (ECEA), as well as CDE’s regulations for placing preschoolers with IEPs.

Head Start

Head Start is a federal-to-local funded model that supports children's growth from prenatal to age 5 through services that support early learning and development, health, and family well-being. Head Start preschool services are available at no-cost to children in eligible families with children ages 3 to 5, while Early Head Start services work with eligible families with children ages birth to 3 and many programs also serve expectant families. Programs deliver child development services in center-based, home-based, or family child care settings.

Head Start services are for children from birth to kindergarten entry, as well as pregnant people and expectant families. Eligible participants include children whose families meet the federal low-income guidelines; that is, families whose incomes are at or below the Federal Poverty Guidelines or who participate in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or SNAP public assistance services. Other eligible participants include children who are in the foster care system or experiencing homelessness by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act definition. Programs may also accept a limited number of children (up to ten percent of funded enrollment) who do not meet any of those eligibility criteria. Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs have specific eligibility requirements for the children of farmworkers. American Indian and Alaskan Native Head Start programs enroll tribal children from reservations or nearby areas. All programs enroll children with disabilities and welcome children who speak a language other than English at home.

Due to generally having more eligible children than available program funding, each Head Start grant recipient maintains a waiting list and collaborates with local funding sources to meet family needs, such as CCCAP or Universal Preschool. According to the FY 2023-24 Program Information Report, which is a mandated report for Head Start, Colorado received funding to provide services for 10,890 children and pregnant families. Grant recipients who fail to meet their funded enrollment requirements are classified under the Full Enrollment Initiative (FEI). Programs received intensive technical assistance from the Region 8 Office of Head Start and the contracted Training and Technical Assistance team and may have converted slots from Head Start Preschool to Early Head Start.

Per the Head Start Act, each state is required to have a Head Start Collaboration Office (HSCO) that exists to facilitate partnerships between Head Start agencies and other state, territorial, or tribal entities that provide services to benefit children from families with low incomes. Colorado’s office is housed within CDEC and contributes to the state systems for early care and education. The state systems are designed to increase the effectiveness of early childhood services by linking young children and their families to the support they need.

In 2024, HSCO partnered with CDE, CDPHE, CDHS, DOLA, HCPF, CDLE, and CDHE to build pathways for Head Start families to access services that meet their unique needs; collect data regarding early childhood programs and child outcomes; support the expansion of high quality workforce opportunities for staff; and ensure alignment in educational, workforce, and health standards. The chart below details HSCO’s areas of collaboration across state agencies.

Agency	Collaboration Areas
CDE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Joint technical assistance to ensure access to referral for initial special education evaluations and delivery of IEP services through collaborative agreements. ● Children with special health conditions ● Transitions to Kindergarten to support the continuity of care for Head Start families ● Emergent and early literacy policy review to align Colorado Universal Preschool program standards to the Colorado READ Act. ● Migrant Education Program to provide equitable resources and supplemental support for eligible migrant children ● McKinney-Vento Homeless Education to support the identification and resource provision for children experiencing homelessness ● Foster Care Education Program to strengthen the stability of Head Start students in foster care
CDHE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strengthen accessibility to credit-bearing credential and degree pathways for early childhood professionals through expanding the availability of Credit for Prior Learning, Stackable Credentials and other innovations that reduce barriers to higher education access for the early childhood workforce.
CDHS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Access to family strengthening and support services for Head Start families in the child welfare system ● Access to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for eligible Head Start families
CDPHE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promotion of oral health and healthy eating resources ● Promotion and coordination of the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program with Head Start programs ● Sharing tax credit resources and information on GetAheadColorado.com to support Head Start families’ economic mobility ● Participation on CDPHE’s Early Childhood Screening and Referral Policy Council to identify and implement policy and system changes that ensure all young children receive appropriate development screening and appropriate services
HCPF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Access to Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment and lead screenings ● Promoting access to Medicaid services for eligible Head Start families by building connections between local Head Start programs and Medicaid’s Regional Accountability Entities
CDLE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Partnership with the Office of New Americans to coordinate refugee families’ enrollment and to create workforce pathways for New Americans within Head Start programs

With the launch of Colorado Universal Preschool, HSCO has facilitated collaboration between state and local entities to ensure alignment between Head Start and Universal Preschool. HSCO serves as a facilitator between Head Start recipients and Universal Preschool leaders to support providers’ program alignment needs.

Child Care Licensing, Access, and Quality

Licensing and Access

Within CDEC, the Division of Early Learning Licensing and Administration (DELLA) is responsible for licensing and monitoring the state’s approximately 4,800 less-than-24-hour licensed child care facilities. In addition, DELLA promulgates regulations that set the minimum health and safety standards for all less-than-24-hour child care facilities in the state. Prior to the creation of CDEC, less-than-24-hour facility licensing services were administered through CDHS; these services and licensing rules have been transferred fully to CDEC.

DELLA executes strategies to expand the state’s licensed child care capacity, with a current focus on expanding infant and toddler care capacity. Research shows that investing in infants and toddlers has the greatest impact on children’s

development and return on investment over time, due to the number of neural connections made in the first 3 years of life. In Colorado, there are approximately 184,000 children under the age of three, and about two-thirds of these young children have all available parents in the workforce.¹ Unfortunately, access to high-quality infant and toddler child care is out of reach for many families, particularly for low-income households, due to challenges in finding care that is either affordable or high-quality. The lack of adequate infant and toddler care in Colorado has an annual economic cost of \$2.7 billion in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue.²

A few of CDEC's strategies to increase access include:

- The Emerging and Expanding Grant Program provided funding to support licensed child care by creating new and expanding child care businesses. Eligible providers are awarded grants ranging from \$2,000 to \$200,000 to cover expenses related to the expansion of current capacity or the opening of a new child care program. For example, funding could be used for coaching, professional development, learning and classroom materials, and capital improvements. In FY 2021-2022, the Emerging & Expanding Child Care Grant Program was successful in expanding capacity throughout Colorado by 5,459 new child care slots across 37 counties. Notably, 1,643 of the newly created slots were specifically designated for infants and toddlers.
- The Employer-Based Child Care Program activity targets employers looking to build child care on site. Grants are awarded to eligible entities to construct, remodel, renovate, or retrofit a child care center on or near the employer's site. These grants are intended to support workforce participation and provide safe, stable, quality, and accessible care for employed parents and families. CDEC also partners Executives Partnering to Invest In Children on the Employer-Based Child Care Design Lab, a unique opportunity for employers to gain the knowledge necessary to plan an on-site or near-site child care facility.
- As required by HB24-1237, CDEC is acting in a consultative role to DOLA to support the implementation of three new programs for the development of child care facilities. This consultation will result in the adoption of policies and procedures for a Child Care Facility Development Toolkit and Technical Assistance Program.

DELLA has also focused this year on expanding its efforts to provide linguistically responsive services to child care providers. CDEC's Bilingual Spanish Licensing Unit (BSLU) provides targeted technical assistance to license exempt Spanish-speaking providers who may be interested in obtaining a child care license. After English, Spanish is the most common language spoken in Colorado, with 12% of the state's population speaking Spanish at home. This demonstrates a need for increased access to safe, quality child care options for Spanish-speaking communities. CDEC initially stood up the BSLU using time-limited stimulus funds, but the Legislature passed HB24-1009 to codify and fund bilingual licensing resources.

Quality

Colorado Shines is the system used for assessing, enhancing, and communicating the quality levels of licensed child care programs in Colorado. This quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) provides a framework for rating all licensed child care programs serving children five years of age or younger using a common set of research-based standards, specifically to incentivize and support programs to maintain and increase quality over time.

The Colorado Shines quality standards apply to all licensed child care centers, family child care homes, and district and charter-based preschool programs serving children prior to kindergarten entry. Programs are measured on Levels 1-5 based on their level of engagement and alignment with the quality standards. Programs awarded Levels 3-5 are considered "high-quality." There are currently 1,122 high-quality programs in the state, or 33.7% of the state's providers that are eligible for a ranking.

¹ [\\$2.7 Billion: The Growing Annual Cost of the Infant-Toddler Child Care Crisis in Colorado](#). Reading Nation Council for a Strong America. March 2024.

² Ibid.

Additionally, CDEC provides child care programs with Colorado Shines Quality grants to pursue continuous quality improvement. Providers can create a quality improvement plan and apply for funding for quality improvement initiatives such as coaching, training, educational materials, or certificates. In the last cycle of this grant, 1,172 programs received quality improvement funds. These grants funded 16,017 hours of coaching for early childhood professionals, in addition to funding other quality improvement activities.

Parents can utilize Colorado Shines to understand a provider’s quality ranking. CDEC’s Child Care Resource and Referral Call Center ensures local resource information is current and comprehensively reflected within Colorado Shines. In 2024, the Child Care Resource and Referral Call Center received 2,259 calls from parents seeking child care referrals.

Community and Family Support Programs

Many of CDEC’s early childhood and family support programs and services are administered within CDEC’s Division of Community and Family Support (DCFS). Within DCFS, the Family Strengthening Unit, the Early Childhood Mental Health Unit, and the Early Intervention Unit operate a slate of programs and services that focus on strengthening the abilities of families and communities so that all children can be healthy, valued, and thriving. [This resource](#) provides an overview of the programs and services housed within DCFS.

Family Strengthening Unit

The Family Strengthening Unit administers 13 programs and two funding streams. The unit consists of two teams: home visiting and family support. Programs administered by the unit focus on building protective factors among children, families, and communities; increasing child well-being and school readiness; preventing child maltreatment; and supporting the early childhood workforce.

In the three years since CDEC was established, the Department has effectively implemented these programs to ensure there were no service or support interruptions to children and families. Data from FY 2021-22 through FY 2023-24 shows that the number of families served by nearly all family strengthening programs has increased each year. Colorado Community Response saw a slight decrease in families served in FY 2023-24 due to the program sunsetting this year.

Program	FY 2021-22	FY 2022-23	FY 2023-24
Family Connects	N/A	415	822
HealthySteps*	2,694	3,140	3,298
Nurse Family Partnership	4,290	4,023	4,587
Parents as Teachers	795	786	856
SafeCare Colorado	1,142	1,154	1,230
Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPPY)	312	305	311
Colorado Community Response	1,208	1,140	1005**
Family Resource Center Program	270	443	811***

Promoting Safe and Stable Families	1,349	1,131	1259
Colorado Fatherhood Program	272	343	428
Mobile Child Care Pilot for Substance Use Disorder Treatment	66	71	107
Circle of Parents	N/A	81	138

* The data for this program is for the number of total child visits, rather than the number of families served.

**The program ended on June 30, 2024.

**This program served 811 families of which 211 were included in a 2024 evaluation as being able to measure the impact of the program.

In 2024, CDEC strengthened collaborative relationships with the early childhood workforce by prioritizing site visits to service providers and state intermediaries receiving state funding for services. For all 13 programs across the family strengthening continuum, CDEC visited at least one and up to seven sites in 2024. By returning to in-person site visits, program managers can foster strong, supportive relationships that are essential to effective implementation and to achieving CDEC’s mission.

CDEC also prioritized supports and resources for service providers and state intermediaries. CDEC hosted regional grant partner orientations for recipients of Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting funding, which is directed toward providers for Parents as Teachers, HIPPIY, and Nurse Family Partnerships. These grant partner orientations brought providers together for staff development and networking opportunities. Additionally, CDPHE provided training on evaluation, quality improvement, and performance measurement. CDEC is planning additional orientations for other programs in the future.

In 2024, CDEC also received \$2.85 million in state funding annually for five years to expand the Family Connects universal home visiting pilot program. Family Connects is a free, voluntary, and universal light-touch nurse home visiting program. Families are offered Family Connects while in the hospital post-birth, and those who accept receive three home visits in the first three months of their child’s life. This evidence-based program increases access to coordinated, affordable, whole-family care and has the potential to address racial disparities in maternal and child health and the child welfare system. The appropriated funding will be utilized to expand the pilot program to support more than 12,300 births at 11 hospitals. These 11 hospitals will serve families in Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Broomfield, Denver, Eagle, Garfield, Jefferson, Mesa, Pitkin, and Weld Counties.

Much of the cross-agency collaboration and systems-level work involving family strengthening programs is intended to support the alignment of child abuse and neglect prevention services across the child welfare system. This includes CDEC’s work through the Colorado Child Abuse Prevention Trust Fund and the Federal Community Based Child Abuse Prevention funding. These areas of work are covered in the [Child Welfare System Alignment section](#). Additional areas of cross-agency collaboration for family support and home visiting programs include:

Home Visiting Investment Task Force

To collaborate on home visiting opportunities and strategies across the state, CDEC manages the Home Visiting Investment Task Force (HVITF). There are currently 35 voting members on the HVITF which consists of home visiting state intermediaries, philanthropic partners, community organizations, parent voice, state legislature representatives, Early Childhood Councils, research partners, and representatives from CDE, CDHS, HCPF, CDPHE, and CDEC. In June 2021, HVITF released the Home Visiting Investment Plan which outlines a strategy to scale a continuum of home visiting services in Colorado. The task force has released a progress report each year since 2021, most recently the [October 2024 Annual Progress Report](#).

Colorado Strengthening Families Network

To enhance its family support programs, CDEC participates in the Colorado Strengthening Families Network (SFN). SFN formed in 2007 to embed the Protective Factors Framework in child and family-serving agencies across the state. The network comprises professionals from across Colorado who have an interest in learning more about new research and best practices related to protective factors. The group meets on a quarterly basis and engages in collaboration around the utilization of protective factors as a strategy to prevent child maltreatment.

In partnership, CDEC, CDHS, and Illuminate Colorado hosted the 2024 Strengthening Colorado Families and Communities Biennial Conference. This milestone event celebrated 10 years of providing educational opportunities for social workers, home visitors, public health professionals, family support staff, early childhood educators, child welfare experts, and many others. The workshop sessions focused on the conference theme: "Connect, Empower, Thrive." The conference offered opportunities for collaboration among state departments and community organizations. This year, 623 individuals registered, and 615 attended, representing various fields. The attendees came from 45 of the 64 counties across Colorado.

SFN, in partnership with Children's Trust Fund Alliance, also brought the "Bringing Protective Factors in Life in Your Work" curricula to Colorado. Funded through mini-grants, certified trainers offer multiple trainings statewide in both English and Spanish. Additionally, CDEC is a member of the Strengthening Families National Network which includes national partner organizations and cross-state leadership teams. This network allows CDEC to enhance its best practices on using protective factors to strengthen families.

Colorado Fatherhood Program

The Colorado Fatherhood Program (CFP) serves fathers from all demographic and socioeconomic spectrums. Eligible CFP participants include any father over 18 years with children or caring for children up to age 24. The program performs specialized outreach to fathers who are single parents, noncustodial, receiving Medicaid, military veterans, without a high school diploma, participating in Head Start, post-incarceration, or experiencing unemployment. Participating fathers receive services and support in building healthy parent-child relationships, gaining economic stability, and building social capital. Fathers receive coordinated case management, resource referral, and workshops. The program served 428 fathers in FFY 2023-24, an increase of 85 fathers from FFY 2022-23.

From the beginning, the program was designed as a collaborative approach to serving fathers in their local communities. During the development of CFP, the Fatherhood Steering Committee was created to support fatherhood sites and foster collaboration across various state departments, local implementing agencies, community stakeholders, and fathers. The Fatherhood Steering Committee meets on a quarterly basis and continues to collaborate across systems to reduce barriers to fatherhood engagement. Additional CFP collaborations include:

- The Colorado Fatherhood Network (CFN) functions as a resource for fatherhood programs throughout the state with the goal of enhancing peer-to-peer support, implementing father-friendly practices, and supporting professional development.
- CDLE acts as a link with the local workforce centers which help fathers with career resources and job training programs. These connections promote economic stability, local workforce boards, and agency programs that can benefit participating fathers.
- CDHS's Office of Economic Security partners with local county departments in communities to decrease barriers to father engagement and supports county departments in linking participants to safety net programs such as TANF, child support, and food assistance.
- CDHS's Office of Children Youth and Families' Domestic Violence Program coordinates with the local domestic violence agencies participating in the CFP by providing domestic violence screening and assessment training and tools which lead to identification of domestic violence and services for victims.
- Financial Health Institute (FHI) provides innovative and effective financial health and economic education curricula to fatherhood sites.

- Illuminate Colorado, the Colorado chapter of Prevent Child Abuse America, collaborates with CDEC to award mini-grants and connect certified Strengthening Families trainers to fatherhood sites to offer protective factors workshops throughout the year.

Early Childhood Mental Health Unit

The Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH) Unit strengthens adult-child relationships and engages families in children's learning and development. This unit was lifted with the creation of CDEC to align with whole child principles and to ensure Colorado's children and families have access to the holistic support needed to ensure children are healthy, valued, and thriving. The ECMH Unit offers mental health programming, services, and resources from prevention and promotion through treatment, thus ensuring the full continuum of early childhood mental health is met. This is critical as early support can offset lifelong negative developmental trajectories which impact our economy, workforce, justice system, and more. The four programs operated by the ECMH Unit are:

Child First

Child First is a national, evidence-based, two-generation model that provides intensive, home-based services for families and young children. Child First helps families and the providers who support them to build strong, nurturing relationships that heal and protect young children from the impact of trauma and chronic stress.

In the 2023-2024 program year, our six Colorado affiliate agencies served 292 children and 325 of their caregivers throughout 24 counties in Colorado. 71% of children and families met their treatment goals, and 78% of families demonstrated improvement in at least one practice domain (including child's language development, caregiver-child interactions, parental depression, family adversity, child's problematic behaviors, parental stress, child's social skills and development).

Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

[Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation](#) (ECMHC) is an evidence-based strategy that supports the mental health and healthy social and emotional development of young children. ECMH consultants are clinically trained mental health professionals who work closely with adults caring for children ages birth to six years. Consultants provide support and training that promote children's healthy social-emotional development and effectively respond to behaviors adults may find challenging. These services are rooted in the philosophy that positive, secure relationships between caregivers, children, and families are essential to healthy child development. Currently, the ECMHC program operates in 20 agencies and is available to provide services in all 64 counties in Colorado.

Incredible Years

The Incredible Years® (IY) is a suite of prevention programs designed to increase a child's success at school and at home by promoting positive parent, teacher, and child relationships. The three programs – Colorado Teacher Classroom Management, Dinosaur School, and Parent Groups – are delivered in school districts, mental health centers, family resource centers, and nonprofit agencies. IY prepares children for school by teaching them how to interact with others and solve problems in a healthy, positive way. While this program has been available in Colorado for 20 years, the State added investment in 2019 to expand access through an additional 13-15 sites each year.

In SFY 2023-24, 465 parents/guardians were served through Parent Groups; 5,631 children participated in Dinosaur School; and 104 teachers and educational staff received Teacher Classroom Management training. The Director of the Incredible Years Peer Coach Initiative started coaching a fifth cohort of peer coaches. This group of peer coaches will support sustainability of the programs in Southwest Colorado.

Early Childhood Mental Health Support Line

The Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH) Support Line is a no-cost, confidential resource for anyone who provides care for children under six. It is available Monday through Friday from 10:30-5:30pm in all 64 counties. The mental health professional reached through the support line can discuss needs, brainstorm strategies, and connect callers to appropriate support services. Through the use of on-demand interpretation, the call line can support callers in more than 200 languages. This resource was developed to increase equitable and timely access to early childhood mental health supports for families and providers across Colorado. The support line launched in March 2022 and has received approximately 1,072 calls as of December 31, 2024.

In addition to these four programs, CDEC also utilized term-limited American Rescue Plan Act stimulus funding to support two curriculums and trainings intended to enhance early childhood mental health: Investments in Conscious Discipline and Pyramid Colorado. In SFY 2023-24, 333 child care providers took the 45 hour Pyramid Colorado training, and 515 child care providers took Conscious Discipline trainings, which ranges from 1.5-20 hours depending on the area of focus. These curricula and trainings were provided to parents and caregivers to increase their understanding of and ability to support the well-being of the young children in their care. Funding for these curricula and trainings discontinued at the end of FY 2023-24 with the rolloff of stimulus dollars.

To collaborate on early childhood mental health opportunities and strategies across the state, CDEC staffs the newly formed Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Advisory Council. The Council launched in June 2023 and nominated a full Steering Committee as of October 2023. The IECMH Advisory Council is a collaborative of partners leveraging their expertise and experience to guide the ongoing development and implementation of a robust, equitable, and accessible continuum of mental health services and supports in Colorado, from promotion and prevention to intervention and treatment. The Council will make recommendations to improve the perinatal, infant, and early childhood system of care, including policy, workforce, strategy, and sustainable funding approaches. There are 50 voting members on the IECMH Advisory Council, including clinical and consultation providers, state intermediaries, philanthropic partners, community organizations, parents, Early Childhood Councils, research partners, and representatives from CDE, CDHS, HCPF, CDPHE, CDHE, BHA, and CDEC.

CDEC also advances the state's mental health systems by participating in initiatives led by other state agencies. CDEC participated in the children's behavioral health subcommittee of the Governor's Behavioral Health Task Force. Through this, CDEC assisted the BHA in creating a Children and Youth Behavioral Health Implementation Plan that maps the steps needed to realize the vision for improving the existing children's behavioral system. Additionally, CDEC participates on two separate committees for HCPF's work to create the Medicaid System of Care: the Implementation Advisory Committee, which will review and advise on the proposed policies for a Medicaid System of Care, and the Leadership Advisory Committee, which will provide insight at statewide leadership level and advise HCPF on how the Medicaid System of Care can successfully be incorporated into the existing behavioral health system.

Early Intervention

The Early Intervention (EI) Program, authorized under Sections 26.5-3-401 through 409, C.R.S., serves children from birth through age two with developmental delays or disabilities and their families. Services are provided under Part C of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and the Department contracts with local Certified EI Service Brokers to deliver services statewide. By effectively identifying developmental delays in infants and toddlers and proactively addressing them, the EI Program mitigates the impact that developmental delays may have on a child's growth and development. The developmental areas EI targets are adaptive skills, cognitive skills, communication skills, motor skills, and social-emotional skills. These services are provided to support outcomes that are critical to a child's success in school and in life.

Critical EI services are made possible through the efforts of the service providers who work directly with children and families, as well as local EI Service Broker staff who help coordinate those services. Several types of services are offered within EI, the most commonly used being speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and behavioral/developmental interventions, such as those targeting social-emotional skills.

CDHS administered Part C of IDEA between July 1, 2006 and June 30, 2022, at which point the Lead Agency changed to CDEC, pursuant to HB22-1295. CDEC's EI Unit, also known as EI Colorado, is responsible for implementing EI services across the state. Additionally, effective July 1, 2022, SB21-275 transferred the responsibilities for EI Part C eligibility evaluations, which had previously been the responsibility of CDE, to CDHS; these responsibilities were then transitioned to CDEC under HB22-1295.

The Department continues to see an uptake in the number of children served by the program and has seen an average increase of 19.93 percent in enrolled children in FY 2023-24 compared to FY 2022-23. The Department anticipates the average number of children served will increase by 10 percent year over year, increasing to 11,566 in FY 2024-25 and 12,722 in FY 2025-26. The Department has been responsible for intake, referrals, and evaluations of children referred to the EI program with a suspected delay in development since July 1, 2022. From this time, a total of 22,599 children have been evaluated through June 30, 2024, and of those children, 19,723 (87.3 percent) were found eligible for EI services.

CDE is the designated Lead Agency and State Education Agency (SEA) for administering Part B under IDEA and ensures that a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) is available to all eligible children with disabilities ages three through twenty-one. Pursuant to section 26.5-3-404, C.R.S., CDEC and CDE entered into a MOU in July 2022 to facilitate an ongoing, effective, and cooperative relationship that will enhance the coordination of transitions for children and families as they move from Part C EI services into Part B special education services. The MOU outlines, in detail, the responsibilities of CDE and CDEC, from coordinating services, to creating transition plans, and the transfer of data.

Compliant with the MOU, the agencies have coordinated several initiatives to administer Part C and transition children to Part B. A number of the following initiatives and activities began before the launch of CDEC but have effectively continued throughout the transition:

- In May 2024, CDEC and CDE reviewed the Extended Part C Option, which allows children who are eligible for Part B preschool services and who turn 3 in late spring and summer to remain in EI services over the summer until the beginning of the next school year in the fall. After the review, CDEC and CDE determined that the option would continue for the 2024-25 school year. In SFY 23-24, 714 children were enrolled in Extended Part C. Under the MOU, local systems must work together to develop processes for transition and Extended Part C. CDEC provides ongoing technical assistance to local EI programs and CDE provides technical assistance to AUs as needed.
- As required in the MOU, CDEC and CDE have created a new AU Notification Monitoring Report that provides AUs with reports of children with qualifying factors at 2 years and 3 months old. The report provides earlier information on which children should be referred to Part B and provides additional information for children who are deaf and/or hard of hearing. As a result, AUs receive notification earlier of children needing to transition to Part B and can adequately prepare for this specific group of children that may be coming to their school district.
- CDEC Part C and CDE Part B staff completed a national survey on the status of Part C and Part B 619 data systems to provide a national picture of the capacities of the systems, track how those capacities are changing over time, and understand states' technical assistance needs. This information will inform and guide future collaboration and data collection activities.

Early Intervention Workforce Investment Committee

In FY 2023-24 and FY 2024-25, CDEC had \$3.5 million to address recruitment and retention of EC workforce. CDEC convened an EI Workforce Investment Committee to develop recommendations, which the Department implemented:

- 3% increase (in addition to 3% provider rate increase) for service coordinator and employed direct service provider personnel lines in EI Broker contracts
- Increase in contracted provider rates for areas where there were significant disparities in rate, primarily the southern areas of the state

- \$30 stipend for subcontracted providers that are billing Medicaid for a speech and/or language session to help support the monitoring of Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) outcomes.
- Reimbursement of subcontracted providers for scheduled visits or an IFSP meeting where the family cancels or does not show less than 24 hours from the scheduled visit.
- Compensation to new subcontracted providers for completing the required 15-hour Early Intervention Provider Training (\$250). If the provider remains in EI after 6 months then an additional \$250 will be compensated after completion of a follow-up survey.

Colorado Interagency Coordinating Council

Additionally, CDEC operates the Colorado Interagency Coordinating Council (CICC), which is mandated by federal law. CICC members are appointed by the Governor to advise and assist the state's lead agency to implement the Coaching requirements of Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The CICC meets quarterly, and membership consists of:

- Six parent members
- Four EI provider representatives
- State agency representation from CDEC, CDE, CDPHE, HCPF, and DOI.

Early Childhood Workforce Recruitment and Retention

The launch of CDEC created the opportunity to stand up a new Division of Early Childhood Workforce dedicated to honoring, professionalizing, and growing Colorado's early care and education professionals. Colorado is experiencing an early childhood workforce crisis in communities across the state. Insufficient access to a qualified workforce is a major contributor to the lack of care for nearly 75,000 children across Colorado communities. Since the pandemic, Colorado has seen an unprecedented **32.5% increase** in the early childhood workforce in just over two years. This is a result of [13 workforce stimulus strategies](#) that focused on increasing access to professional development opportunities; reducing financial hardship; and strengthening work environments. \$50 million of the workforce stimulus funding went directly to the workforce through scholarships, loan forgiveness, or other compensation-related awards. For more information about the ECE workforce in Colorado, please visit CDEC's [Workforce Dashboard](#).

While this increase is notable, workforce turnover remains high across early childhood contexts with 17% of lead teachers, 26% of assistant teachers, and 7% of program directors leaving the field each year. As a state, Colorado must now commit to retaining and strengthening this workforce through interagency efforts to improve compensation and support alignment of career pathways toward career advancement. To address this crisis, CDEC's Division of Early Childhood Workforce (DECW) leads the State in creating interagency strategies focused on recruiting, retaining and growing a diverse and highly competent early care and education workforce. A well-prepared and skilled early childhood workforce is paramount to ensuring Colorado's children receive the best possible start in life. The Division is organized into three units: Professional Learning and Design, Registry and Career Pathways, and Strategy and System Leadership.

The Professional Learning and Design Unit provides leadership to ensure every member of the early care and education workforce can access required training and continue their growth through evidence-based learning opportunities and technical assistance. This includes virtual instructor-led learning, self-paced online learning, hybrid training programs, training-of-trainer curricula, mentoring and coaching programs, and documentation tools that reinforce consistent and quality practices across diverse early learning and development settings.

The Registry and Career Pathways Unit provides leadership to build the infrastructure and systems that support diverse professionals across the early childhood sector, as well as to identify and address barriers for individuals

desiring a career in early childhood education. This entails managing a robust workforce registry and learning management system, as well as simplifying qualification and credentialing pathways.

The Strategy and System Leadership Unit implements robust strategies focused on stabilizing, supporting, and growing the early childhood field. This includes compensation focused strategies including pilot salary increase studies, loan forgiveness, scholarship programs, and benefits-focused initiatives. Additionally, the Unit deeply engages in cross-agency and stakeholder partnerships focused on creating alignment between higher education and professional development partners, early childhood councils, funders and other key workforce strategy partners.

Workforce Initiatives and Supply Snapshot

As of fall 2024, the early childhood workforce is approaching 28,060 professionals. While this growth has been critical for sustaining the workforce, the early child care and education field continues to experience a high annual turnover rate as noted above. Still, the regrowth indicates the effectiveness of CDEC's recruitment and retention initiatives, many of which involve collaboration with other state agencies. Key impacts of the CDEC investments in the early childhood workforce are highlighted below.

Recruitment and Work-based Learning Support. Targeted scholarships have been awarded to 7,365 early childhood professionals through October 2024 as a result of implementing the following approaches:

- T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Colorado Scholarship Program offers early childhood professionals a pathway to pursue higher education: 229 scholarships
- Child Development Associate Credential supports, such as funding for training and assessment fees: 115 participants active and/or completed
- Funding for federally registered apprenticeship pathways include paid work experience, mentorship, classroom instruction and progressive wage increases while pursuing credentials or degrees: 50 apprentices
- Scholarships for free ECE 101 and ECE 103 courses to individuals which align with the minimum coursework required to become an early childhood educator: 7,119 scholarships

Career Advancement and Professional Learning Support.

- Teacher Peer Mentorship: 27 participants developed leadership from within, giving experienced teachers professional development opportunities, and helping new teachers improve skills with the support of their peers
- Coaching Scholarships: 38 coaches received graduate scholarships to maintain or advance their credentials
- Business Training: 585 providers received business training and related supports
- Early Childhood Mental Health Consultants: 34 consultants received scholarships and/or internship support to maintain and grow their credentials
- Substitutes and Substitute Placements: 29,263 hours of substitute time were subsidized to facilitate professional learning and other time away from the classroom
- PDIS Course Completions: 394,431 Colorado Shines courses were completed through CDEC's free online learning system during 2024
- In-person Expanding Quality for Infants and Toddlers: 40,560 hours of training were provided to 845 individuals in order to strengthen the skills and knowledge base of early childhood educators
- EQ RELATE Coaching: 1481 hours of coaching was provided to an estimated 436 individuals that focused on the unique developmental needs of infants and toddlers

Living Wage and Compensation Initiatives. Several initiatives are working together to impact the overall compensation of the early care and education workforce. These programs include the following:

- Student loan forgiveness: 781 working educators awarded \$5000 each
- Teacher Salary Increase Pilot: 304 lead and assistant teachers received wage increases
- Family Child Care Compensation Pilot: 62 professionals received compensation to improve benefits (health,

retirement and paid time off)

- Early Childhood Professional Credential (ECPC) Tax Credit Eligibility: 21,588 new credentials awarded since June 2021 with 27 percent of recipients identifying as Latinx/Hispanic. In the 2022 tax year, \$14,136,250 in tax credits were awarded to over 14,000 ECE professionals. In the 2023 tax year, \$18,179,160 in tax credits were awarded to over 13,500 ECE professionals.
- Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant Bonuses: 68 consultants received bonuses to support retention

The Department will continue to evaluate opportunities for ongoing local, state, federal, and philanthropic funding to sustain early childhood workforce investments, relying on data and evidence of the impact to determine priority initiatives. The sections below highlight several of CDEC's current strategic activities and implementation partnerships that continued or began in 2024.

Colorado's Comprehensive Early Childhood Workforce Plan

In partnership, CDEC and the Early Childhood Leadership Commission launched [Colorado's Comprehensive Early Childhood Workforce Plan](#) in August of 2024. This plan was created to align with the [Early Childhood Colorado Framework](#), which was refreshed in 2023 and recognizes the need to honor the importance of all of the professionals working on behalf of young children and families for the important work they do each day. Drawing from listening sessions, advisory groups, existing plans, expert contributions, and research initiatives, this plan introduces several key thematic areas impacting the workforce and provides primers on some of the professions that shape the early childhood landscape. The plan has been designed to both address immediate priorities and provide a visionary outlook for future iterations and updates, recognizing the evolving needs of Colorado's early childhood workforce. As CDEC moves forward, it will remain crucial to emphasize the importance of systems-level cooperation and collaboration across sectors to ensure the plan's success.

Early Educator Investment Collaborative (EEIC) Grant

CDEC received a \$3.8 million grant to support partnerships between fiscal agencies and program departments to catalyze transformative change in ECE workforce compensation. The grant focuses on innovations in financial systems, including new dedicated revenue streams and revamped spending, enhanced data collection and modeling to inform policy, and greater collaboration between agencies in support of improving workforce compensation. Read the full [press release](#) and learn more about the work of each grantee partnership on the Collaborative's [website](#). In addition to supporting three new CDEC positions (Budget Analyst, Compensation Manager and Program Assistant), the funding establishes liaison positions across key state agencies. Early Childhood Liaison Positions are housed at the following agencies:

- CDLE to better support access to workforce development funding for the ECE workforce
- OEDIT to support business training and small business supports for child care programs
- CDHS to support understanding of public benefits utilization across the early childhood workforce and plan for benefits cliff mitigation efforts if small salary increases can be implemented in the future
- CDHE to ensure alignment across early childhood qualifications and training opportunities as the aspirational salary scales in the Compensation and Benefits Task Force Report are tied to Early Childhood Professional Credential Levels

Early Childhood Educator Income Tax Credit

The [Early Childhood Educator Income Tax Credit](#) was initially created in 2022 to support the economic self-sufficiency of early childhood educators as well as the quality and stability of child care in Colorado. CDEC supports DOR in implementing tax credit, which is attached to the Early Childhood Professional Credential (ECPC) system. The ECPC system is a six-step credential ladder that recognizes varying levels of education, training, experience, and demonstrated competencies. Individuals qualifying for the Early Childhood Educator Income Tax Credit are awarded a credit amount based on the highest credential level held during the calendar year, with those at the highest levels receiving larger credits. CDEC has collaborated with DOR to strengthen the validity, reliability and responsiveness of the state's system for reviewing credentials for the Early Childhood Educator Income Tax Credit. DOR reported that more than 13,000 early childhood educators were awarded the Early Childhood Educator Tax Credit in 2023,

representing more than \$18 million in increased compensation for the early childhood workforce. The [tax credit has successfully incentivized](#) early childhood professionals to obtain their credentials or move to a higher credential level, which represents an increase in training, experience, and formal education of the workforce. Since the tax credit was implemented in 2022, 16,116 educators obtained an ECPC for the first time and 84% of those with an existing credential increased their level.

Care Worker Income Tax Credit

The passage of [HB24-1312](#) established the Care Worker Income Tax Credit. Starting in tax year 2025, qualifying child care workers, early childhood professionals, and direct health care workers will be eligible for a refundable \$1,200 Colorado state income tax credit. CDEC will coordinate outreach to the child care and family, friend and neighbor (FFN) workforce as well as support DOR by determining eligibility for the credit by confirming care worker registration within the [Colorado Shines Professional Development Information System \(PDIS\)](#). Outreach efforts, technology enhancements, and community partnerships are actively underway to ensure successful implementation of the Care Worker Income Tax Credit.

Family, Friend, and Neighbor Advisory Council

CDEC convened the inaugural Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) Advisory Council in 2024. This council advises the CDEC, legislators, and other organizations about the needs of FFN teachers, and will make recommendations on changes to regulations, policies, funding, and procedures that would benefit the FFN community.

Language Access and Justice

CDEC recognizes the importance of language justice and is actively taking steps toward ensuring that the professional resources and supports are offered in languages other than English. Initiatives to expand language access and address barriers for non-English speaking professionals and potential professionals include:

- **Expanding Language Offerings for PDIS Courses::** Currently, the PDIS offers over 60 hours of eLearning in Spanish with plans to expand the eLearning catalog to include courses in Arabic in 2025. In addition, the Professional Learning and Design Unit offers instructor-led training in Spanish and Arabic, such as the Expanding Quality for Infants and Toddlers 48-hour course and Family Child Care Homes Pre-licensing course. The Peer Mentoring program offered through this unit also offers participants the opportunity to take this 15-hour training in Spanish.
- **Expanding Language Access for the Coach and Trainer Credential:** Early childhood professionals can continue their professional development and career growth by obtaining a Coach and Trainer Credential. The Division supports the professional development for these credentials; for example, a requirement for the Coach Credential is completion of the course *Relationship-Based Professional Development (RBPD)*, which is offered for free by the Regional Coaching team. CDEC is developing a Train-the-Trainer curriculum for RBPD in English and Spanish in 2025, to expand the availability of this training and expand it to Spanish-speaking communities. In addition, the Trainer Credential requires two eLearning courses created by CDEC, which will soon be available in Spanish.

Higher Education Partnerships

In 2024, CDEC deepened partnerships with CDHE and Colorado Community College System (CCCS) to provide scholarships, free courses, and innovative higher education pathways to early childhood professionals. These partnerships provide professionals with a menu of options for financial assistance and access to responsive higher education and training needed to enter the early childhood workforce. Specific strategies include providing higher education scholarships through 22 public colleges and universities to help professionals obtain higher education certificates and degrees; providing student loan repayment to teachers as an innovative compensation strategy to reduce student loan debt burden; partnering with institutes of higher education so professionals with high quality training can receive credit for non-higher education-based training and professional experience; and providing scholarships for free ECE 1011 and ECE 1031 courses to individuals that align with the minimum coursework required to become an early childhood educator.

Additionally, CDEC partners with CDHE and CDE to support several strong higher education and district-based partnerships with “grow your own” strategies for dual enrollment college courses in high school, and these have demonstrated impact at bringing young teachers into the field.

Early Childhood Mental Health Professional Recruitment and Retention

Through partnerships with BHA and CDEC’s Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH) Unit, CDEC has launched [innovative recruitment, retention, and recognition efforts](#), including bonuses, internships, and licensure fee reimbursements, targeting the early childhood mental health workforce.

Apprenticeship Programs

In partnership with Child Care Innovations (CCI) at Red Rocks Community College, Colorado Mesa University and University of Colorado Colorado Springs, CDEC offers pathways for early childhood professionals to participate in federally-registered apprenticeship programs to receive on-the-job training. Early childhood professionals receive scholarships for professional development opportunities and programs receive incentives to host apprentices.

Business Training and Consultation

CDEC partners with Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT) and its network of small business development centers (SBDCs), along with local early childhood councils, to offer no-cost business training and consultation for child care providers. CDEC and OEDIT meet regularly to discuss progress and to set the strategic direction for this shared work, including convening a working group to reconceptualize the training model. CDEC and OEDIT also schedule quarterly check-ins with participating SBDCs to hear what is going well and what requires additional attention. Finally, CDEC, OEDIT, and Energize Colorado staff meet quarterly to discuss shared opportunities in the early childhood business space.

Data and Technology

HB22-1295 charged CDEC to develop information technology platforms that enhance families’, providers’, and decision makers’ access to services, resources, and information available across the early childhood ecosystem.³ The Colorado General Assembly appropriated \$14.65 million in federal Child Care Development Funds to build a streamlined platform for families to apply to multiple early childhood services in one place as well as an integrated data system that holds information from across programs and services.

In 2024, CDEC launched the first phases of both the Unified Family Experience (UFE) and the Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS). Together, these products are the foundation for streamlining how families access resources and how decision makers—from the Department to legislators—access the information they need to make informed choices.

Unified Family Experience

The Unified Family Experience, which launched in September 2024, empowers families to learn about and access early childhood resources. The UFE is housed on [Raising Colorado Kids](#), which is a central hub for Colorado families to find information and resources for help raising healthy, thriving children. Other resources on Raising Colorado Kids include resources for learning about and finding child care and resources to learn about child development.

The UFE consists of two components:

1. **Early Childhood Services Finder:** With this service, families can choose to complete a user-friendly questionnaire, anonymously answering a single set of eligibility questions to see whether they are likely eligible

³ See 26.5-1-111, C.R.S.

for each of 21 programs. The automated assessment will specify which factors make them likely or unlikely eligible for each program, and it will provide links to resources to help families learn more about programs of interest and where to apply.

2. **Application Status Checker:** With this service, families who have submitted an application to CCCAP and/or Colorado Universal Preschool will be able to check the status of their application through the UFE. The family-facing portal will retrieve data from the existing CCCAP and Colorado Universal Preschool application systems to confirm where their application is in the review process at any given time. For example, a family might see a status indicator confirming that the county is in the process of reviewing the family's application status.

The UFE Early Childhood Services Finder includes programs administered by CDEC as well as programs administered by other state agencies, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Women Infants Children (WIC), and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

The phased rollout for Raising Colorado Kids started in September. During fall CDEC demonstrated the Raising Colorado Kids and UFE platform to legislators and partners. In December of 2024 Raising Colorado Kids will begin its first family facing release with a few select partners to gather additional feedback. A larger marketing initiative is planned for January 2025 for the full family facing rollout.

Early Childhood Integrated Data System

The ECIDS is a centralized information hub that holds relevant data for research and analytics. The ECIDS helps to securely access, manage, integrate, and analyze related department-wide data sourced from a large set of systems across different early childhood programs and services. In the long term, ECIDS will enable evidence-based decision-making by the State and Department's leadership in areas such as cross-program participation and demand relative to the supply of services.

The ECIDS is being developed in phases. The first phase of the ECIDS established an internal technical platform to address the State's gap of available integrated data. The focus of the first phase of ECIDS development is integrating data from the Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) and the Colorado Universal Preschool Program. The platform includes two data integrations:

1. The distinct count of children enrolled in CCCAP and Colorado Universal Preschool over a given period of time.
2. The distinct count of licensed child care providers that participate in CCCAP and Colorado Universal Preschool over a given period of time.

Both data integrations will yield data analysis on the utilization, reach, and capacity of CCCAP and Colorado Universal Preschool. The ECIDS has launched internally with reporting and dashboard visuals, data visualizations, and geographic mapping visuals by county. The distinct child count and provider count sets a foundation for a long-term roadmap of ECIDS, with this first deliverable being a key milestone in an iterative approach.

CDEC has created a roadmap for future development of the ECIDS. Subsequent stages aim to integrate other State agency data sets to provide State leaders with cross-program data that will enable better support for local communities, policy managers, and program leaders. Future phases will also focus on creating dashboards and public reports for local administrators, parents, and advocates to use to inform decision-making.



Systems Collaboration: Supporting Program Implementation Across the State

Children age birth through five and their families receive a range of support and services operated by the State of Colorado. CDEC collaborates extensively with agencies administering these services. This collaboration enables enhanced program outreach, alignment of services for programs with similar goals but housed in separate agencies, and effective hand-offs for children and families moving between services. This section of the report details how CDEC collaborates with other state agencies to support effective administration of these programs.

Child Welfare System Alignment

Effective child maltreatment prevention requires collaboration between the early childhood, health care, public health, and human services sectors. CDEC recognizes the importance of its role in this work, and it has elevated strengthening families as one of the goals in CDEC’s Strategic Plan. Specifically, CDEC aims to create supportive and inclusive environments for early childhood development and to offer families support for raising happy, healthy children despite the challenges that come their way.

CDEC administers a menu of early childhood programs and services to support families and early care and education providers who work with families. These programs, which range from theory-informed to evidence-based, align with a protective factors framework, which posits that five factors (resilience skills, social-emotional competencies, social connections, knowledge of child development, and concrete support in times of need) are the foundation for strong families. When protective factors are well-established, the family environment promotes optimal child and youth development and the likelihood of child abuse and neglect diminishes. [This resource](#) provides an overview of the programs and services housed within CDEC’s Division of Community and Family Support.

CDEC Prevention Programs by Protective Factor				
Concrete Supports in Times of Need	Knowledge of Child Development	Social Connections	Resilience Skills	Social Emotional Competence

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colorado Child Care Assistance Program • Child First • Colorado Community Response* • Early Intervention Colorado • Family Resource Centers • Colorado Fatherhood Program • Family Connects • Intensive case management and navigation services • Mobile Child Care for Substance Use Disorder Treatment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conscious Discipline • Early Learning Guidelines • Early Intervention Colorado • Early Childhood Mental Health Support Line • Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Training • Home Visiting Programs (Nurse Family Partnerships, Parents as Teachers, SafeCare, Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters) • Colorado Fatherhood Program • Healthy Steps • Nurturing Parenting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Resource Centers • Colorado Fatherhood Program • Circle of Parents • Colorado Connected Community Norms Campaign 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seedlings, Roots, Branches, and Sprout Curricula • Respite care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incredible Years • Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation • Pyramid • Healthy Steps
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* Program sunsetted as of June 30, 2024

Collaborative Initiatives and Program and Funding Alignment

Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention

Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) funding supports community-based efforts to develop, operate, and enhance initiatives, programs, and activities to prevent child abuse and neglect. Funding also supports the coordination of resources and activities to better strengthen and support families and, therefore, to reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. Funding is made available for activities that target the general population (primary) and vulnerable families at risk of abuse or neglect (secondary).

CDEC is funding 10 communities to implement work identified in local prevention planning. These funded activities focus on providing individualized services, strengthening organizational culture and practice, fostering collaboration and community efficacy, and influencing policy and legislative change. Starting October 1, 2023, CDEC engaged in the process of refreshing the framework and toolkit that guides local planning and implementation. The Colorado Partnership for Thriving Families will host the updated resources, with a complete web presence anticipated by September 2025

Family First Prevention Services Act Plan

The federal Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) legislation supports states in focusing on prevention services for children and families who are candidates for foster care. FFPSA plans identify strategies and treatments each state wishes to utilize to prevent children and families from entering the child welfare system. Colorado's FFPSA Plan, led by CDHS, was officially approved in November 2022. There continues to be a strong collaboration between CHDS and CDEC, including:

- Participating in revising the FFPSA state plan to expand opportunities to serve more families with SafeCare Colorado. The plan has been submitted and is currently being reviewed at the federal level.
- Participating in the CDHS Child Welfare Prevention Task Group. This group supports and reviews programs for inclusion in the Colorado FFPSA prevention plan.
- Staff from child welfare associated with FFPSA have presented and spoken with the Colorado Child Abuse Prevention Trust Fund Board, which is responsible for making recommendations to CDEC on how to invest funding from FFPSA reimbursements.

The following home visiting programs, operated by CDEC, are included in Colorado's five-year FFPSA plan: Nurse Family Partnership (NFP), SafeCare Colorado (SCC), Parents as Teachers, Healthy Families America, and Child First. Currently, CDEC staff serve on the leadership team of the Child Welfare Prevention Task Group which is now responsible for implementation of the approved plan.

Colorado Partnership for Thriving Families

CDEC has membership in the Colorado Partnership for Thriving Families (CPTF). CPTF is a collaboration between families, county Human Service Directors, county public health directors, state agencies (CDEC, CDHS, CDPHE, HCPF), and other statewide partners such as the Colorado Human Services Directors Association, Colorado Association of Local Public Health Organizations, Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab, Casey Family Programs, and Illuminate Colorado (the Colorado Chapter of Prevent Child Abuse America). CPTF aims to significantly reduce child fatalities and child maltreatment for all children birth through five years old by positively and proactively supporting strong and healthy family formation. Priorities include:

- Enhance cross-system service coordination and strengthen family, community, and governmental partnerships.
- Expand the availability of family services and supports that are culturally and linguistically responsive, community driven, and evidence-based.
- Shift family, community, and systems norms on support-seeking and support offering and increase community connection, social cohesion, and support networks.

CPTF implements CDEC's Family Support through Primary Prevention (FSPP) grant. FSPP targets families with children ages prenatal to five with a focus on the first year of life, and the goals of the grant include:

- Collaborate across sectors and engage families in applying a public health approach to child maltreatment prevention, family strengthening, and equitable well-being;
- Enhance cross-system service coordination and strengthen family, community, and governmental partnerships
- Connect postpartum families to services and supports that are culturally responsive, universal, and evidence-based.

Colorado Child Abuse Prevention Trust Fund

CDEC facilitates the Colorado Child Abuse Prevention Trust Fund (COCAP), established pursuant to section 26.5-3-201-208, C.R.S., which provides visionary leadership and collaborative support to align, advance, and uplift primary and secondary child maltreatment prevention efforts in Colorado. The COCAP board makes recommendations on the distribution of funds. The board comprises 19 members representing CDEC, CDPHE, CDE, HCPF, CDLA, the Office of the Child Protection Ombudsman, CDHS's Division of Child Welfare, four county representatives, three family representatives, and two legislators.

COCAP's primary focus is to prevent and reduce the occurrence of prenatal substance exposure and support an evidence-based or research-based child sexual abuse prevention training model to prevent and reduce the occurrence of child sexual abuse. In FY 2023-24, the funding stream provided training for 744 adults virtually and 524 adults in-person, for a total of 1,197 adults to prevent child sexual abuse. This funding has a statewide impact and is available in every county.

After more than a year of development, the board passed and adopted a [Prevention Investment Strategy](#), which included a total of nine policy and practice recommendations across three drivers of change. Four focus on guiding direct investments for resources that flow to the Trust Fund and CDEC; three focus on building Trust Fund resources long-term; and two focus on aligning and accelerating progress in Colorado's prevention ecosystem. Collectively, recommendations will help move the needle on target outcomes. In April 2024, the board passed and adopted the Prevention Investment Strategy which included 9 recommendations on growing revenue for the trust account, investing board revenue.

COCAP's priorities for SFY 2024 - 25 are to:

- Provide funding for child sexual abuse prevention training across Colorado.
- Align delivery of Child Welfare Services Task Force Prevention Services Array recommendations and the recommendations from the Home Visiting Investment Plan with the new Colorado Child Abuse Prevention Trust Fund Investment Strategy.
- Coordinate a retreat for the 19-member board in April 2025 to discuss the revenue received into the trust. The goal is to determine funding priorities using the Prevention Investment Strategies document, and to make recommendations to CDEC for investing the board's revenue in the trust fund's principal account, reserves, and FFPSA, if spending authority is granted.

Infant Safe Sleep Partnership

The mission of the Colorado Infant Safe Sleep Partnership (ISSP) is to support families, providers, organizations and policymakers to increase infant safe sleep practices and address related barriers and disparities through education, practice change, and systems improvement. ISSP includes individuals from CDPHE, CDHS, CDEC as well as health care providers, community organizations, and nonprofit representatives. This is an ongoing collaboration focusing on the following priority areas:

- Develop culturally-responsive public awareness and educational campaigns in collaboration with families and community-based organizations.
- Design and implement quality improvement initiatives based in hospitals and simultaneous provider education opportunities.
- Work in constant partnership with community organizations to address systemic issues that may impact safe sleep practices including economic security, physical and behavioral health access, transportation access, systemic/historical racism, housing, and immigration status.

Child Fatality Prevention System

The Child Fatality Prevention System (CFPS) is a statewide, legislatively mandated, multidisciplinary, multi-agency network to prevent child deaths. CFPS consists of the CDPHE State Support Team, at least 43 local child fatality prevention review teams (local teams), and a 46-member State Review Team. The CDPHE State Support Team works with county and district public health agencies to coordinate the local teams, which review deaths of infants, children, and youth under 18 in Colorado and implement strategies to prevent future deaths. The CFPS State Review Team, which CDEC is part of, develops an annual legislative report on child death prevention and data quality recommendations. The State Review Team also works to identify and support implementation of strategies to prevent child abuse and neglect.

Child Fatality Review Recommendation Steering Committee

CDEC is a member of CDHS's Child Fatality Review Recommendations Steering Committee. This Committee supports the implementation of recommendations made by the separate CDHS Child Fatality Review Team. The Review Team is a multi-disciplinary case review of fatal, near fatal, and egregious incidents of child mistreatment, when the family had involvement in the child welfare system within the last three years.

Child Welfare Prevention Task Group

The home visiting supervisor is a voting member of CDHS's Child Welfare Prevention Task Group. The task group is committed to developing a prevention infrastructure that reduces the number of children/youth in out-of-home placement, families' further involvement, and reentry into the child welfare system. Members of the group provide leadership and guidance on processes, programs, practices, policies, and strategies to support the creation and expansion of Colorado's prevention continuum

Interagency Agreement Between CDEC and CDHS

To ensure ongoing alignment and collaboration, CDEC and CDHS's Division of Child Welfare (DCW) entered into an IAA in June 2022. The IAA covers agency collaboration on fulfilling the requirements for Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) and all the programs in CDEC's Family Strengthening Unit, including the Colorado Child Abuse Prevention Trust Fund, Community Based Child Abuse Prevention Program, Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV), as well as Early Intervention, Head Start, and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation. CDEC and CDHS-DCW hold regular meetings to monitor the implementation of the MOU.

Background Investigation Collaboration

CDEC's Division of Early Learning Licensing and Administration (DELLA) is also key to ensuring alignment between early childhood services and the child welfare system. Prior to the creation of CDEC, DELLA's Background Investigation Unit, then housed within CDHS's Office of Early Childhood, processed all criminal and Trails abuse and neglect background checks for all 24-hour and less than 24-hour child care programs.

After the launch of CDEC, an Interagency Agreement (IAA) between CDEC and CDHS was established to continue the Background Investigation Unit's continued role in processing background checks for CDHS's Division of Child Welfare and Provider Services Unit, which regulates 24-hour programs, while CDHS set up its own background investigation unit. DELLA continues working closely with CDHS to stand up its own background investigation unit by supporting the identification of necessary IT system changes and the development of policies and procedures.

CDEC and CDHS collaborated on an IAA effective October 1, 2024 through September 30, 2025. This IAA renews the authorization for CDEC's Background Investigation Unit to conduct background checks for the CDHS Provider Services Unit, including criminal background checks and abuse and neglect checks, until CDHS statutes are approved by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and CDHS is ready to implement its own background investigation unit.

Child and Adult Care Food Program

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) provides reimbursement for healthy meals and snacks served to Colorado's children and adults in child care centers and homes, afterschool programs, emergency and homeless shelters, Head Start, Early Head Start, and outside-school-hours programs and adult day care centers. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) funds the CACFP, and CDPHE administers the program. CDEC partners with CDPHE in order to increase awareness of and access to CACFP for all eligible child care providers in Colorado. As required by HB24-1223, CDEC is collaborating with CDPHE to contract for a study to determine the feasibility of de-linking eligibility for CACFP from the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP). Currently, for family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) child care providers to enroll in CACFP, they must be an approved CCCAP-Qualified Exempt provider. The study will examine alternative eligibility processes and the feasibility of implementation for FFN

providers to participate in CACFP. CDEC and CDPHE met regularly to develop the Scope of Work, and the Request for Proposal was posted in December 2024. The final report will be completed by June 30, 2025.

Regular collaboration between CDEC and CDPHE regarding the administration of CACFP primarily occurs through the Quality Nutrition Workgroup. The workgroup exists to reinforce the early childhood nutrition system by fostering collaboration amongst partners statewide. In the early childhood system, CACFP subsidizes eligible child care providers' cost of providing quality nutrition to the children they serve. CACFP is the food program most often utilized in the early childhood system, as eligibility for CDE's School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program, which similarly subsidize access to quality nutrition, is [limited to programs affiliated with school districts](#).

The Quality Nutrition Workgroup maximizes coordination across state agencies, nutrition organizations, and the early childhood network. By integrating family voice and prioritizing early childhood mental health and wellness, the workgroup explores opportunities to increase access to food security for families and early childhood professionals so that they can make informed food choices and access healthy foods easily. Current membership includes representatives from:

- **CDEC:** Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP), Licensing Division, Data Management Unit, Workforce Division, and the Partnerships, Alignment, and Collaboration Team (PACT)
- **CDPHE:** CACFP, Farm to Child Program, and WIC
- **CDE:** School Nutrition Unit
- **Local Government and Organizations:** City and County of Denver Office of Children's Affairs, City of Denver Healthy Food for Denver's Kids Initiative, Grand Beginnings Early Childhood Council, Colorado Small Business Development Center,
- **Philanthropy, Nonprofits, and Advocates:** Donnell Kay Foundation, Nourish Colorado, other nutrition advocates

The Quality Nutrition Workgroup has created a [number of resources](#) to increase awareness of and participation in quality nutrition programming, thereby leveraging cross-agency work to understand and promote these programs. Resources include:

- [CACFP Participation GIS Story Map](#): CACFP, in partnership with CDE and the Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger, developed a story map to visualize current participation in the Summer Food Service Program and CACFP. This map brings to light areas of opportunity for increasing access to and participation in these youth feeding programs and can be used by partners in informing strategic outreach efforts.
- The [Family Child Care Homes CACFP Brochure](#) ([Español](#), [العربية](#)) and [Child Care Centers CACFP Brochure](#) ([Español](#), [العربية](#)) help licensed Family Child Care Homes (FCCH) and child care center providers understand the benefits of participating in CACFP for centers, children, and families.
- The CACFP Cost-Benefit Tools for [child care homes](#) and [child care centers](#) help licensed providers estimate monthly meal reimbursements through the program.
- [Meal Standards of Programs](#) crosswalks CACFP, National School Lunch Program/School Breakfast Program, Head Start/Early Head Start, and Colorado Licensing Regulations standards. The Workgroup distributed this resource widely to those who advise providers on participation in such programs in an effort to make areas of regulatory overlap and difference transparent.

In addition to co-creating resources, the workgroup also identifies cross-entity opportunities to elevate the importance of quality nutrition for young children. A few examples include:

- CDEC's Division of Early Learning Licensing & Administration (DELLA) shares a list of pending, open, and closed providers participating in CACFP each month, enabling CACFP Food Program Sponsors to encourage providers that are becoming licensed or who are already licensed but not participating to learn more about the program.

- CDEC-DELLA presents to CACFP Food Program Sponsors at their biannual meetings on updates to licensing rules, mandatory abuse reporting requirements, and the various program types licensed by CDEC to ensure alignment between CDEC Licensing Specialists and CACFP Food Program Sponsors.
- The pre-licensing curriculum for Family Child Care Home (FCCH) providers includes information about CACFP, and CACFP meets with CDEC’s Family Child Care Home Navigators to increase navigators’ understanding of the program.
- CACFP Food Program Sponsors, who administer CACFP for organizations, connect child care providers with other professionals in the early childhood system, such as CDE’s School Nutrition Unit, Early Childhood Councils, and CDPHE’s Farm to Child Program.

In addition to convening the Quality Nutrition Workgroup, CDEC’s State Systems Building staff served as co-lead for the CDPHE’s Farm to Child Collaborative. Farm to Child, administered by CDPHE, enriches the connection communities have with fresh, healthy food by changing food purchasing and education practices in early care and education settings. Center- and home-based providers who prepare meals on site might explore Farm to Child through CACFP so they can buy food from local farmers or grow their own food. Participating in Farm to Child can help build the provider’s connection to the community which could lead to more resources like grants or donations.

The Collaborative consists of more than 285 members representing 20 early childhood and food system organizations across the state. The Collaborative ensures that work across sectors, organizations, and communities is aligned and identifies appropriate funders to advance local and regional food systems. The Collaborative’s work is informed by the [Colorado Farm to Child Roadmap](#) strategic initiatives, which include advancing agency coordination, policy, and funding for local food procurement. The Collaborative has created many resources, including brochures, strategic initiatives and implementation plans, and newsletters, which are intended to support the implementation of Farm to Child. These resources can be found on the [Farm to Child website](#).

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) provides resources, knowledge, and tools to support families raising a child under the age of five. WIC is a no-cost federally funded program through the federal Department of Agriculture, and it is administered in Colorado through CDPHE. WIC aims to safeguard the health of low-income women, infants, and children up to age 5, and its benefits include healthy foods, breastfeeding support, nutrition education, and supporting families through referrals to other programs and supports.

To support the successful administration of WIC, CDEC’s Head Start Collaboration Office (HSCO) and CDPHE’s Prevention Services Division collaborate regularly on outreach and partnerships. Meetings between CDEC’s Head Start Collaboration Director and CDEC’s WIC Outreach & Partnerships Coordinator occur on a quarterly cadence to discuss coordination of outreach messages between CDEC programs such as Universal Preschool, Family Friend and Neighbor (FFN) activities, child care, Head Start, and home visiting to bolster awareness of WIC and the benefits it provides. WIC and CDEC programs share outreach materials and recruitment information to enhance services that benefit families and children.

WIC refers families to programs administered and supported by CDEC, including CCCAP, Head Start, and various home visiting options to ensure families can access the resources they need for whole-family health. However, due to limitations in data collection, it is not possible to report the number of referrals by WIC and the number of clients utilizing WIC and participating in programs run by CDEC. Future phases of the Early Childhood Integrated System (ECIDS) may provide insight into families’ experience with services across programs, including how many families receiving WIC are also benefitting from other early childhood services.

Kindergarten Transitions

Effective transitions from preschool to kindergarten are important for children and their families and, from a systems perspective, represent one of the most complex transition points because of the cross-agency and cross-system collaboration required. Transition practices that support positive relationships between children, families, and educators can substantially impact child outcomes. The transition to kindergarten represents an important shift in children’s and families’ education experiences as the goals, demands, and classroom structures in kindergarten are often different than those in preschool and child care settings. CDEC is committed to building strategies and systems that support children and their families’ smooth transition from early learning experiences (including child care, preschool, Head Start, developmental/Special Education preschool, or friend, family, and neighbor care) into kindergarten, ready to learn and to be behaviorally and academically successful.

Prior to the launch of CDEC, a 2018 comprehensive needs assessment completed for the Preschool Development Planning Grant revealed a need to build a systems-level approach for supporting the transition to kindergarten. To create a foundation for this work, a Kindergarten Transitions Project Team was convened comprising CDEC and CDE staff. This workgroup, in partnership with the National P-3 Center, developed a systems-level vision for Colorado’s transition to kindergarten. Disseminated in 2022, the [Transition to Kindergarten in Colorado Roadmap](#) identifies eight key strategies to strengthen and systematize Colorado’s approach to transitions to kindergarten and the birth through five (B-5) system.

In practice, this collaboration is facilitated by CDEC’s Head Start Collaboration Office (HSCO), which partners with CDE—specifically the Elementary Literacy and School Readiness Office, the Office of Special Education, the Migrant Education Program, and supports for highly mobile students—to support a sturdy bridge between preschool and kindergarten. CDEC has developed several resources, professional development offerings, and supports in collaboration with CDE which can be used by both the sending and receiving sides to strengthen practices and processes that support the transition to kindergarten.

CDEC worked with the National P-3 Center to create a Colorado-specific P-3 Leadership Model plan. The goal of the model focused on opportunities for Colorado leaders who came together, received joint training, and collaborated on P-3 projects of mutual interest. The National P-3 Center took the rich contributions throughout the project period and combined them with national perspectives and research to develop a “Discovering Possibilities for Expanding P-3 Leadership in Colorado: Preliminary Ideas from the Field” that outlined recommendations and strategies to CDEC, CDE, and the Governor’s Office. The discovery memo emphasizes that P-3 leadership should be a shared priority and investment among state agencies, particularly CDEC and CDE.

Additionally, a cross-sector state agency team attended the P-3 Fall Institute in October 2024. The National P-3 Institute was an intensive, three-day, team-based opportunity to dig deeply into problems of practice and to plan strategically for implementation success. Unique in design, the Institute combined engagement with national experts, structured team planning time, and cross-pollination of promising practices within a community of leaders from across the country. The Institute was designed for teams of leaders from states, school districts, and community-based organizations. Teams were selected to attend based on a competitive application process. The Colorado team, which included leadership from CDEC and CDE, aimed to enhance systems focused on school readiness across the P-3 continuum.

CDEC and CDE also collaborated on a report to create stronger alignment in literacy instruction between preschool and k-3, funded by the PDG B-5 grant. This report, titled [Colorado Universal Preschool: Emergent and Early Literacy Alignment: 2024 Recommendations](#), outlines strategies for incorporating the Science of Reading into Colorado’s Universal Preschool Program. CDEC and CDE will continue to collaborate on creating an action plan to implement those recommendations in early 2025.

Finally, with the continuation of Colorado’s Universal Preschool Program, HSCO works with CDE and Universal Preschool to ensure continuity between programs and kindergarten entry. The PDG grant ended in December 2024. Without additional resources, CDEC will need to be strategic in implementing strategies captured in the Roadmap; providing ongoing support to families, ECE providers, Pre-K-12 educators, and other professionals; and ensuring ongoing coordination and collaboration with CDE.

Appendix

The table below includes additional details of collaboration for areas of work not covered in-depth in the report.

Strategic Goal	Collaborating Agencies	Topic	Details of Collaboration
Expand Access	CDHS, CDPHE, CSDB, HCPF	Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) Interagency Steering Committee	CDHS is the recipient and CDEC is the co-principal of the federal Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) grant. This grant implements a system of screening, identification, and referral to early intervention for children who are deaf or hard of hearing from birth through the age of 36 months. CDHS, CDEC, CDPHE and the Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind (CSDB) all have certain responsibilities under the EHDI system. The four agencies have created the EHDI Interagency Steering Committee to discuss agency responsibilities, data sharing needs, and gaps that may need to be addressed. The EHDI Interagency Steering Committee has developed a Charter and is exploring data sharing agreements as needed.
Expand Access	CDPHE	Rules and Regulations Governing the Health and Sanitation of Child Care Facilities in the State of Colorado	CDPHE implements 6 CCR 1010-7, Rules and Regulations Governing the Health and Sanitation of Child Care Facilities in the State of Colorado. The regulations cover a wide variety of topics including but not limited to environmental hazards, disease control, and food safety (also includes infant feeding). The regulations apply to all licensed child care facilities, with the exception of neighborhood youth organizations and any home based care such as family child care homes and foster homes, and to 24 hour facilities such as residential child care centers. CDPHE delegates authority to local public health agencies and performs all inspection work in counties that do not have a local program. CDPHE partners closely with CDEC and CDHS on any regulation changes to avoid any duplication or conflict in regulations.
Expand Access	CDPHE, HCPF	Child Care Immunizations	CDPHE reviewed and updated the Child Care and Preschool Immunization Course, which is an annual requirement for child care providers and health consultants who review immunization records. This course is offered on Colorado Shines Professional Development Information System (PDIS). CDPHE presented to CDEC and to local licensing specialists on school and child care immunization date reporting requirements and resources.

			CDPHE meets regularly with CDEC, CDE, and Healthy Child Care Colorado immunization providers, local public health agencies, and child care facilities to understand barriers and build resources and tools to increase immunization uptake in this population.
Expand Access	CDE	School Discipline Task Force	The School Discipline Task Force was created as part of the 2023 legislative session (S.B.23-029) to study and make recommendations regarding school district discipline policies and practices, State and Local discipline reporting requirements, and local engagement. CDEC’s ECMH Unit Manager participated in the CDE initiative and served as an appointed Disproportionate Discipline Task Force member during FY 2023-24.
Expand Access	CDPHE	Task Force to Prioritize Grants Target Population	CDEC’s Incredible Years and Child First Program Administrator in the Early Childhood Mental Health Unit serves on the Task Force to Prioritize Grants Target Population (HB23-1223) implemented by the Prevention Services Division at CDPHE. This legislation charges CDPHE to convene a task force to establish shared goals, objectives, and guidelines for governmental agencies and community-based agencies to achieve maximum impact in reducing youth violence, suicide, and delinquency risk factors.
Strengthen Families	CDPHE, HCPF	Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Grant Steering Committee and Workgroups	CDPHE and HCPF have membership on CDEC’s Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Grant Steering Committee and Workgroups. The grant provides CDEC \$255,600 annually for five years (2021-2026) to complete activities that will advance Colorado’s maternal and child health and early childhood systems of care. CDPHE provides data and evaluation support to identify strengths and needs, help prioritize activities and measure progress on objectives for federal funders and the state.
Strengthen Families	CDPHE	Economic Mobility and Family Supports	CDEC has a dedicated FTE to promote economic mobility and family well-being and to align efforts through CDPHE, CDEC, CDHS, DOR, and local partners and programs. CDEC programs share information on CDPHE’s Get Ahead Colorado public information campaign promoting tax credit opportunities and referral to free tax filing services via CDEC communication channels and state meetings.