

# Early Childhood in Colorado

## A Shared Commitment To Children and Families: 2018 and Beyond

### STATEWIDE COMMITMENT TO EARLY CHILDHOOD

Colorado has a long history of working together to ensure children and families grow and thrive. Our state has made admirable advances across the three domains of the *Early Childhood Colorado Framework*: Health & Well-Being, Family Support & Education and Learning & Development. Families, professionals, advocates and policy makers have worked together to build coordinated systems that support local areas to be responsive to the needs of their communities. The collaboration between state and local entities across private and public domains is a testament to Colorado's long and unwavering commitment to supporting children and families. However, there is much more work to be done to ensure all children and families have the supports they need to reach our shared vision: **all children are valued, healthy and thriving.**

### WHY FOCUSING ON EARLY CHILDHOOD IS IMPORTANT

Children's healthy development depends on the nurturing and supportive relationships they have with the parents and caregivers in their lives. When children are provided safe, healthy and learning-rich environments, the returns to society are abundant and communities thrive. Investing in high quality programs builds a developmental foundation which leads to a 13% financial return through long-term positive outcomes in education, health, economic productivity and reduced crime. These investments also provide opportunities for parents and caregivers to enhance their own educational and career opportunities to become self-sufficient and provide for their families. Investments in early childhood are one of the most effective strategies in achieving significant social and economic outcomes.

### THE EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERSHIP COMMISSION

The Early Childhood Leadership Commission (ECLC) is Colorado's statutorily-recognized state advisory council for early childhood. Our role is to be a statewide leader, subject matter expert and champion of best and promising practices throughout the state.

The ECLC is comprised of 20 individuals representing parents, business, five state departments, school districts, local municipalities, foundations, nonprofits and other important early childhood stakeholders. We serve as the trusted and proactive early childhood champion for high quality, outcome-focused learning and development, health and well-being, and family support and education for pregnant women, and children birth through age eight and their families.

The ECLC:

- Develops strategies to monitor and align efforts that increase the access, quality and equity of services through the *Early Childhood Colorado Framework*;
- Assists in the development of public-private partnerships to coordinate and enhance services and supports; and
- Champions the use of relevant data and makes recommendations to the Governor's Office, the General Assembly and state agencies.

### OUR COMMITMENT

The Early Childhood Leadership Commission is committed to working with the incoming Governor, the Colorado General Assembly, state agencies and stakeholders to address the early childhood challenges Colorado faces to ensure that all children are valued, healthy and thriving.



# Early Childhood: Areas of Opportunity

While Colorado has experienced tremendous progress in the early childhood sector, there are still challenges that must be addressed at the local and state level. The ECLC encourages efforts to support and enhance the following Areas of Opportunity:

## ● IMPROVE ACCESS TO HIGH QUALITY EARLY CARE & EDUCATION FOR ALL FAMILIES

**63%**

of Colorado children under age 5 live in homes in which all available caregivers work

High quality early care and education environments provide a stable place for children to grow and thrive, allowing them to build the strong foundation of cognitive and social-emotional skills they need to be prepared to succeed in school and develop life-long positive outcomes. Unfortunately, the availability of high quality services is severely lacking and poses a significant expense to families. Additional investments are needed to deliver services through a combination of programs, providers and settings, including licensed family and center-based child care programs, public schools, informal family/friend/neighbor care and other community-based organizations. This mixed delivery system provides early childhood care and education options that ensure wherever children are cared for, they are in high quality, supportive environments. Particular attention should be paid to infant and toddler care, which is significantly more difficult for families to access and afford.

## ● ELEVATE THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE TO ENSURE COORDINATED CAREER PATHWAYS AND APPROPRIATE COMPENSATION

Early childhood educators provide the critical foundation for children in out-of-home care to develop the literacy and social-emotional skills they need to succeed in school. The early care and education sector is a cornerstone of local and state economic health, enabling parents to work and provide for their families while employing a large workforce of educators. However, as professional development opportunities and expectations for these educators have increased, compensation lags behind most other industries, and communities throughout Colorado are facing significant challenges recruiting and retaining a stable early childhood workforce. Ensuring that Colorado has a qualified, consistent and diverse early childhood workforce is critical to supporting the healthy development of children and maintaining a thriving economy.

**46%**

of the early childhood workforce receive public subsidies due to low wages

## ● SUPPORT IMPROVED FAMILY HEALTH & ECONOMIC SECURITY THROUGH A TWO-GENERATION APPROACH

Children living in **POVERTY** are more likely to start **SCHOOL** at a disadvantage, have poor **HEALTH**, and have lower **INCOME** as adults

Parents are their children's first and most important teachers. Ensuring that parents have the health and economic supports they need to provide a nurturing home environment and meet their children's basic needs is essential for a child's healthy development. Children who are cared for in stable environments with access to health services, nutritious foods, safe water, stable housing and high quality learning environments are better able to develop the skills they need to succeed in school and thrive in their communities. Unfortunately, many children are living in environments without these basic supports, which research suggests can lead to poor mental and physical health, less success at school and work, and lower socioeconomic status in adulthood. Colorado should continue to support family health and economic security through state and local programs and ensure that interventions provide opportunities for both children and caregivers.

The ECLC expressly acknowledges the importance of supporting equitable outcomes for all of Colorado's residents and encourages thoughtful inclusion of supports and services for diverse communities.