



BACKGROUND



Early childhood is a critical time in children and families' lives that lays the foundation for what is to come. During this period, children are constantly acquiring new knowledge and skills that dramatically impact their life outcomes. Unfortunately, the early years are when families often have the least support, and children face the greatest barriers to opportunity. Children experiencing disruptive levels of adversity during childhood face a lifetime of challenges in overcoming these unstable foundations. Therefore, **access to high quality early childhood experiences are critical in providing kids with the foundation they need to thrive.**

In Colorado, early childhood programs currently exist across multiple state agencies with various eligibility requirements and funding streams. This fragmentation makes it difficult for parents and providers to navigate these programs, threatening both quality and accessibility for thousands of kids.

In spring 2021, the passage of HB21-1304 gave Colorado the monumental opportunity to establish a cabinet-level Department of Early Childhood based on a community-informed transition process. Months of deep stakeholder engagement followed, with more than 130 meetings that included parents, families, members of the early childhood workforce, providers, school districts, counties, and advocates. In January 2022, the Early Childhood Leadership Commission (ECLC) **unanimously approved** recommendations regarding the design of the new state agency and implementation of universal preschool.

HB22-1295 codifies the unanimous recommendations of the Early Childhood Leadership Commission by ensuring:

- **Effective Governance:** Integrates programs that impact young children and their families under one department to provide a seamless experience for families, while ensuring that families have an authentic voice in the governance of the department.
- **Universal Access and Equity:** Provides universal access to a range of **high-quality** preschool options, including **school- and community-based programs**, while also prioritizing additional resources for low-income and at-risk children.
- **Family-Centered:** Ensures families can easily navigate family support programs as well as childcare and preschool applications, enrollment, and payments.

OVERARCHING VISION



- **Making early childhood easier to navigate** by aligning rules, regulations and programs; creating a streamlined application; and ensuring one point of contact is responsible for early childhood coordination in every community.
- **Advancing equitable access** by prioritizing more effective, and trauma-informed programming for children facing the greatest barriers to opportunity.
- **Prioritizing a whole family approach** to early childhood by better integrating family strengthening programs and reducing the stigma associated with such programs.
- **Putting parents and providers first** by ensuring they have a voice in the regulations that impact their early childhood programs; and requiring local coordination between providers, counties, school districts, and community-based organizations to help create a full-day of voluntary programming for all preschool-aged children of families that want these services.
- **Addressing capacity challenges** by making the system easier for providers to navigate, strengthening our infrastructure with local coordination and state leadership, and encouraging better coordination to fund more full day programs.
- Prioritizing parent choice by **supporting a mixed delivery system** of early childhood providers, including community-based, home-based, and school-based providers.
- **Ensuring state resources** fund high-quality programs based on nationally recognized standards that prioritize child outcomes and social emotional skills.



GOVERNANCE AND ALIGNMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS.

This bill codifies the unanimous governance recommendations from the ECLC by:

- Aligning all early childhood and family support programs within the Department of Early Childhood, including all programs and services delivered by the Office of Early Childhood, the Colorado Preschool Program (beginning in the 2023-24 school year), Early Childhood At-Risk Enhancement (ECARE) program, and the Early Childhood Workforce Development Team in the Colorado Department of Education, including the Professional Development Information System (PDIS) and early childhood assessments.
- Orienting programs toward an integrated and trauma-informed approach to family services that can support families and children in achieving their goals.
- Supporting interagency cooperation as universal preschool is implemented while also retaining the authority of the Colorado Department of Education, per federal and state requirements, to oversee Preschool Special Education services.
- Implementing data and technology solutions to effectively streamline the parent and provider experience.
- Establishing a nimble governance system that ensures parents, providers, and partners have a voice in advising regulations and rules, while recognizing the urgency of building a new system in which the executive director holds final rulemaking authority.
- Requiring an evaluation and review of program movement and system alignment within the early years of the new department.



IMPLEMENTING UNIVERSAL PRESCHOOL.

This bill advances the unanimous universal preschool recommendations from the ECLC by:

- Building and strengthening early childhood infrastructure by elevating a state vision for a mixed delivery universal preschool program. The infrastructure will be thoughtfully led by local coordinating organizations that bring partners together to build and achieve a local plan.
- Simplifying the application process for families by establishing a single point of entry for all available preschool and child care services.
- Ensuring we achieve the vision of universal, voluntary access for all children the year prior to kindergarten entry using a new model of calculating per child rates. This will occur while prioritizing resources and additional preschool programming for those most in need.
- Establishing community-informed, evidence-based standards for quality and evaluation to (1) ensure positive child and family outcomes and support continuous program improvement and (2) eliminate duplicative regulations and oversight.
- Supporting the early childhood workforce who are critical to advancing child outcomes and achieving the success of universal preschool.



**Better
Beginnings**
COLORADO

Contacts: **Moira Cullen**, mcullen@capstonegroupllc.com (303) 868-8452
Will Coyne, will@headwatersstrategies.com (720) 308-7931
Riley Kitts, riley@coloradokids.org (303) 960-6492

SUPPORTERS

Assuring Better Child Health & Development

Bruce Atchison, Previous Director of Policy at Education Commission of the States

Charlotte Brantley, Former President and CEO Clayton Early Learning

Children's Hospital Colorado

Clayton Early Learning

Colorado Children's Campaign

Colorado Head Start Association

Colorado Home Visiting Coalition

Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition

Colorado Succeeds

Community Partnership for Child Development

Council for a Strong America

Democrats for Education Reform and Education Reform Now

Early Childhood Council Leadership Alliance

Early Childhood Education Association of Colorado (ECEA of CO)

Early Childhood Options

The Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County

Early Connections Learning Centers

Early Learning Ventures

Gary Ventures

Healthy Child Care Colorado

Healthier Colorado

Illuminate Colorado

Invest in Kids

Kempe Foundation

Jeanne McQueeney, Eagle County Commissioner

Mile High Early Learning

Mile High United Way

Montelores Early Childhood Council

Parent Possible

Save the Children Action Network (SCAN)

Small Business Majority

Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning

The Women's Foundation of Colorado

