

Framework for a Comprehensive Early Childhood System for Boulder County

Just think...

- ...if all children could grow to their full potential.
- ...if all parents had the information and support they need.
- ...if all child care professionals had sufficient resources.
- ...if all child-serving agencies worked in concert.
- ...if public policy supported them all.

Just think...

- ...if all of Boulder County shared a vision of young children as a priority.

**Prepared by
The Early Childhood Council of Boulder County
(December, 2008)**

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For more information, please contact:

**Bobbie Watson, Director
Early Childhood Council of Boulder County
(303) 441-3181**

watsonb@bouldercolorado.gov

<http://www.earlychildhoodbouldercounty.org>

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ECCBC Board of Directors

ECCBC Community members

ECCBC Steering Committee

ECCBC Expert Committee

ECCBC Advisory Council

Attendees of Community Finance Forums

ECCBC staff

City of Boulder: Housing and Human Services Staff as well as Children, Youth and Families staff

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Executive Summary

A. Introduction

The Early Childhood Council of Boulder County (ECCBC) is a collaborative network of more than 150 local organizations and individuals. It is the primary forum for countywide planning and coordinating programs and policy related to families and young children. The *Framework for a Comprehensive Early Childhood System for Boulder County* updates the community on the progress that ECCBC has made over the past several years in developing a unified and coherent system of programs and services that will ensure that Boulder County's children and families in have the best possible opportunity to succeed in school and in life. It also outlines future steps toward the implementation of the proposed comprehensive early childhood system, and invites community members to become involved in the process.

B. Rationale: The Importance of the Early Years and the Benefits of a Comprehensive Early Childhood System

The first three to five years of a child's life are crucial to his or her healthy cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development. What happens during this time can have a significant influence – either positive or negative – on a child's chances for success later in life. During this period the brain grows to 90% of its adult size, and children learn the basics about language and numbers, how to get along with others, how to concentrate on a task, and how to solve problems – all essential ingredients for success in school. It is also a critical time to support children's healthy physical development, and to ensure that health problems do not interfere with learning necessary skills for school success.

A comprehensive early childhood system can help to ensure that all children and families have access to high-quality programs and services that will prepare them for success in school and in life. Indeed, extensive research demonstrates that investments in high-quality early childhood programs yield substantial short and long-term benefits that far outweigh their initial costs. They achieve these impressive results by:

- Supporting healthy early childhood development and effective parenting
- Promoting academic success and develop productive adult citizens
- Reducing public expenditures on remedial education, crime, and health-related problems
- Strengthening local and regional economies

C. Challenges and Opportunities Facing Families and Children for Boulder County

The proposed comprehensive early childhood system is designed to build the capacity of local communities to respond to a range of changing needs and circumstances among Boulder County's families and children. The *Framework* specifically addresses three important local trends that have potentially far-reaching, long-term impacts:

1) *Gaps in School Readiness and School Achievement*

A significant number of Boulder County children (perhaps as many as 30%) arrive at kindergarten each year unprepared for classroom learning for a variety of reasons. These gaps in school readiness can -- and often do -- become persistent gaps in school achievement throughout a child's K-12 career. In the Boulder Valley and St. Vrain Valley School Districts, these gaps are revealed in significant disparities on Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) scores between Latino and non-Hispanic white students, and between low-income and middle-/upper-income students.

2) *Quality, Affordability, and Availability of Early Childhood Programs and Services*

Gaps in school readiness and school achievement can be mitigated by quality early childhood programs and services, but the current early childhood system for Boulder County lacks consistent quality, affordability, and availability. For example,

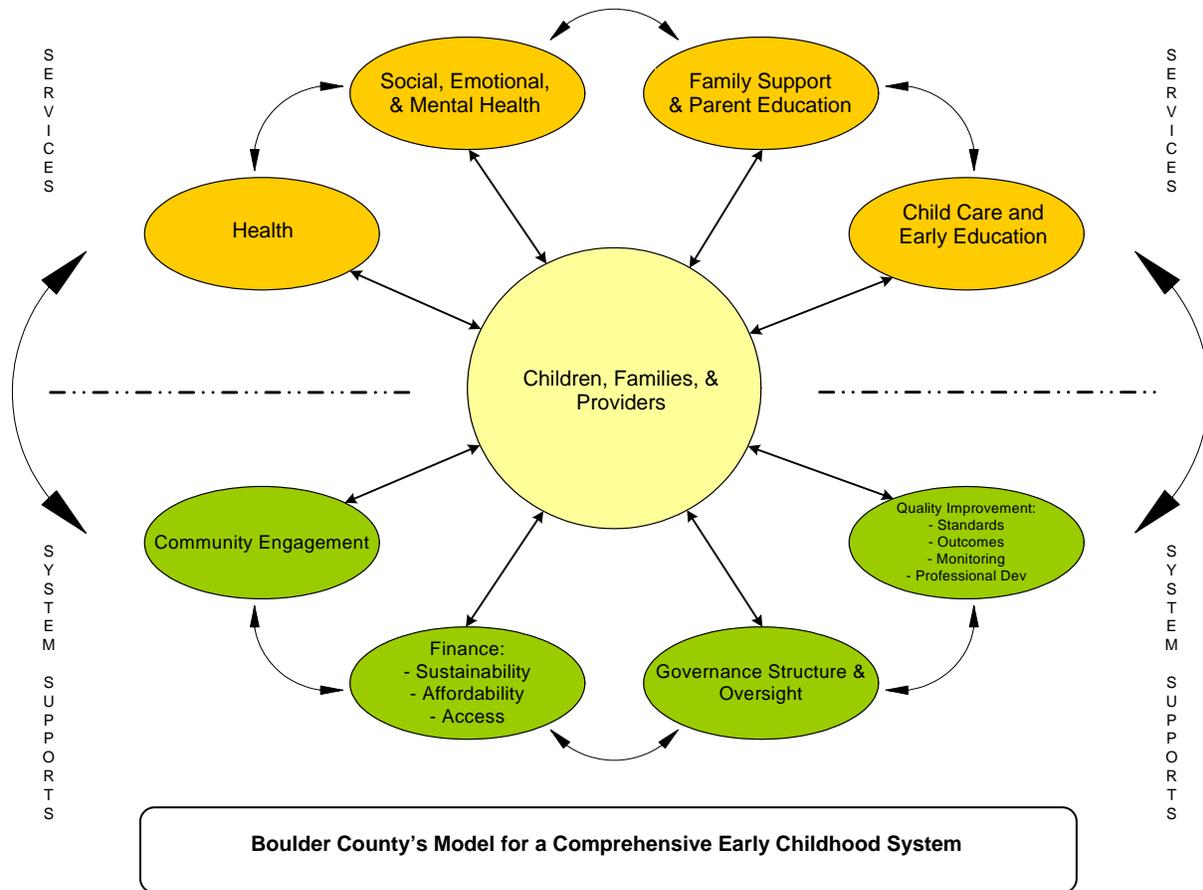
- About half of all households with a child aged 3-5 years for Boulder County use some form of paid child care, but care can be prohibitively expensive. Costs for childcare are updated annually and the most recent figures estimate that full-time child care can cost around \$1100 per child per month. This has obvious implications for parents' workforce participation and capacity for economic self-sufficiency.
- Opportunities such as Head Start, the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP), and child care subsidy programs are filled to capacity and carry waiting lists.
- Only 12.2% of child care centers for Boulder County have completed a national accreditation process (compared to 16.5% statewide), and there is no comprehensive system for quality assurance at the neither state nor county level. .
- There is a disparity in access to a range of other services that support optimal physical, cognitive, and social/emotional development, such as health, mental health, and family support services.

3) *A Growing and Changing Population*

Boulder County's population is rapidly growing and changing, and programs that serve children and families are being challenged to meet emerging needs. For example, Boulder County is becoming much more ethnically diverse: the percentage of the population that is Hispanic/Latino has nearly doubled since 1990. In the meantime, the percentage of children living in poverty for Boulder County increased 36.7% between 2000 and 2006.

D. Description of the Proposed Comprehensive Early Childhood System for Boulder County

ECCBC's proposed comprehensive early childhood system includes *service components* that are provided directly to children and families, as well as *infrastructure components* that ensure those programs and services are funded, coordinated, and delivered effectively and in a sustainable manner. These elements and the relationship between them are illustrated in the diagram below.



Programs and services include:

- **Child Care and Early Education (or “Early Learning”).** Services that support cognition, general knowledge, language, and literacy development in nurturing environments where children can learn what they need to succeed in school and in life.
- **Family Support and Parent Education.** Services that recognize and empower parents as primary nurturers, teachers, and providers for their children, and strengthen the self-sufficiency and overall quality of life for families.
- **Social, Emotional, and Mental health.** Services that promote the social and emotional development of children and the early detection of mental health concerns.
- **Health.** Services that promote the physical well-being and motor development of children and the early detection of health problems or developmental delays.

“System supports” would ensure that programs and services are accountable, sustainable, and of high quality:

- **Finance.** To ensure a system that is funded through sustainable mechanisms, that maximizes resources, and ensures affordable and accessible services.

- **Governance and coordination.** To ensure a coordinated system that is guided by leadership with the capacity for key functions such as planning, policy-making, fiscal management, and accountability.
- **Quality assurance.** Comprised of professional development and evaluation, quality assurance ensures that the system will be driven by a unified set of standards and outcomes and implemented by well-trained professionals.
- **Community engagement.** Outreach and education to ensure that the early childhood system reflects the vision, values, and priorities of the community as a whole, and is responsive to the needs of all community members.

The System will also incorporate specific goals, which are captured under the headings Ready Child, Ready Family, Ready Child Care and Early Education, and Ready Community. Each of these goal areas will be associated with an identified set of indicators that will be used to track and measure progress toward desired outcomes.

E. Progress to Date

ECCBC has been laying the groundwork for a comprehensive early childhood system since its inception in 1996. ECCBC has conducted research studies and developed policy recommendations for Boulder County in key areas such as:

- Child care usage and demand
- The economic impact of the child care industry for Boulder County
- Latino school readiness

In addition, ECCBC has engaged colleagues and consultants at the local, state, and national levels to develop the conceptual framework and strategic priorities for the proposed comprehensive system. For example, ECCBC has:

- Integrated lessons learned from a federally-funded pilot program for Boulder County that tested the integration of the System's four service components (early care and education; family support and parent education; social-emotional and mental health; and health) in a real-world environment.
- Convened an Expert Committee that helped to identify essential early childhood programs and services for Boulder County, prioritize unmet needs, define a set of guiding principles, and recommend program/services priorities and strategies.
- Convened Community Finance Forums to define certain parameters and planning assumptions for the proposed System, and contracted with a national expert to develop a method for estimating potential costs based on these considerations.
- Continued to conduct community outreach and engagement activities, to educate the public about the proposed System, and to encourage as many people from diverse communities as possible to become involved.

F. Next Steps Toward Implementation

In the coming months, ECCBC will work with the community to finish the research-and-development phase of the proposed comprehensive early childhood system and to plan strategies for implementation. Key next steps include:

- Continue to gather and update data and information as necessary, such as:
 - Updating projections of unmet need within the current early childhood system.
 - Developing baseline data for the proposed system indicators.
 - Calculating estimates for the potential “return on investment” that could be generated from adequately funding early childhood programs and services for Boulder County.
- Convene a Finance Task Force that will: (1) estimate the costs for the proposed system, (2) recommend priorities based on current financial realities, and (3) develop strategies for identifying additional revenue sources.
- Convene a Leadership Committee that will consider the conclusions from the Expert Committee and the Finance Task Force and make recommendations regarding policy development. This committee will also champion a community visioning process that will support the adoption of early childhood as a core community value.
- Convene a Governance and Implementation Task Force that will make recommendations that address the practical logistics involved in establishing the “infrastructure” components of the proposed comprehensive early childhood system, including functions such as: program operations and management; personnel and finance; program monitoring, assessment and evaluation; legal, and fiduciary responsibilities.

Full copies of the *Framework* are available by request or on the website. Additional information regarding the development of a Comprehensive System of Early Childhood for Boulder County is available on the website: www.earlychildhoodbouldercounty.org as well as by contacting:

Bobbie Watson
ECCBC Director
2160 Spruce Street
Boulder CO 80302
303-441-3181
watsonb@bouldercolorado.gov

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III. Introduction

The Early Childhood Council of Boulder County (ECCBC), a collaborative network of more than 150 local organizations and individuals. It is the primary forum for countywide planning and coordination of programs and policy related to families and young children. ECCBC has been working toward the implementation of a comprehensive system of early childhood programs and services for Boulder County since its inception in 1996.

The purpose of this report is to update Boulder County residents, policy-makers and community leaders on the progress that ECCBC has made in developing a comprehensive early childhood system, and to outline future steps toward its implementation. The report includes the following information, which is briefly outlined in this introduction:

1. The rationale for a comprehensive early childhood system for Boulder County.
2. A brief summary of the challenges facing families and children for Boulder County.
3. ECCBC's proposed comprehensive early childhood system for Boulder County:
 - a. Description
 - i. Program and services components
 - ii. System infrastructure components
 - b. Guiding principles
 - c. Goals and outcomes (indicators)
4. ECCBC's planning process:
 - a. Progress to-date
5. Next steps: implementing the system
6. Conclusions

IV. Background

A. Rationale for a Comprehensive Early Childhood System: Benefits for Children, Families, and Communities

An extensive body of research demonstrates that investments in high-quality early childhood programs yield substantial short- and long-term benefits that far outweigh their initial costs. These programs:

- *Support healthy early childhood development.*^{1,2}

The first 3-5 years of life have a critical influence on a child's capacity to be successful in school and in life. The physical "hardware" of the human brain reaches 90% of its adult size by age five. In the meantime, the brain's "software" – the connections between different parts of the brain which are critical to capacities such as language literacy – develops through experiences and relationships.

Developing social and emotional skills is also important during the early years. They enable children to learn from teachers, make friends, express thoughts and feelings,

and cope with frustration. These kinds of skills, in turn, directly influence cognitive learning such as early literacy, numeracy and language skills.

Early care and education providers (whether they be licensed centers or homes, informal friend/relative care, or parents themselves) who understand the complexities of cognitive, social/emotional, and physical development in early childhood play a critical role in helping to ensure that children are prepared for success in school and in life.

- *Promote academic success and develop productive adults.*^{3,4}

Longitudinal studies show that participants in high-quality early childhood programs fare better than their peers throughout their K-12 education. They achieve higher test scores and graduation rates and are less likely to repeat a grade or be referred to Special Education. As adults, they attain greater economic self-sufficiency, including higher labor force participation and higher incomes.

Early childhood programs that significantly engage parents also show benefits for them as well, including: improved parent-child relationships and reduced levels of child abuse; increased economic self-sufficiency; better maternal reproductive health; and lower incidence of maternal substance abuse.

- *Reduce public expenditures on remedial education, crime, and health-related problems.*^{5,6}

Various studies have determined that every \$1 invested in quality early childhood programs can return anywhere from \$4 to \$17 in future savings to the general public. Savings accrue from several factors, including:

- ✓ Reduced need for academic remediation such as special education and grade repetition.
 - ✓ Less crime and lower rates of incarceration.
 - ✓ Reduced dependence on public assistance.
 - ✓ Increased economic output (i.e., increased employment, wages, and taxes paid).
 - ✓ Improvements in health-related indicators such as teen pregnancy, and smoking.
- *Strengthen local and regional economies.*^{7,8}

Early Childhood programs contribute to a community's economic vitality by enabling parents to work and by creating an economic environment that is attractive to employers as well as employees. In addition, the child care industry has a strong "multiplier effect" on regional economies, meaning that dollars spent on child care are re-spent locally many times over, for example, in the form of wages paid to employees, purchases of materials and supplies, etc. In fact, child care ranks in the

93rd percentile of all industries in this regard, ahead of retail, tourism, hospitals, elementary and secondary schools, and colleges and universities. Although the potential for beneficial “ripple effects” throughout a local/regional economy characteristic makes the child care industry an attractive target for economic development policy and intervention, it has not typically received this kind of attention or investment. Furthermore, communities seeking to preserve economic diversity can help make their locales more affordable by subsidizing child care costs, in much the same way as they do housing costs.

B. Challenges Facing Families and Children for Boulder County

- 1) *Although students in the Boulder Valley and the St. Vrain Valley School Districts generally outperform their peers statewide, there are persistent gaps in school readiness and academic achievement between Latino and non-Hispanic white students. Similar disparities exist between low-income and middle-/upper-income students. These gaps are evident as soon as children enter Kindergarten, and persist through the years as disparities in CSAP test results and graduation rates.*
 - ✓ BVSD’s 2006 CSAP scores showed the second highest gap between Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites among all school districts in Colorado. And these gaps continue to widen throughout the student’s public school career.
 - ✓ Among 3rd graders who qualify for the free/reduced school lunch program (i.e., low-income students) only 50% of those in BVSD and 60% of those in SVVSD achieved “proficient” CSAP scores, compared to 90% of those who did not qualify for the program.
 - ✓ The Hispanic graduation rate among the class of 2006 was 70% in SVVSD and 65% in BVSD, compared to just over 90% among non-Hispanic whites.
- 2) *Boulder County’s population is rapidly growing and changing, and programs that serve children and families are being challenged to meet emerging needs.*
 - ✓ Boulder County is becoming much more ethnically diverse. The percentage of the population that is Hispanic/Latino has nearly doubled since 1990, from 6.7% to 12.8%. This growth is even more pronounced among young children: in 2005 25% of all children born for Boulder County were to Latina women.⁹
 - ✓ 11.2% of all children under 18 for Boulder County lived below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) in 2006. This represents an increase of 36.7% in the percentage of children living in poverty since 2000; the poverty rate for children under 5 years was 16.7%. Furthermore, the rate of poverty among children for Boulder County is increasing as about twice as fast as for the general population.¹⁰
 - ✓ A greater percentage of Latino children live in poverty than non-Latinos.
- 3) *These gaps can be mitigated by quality early childhood programs and services, but the current early childhood system lacks consistent quality, affordability, and availability.*

- ✓ The Colorado Preschool Program, which targets low-income and at-risk children, is one example of a high-quality early childhood program that makes a huge impact. 83.4% of CPP participants perform at or above grade level when they enter Kindergarten, which is roughly the same rate as the general population and far higher than other low-income children. And these gains continue: CPP students score 28% higher on average than other low-income children on 3rd grade CSAP tests. Results are even stronger for English Language Learners. CPP saved Colorado school districts almost \$21 million over a five year period in special education costs.¹¹
- ✓ As of 2005, there were a total of 188 eligible children on the waiting list for Head Start programs for Boulder County. A more comprehensive estimate projects an unmet need of 458 Head Start slots, or about 89% more than are currently available.¹²
- ✓ In 2003, about 12,000 households for Boulder County had children in paid early care and education outside of the home, about one-third of all households with children. Of these, 74% would alter their labor force participation if child care were no longer available.¹³
- ✓ A year of full-time child care (about 2000 hours per year) costs more than a year of tuition at CU. Infant care is even more expensive, averaging about \$1,100 per month; local child care costs have risen 28% above inflation since 2001.¹⁴
- ✓ Only 12.2% of child care centers for Boulder County have completed a national accreditation process (compared to 16.5% statewide). There is no comprehensive system for quality assurance, either statewide or countywide. Higher quality care often costs more than parents can afford to pay, and there are few incentives to improve quality. The average annual salary for a child care worker is \$18,210, about the same as a maid or a security guard.¹⁵
- ✓ There is also a disparity in access to a range of other supportive services that are essential to support optimal physical, cognitive, and social/emotional development, such as health and mental health. For example, while 94% of Boulder County's non-Hispanic whites are insured, only 55% of Hispanic residents have health insurance and only 80% of Hispanic children have any coverage.¹⁶

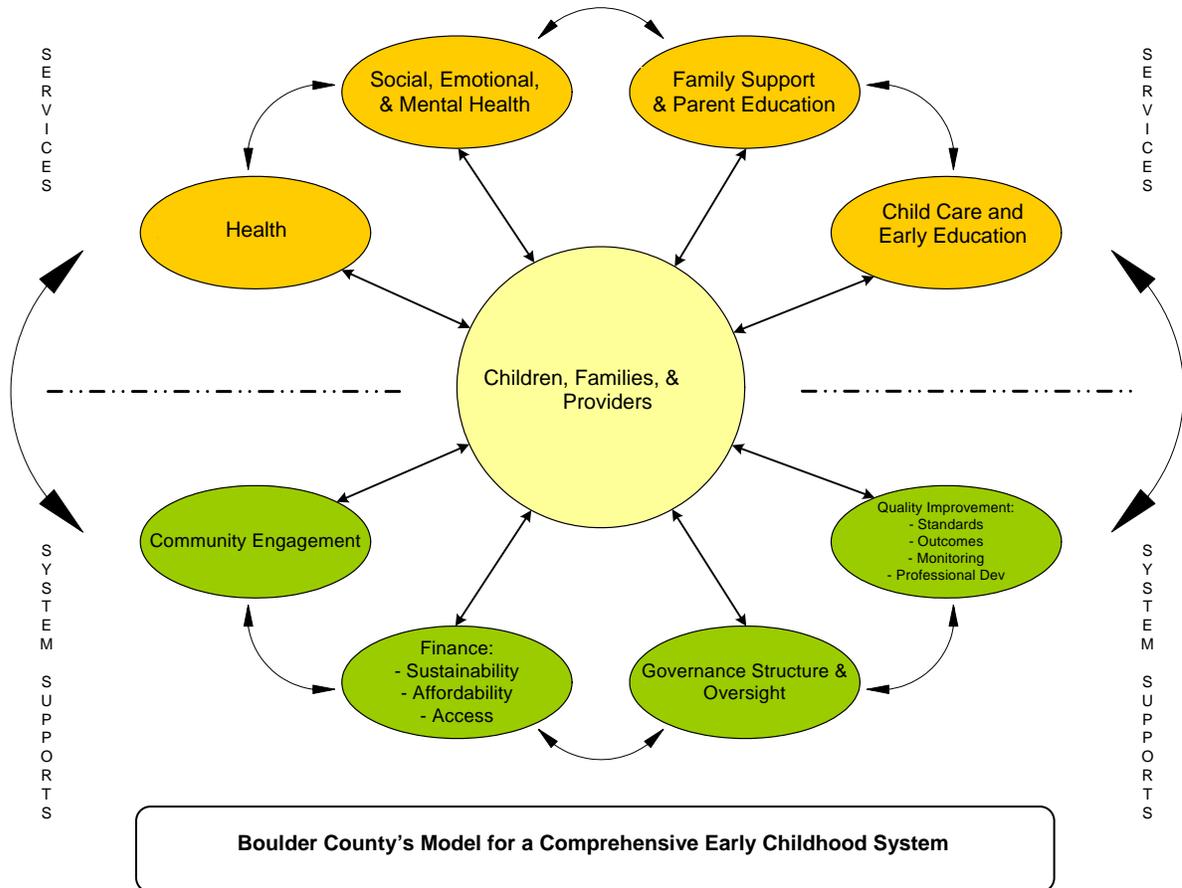
V. ECCBC'S Proposed Comprehensive Early Childhood System for Boulder County

A. Description

For the past several years, ECCBC has been constructing a framework for a comprehensive early childhood system that would ensure that all young children for Boulder County would have the best possible opportunity to succeed in school and in life. The current version of this model, illustrated in the schematic diagram below, reflects the collective effort of many groups and individuals for Boulder County as well as the work by many Colorado and national groups.¹⁷ Most recently, ECCBC convened an Expert Committee to help identify early childhood programs and services considered essential to a comprehensive system for Boulder County (see Section IV. "Progress Report," page 24). This group defined a

comprehensive early childhood system as “several interrelated elements working together toward a common goal: to support the healthy growth and optimal development of all young children in the context of their families.”¹⁸

These elements of the proposed system are broadly categorized as *service components* that are provided to children and families, and *infrastructure components* that ensure those programs and services are funded, coordinated, and delivered effectively and in a sustainable manner.



1) Program and Service Components:

- **Child Care and Early Education (or “Early Learning”):** Services that support cognition, general knowledge, language, and literacy development in nurturing environments where children can learn what they need to succeed in school and in life.
- **Family Support and Parent Education:** Services that recognize and empower parents¹⁹ as primary nurturers, teachers, and providers for their children, and strengthen the self sufficiency and overall quality of life for families.
- **Social, Emotional, and Mental Health:** Services that promote the social and emotional development of children and the early detection of mental health concerns.
- **Health:** Services that promote the physical well-being and motor development of children and the early detection of health problems or developmental delays.

Quick Study - Types of Care:

It is estimated that one-third to one-half of all households with children under 5 years old for Boulder County regularly use some kind of paid child care arrangement.²⁰ The vast majority (80-90%) of these children are in formal settings such as Child Care Centers, Preschools, and Family Child Care Homes, that are licensed and regulated by the State of Colorado. The remainder are in informal, unregulated settings such as Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) Care, and in-home or “nanny” care. Each type of care is described briefly below:²¹

1) *Child Care Centers and Preschools*

Care is provided in a facility similar to school where there may be many classrooms, and children are usually grouped by age. Child Care Centers and Preschools are regulated by the Colorado Department of Human Services, Division of Child Care.

2) *Family Home Child Care*

Children are cared for in a home (not a relative’s) that has been licensed by the state to provide child care. Family Home Child Care is regulated by the Colorado Department of Human Services, Division of Child Care, and must meet different licensing requirements depending on the type of facility.

3) *Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) Care*

An agreement with a family member or an unrelated person to provide care in their own home or in the child’s. FFN Care is legally exempt from licensing regulations, as long as care is limited to one family (plus the provider’s relatives). In Boulder County, publicly-funded child care subsidies such as CCCAP may be paid to FFN providers.

4) *In-Home Care*

Sometimes called “nanny care”. An individual is hired to work in home to take care of a child, setting the hours, responsibilities, and compensation for the job. In-Home Care is not regulated in Colorado.

2) Infrastructure Components:

- **Finance:** To ensure a system that is funded through sustainable mechanisms, that maximizes resources, and ensures affordable and accessible services.
- **Governance and coordination:** To ensure a coordinated system that is guided by leadership with the capacity for key functions such as planning, policy-making, fiscal management, and accountability.
- **Quality assurance:** Comprised of professional development and evaluation, quality assurance ensures a system driven by a unified set of standards and outcomes and implemented by well-trained professionals.
- **Community engagement:** Outreach and education to ensure that the early childhood system reflects the vision, values, and priorities of the community as a whole, and is responsive to the needs of all community members.

B. Guiding Principles: the core values of a comprehensive early childhood system

Based on extensive input from local child care professionals and community members, ECCBC has established the following principles to guide the development, funding, and implementation of the proposed Comprehensive Early Childhood System:

- **Comprehensive and inclusive** in its design to meet the needs of all children and families.
- **Family and child-centered** in a way that values the uniqueness of each child and each family, builds on family strengths, and is responsive to unique needs.
- **Focused on prevention** through promotion of physical, social-emotional, cognitive, and language development of children, and early identification and intervention services for children with special health care needs, mental health concerns, disabilities, or developmental delays.
- **Affordable, accessible, and available** to ensure that parents have choices in utilizing high quality, culturally competent services for their children.
- **Coordinated and integrated** to promote seamless and flexible service delivery, prevent gaps and duplication, maximize resources, and leverage the strengths of the existing system.
- **Accountable** to the community and funders through monitoring of outcomes and indicators and a commitment to continuous quality improvement.
- **Sustainable** through stable funding mechanisms, governance, and infrastructure for services.

C. Assurances: Commitments Made to Boulder County Residents by ECCBC

- ECCBC will continue to act as the countywide convener for the comprehensive early childhood system planning initiative whereby stakeholders' input is encouraged, valued and incorporated.
- The continued refinement of the comprehensive early childhood system plan is only the first step in the process of implementation.
- The community of Boulder County residents will be updated on a bi-annual basis as to progress in the comprehensive system development initiative through community events (in the spring and fall of each year) and through updates on the ECCBC website (www.earlychildhoodbouldercounty.gov).
- ECCBC and our partners are designing a comprehensive early childhood System which has measurable indicators which will be reported to the community on an annual basis in order to track the impacts on young children and families for Boulder County. A Report to the Community will be released in the summer of each year.

D. Goals and Indicators

The proposed comprehensive early childhood system is designed to accomplish four goals, adapted from the Colorado School Readiness Project²² to suit Boulder County's particular context. Progress toward these goals will be measured by monitoring certain indicators,

which were developed in consultation with the Expert Committee, OMNI Institute, and others, and were based upon national and local research.*

1) Goal #1: Ready Children – *The child arrives ready for school: healthy, well-adjusted and having been exposed to the fundamentals of learning.*

Rationale:

The quality of a child’s health and mental health in early life is critical for success in life. Language development and cognitive development in the early years are also building blocks for future success.

Multiple national research studies demonstrate the link between a healthy early childhood that provides learning opportunities and success in school and beyond. These children achieve success in kindergarten, become successful graduates and ultimately become productive adults in society.

Developmentally appropriate practices are key. Healthy early childhood is about physical well-being, fine and gross motor skill development, optimum socio-emotional development, cognition and language development. Healthy early childhood is about good nutrition and basic medical care, loving attention from parents and caregivers and play, lots of play.

By focusing on the ready child goal, resources and support can be directed to assure that all children for Boulder County have a basic health, mental health and early learning support system.

Indicators:

- ✓ Change in the percentage of children enrolled in CHP+ health insurance program.
- ✓ Percentage of 3rd grade children with untreated tooth decay.
- ✓ Percentage of obese children age 2-5 years among WIC (Women, Infants and Children) participants.
- ✓ Percentage of all children achieving proficiency on 3rd grade CSAP reading and math tests.
- ✓ Percentage of low-income children (i.e., eligible for the Free and Reduced-Price School Lunch Program) achieving proficiency on 3rd grade CSAP reading and math tests.

* The indicators referenced here were evaluated and selected according to the accessibility of statistically valid and reliable data, in addition to the degree to which they measure progress toward identified goals. Another set of “emerging” indicators have been also been identified, which may track system goals more precisely but are not yet readily available in a reliable form. See Expert Committee. Report to the Community: Recommended Program and Services Priorities for a Comprehensive Early Childhood System. Boulder, CO: Early Childhood Council of Boulder County, 2008.

2) Goal #2: Ready Family – *The family is empowered to nurture their children’s healthy growth and development as their child’s first and best teacher. The family has access to programs and services to support their child’s development and can advocate effectively for their child(ren).*

Rationale:

Parents are their children’s best teacher. Therefore, a family that has a safe and stable home, can provide healthy food, can provide a loving nurturing environment and understands developmentally appropriate early life experiences, is the most important component in a child’s life.

Research studies show that family poverty exacerbates negative outcomes for children. Poor children tend to have more health problems, to not do well in school (from kindergarten on it gets worse), and to have low graduation rates. Boulder County has a persistent achievement gap in school and a growing economic divide.

By focusing on the ready family goal, resources and support can be directed to Boulder County’s youngest children’s first and best support system for life – their family.

Indicators:

- ✓ Percentage of eligible children under five years old enrolled in the WIC program.
- ✓ Percentage of eligible families receiving food stamp assistance.
- ✓ Substantiated rate of child abuse & neglect cases.

3) Goal #3: Ready Child Care and Early Education – *All families for Boulder County have access to high quality early childhood programs and services. A high value is placed on parental choice and all venues for early care and education, including homes (licensed and unlicensed), centers, and preschools are affordable, available, accessible, and of high quality. Parents who choose to provide in-home care for their child(ren) have access to high quality family support and parent education programs and services.*

Rationale:

High quality early care and education services are critical components of a comprehensive system of early childhood support. Most young children in our community spend at least some time (many children spend a lot of time) in licensed child care settings – child care centers, family homes and/or preschools.

Research studies demonstrate that high quality care includes clean and safe facilities, thoughtful learning environments, credentialed early childhood providers, low child/caregiver ratios and parent involvement. Research studies also show that high quality care can mitigate negative effects on children of low-income and/or other risk factors. High quality early care and education services help at-risk children become successful in school and life. In addition, although less impressive, studies also indicate that non-at-risk children also accrue benefit from exposure to high quality early childhood programs.

By focusing on the ready early care and education goal, resources and policy development can be directed to the availability, affordability and accessibility of high quality early education programs and services for all families of young children for Boulder County .

Indicators:

- ✓ Number of licensed child care providers.
- ✓ Number of Qualistar-rated family child care homes and centers.
- ✓ Number of child care homes and centers receiving national accreditation.
- ✓ Number and types of credentials obtained by early childhood professionals.
- ✓ Percentage of child care providers receiving training and/or experience serving children with special needs.

Quick Study - Child Care Quality

Research suggests that most of the benefit that children gain from participating in early childhood programs results from a few key program characteristics. Taken together, these ingredients are generally referred to as “program quality.” Several organizations, such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC),²³ the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC),²⁴ the FPG Child Development Institute,²⁵ Qualistar,²⁶ and others, have developed a variety of instruments to measure different aspects of quality in early learning programs, some of which are described briefly below.

1) Teacher-Child Interaction

How adults interact with children to support language/literacy skills and healthy social-emotional development.

2) Learning Environment

Developmentally appropriate learning activities, physical environment, furniture and equipment, health and safety.

3) Family Engagement

How the program develops relationships with families, serves as a resource for them and offers them opportunities to be part of their children’s early learning experience.

4) Training and Education

Work experience and formal education in early childhood achieved by the providers working in the program.

5) Adult-to-Child Ratio and Group Size

Programs with lower ratios and smaller groups allow quality individual learning experiences based on a child’s needs, and provide stimulating learning activities for all children.

6) Accreditation

Programs that are accredited through a national accrediting agency (such as NAEYC or the National Association for Family Child Care) are more likely to follow national standards of high-quality early childhood education.

4) Goal #4: Ready Community – *The community recognizes the importance of early childhood as integral to quality of life for Boulder County, and as a critical part of the continuum of social equity. The community implements policies which support all families with young children throughout the county.*

Rationale:

The quality of a community's commitment to its youngest children is critical in addressing 21st century challenges across the population. National research studies demonstrate significant economic and societal return on investment with monies devoted to comprehensive early childhood services. The list of long term positive outcomes is long:

- Improved school readiness and social skills,
- higher IQ scores,
- higher standardized test scores,
- decreased crime and delinquency,
- greater earning capacity,
- parents able to find and keep work,
- reduced crime costs,
- reduced welfare use, and
- increased income tax revenue.

Appropriate resource allocation and public policy are key to the quality of the community's commitment. Healthy early childhood communities recognize that public policy can support all families, not just the at-risk population. Healthy early childhood communities have plans that address the achievement gap between populations.

By focusing on the ready community goal, resources and public policy can be directed at aligning early childhood goals with the public good, positive socio-economic outcomes and socio-economic sustainability

Indicators:

- ✓ Percentage of eligible children served in publicly-funded early childhood programs for low-income children and families (e.g., Head Start, Colorado Preschool Program, Child Care Certificate Program, etc.).
- ✓ Average weekly cost for child care centers and homes for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.
- ✓ Estimated percentage of income required to pay for child care.
- ✓ Number of public dollars spent to subsidize child care programs for low-income children and families.
- ✓ Number of licensed CCCAP (Colorado Child Care Assistance Program) providers for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.
- ✓ Average hourly wages for child care center providers.

VI. Progress Report: Boulder County’s Early Childhood System Planning Process

A. ECCBC History, Vision and Mission

The Boulder County Early Childhood Council was formed in 1996 as the Early Care and Education Task Force. The following year it was designated one of 13 statewide “Consolidated Child Care Pilot” sites by the Colorado Department of Education, and received funding and support to develop an integrated, coordinated system of early childhood programs and services.

HB 07-1062, passed by the Colorado Legislature in 2007, significantly expanded the size and scope of the program by establishing “Early Childhood Councils” throughout the state, and by removing the “pilot” designation for existing collaboratives such as ECCBC. As an official Early Childhood Council, ECCBC is now charged with the task of “increasing and sustaining the quality, accessibility, capacity, and affordability of early childhood services for children 5 years of age or younger and their parents,” and with creating “a comprehensive early childhood system that includes quality care and education, family support, health, and mental health programs.”

Today there are 31 Early Childhood Councils throughout the state, serving 56 of Colorado’s 64 counties.

ECCBC’s vision is “to ensure that all young children birth to five for Boulder County are ready to succeed in school and in life.” Its mission is “to expand and improve the comprehensive system of quality early childhood services for families for Boulder County.” Since 2003 its work has been organized around three primary strategic goals:

1. *To develop and implement a comprehensive early childhood system for Boulder County.*
 - a. Develop sustainable funding.
 - b. Create a shared community vision of childhood as a community priority.
2. *To improve the quality of early childhood programs and services for Boulder County.*
 - a. Develop strategies for enhancing compensation for early childhood providers.
 - b. Increase opportunities for professional development.
 - c. Build the capacity of early childhood programs to ensure that all children arrive at Kindergarten prepared to succeed in school.
3. *To improve the availability, affordability, and accessibility of early childhood programs and services.*
 - a. Develop a mechanism for a “single point of entry” for services.
 - b. To improve Spanish language skills and cultural competency for family child care homes.

Membership in the council today comprises over 150 organizations and individuals from throughout Boulder County representing a broad cross-section of early childhood

professionals in both the public and private sectors, as well as parents, representatives of both school districts, governmental entities, and other concerned adults. Since its inception the council has been housed at the City of Boulder’s Children, Youth, and Families Division and has received funding from a wide variety of public and private sources. The City of Boulder acts as the fiscal agent for the council.

B. Impetus and Support for Early Childhood System Planning

1) Background: Challenges and Opportunities in the 1990’s General Trends

Many individuals and groups have been laying the groundwork for a comprehensive early childhood system for Boulder County for more than a decade. Much of this work has been done in response to a series of challenges and opportunities at the local, state, and national levels, a few of which are briefly described below.

a. Welfare Reform (1996)

When President Bill Clinton signed the “Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act” of 1996 his stated intent was to “end welfare as we know it.” A major thrust of the Act was to limit the amount of time that recipients could be on the welfare rolls in order to encourage them to enter the workforce as quickly as possible. Funding for the new program, called “Temporary Assistance to Needy Families,” (TANF) was allocated to states in the form of block grants which could be used for a wide range of purposes, including non-monetary supports such as transportation and child care.

This initiative immediately increased the demand for high-quality, affordable, available child care for low-income people who had formerly been caring for their own children at home, and gave states wide latitude to experiment with a variety of models for meeting that demand. Indeed, some experts who have evaluated the long-term impacts of Welfare Reform have concluded that those states that have been most successful in implementing the legislation are those that have invested the most in child care, largely because two-thirds of TANF recipients are single mothers.²⁷ In Colorado, this led to the creation of the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP).

b. Governor Romer’s Business Commission on Child Care Financing (1995)

On May 16, 1995, Governor Roy Romer appointed a twenty-five member Business Commission on Child Care Financing. The Commission was charged with examining child care from a business perspective and proposing innovative but realistic methods to help finance quality child care that is affordable and accessible for Colorado families. Members of the Commission included executives from the banking industry, the communications field, tax law, small business, the gaming industry, ski resort and hotel management, economic development, accounting and tax analysis, data processing, the airlines, labor, and real estate, as well as a college vice president, a

university dean, an economist, and management consultants. The Commission was chaired by Douglas Price, President of FirstBank of Denver.

In developing its final recommendations, the Business Commission on Child Care Financing examined successful models in other states and communities as well as their own ideas generated through discussion and problem solving. All of the recommendations were aimed at improving the supply of high-quality, affordable care for Colorado's children. Some of the proposed actions were intended to directly benefit parents and children as consumers of child care services; others to provide financial relief and assistance to providers in expanding and improving their services. All of the recommendations were selected because they were deemed to make sound business sense.

The Commission's recommendations included:

- 1) Establish model planning and zoning programs designed to increase and impact the supply of child care.
- 2) Develop and distribute a business-oriented resource guide describing child care employee benefit options.
- 3) Design, implement, and distribute a packet of model child care programs that can be locally replicated or adapted by employers of varying sizes and organizational structures.
- 4) Establish a multi-bank community development corporation that will provide loans and other financial assistance to child care providers.
- 5) Develop and distribute a child care consumer guide for parents.
- 6) Restructure the current Colorado enterprise zone child care contribution program to improve the availability, quality, and affordability of child care.
- 7) Initiate legislation to establish a voluntary child care check-off on Colorado state income tax returns to fund quality enhancement in licensed child care facilities through a dedicated funding source.
- 8) Initiate a refundable child care income tax credit for Colorado families to significantly assist them in paying for licensed child care.
- 9) Initiate a change in property tax assessment rates to allow child care facilities to be taxed at the residential rate rather than the commercial rate.
- 10) Develop policies that provide for the utilization of existing public educational buildings for child care programs.
- 11) Convene a Governor's statewide summit on business and child care.
- 12) Create a permanent business and child care commission.

While a number of these recommendations were adopted and implemented, others have yet to be achieved. Perhaps the greatest impact of the Commission's work, however, was to raise awareness about the importance of high-quality child care among business leaders statewide. This in turn made it easier for Boulder County early childhood professionals to recruit local businesses as partners in several local initiatives.

c. The “Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes” Study (1995 & 1999)

In 1995 a team of researchers from four universities (the University of Colorado, the University of North Carolina, the University of California at Los Angeles, and Yale) released the findings of a large-scale study of child care that generated significant interest and concern in Colorado and for Boulder County.²⁸ The researchers were particularly interested in the interrelationship between cost and quality including how much high-quality child care actually costs to provide (versus the price that parents expect to pay or can afford to pay), the quality of care, the characteristics of local child care markets that affect quality, and the effect on child outcomes that care of varying quality has on children.

400 child care centers representing 749 classrooms were examined in California, Colorado, Connecticut, and North Carolina; about half of these were non-profit centers and half were for-profit. In addition, 826 children were individually assessed to learn the effects of program characteristics on children’s development.

The study found that about 86% of the centers in the study provided mediocre or poor-quality services. Only 14% of the centers surveyed met levels of process quality considered good by professional standards. 12% were judged to be of such poor quality that children’s basic health and safety needs were only partly met and few learning experiences were provided. Quality in the rest (74%) of the centers was judged mediocre.

Care for infants and toddlers was particularly poor. Only 8% of classrooms serving infants were rated high quality; fully 40% were judged low quality. At least half the infant and toddler classrooms observed had poor general health practices.

Furthermore, there was no significant difference in quality between non-profit and for-profit centers except in the state with lower licensing standards where quality in for profit centers was lower than in nonprofit centers.

When the researchers analyzed how much it costs to provide quality care and how those expenses are covered, they discovered that a significant amount of the true cost of care – perhaps as much as half – is borne not by parent fees but by “hidden subsidies.” One major source of these subsidies is the “foregone wages” of those who work in the child care industry, i.e., the gap between what workers earn in a child care center versus what those same individuals could earn working in another industry with equivalent education and experience. Presumably, this gap is related to the fact if child care providers charged the full cost of quality care, few parents would be able to afford it.

The study provided evidence of market competitive characteristics and imperfections that the authors had reason to believe affect the cost and provision of quality. In particular, efficient markets require that buyers have full information. Parents and other purchasers of care need to be able to identify good quality care and demand

higher quality. Even so, centers cannot afford to provide higher quality with the existing fee structure.

Finally, in a follow-up study released in 1999,²⁹ the same research team found that high-quality care did in fact have long-lasting positive effects on children's academic performance and social-emotional development at least through second grade. The greatest benefit of higher quality care accrued to low-income and at-risk children.

The research team made several policy recommendations to address these issues and concerns:

- 1) Launch consumer education efforts to help parents identify good quality child care programs and to inform the American public of the consequences of poor-quality programs for children.
- 2) Implement higher standards for child care at the state level as a step toward eliminating poor-quality child care.
- 3) Increase public and private investments in child care, using strategies such as tying funding to standards that produce high-quality care, providing financial incentives to enable the hiring and retention of trained professionals, and tailoring employee benefits to provide child care support.
- 4) Develop the means to compensate child care workers as is appropriate for their levels of training, experience, and responsibility.

d. Public Engagement Campaigns Re: Early Childhood Brain Development (1997)

In the mid-1990's, several research studies pointing to the importance of the development of the human brain during first three years of life gained national attention. This new information became the basis for several national awareness-raising efforts aimed at parents, policy makers, and early childhood professionals. Perhaps the best-known of these initiatives was called "I am Your Child" and was launched by film director Rob Reiner in 1997.³⁰ Its stated goals were:

- to increase public awareness about the importance of the first three years of life;
- unite and expand the work being done on the national, state and local levels to improve services for young children and their families; and
- to provide families with young children the information, resources and services they need.

The campaign included several national media events, including:

- **Hour-Long ABC Prime Time Special** -- Produced by Rob Reiner and Michele Singer Reiner, the special featured music, comedy and a documentary about a community that has mobilized on behalf of young children. The program, hosted by Tom Hanks, starred Billy Crystal, Rosie O'Donnell, and more.
- A [World Wide Web Site](#) (now called Parents Action for Children) facilitated widespread communication about campaign activities, enabling campaign

leaders to find colleagues in their geographic areas and to share ideas with each other.

- **Newsweek Special Edition** – This special edition was published to coincide with the airing of the prime-time special and provided a “status report” on young children and their families.
- **A Parent Booklet** – “The First Years Last Forever” was funded by AT&T and distributed free of charge. The booklet included tips on how families can promote young children’s healthy development.
- **PSAs** – The Ad Council distributed a series of print and electronic PSAs focusing on the importance of family involvement in early childhood development.
- **Video for New Parents** – This video was sent to birthing hospitals, schools, libraries and child care centers throughout the country, and was made available for free to parents and other caregivers.
- **Electronic Media** – Funded by IBM, a free CD-ROM addressed, among other things, questions parents have about their children, beginning in the prenatal period and extending through the first three years of life.

The campaign stimulated conversation among parents, business leaders, and policy makers throughout the country. Among its enduring legacies was increased support for home visitation and parent education programs such as Bright Beginnings, and on-line information resource centers such as Zero-to-Three’s “Brain Wonders” project.³¹

2) System-Building Milestones for Boulder County Since 2000

a. Federal “Early Learning Opportunities Act” (ELOA) Program (2005-2007)

Planning for a comprehensive early childhood system received a significant boost in 2005-2007 in the form of a federal Early Learning Opportunities Act (ELOA) grant. This \$960,000 grant funded pilot programs that served as a “laboratory” for innovation and which demonstrated the viability of integrating health, mental health, family support/parent engagement programs and services into a variety of child care settings, along with mentoring, training, and other support to improve the quality of care. The grant also supported the ongoing development of a comprehensive system of early childhood programs and services for Boulder County, based upon “lessons learned” from the pilot programs.

The specific goals of the grant were to:

- **Develop a framework for a comprehensive, fully-funded system of early childhood programs and services for Boulder County**, including: analyzing fiscal and policy issues (incorporating “lessons learned” from the pilot programs in Goals #2 and #3 below); engaging key stakeholder groups in the design of the system; developing a shared community vision; identifying community

indicators that will measure progress; and planning for the development and implementation of the comprehensive early childhood system.

- **Enhance and expand the School Readiness Program**, an initiative that integrates Child Health Promotion, mental health consultation, and child care quality enhancement services. The program was expanded to 8-10 new child care homes and centers (serving up to 250 children) and incorporating developmentally and culturally appropriate literacy component targeting parents and Early Childhood providers.
- **Develop a replicable community-based model for improving the quality of care provided by Spanish-speaking Latina informal care providers** (targeting a network of 30 providers serving an estimated 100-150 Latino children, convened by the Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition) by providing early childhood professional development, improving language and literacy skills, providing access to Child Health Promotion and other community services.

ECCBC implemented the ELOA program in close cooperation with the Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition, the Boulder County Health Department, the Mental Health Center of Boulder County, the University of Colorado Department of Speech, Language, and Hearing, and several local child care providers. The ELOA program represented a mini-pilot for a comprehensive early childhood system for Boulder County and lessons learned from this project have been incorporated into the overall comprehensive system design.

b. John S. and James L. Knight and The Brett Family Foundations’ “Sustainability Initiative” (2005-2006)

The Knight Foundation and the Brett Family Foundation provided ECCBC with grants in 2005-2006 for the “Sustainability Initiative,” whose purpose was to increase Boulder County’s capacity to develop, implement, and sustain a comprehensive early childhood system. This project complemented the ELOA process by developing a plan for a broad community outreach and engagement strategy, including building awareness and support among community leaders and public officials.

Although the Knight Foundation prematurely discontinued funding for the Sustainability Initiative (funding only one year of a three-year grant) due to a change in its national grant making priorities, the objectives of that project continue to provide the framework for ECCBC’s early childhood system planning activities, including:

- implementing a “community visioning process” along with extensive public outreach and engagement; and
- convening Expert and Leadership Committees and Finance Task Force.

c. Ongoing Support From Colorado Dept. of Education, Boulder County, and the City of Boulder (2007-present)

Since the ELOA, Knight, and Brett Foundation grants ended, ECCBC's system-planning efforts have been supported by grants from several sources, including:

- ongoing in-kind administrative, finance/accounting, legal and logistical support from the City of Boulder
- the Boulder County Department of Social Services
- the Colorado Department of Education's "Early Childhood Systems Building" grant program
- the Colorado Department of Human Services Child Care Quality Expansion program

d. Other Local Government Initiatives

➤ **Longmont Bright EYES**

In Longmont, the Bright EYES (Early Years Education Stewards) initiative was begun in 2003 when a group of representatives from the City of Longmont, the St. Vrain Valley School District and several Longmont health and human service agencies came together "to focus on ways that the Longmont community could help ensure that **ALL** Longmont children have a healthy start in life and are ready to learn when they enter school."³² The catalyst for this effort came from Mayor Julia Pirnack, who was interested in examining ways in which the City of Longmont could participate in the National League of Cities Strengthening Families project, which was focused on early childhood issues.

The project is now housed within the City of Longmont's Children and Youth Resources Division. Its goals are to:

- increase the availability of comprehensive school readiness programs;
- enhance community awareness around the importance of early care and education;
- provide enrichment activities for families and their young children;
- provide opportunities for parental and community engagement;
- enhance awareness and opportunities for children to develop cognitive and language skills, and improve the social/emotional development and health of young children so they are ready to learn when entering school.

Bright EYES is currently undertaking two primary projects:

- The Meeker Neighborhood Center has been transformed into a Family Resource Center that houses early education classrooms (operated by the Longmont Children's Council, the local Head Start program) as well as family support and

parent engagement resources and activities for the adjacent Kensington neighborhood.

- The Mayor’s Book Club was established in 2007 to help 3 and 4 year-olds develop a love for reading and learning at an early age. The Club provides free books each month to 500 Longmont children for 12 months. The Mayor also reads the book each weekday morning on Longmont’s local access channel, Channel 3.

➤ **City of Boulder: Housing and Human Services Master Plan & Social Sustainability Strategic Plan**

The City of Boulder’s Housing and Human Services Master Plan identifies the following as key strategies for achieving the City’s overall goals:³³

- **Strengthening Families:** Emphasize programming that works to achieve beneficial outcomes by strengthening the family.
- **Prevention and Early Intervention:** Place primary focus on prevention and early intervention services to forestall more expensive treatment services.
- **Early Care and Education:** Continue the focus on early child care and education—particularly for low-income families and families with children with disabilities and expand comprehensive planning efforts.

Similarly, Boulder developed the following mission statement for Social Sustainability, which is included in the 2007 Social Sustainability Strategic Plan:³⁴ “To enhance community livability by providing outreach and developing policies that address the needs of the community, including under-served, under-represented and under-participating residents, so all who live in Boulder can feel a part of, and thrive in, our community.”

One of the key goals identified as part of this larger mission is to “address the needs of children”. The two strategies identified to achieve this goal are:

1. Expand current city Child Care Certificate Program (child care subsidies for low income, working families). This program provides additional subsidy to the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program to reimburse child care providers at market rate for low-income children. This strategy enables families to maintain work and home stability and employers to retain workers.
2. Support Early Childhood Council of Boulder County (ECCBC) development of a comprehensive strategic plan for early childhood programs and services for all children birth to five years for Boulder County. The comprehensive plan will identify needs, gaps, trends, current capacity, financing strategies, and governance structures for accessible, quality care and education.

➤ **Boulder County Human Services Strategic Plan**

The Boulder County Department of Community Services has spearheaded the development of a strategic plan for human services, which has been underway since 2006. This process has extensively involved a wide range of community agencies and individuals, and produced both a “systems plan” and a “services plan” which were recently released in a report entitled “Building Caring and Livable Communities for All: 2008-2013 Boulder County Human Services Strategic Plan (DRAFT).” The plan and the process have presumed that ECCBC’s Comprehensive Early Childhood System Plan would be incorporated as an integral component. Specifically, Goal #1 of the “Coordinating Educational Opportunities” topic area is “to ensure all children for Boulder County (0-5) are provided early intervention and developmentally appropriate services to maximize health and readiness to learn.” The only strategy listed to achieve this goal is the implementation the ECCBC Early Childhood System Plan.

This type of collaboration and integration with other countywide planning efforts has helped to ensure that the comprehensive early childhood system will be responsive to a range of interrelated human services needs, challenges, and opportunities.

C. Accomplishments to Date

1) Initial Phases: Information Sharing, Coordination, Collaboration

Planning for a comprehensive early childhood system for Boulder County has been underway since the Early Care and Education Task Force was formed in 1996. The initial stages of the process included information sharing, service coordination, and collaborative program planning among the Countywide agencies and organizations that serve young children and their families. In addition, ECCBC staff and community partners have collected information and resources to establish a baseline of knowledge regarding early childhood issues for Boulder County and beyond. For example, ECCBC has:

- Identified early childhood programs and services for Boulder County that fit within the four-fold rubric of the proposed comprehensive early childhood system (i.e., Early Learning; Family Support and Parent Education; Social, Emotional, and Mental Health; Health).
- Researched long-term outcomes of quality early childhood programs and “return on investment”.
- Reviewed “best practices” for early childhood systems in other states and communities. (see ECCBC website www.earlychildhoodbouldercounty.org/reference document A)
- Created and updated a “resource map” that identifies the sources and amounts of all federal, state, and local funding spent for Boulder County (or is generated and spent locally) to support early childhood programs and services.
- Continued to gather and publish a variety of information, such as:

- Annual child care cost and salary surveys;
- The annual “Status of Children for Boulder County” report, which has been published every year since 1997; and
- Training needs surveys for early childhood professionals.

2) *In-Depth Research Studies*

ECCBC has also conducted three significant in-depth studies in order to better understand the dimensions of particular issues within the early childhood field for Boulder County.

a. Child Care Survey (2000)³⁵

In 1999, the City of Boulder’s Division of Children, Youth, and Families and the Boulder County Department of Health commissioned a countywide telephone survey regarding child care and family health issues. 627 interviews with were completed with households that included least one child under the age of 15. Among the survey’s findings were the following:

- 39% of sample households (which extrapolates to 21,551 households countywide) needed child care, including 33% currently using care and 6% needing care but not using it because it was unavailable or unaffordable. Households with at least one child age 3-5 years were most likely to be currently using care (46%).
- Eighteen percent (18%) of respondents who did not currently use or need care anticipated a need for care in the next five years. Twenty-six percent (26%) of those households were below 200 % of poverty.
- Aspects of finding care that were most likely to be rated as “big problems” among those who currently used care or needed care were: Affordable care (44%); well trained providers (42%); good quality care (41%); finding any care (29%).
- There were significant differences between those households currently using care and those not using but needing care:
 - Single heads of household and low-income households were more likely to have a big problem finding care in a convenient location and during hours needed.
 - Hispanic households were more likely to having a big problem finding any care and finding affordable care.

b. Economic Impact Study (2003)³⁶

In 2003, ECCBC (then known as the Early Care and Education Council of Boulder County, or ECECBC) commissioned BBC Research and Consulting to study the economic impact of the early care and education industry on Boulder County’s economy. Utilizing sophisticated economic models as well as a telephone survey of 200 parents with children in care, they found that:

- Almost half of parents surveyed said that a working adult in their household would have to stop working if paid child care were no longer available. In one quarter of the households surveyed, a working adult would have to reduce the number of hours worked each week. 23% of households said that they have had to refuse overtime hours because of child care that was inconsistent or unavailable.
- One-third of parents reported missing one or more days of work in the previous year due to inconsistent or unavailable child care. 1 in 10 reported missing more than 10 days of work for this reason. Extrapolating to the entire population, this could mean that as many as 3,700 households miss two weeks of work or more each year due to problems with child care arrangements.
- The total economic impact of the early childhood education industry for Boulder County exceeds \$460 million per year, including:
 - \$50,527,000 in “direct expenditures” made by early childhood education providers annually in the form of salaries/wages paid and purchases of goods and services;
 - \$223,548,000 in “direct expenditures” by parents in the form of foregone wages of those who would alter their workforce participation if child care were no longer available;
 - \$28,270,000 in “indirect expenditures” by early childhood education providers in the form of money that is “re-circulated” in the local economy;
 - \$160,552,549 in “indirect expenditures” by parents, representing the money that would not re-circulate if those parents altered their labor force based on the lack of available child care.

c. Latino School Readiness Report (2003)³⁷

In 2003 the Knight Foundation, Boulder County Head Start, and the City of Boulder Children, Youth and Families Division commissioned a study to guide efforts to reduce the achievement gap between Latino and non-Latino students in local school districts. The report summarized the findings as follows:

- **Elements of Best Practice for School Readiness of Latino Children**
 - Parents and community service providers need to view culture as an asset rather than as a problem.
 - Early childhood programs should stress belonging to family, group and community, and emphasize group learning.
 - Programs should strive to maintain strong bonds between home and the care setting.
 - Early childhood programs should have a clear language policy, so that parents, children and providers know what is expected of them regarding learning and speaking English and Spanish.
 - Maintain high quality of care and teaching, including respect for language and culture.

- **Needs and Preferences of Families, Child Care Providers, and Community Agencies for Boulder County**
 - Latino children should maintain culture and language while becoming ready for bilingual school situations.
 - Trust is an issue for parents as they learn to deal with licensed child care facilities.
 - Cost, discrimination, and difficulty in using the child care system are barriers for Latino parents.
 - Most formal child care providers lack the skills and tools for providing bilingual/bicultural care and learning.
 - Families with children in child care have many stresses beyond the education of their children. Basic needs must be met before parents can focus on school readiness.
 - Informal child care providers are preferred because they are known and trusted, have experience with children, and can offer shared language and culture.
 - Informal child care providers are open to learning about child development and other school readiness issues.

- **Examples of Best Practice for School Readiness**
 - There are several examples of programs that have undergone careful research to show that they are effective in helping Latino children be prepared to enter school.
 - Many other programs have been proven successful for promoting school readiness in children in the general population; these programs may be effective for Latino children if modified to meet culture and language needs.
 - Less research has been done on strategies to support informal (unlicensed) child care providers, improve cultural competence in community settings, and increase families' access to early care and education services by reducing cost, although sample programs in each of those areas have been identified.

Based on the report's findings, ECCBC partnered with the Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition to initiate programs that provide Latino/a child care providers with training and credentialing enabling them to work in licensed child care homes and centers. The report also guided the ELOA-funded project that linked a network of Latino/a informal care providers with training and community services, with the ultimate goal of improving the quality of the early childhood environment.

A full copy of this report is on the ECCBC website:
www.earlychildhoodbouldercounty.org

d. Other Reports

ECCBC member organizations continue to produce a range of useful reports and studies on an ongoing basis that support the development of an efficient and effective early childhood system for Boulder County. Examples include:

- The annual “Status of Children in Boulder County” report issued by the Boulder County Movement for Children.
- The Head Start Needs Assessment produced every two years by local Head Start programs that serve the St. Vrain and Boulder Valley School Districts.
- The Annual Report of the Colorado Preschool Program.
- Studies or reports commissioned by local governments or community agencies.

3) *Engaging Local, Colorado, and National Experts*

The previously mentioned grants from ELOA, Knight and Brett Foundations, Colorado Department of Education, and Boulder County have enabled ECCBC to convene groups of local experts and to hire national consultants to provide key input on the design and funding strategies for the proposed comprehensive early childhood system. This consultation has so far been provided primarily through two forums, as described below:

a. Expert Committee: Early Childhood Programs and Services (2006-08)³⁸

ECCBC convened an Expert Committee that met from November, 2006 through September, 2007, with a review of the final report in October 2008. This group brought particular expertise in early childhood programs and services throughout Boulder County, and included representatives from both local school districts (Boulder Valley and St. Vrain Valley), health and mental health programs, family support and parent engagement programs, services for children with special needs, for-profit and not-for-profit child care centers and homes, higher education, and members of the Latino community.

The committee accomplished the following objectives:

- Defined a set of guiding principles for the comprehensive system.
- Reviewed best practices currently utilized within Boulder County.
- Identified major needs and gaps in services (See Appendix B).
- Developed program and service outcomes and indicators to measure success
- Recommended priorities for development and/or expansion of programs and services.
- Discussed possible strategies to meet current and anticipated future demand for early childhood programs and services.

The committee also divided into four subcommittees that developed a comprehensive set of goals for each of the four program/service areas of the proposed comprehensive early childhood system. Ultimately, the committee recommended focusing on the following priorities:

- Priority #1: Child care and early education providers will be paid a wage that is commensurate with qualifications and responsibilities.
- Priority #2: All families will have access to preventative health and mental health and oral services including screening and referrals.
- Priority #3: Child care and early education subsidy programs will promote equity and quality for all families.
- Priority #4: Unmet demand for child care and early education will be quantified and addressed.
- Priority #5: Child care and early education providers will be equipped to address the whole child.
- Priority #6: Native language and literacy will be supported for all children and families.

Additional considerations:

- The importance of parent engagement and family support.
- The importance of public support for child care and early education.

In addition to identifying the priorities, the Expert Committee reviewed possible strategies and options available to implement the *Framework* by goal area. Initial work in defining strategies was started but it became evident that additional steps in the planning process would be required before the “strategies” section could be completed. As of early 2009, the ECCBC Advisory Council has begun to further define program outcomes and strategies based upon the recommendations of the Expert Committee. Work on defining programs and services outcomes and indicators, and measuring the success of the system as a whole, is summarized in the Expert Committee recommendations *Report to the Community: Recommended Program and Service Priorities for a Comprehensive Early Childhood System*. (www.earlychildhoodbouldercounty.org)

It is anticipated that the ECCBC Advisory Council will continue the work of the Expert Committee through ongoing evaluation of program needs and gaps and development of strategies to address those community needs.

b. Community Finance Forums: Cost Analysis and Financing Strategies (2007)

In May 2007, ECCBC convened a “Community Finance Forum” comprised of people with expertise in financing early childhood programs and services at the state and local level (see Appendix C). This group: (1) reviewed methods for calculating the cost of the proposed comprehensive early childhood system based upon a range of planning assumptions; (2) helped to develop and recommend

strategies for providing sustainable funding for the system; and (3) provided input into the planning assumptions that guided a cost modeling exercise.

This effort was further supported by the work of Dr. Rick Brandon, a national consultant based at the University of Washington's Human Service Policy Center (HSPC). Based on input from the Community Finance Forum, Dr. Brandon was able to provide cost estimates for a public-private financing approach to early care and education for children age birth through five that would:

- ✓ Build on the private sector, maintaining a high degree of parental choice and provider flexibility;
- ✓ Provide access to high quality early care and education for children of all income groups in the most cost effective manner; and
- ✓ Contain mechanisms to assure high quality ECE services in return for improved financing. High quality is understood to require more qualified staff, lower child: adult ratios, adequate staff support and reliable, well-communicated information for parents.

HSPC then developed an approach to specifying detailed policies to assure access to high quality early care and education, including applying computer models to estimate the cost and impact of alternative policies. This has been conducted successfully in five states (Ohio, South Carolina, Illinois, Mississippi and Washington), whose policy makers are using the results to improve their financing systems. With funding from a private foundation, HSPC developed a streamlined method of producing cost estimates without the time and expense required for the full scale modeling effort. This method entails developing major policy specifications that determine the cost to providers of meeting different levels of quality, then considering which of the five test states selected packages of financing policies are closest to those preferred by local stakeholders.

HSPC's cost modeling took into account Boulder County's desire to implement a comprehensive system that includes a variety of programs and services such as early learning, health, mental health, and parent engagement and family support. In addition, it includes costs associated with the infrastructure required to operate the system itself, to monitor progress, and to ensure accountability and sustainability.

HSPC's estimates for Boulder County were based on applying specific policies for achieving three levels of early care and education quality developed by the Forum participants, then adjusting the analyses to reflect financing policies specified by one state (South Carolina) which engaged in the entire policy simulation process, a situation similar to those envisaged by the ECCBC. The result was a rough estimate of the increase in public and private funding that would be necessary to make high quality early childhood system accessible and affordable for all of Boulder County's young children.

Analysis was done for two levels of compensation for early care and education providers, a key indicator of early care and education quality. For both compensation levels, the costs of assisting parents and providers were modeled using a *Parent Provider Assistance Package (PPAP)*, a market-based approach that preserves the maximum level of parental choice in the selection of child care providers. This approach would support about half the cost through financial assistance to providers that is not related to a child's income; the remainder of the cost would to be supported by a mixture of public-private subsidies and parent co-payments, with the co-pay determined by family income. This model replicates the way that the higher education system is financed.

A draft version of the report and presentation of its findings were reviewed by the Boulder County Community Financing Forum in September, 2007. The Final Report was delivered in December, 2007 as the *Boulder County Community Financing Forum for Access to High Quality Early Care and Education: Policy Specification/Cost/Model Inputs*. This report will inform the deliberations of the Finance Task Force, which will be convened in 2009 (see below, Section V. "Early Childhood System Implementation: Next Steps").

4) Community Outreach and Engagement (ongoing)

ECCBC has undertaken an ambitious community outreach and engagement effort to educate and inform many different constituencies in Boulder County about the importance of quality early childhood programs and services, and to invite their participation in the development of the comprehensive early childhood system. For example, ECCBC representatives have made presentations to groups such as:

- Longmont Bright EYES
- Funders (including United Way, The Community Foundation Serving Boulder County, Temple Hoyne Buell Foundation, Knight Foundation, Daniels Fund, the Weaver Family Foundation, Social Venture Partners, and others)
- "Restoring the Soul of Our Communities," a community-based network supporting partnerships between faith communities and human services organizations in Boulder County (presentations were made in 2006 and 2008)
- Knight Foundation Community Advisory Council
- Civic organizations such as Boulder Valley Rotary and the Boulder County Movement for Children
- Saint Vrain Early Childhood Council
- The Acorn School Board of Directors
- Boulder County Movement for Children

Outreach and engagement efforts such as these will continue throughout the duration of the development and implementation of the comprehensive early childhood system.

VII. Next Steps: Implementing the System (www.earlychildhoodbouldercounty.org Reference Document D)

A. Ongoing Data Gathering and Research

ECCBC staff will continue to gather data and information as necessary to inform the development and implementation of the comprehensive early childhood system. Examples of such studies that are already being planned include:

- Undertaking a countywide early childhood needs assessment to be completed by June 2009
- Developing baseline data for the proposed system indicators (see above, Section III.C. “Goals and Indicators”)
- Calculating estimates for the potential “return on investment” that could be generated from adequately funding early childhood programs and services in Boulder County.

B. Finance Task Force (2009-2010)

Based on the Expert Committee’s recommendations regarding the service and program components of the proposed comprehensive early childhood system (the “daisy model”), and the cost estimates from the Brandon report, the Finance Task Force will: (1) estimate the costs for the proposed system, (2) make recommendations on system development priorities based on financial realities, and (3) develop strategies for identifying additional revenue sources. This group will be convened in 2009. and expected to release final recommendations in 2010.

C. Leadership Committee (2010-2011)

A Leadership Committee, made up of community leaders and policy-makers, will consider the conclusions from the Expert Committee and the Finance Task Force and will make recommendations regarding policy development. This committee will also champion a community outreach and engagement process that will support the adoption of early childhood as a core community value. It is anticipated that this Committee will begin its work in 2010 and work through mid-2011.

D. Governance and Implementation Task Force (2010-2011)

A Governance and Implementation Task Force will make recommendations that address the practical logistics involved in establishing the “infrastructure” components of the proposed comprehensive early childhood system, including functions such as: program operations and management; personnel and finance; program monitoring, assessment and evaluation; legal, and fiduciary responsibilities. This Committee will also be involved in recommending roll-out and implementation strategies and timelines. It is expected to convene in 2010 and continue through 2011.

E. Release of the Final Comprehensive Early Childhood System Plan (2011)

Systems development is a complex and iterative process involving many stakeholders. Although ECCBC has been the countywide convener for over 10 years, it will take several more years before the comprehensive early childhood plan is complete. It is anticipated that portions of the comprehensive plan will be implemented in “stages” depending on available financing and infrastructure capacity. The community of Boulder County is invited to track the progress of this planning process through attendance at community events as well as by visiting the ECCBC website (www.earlychildhoodbouldercounty.org).

VIII. Conclusion:

We have all heard the Maasai greeting which translates, “And how are the children?” Today, ECCBC and our partner agencies continue to embrace this philosophy which advocates for our county’s most valuable resource—our children. The Maasai know, and we believe that, if our children are well, our community will prosper. Our county is one of the “best off” in Colorado, but our children lag behind in well-being and school readiness. Their future opportunities are being prematurely limited by lack of access to high quality early child care, health and mental health resources and the inability of parents to learn how to best advocate for their children’s well-being.

The *Framework* is not complete and there is more work to be done. As more recommendations are finalized, as community input is garnered and used to impact systems design, as the State of Colorado continues to clarify priorities for a comprehensive statewide early childhood system, ECCBC and our partners will release additional *Reports to the Community*. These will be made available on the ECCBC website as well as through community forums and public outreach and education efforts.

ECCBC and our partners throughout Boulder County believe that now is the time to take action to assure a brighter future for our children and our community. We have a vision that through strategic partnership between the private and public sectors, through collaborations with the families we serve and our interagency partners, and through the development of the political will to see different outcomes for our children, we will enable be able to empower all of the children of Boulder County so that we can answer the Maasai greeting with the follow reply, “...they are well, all of the children are well.”

IX. Endnotes

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