

FAQs

2009

Framework for a Comprehensive Early Childhood System for Boulder County



1. WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM?

Boulder County today has an array of programs and services designed to serve the needs of young children and their families. Some are of high quality and some are not. Some are affordable and some are not. Some provide culturally sensitive programs and others still have a way to go to meet the diverse needs of families with young children in Boulder County.

A comprehensive system would link families with young children to the programs and services which best meet their individual needs. A quality assessment and improvement system would be designed for all programs so that parents could determine the quality of the services offered. An affordable payment system would be implemented to permit all families to access these high quality services for their children. This kind of system would give all children the best opportunity to succeed in school and in life.



1. COMPREHENSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM CONTINUED

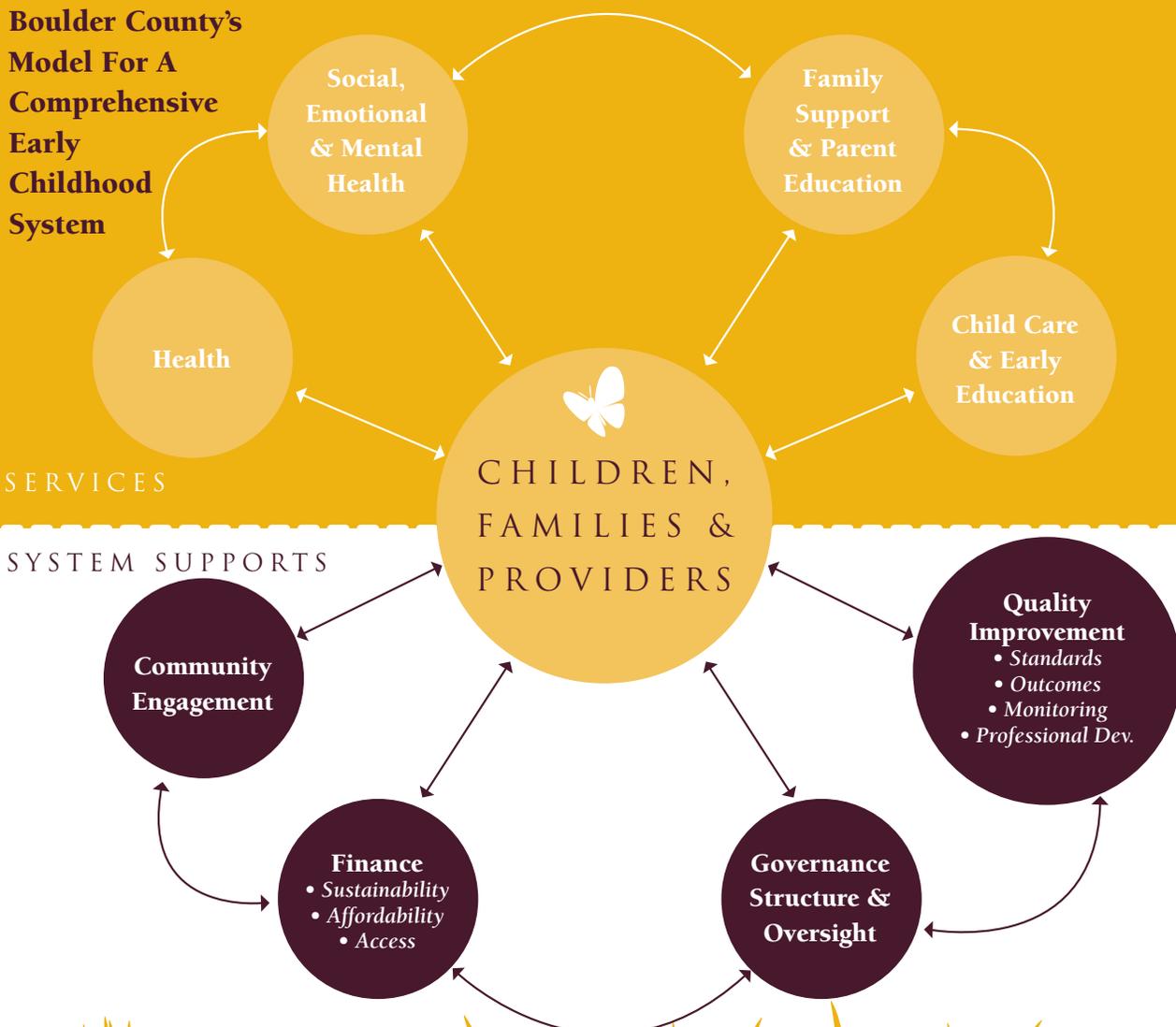
The fact that children, families and early childhood professionals are at the center of the comprehensive system (see model below) is notable. The goal is to improve the quality of life for families with young children as well as support the early childhood professionals within our community.

The Comprehensive system has two major components shown below.

Services support the children and their families. They address the quality of education and the environments the children are in, at home and during care. These services and programs provide support for parents, support for the mental and physical health of the child, support for the caregivers and teachers.

System Supports refer to the management and infrastructure to support the services and programs. The systems function will manage funding for the system. It's where the quality control and accountability are managed. This takes leadership. The system must meet community goals. This means the community must understand its function and its accomplishments and hold the system accountable to meet those community goals.

Boulder County's Model For A Comprehensive Early Childhood System



2. WHY IS A COMPREHENSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM IMPORTANT?

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. It is this period when 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 of which are essential ingredients for success in school. It is also a critical time to support children's healthy physical development. This ensures 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. This, in turn, will prepare the children for success in school and in life. A large body of research demonstrates that investment in high-quality early childhood programs yield substantial short- and long-term benefits. These returns far outweigh their initial costs. They achieve these impressive results by:

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

3. WHAT PROBLEMS WOULD IT ADDRESS?

Each year, some of the new kindergarteners arrive not prepared for a classroom setting. In Boulder County, this can be as many as 30%. These are children who do not know how to interact with peers nor adults, who have not learned how to focus on a problem nor work in a group setting. This lack of readiness for kindergarten often translates into a lack of readiness to learn and eventual under-achievement in later school years. Children who struggle in school are more likely to drop out, to earn less as adults and to depend on some form of public assistance. A comprehensive early childhood system will enhance and support high quality programs that increase the chance that a kindergartner arrives ready to learn. This gives them a better chance to succeed in school and in life.

4. HOW MUCH WOULD A COMPREHENSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM COST? WHO WILL PAY FOR IT?

Many details of the proposed comprehensive early childhood system are still being worked out. So the full cost is not yet known. For example, we don't yet know which programs and services will be implemented first. Nor do we know how families and children would wish to participate. Some families choose to be stay-at-home parents and should have access to parenting skills workshops and early childhood development classes. This system is being designed to honor parents as their child's first and best teacher.

The financial plan will be finished in the next 18-24 months. It will estimate costs and develop financing options. It is expected that costs would be covered by a combination of public and private funding sources. This would include a sliding fee scale for most programs. The community is invited to share its thoughts and expertise in developing this plan through public forums which will be widely publicized.



5. WHAT DIFFERENCE WOULD A COMPREHENSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM MAKE TO BOULDER COUNTY PARENTS?

The current patchwork of programs and services, pre-schools, child care centers, licensed child care homes and informal child care providers is confusing, difficult to navigate, with a wide range of quality from high to sub-standard. How is a parent to know? Many of our youngest children, an estimated 40% of those under age five, are cared for in a home setting, either within their own homes or those of family members, friends or neighbors. Many of these homes will provide safe and nurturing environments. But a number of centers and homes could improve the quality of their early learning environments. All young children deserve a safe, nurturing and stimulating environment and a comprehensive system would work to ensure a standard minimal level of quality and safety.

All children deserve to grow up healthy. A comprehensive early childhood system would improve a family's access to a whole array of services such as health screenings, referrals for dental health care, hearing and vision assessments and assistance in managing challenging behaviors and classes to address the many questions that all families have about their child's growth and development.

6. HOW WOULD THE REST OF THE COMMUNITY BENEFIT?

The rate of return on investment in high quality early childhood programs is very high. For each \$1 invested, as much as \$17 is saved by the community. Schools save money. Children who succeed in school cost less. The community saves money. High school graduates contribute more and consume less community resources. The crime rate is lower and there is less dependence on public assistance. These assumptions are backed by over 40 years of studies on the return-on-investment in high quality early childhood programs.

Young people who are well educated and motivated attract employers to the area. Low crime rates benefit the community. This means more and better jobs. It also means a more robust and sustainable tax base. Plus, research shows that the economic multiplier effect of a good child care system is better than a college or a mall. Everyone benefits from children who are ready to succeed.

7. WHO IS WORKING ON THE COMPREHENSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM AND HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

The Early Childhood Council of Boulder County (ECCBC) is the county convener for the system planning initiative. With over 150 members, ECCBC provides a wide cross section of view points. Some are from organizations, such as the county's two school districts. Some are individuals with special skills. But they all share one ideal. That is improving the lives of Boulder County's young children and their families.

This work has been going on for over 10 years. During that time, ECCBC has invited those that shared that ideal to join in the process. Many have accepted that invitation. Some have been parents. Some have been community groups. Some were experts in child care and early education. Others were business leaders and public officials. And partnership at the state and national level continues to be strong.

There is still much work to be done. The ECCBC would like to invite you to get involved. If you would like more information about ECCBC, please contact:

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