

**REFERENCE DOCUMENT A**  
**“BEST PRACTICES” AND EXAMPLES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS**

The research supporting ECCBC’s proposed Comprehensive Early Childhood System includes “lessons learned” from similar initiatives that have been implemented at the national, state, and local levels. ECCBC has developed working relationships with representatives of several of these initiatives, who have provided helpful consultation, technical assistance, and strategic advice to the system planning process.

**1) National/Federal Initiatives**

There are currently no federal programs that mandate Comprehensive Early Childhood Systems. Those that support the kind of early childhood service integration and infrastructure supports envisioned by ECCBC do not operate at sufficient capacity to meet all of the identified need in Colorado or in Boulder County.

Instead, entities at the state and local level must cobble early childhood systems together from several different programs and funding streams. Two of the most important resources provided by the federal government are Head Start and the Child Care Development Block Grant, as described below.

- *Head Start*<sup>i</sup>

The Head Start program has been the US government’s most comprehensive and sustained early childhood education program since its inception in 1965; its FY 2008 appropriation was \$6.17 billion. While Head Start seeks to combine a range of programs and services that are similar to those envisioned by ECCBC’s proposed Comprehensive Early Childhood System, the population it serves is nevertheless limited to those under certain income levels. The following information appears in the Head Start’s 2005 “Biennial Report to Congress” (the latest report available):

As expressed in the Head Start Act, the purpose of the Head Start program is “to promote school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of low-income children and their families, through the provision of health, educational, nutritional, social, and other services that are determined, based on family needs assessments, to be necessary.” To this end, the HHS Administration for Children and Families (ACF) awards grants to conduct Head Start programs to local public and private for profit and non-profit agencies. In FY 2005, 1,670 grantees in more than 2,200 urban, suburban and rural communities in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. Territories served 906,993 children. Of these children 62,000 were under the age of three.

Head Start focuses primarily on children whose families have incomes at or below the poverty line (in 2005 set at an annual income of \$19,350 for a family of four), or who are eligible for public assistance. Present regulations permit up to 10 percent of the Head Start population in local programs to come from families who do not meet the low-income criteria. The Head Start statute and regulations also require that a minimum of 10 percent of enrollment opportunities in each program be made available to children with disabilities.

In Boulder County the Head Start program is operated by two entities: Longmont Children’s (Council serving the St. Vrain Valley School District) and Boulder County Head Start (Boulder Valley School Districts). These two programs combined receive approximately \$2.25 million in federal grants and an additional \$294,000 in local matching funds. They currently serve about 500 Boulder County children, although it is estimated that as many as 450 additional eligible children are not able to enroll because of a lack of capacity (see above, Section II.B. “Challenges Facing Families and Children in Boulder County”).

- *Child Care Development Block Grants (CDBG)*

Child Care Development Block Grants are used by states to fund a wide variety of early childhood programs and services. In Colorado, they are allocated to several state agencies to support activities at the state and local level, including:

The Colorado Child Care Assistance Program  
Early Childhood Systems Building  
School Readiness  
Child Care Resource and Referral  
Child Care Recruitment and Training  
TEACH Scholarships

The total amount of CDBG monies that flow into Colorado is \$61 million. Of this total, approximately \$1.85 million comes to Boulder County in the form of grants to the Boulder County Department of Social Services and the City of Boulder for the programs listed above.

- *Maternal Child Health Bureau, Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Initiative<sup>ii</sup>*

The Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB), which is located within the US Department of Health and Human Services’ Health Resources and Services Administration, launched the “State Maternal and Child Health Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Initiative” (ECCS) in 2003. ECCS has provided grants and technical assistance to 49 states through this initiative to support their efforts to build and integrate early childhood service systems that address four “critical components” identified by MCHB:

- access to comprehensive health services and medical homes;
- social-emotional development and mental health of young children;
- early care and education;
- parenting education and family support.

One of the first ECCS grant recipients was Smart Start Colorado, which has been integrally involved as a convener and facilitator of early childhood systems building at

the state level for the past several years (see below, “Colorado Initiatives”). The conceptual framework for ECCBC’s Comprehensive Early Childhood System has drawn significantly from work done in Colorado and elsewhere through the MCHB’s Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Initiative.

The National Center for Children in Poverty recently conducted a review of early childhood system plans that had been developed in ten states through the ECCS program. Specifically, they investigated the relationship between state-level and local-level early childhood systems planning and implementation.<sup>iii</sup> They observed that local-level planning for comprehensive early childhood systems is not only a feasible and viable strategy, but is necessary to the construction of functional state-level systems.

The Project THRIVE review of local systems development in state ECCS initiatives can be summed up in six key points.

- **Succeeding in early childhood systems development requires state-to-local support.** Local systems development is critical because that’s where families live and providers deliver services. Ultimately, the “system” is what happens on the ground, at the local level. If local systems are not in place, state ECCS initiatives will not achieve their goals for improving children’s health, education, and well-being.
- **Funding to local communities is helpful, but not necessary.** State support for local systems development comes in many forms and does not require an extensive financial investment. While some ECCS initiatives have worked with partners to secure funding, other states have only provided technical assistance or guidance to communities, for no direct financial cost. Each of these strategies has worked.
- **Local flexibility is important.** State and local strategies should be in sync, and improving the alignment of state policies to local systems is one of the key functions of ECCS. But local communities must be allowed the flexibility and creativity they need to function in their particular circumstances. When all directives are top-down, it is not truly a local system.
- **A statewide focus is not essential.** It is not necessary for local systems to be implemented statewide: different communities can be targeted in different ways, and some communities may require more local systems assistance than others. In a limited resource situation, targeting particular communities with high needs for intensive support may ultimately develop stronger local systems and lead to better outcomes for families than providing minimal statewide support.
- **State oversight can help assure quality and consistency of services for families.** While local autonomy and flexibility are highly valued, having a statewide plan, an oversight board/entity, and engaging both the executive branch and legislative leadership are important keys to success. The overarching state

leadership can assure that policies enable local community efforts, funds are available to finance programs, and families have equitable access to needed services.

- **Results accountability and performance monitoring are particularly important in supporting local systems.** States are thinking about how their state-level goals, outcome indicators, and performance measures fit with local systems development. Some (such as Michigan and Vermont) are aligning their state and local results accountability efforts. Such efforts could be much more widely used to focus early childhood systems on changing outcomes for children and their families.

## 2) State Pre-K Initiatives (outside Colorado)<sup>iv</sup>

State-Funded pre-school (also known as pre-Kindergarten or Pre-K) is the fastest-growing segment of public education in the US today. 38 states currently fund some type of pre-K program. Of these the following trends were noted for FY 2006-2007:

- State spending per child rose to \$3,642 on average, halting, if not reversing, a trend of declining per-child commitments that have persisted for years.
- Total spending by state governments reached an all-time high of more than \$3.7 billion.
- More than a million children attended state-funded preschool programs, making states the largest source of public Pre-K.
- Thirty of the 38 states with programs increased enrollment.
- Twenty-two percent of all 4 year-olds in the nation attended state-funded pre-K, an increase from 20% in the previous year.
- Access for three year-olds rose, perhaps signaling a new trend toward expanding services to this age group

Behind these national averages lie large and growing disparities. More than ever, the chances for a child to benefit from state funded pre-K are largely determined by the state in which he or she lives. The top 10 states as far as access is concerned serve more than 33% of all their 4 year-olds. Longtime leader Oklahoma (in descending order ranked by access are: FL, GE, WV, TX, VT, SC, WS, NY, MY) serves more than 66% of its 4 year-olds in high quality pre-K programs. At the other end of the spectrum, 12 states (AL, HA, ID, IN, MS, MN, NH, ND, RI, SD, UT, WY) provide no state-funded preschool programs to even their most disadvantaged families other than special education services for young children with disabilities.

Other important disparities across states:

- State spending per child ranges from \$0 in 12 states to over \$10,000 per child in New Jersey

- Maximum class size and staff-child ratios range from no limit in Texas and Kansas to 15 children with a teacher + full time assistant in New Jersey
- Degree requirements for early childhood programs range from a bachelor's degree with teaching certificate in early childhood to little more than high school diploma

In 2007, national enrollment in Pre-K for both 4 year-olds as well as 3 year-olds increased, signifying renewed interest in states providing state-funded programs for children for two years prior to school entry. Even so, enrollment of 3 year-olds remains relatively low when compared with 4 year-olds.

Listed below are brief descriptions of four exemplary state-level initiatives:

- *Illinois*

Illinois has made early learning a priority for policy, programs, and funding for the past 23 years. Since 1998, state Early Childhood Block Grants have supported pre-kindergarten, parent training, and coordinated services for at-risk infants and toddlers. The state has been an innovator in increasing early learning opportunities for very young children, and leads the nation in Pre-K access for 3-year-olds. A new preschool initiative, Preschool for All, was established in 2006 with the goal of offering universal access to preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds in the state. The Fiscal Year 2007 budget included a \$45 million increase in state funding and provided 10,000 additional slots for 3- to 5-year-olds.

- *Oklahoma*

The State of Oklahoma began offering free, high-quality pre-kindergarten programs to targeted families in 1990, and made them universally available ten years ago. In 2004 the program cost \$72 million and served more than 30,000 children, about two-thirds of the state's entire 4-year-old population, the highest Pre-K participation rate of any state in the country. A recent large-scale study offers evidence for the first time that "universal pre-school, open to all children, benefits both low-income and middle-class kids." The most significant gains are among low-income and Hispanic children; the results are attributed to the programs' low student-teacher ratios and high level of teachers' education and specialized training.

- *North Carolina*

North Carolina Smart Start is a public initiative begun in 1993 that provides funding (\$192 million in 2007) to all the state's 100 counties based on local need. Funds support local planning and collaboration and provide comprehensive early childhood services for all children age 0-5 years, including: improving the quality, availability, and affordability of child care; health, mental health and dental services; and family support programs. Since 2001, North Carolina has offered a statewide Pre-K program called More at Four targeting at-risk 4-year-olds; new

funding will add 10,000 more slots in 2008. Child care centers who wish to participate must meet early learning standards that are aligned with the K-2 course of study, and achieve certain quality ratings.

- *New Jersey*

The Abbott Preschool Program was launched in 1998 in response to a New Jersey Supreme Court ruling requiring the availability of pre-kindergarten programs in the state's 31 poorest districts. Since then other state monies have been added to support Pre-K programs in other districts as well, including a recent push to make high-quality Pre-K universally available to all 4-year-olds in the state. Funds follow individual families at or below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level via a voucher system, and are used to provide Pre-K program staff with salaries comparable to public school teachers, and to expand existing programs to full-day and full-year. Today, New Jersey provides the highest level of per-pupil Pre-K funding (around \$10,000 per child), and has one of the highest quality state-funded Pre-K programs in the US. Longitudinal outcome studies show significant gains in language and math skills among Abbott participants that persist through Kindergarten and beyond.

### **3) County-level Initiatives**

Counties that operate comprehensive early childhood systems tend to be somewhat larger than Boulder County. This is due primarily to the large portion of early childhood funding that derives from sources that are not usually controlled at the county level (e.g., federal and state monies and parent fees). On the other hand, Boulder County has two characteristics that make a comprehensive early childhood system feasible here: (1) a unique history of successful collaboration among public and private entities, and (2) a longstanding commitment to enhancing "quality of life" through a viable human services infrastructure.

ECCBC has investigated several examples of County-level early childhood systems, including three that are of particular interest: Denver, Cuyahoga County, Ohio, and Shelby County, Tennessee.

- *Denver, Colorado*

Although Denver has not yet established a comprehensive early childhood system along the lines of the one being proposed for Boulder County by ECCBC, it has nevertheless attempted to implement a universal pre-Kindergarten program. This initiative received a significant boost in 2006, when Denver voters approved a 0.12 per cent increase in the local sales tax rate, or 12 cents on every \$100 purchase, to fund a voucher program that makes pre-school affordable to all Denver four-year-olds. The sales tax increase raises an estimated \$12 million per year, which funds subsidies for pre-school tuition and supports enhancements to existing pre-school programs. Tuition subsidies are based on income level. Low-income families receive an average subsidy of 70 per cent of

preschool tuition, while high-income families receive up to five per cent.

Unlike some other programs, Denver's takes a market-based approach to pre-school choice. Parents can choose from a host of state-licensed pre-school providers, including home- and school-based programs as well as programs run by faith organizations. Providers must participate in a quality improvement plan to receive funding. To provide a high level of transparency and accountability to taxpayers, the program includes built-in reporting metrics.

- *Cuyahoga County, Ohio*<sup>v</sup>

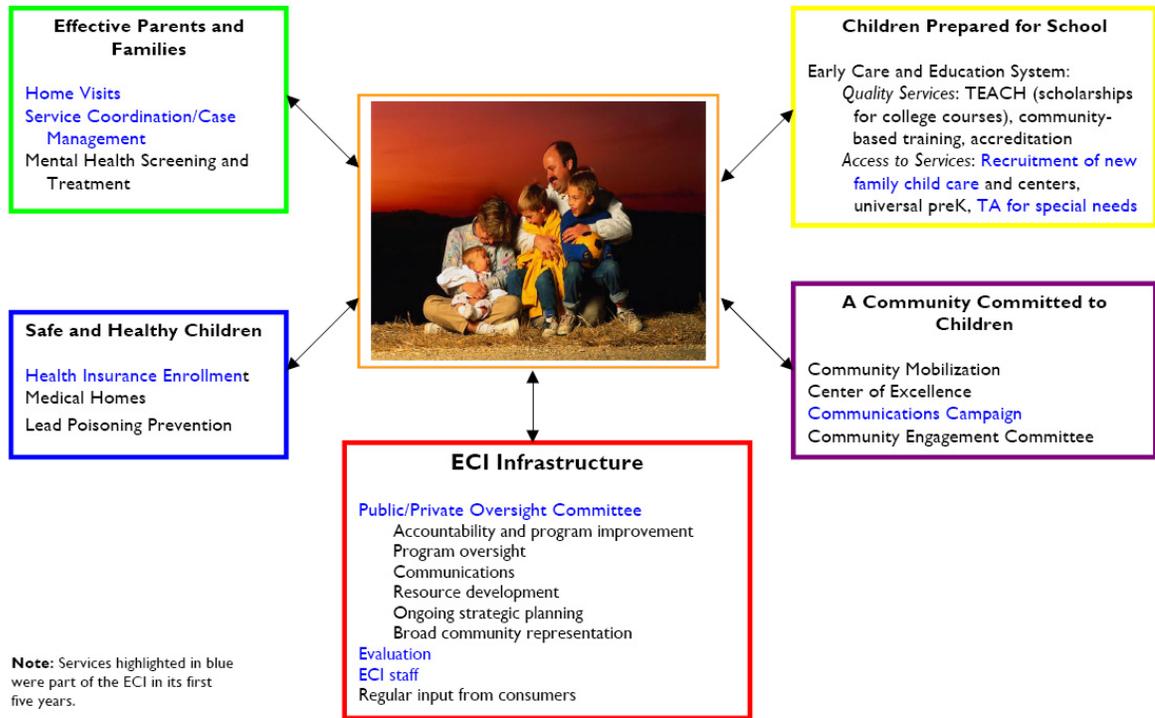
Cuyahoga County, Ohio (which includes the City of Cleveland and surrounding areas) has one of the most highly-developed and successful county-level early childhood systems in the country. Since its inception in 1999 the initiative has operated as a public/private partnership that includes:

- The Board of County Commissioners and the County departments and agencies serving the community's youngest children and their families;
- 23 local foundations and corporations, which have pooled resources to supplement public funds channeled through the county (since 1999, private funders have contributed \$14 million to the Initiative's programs, administration, and evaluation);
- An extensive range of health and social service agencies, including all of the County's hospitals, some 1,500 home-based child care providers, and more than 80 nonprofit organizations, committed to early childhood development.

From a legal point of view, the Initiative functions as part of County government. From the outset, however, the County Commissioners has shared oversight responsibilities with its funding partners. To carry out these duties, the Commissioners established a Partnership Committee to provide advice and guidance to the Initiative. Composed of the three County Commissioners and representatives from each of the ECI's other funders, the Committee met quarterly to discuss program operations, review evaluation findings, and monitor program expenses and resource allocation. It also provided a useful forum for discussing the Initiative and proposing changes or additions to basic services.

The Chart below, taken from the Cuyahoga County Early Childhood Initiative's Strategic Plan, illustrates the goals and services around which the project is organized. This scheme closely parallels ECCBC's proposed Comprehensive Early Childhood System.

**FIGURE 1.  
THE CUYAHOGA COUNTY EARLY CHILDHOOD INITIATIVE:  
GOALS AND SERVICES**



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In addition, Cuyahoga County has identified the following “Essential Elements of an Effective Early Childhood System” based upon a local adaptation of national research. Again, these elements closely mirror those that have been identified through ECCBC’s Comprehensive Early Childhood System planning process:

**Table 3.  
Essential Elements of an Effective Early Childhood System**

In addition to offering appropriate, well-delivered services, an effective early childhood system must incorporate the following essential elements:

**Governance**

- Link government and community leadership
- Coordinate the work of public agencies
- Base planning on data
- Coordinate public and private funds
- Oversee mechanisms for accountability

**State and Local Leadership Development**

- Establish intra-agency links
- Maintain communication between early learning leaders in government and the private sector
- Nurture new leaders with orientation and training

**Quality Assurance**

- Establish outcomes for children and families
- Set and safeguard program and personnel standards
- Increase professional development through regulation, certification, and accreditation

**Consumer/Family Information and Involvement**

- Support parents as effective consumers
- Help programs and parents to become more family centered
- Engage parents as partners in the design and implementation of early learning programs and systems

**Public Education and Engagement**

- Raise public awareness about the importance of early childhood
- Build public will for increased allocation of resources for early childhood

**Financing**

- Identify funding strategies for early childhood
- Acquire public and private funding sources (including parent contribution)

**Research**

- Conduct research and evaluation
- Use data to leverage funds, improve programs and services, and inform policy

**Accountability**

- Document accomplishments in ways that are useful to parents, policymakers, funders, and the public

**SOURCE:** Adapted from Kagan, S.L. & Cohen, N.E. (1997). *Not by chance*. Connecticut: Yale University Press.

In its first three years of operation, the Cuyahoga County Early Childhood Initiative reached 83,000 children; an estimated 70% of children born in the County's during the Initiative's first five years were touched by one or more of its services.

- *Shelby County, Tennessee*

Shelby County, Tennessee (which includes the City of Memphis) launched an ambitious partnership between local government, business leaders, and higher education in 2000, which is now called the First Years Institute (FYI). This community collaborative is working to improve the health and welfare for children in Shelby County, prenatal through age 5. The organization is supported by Memphis City and Shelby County government, health care, business, education and child care communities. It also promotes the replication of its system model across the state through supportive partnerships with other similar initiatives. As one example of their success, the State of Tennessee has recently increased state funding for Pre-K as a result of

FYI's mission is "to serve as a catalyst to strengthen the community by building well-researched, high quality support systems essential to enable children to be competently nurtured - physically, emotionally and cognitively - from gestation through the preschool years, and for families and caregivers to be valued and supported in accomplishing this task." Its goals are:

- i. A community priority on quality early care and development of children;
- ii. Public policy that supports, politically and financially, the optimum early development of children;
- iii. Value and support for every family and caregiver nurturing children in their earliest years;
- iv. Access to affordable, quality early care and education for children in Memphis/Shelby County, particularly prenatal to five;
- v. Access to affordable, quality health care for children in Memphis/Shelby County, particularly prenatal to five.

Because of the high numbers and percentages of children in poverty in Shelby County, this initiative relies heavily on the Head Start program as the vehicle for delivering high-quality ECE that is closely coordinated with the other system elements such as health care and parenting support.

One reason for ECCBC's interest in Shelby County's experience is that they are one of the few counties in the US that has undertaken a detailed study of the cost of financing universally available, high-quality Pre-K. Dr. Rick Brandon and his associates at the Human Services Policy Center conducted this study, which led to their being selected by ECCBC to lead a similar exercise for Boulder County (see above, Section IV.C. "Accomplishments to Date").

#### 4) Colorado Initiatives

- *Overview: Colorado vs. Other States*

Several national data sources rank and compare states on child- or family-based indicators. In early 2008, Lt. Governor Barbara O'Brien's office released the following brief overview of some recent comparisons of state-level *policies* related to a comprehensive early childhood system.

Colorado's **Health Policies** meet:<sup>vi</sup>

- 4 of 9 national standards for promoting access to healthcare
- 2 of 4 national standards for promoting quality healthcare

Colorado's **Family support and Engagement** policies meet:<sup>vii</sup>

- 1 of 5 national standards for promoting effective parenting
- 2 of 5 national standards for promoting family economic security

Colorado's **Early Learning** policies meet:<sup>viii</sup>

- 2 of 6 national standards for promoting access to early learning
- 1 of 6 national standards for promoting quality in early learning

Colorado's **funding for Pre-Kindergarten** (i.e., the Colorado Preschool and Kindergarten Program), ranks:<sup>ix</sup>

- 22<sup>nd</sup> out of 38 states for access for 4 year olds
- 11<sup>th</sup> out of 26 states for access for 3 year olds
- 36<sup>th</sup> out of 38 states for state spending on Pre-K
- meets 5 out of 10 criteria for quality Pre-K standards

Colorado's **Child Care System** ranks:<sup>x</sup>

- 40<sup>th</sup> in overall quality ratings
- 44<sup>th</sup> in child care standards
- 17<sup>th</sup> in the quality of child care oversight

Colorado's **K-12 Education System**:<sup>xi</sup>

- Ranks 38<sup>th</sup> of the 50 states + Washington DC in its overall effort to boost student success which translates into an overall grade of C
- Meets only 2 of 5 national criteria regarding Transitions and Alignment in Early Childhood Education, ranking 43<sup>rd</sup> of the 51 ranked entities for a grade of C-
- Scored an overall grade of B- in terms of standards, assessment, and accountability, ranking 28<sup>th</sup> out of the 51 entities
- Scored an overall grade of B as defined by criteria outlined in *Chance for Success*, ranking 16<sup>th</sup> among the 51 entities

- *Colorado Preschool and Kindergarten Program*

The **Colorado Preschool and Kindergarten Program** (CPKP) began in 1998 as a state effort to reduce school dropout rates. A number of different eligibility criteria are used for entry into CPKP. Three year-olds must have at least three risk factors in order to qualify, while 4 year olds need only one risk factor. These include: eligibility for free or reduced school lunch, low parental educational levels, parental substance abuse, homelessness, or participation in the foster care program. State legislation permits 15% of the CPKP slots to be used to offer full day kindergarten. Legislation also allows 5% of the slots to be used for full-day preschool programs.

All state funding for CPKP is provided to public schools through Colorado's school finance funding formula. Public schools are allowed to offer programs directly (that is, have kindergarten or preschool classrooms within the public schools) or subcontract with Head Start or community-based agencies. Prekindergarten programs may utilize additional funding sources, such as federal Head Start funds, to supplement CPKP services and programs, or to extend the program day, or to provide wrap-around services.

The CPKP initiative is expected to grow in upcoming years. Funding for additional slots for CPKP in order to serve more preschool- and kindergarten-age children is a top

priority for the Colorado legislature. Effective in the 2007-2008 school year, 2,000 new slots were approved with an additional 3,500 slots authorized for the 2008-2009 year.

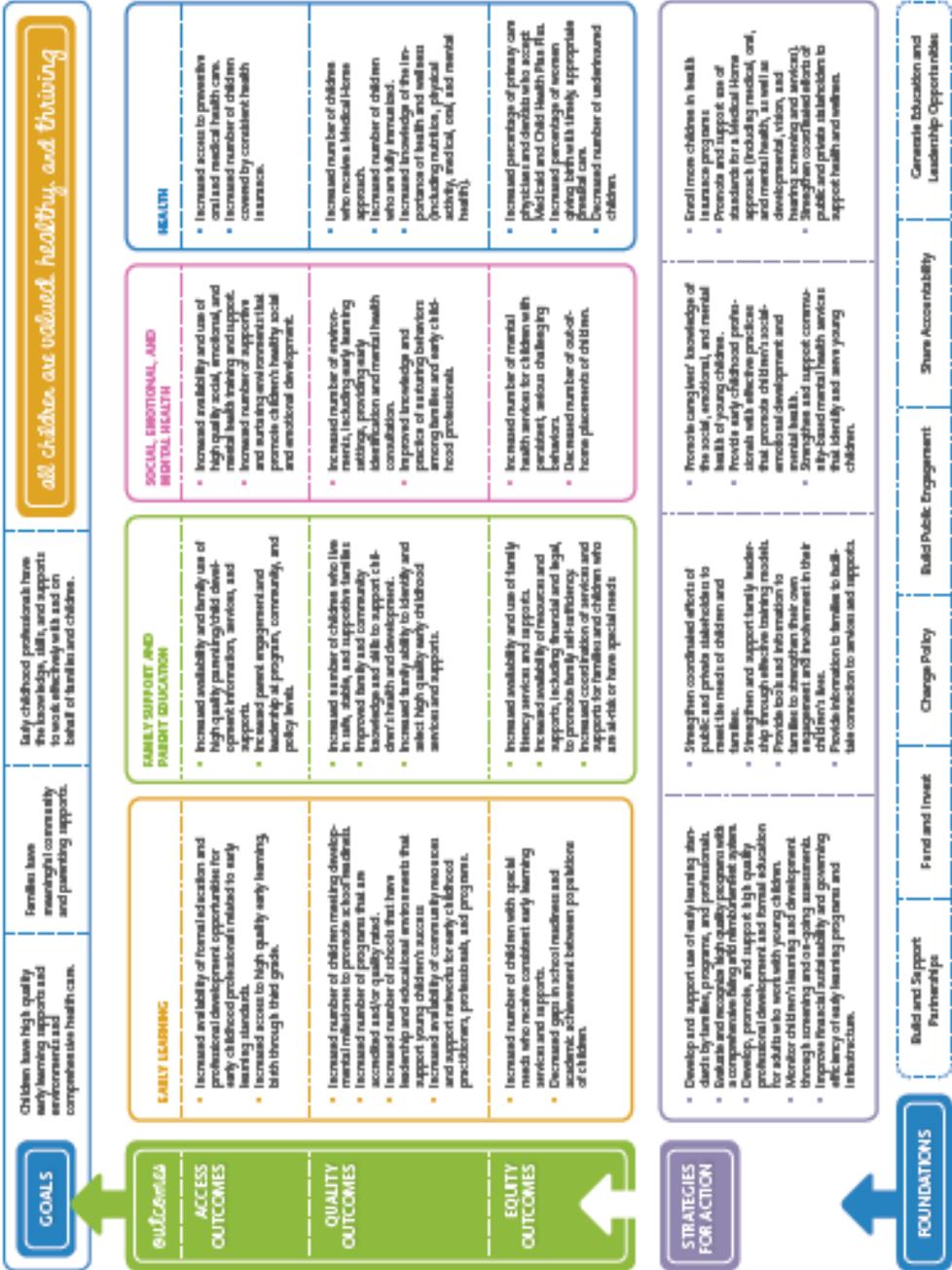
- *System Building Efforts at the State Level*

At the state level, efforts to design a comprehensive early childhood system began in the mid-1990s with the passage of legislation that created 12 consolidated child care pilots whose charge was to increase the quality, accessibility and affordability of child care within their local areas. At that time, then-Governor Roy Romer was actively supporting early childhood systems building efforts and convened the Business Commission on Child Care Financing as well as the Commission on Early Care and Education. Several other state-level groups were also focused on building and sustaining partnerships: the Head Start State Collaboration Office, the Early Childhood Summit as well as the Consolidated Child Care Pilots Leadership Team.

In 2007, House bill 1062 was passed which increased the number of pilots to 31, changed their designations from “pilots” to early childhood councils, and outlined requirements for leadership and goals for the councils.

Upon taking office in January 2007, Governor Ritter asked Lieutenant Governor O'Brien to assume leadership for early childhood issues. A stronger, better, higher quality system of early childhood services and programs is one of the legacies they want their administration to leave. Colorado has a long history of partnerships that support early childhood work in this state. Over the past two decades, momentum has grown for Colorado to increase access to, and improve the quality of, programs and services that serve young children and their families. Under the leadership of the Lieutenant Governor, there are explicit efforts to build and link *systems* that will guarantee our early childhood work has long lasting impacts at the state and local levels.

One product of the past several years of state-level early childhood systems building in Colorado has been the creation of a schematic diagram (below) that captures the most important elements of a Comprehensive Early Childhood System, from which ECCBC as drawn significantly in its own conceptual framework.



EARLY CHILDHOOD COLORADO FRAMEWORK / JULY 2020

**EARLY CHILDHOOD COLORADO PROVIDES A FRAMEWORK THAT:**

- Recognizes the needs of the whole child and family.
- Communicates the vision for comprehensive early childhood work.
- Focuses on specific, measurable outcomes.
- Guides, organizes, and focuses the actions and accountability of public and private stakeholders.

**THIS WORK IS GUIDED BY THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES:**

- Be child-focused and family-centered.
- Recognize and respond to variations in cultures, languages, and abilities.
- Use data to inform decisions.
- Build on strengths of communities and families.
- Focus on children from birth to age 8.
- Promote partnerships.
- Act at state, local, and statewide levels.

**For more information contact EarlyChildhoodTeam@colorado.gov**

*P-3 Sub-committee of Governor Ritter's P-20 Education Coordinating Council*

This sub-committee focuses on the earliest years of the education continuum, beginning with the years before children enter school (Pre-school) and extending through 3rd grade, transcending the traditional boundaries of early care and education (ECE) and elementary school. P-3 also includes the important K-3 primary school years.

- *Head Start-State Collaboration Office*

The intent of the Head Start-State Collaboration Office (HSSCO) is to facilitate Head Start's involvement in the development of state policies and plans that affect low-income families, as well as to encourage Head Start agencies to collaborate with entities at the state level. The HSSCO serves as a state liaison between the Head Start Regional Office and the local Head Start grantees.

- *Smart Start Colorado*

Smart Start Colorado was launched in 2005 to provide a framework for a comprehensive system of early childhood in Colorado. Smart Start convenes key stakeholders including state and local early childhood councils, agencies, organizations and associations, bringing them together to create a better system of early childhood supports and services for children birth to age eight and their families. Smart Start has 8 state-level committees charged with moving system building efforts forward around the following activities:

1. Program quality and standards
2. Program availability
3. Parent and family engagement
4. Professional and workforce development
5. Public engagement
6. Systems oversight
7. Accountability
8. Funding and finance

The Smart Start State System Team coordinates the work of all the committees and task forces. The Early Childhood Council of Boulder County has been involved, from the beginning, with this work at the state-level and continues to ensure that the framework for a Boulder County system is in alignment with efforts at the state level.

## NOTES

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- <sup>viii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>ix</sup> Barnett, et al. State of Preschool 2007.
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