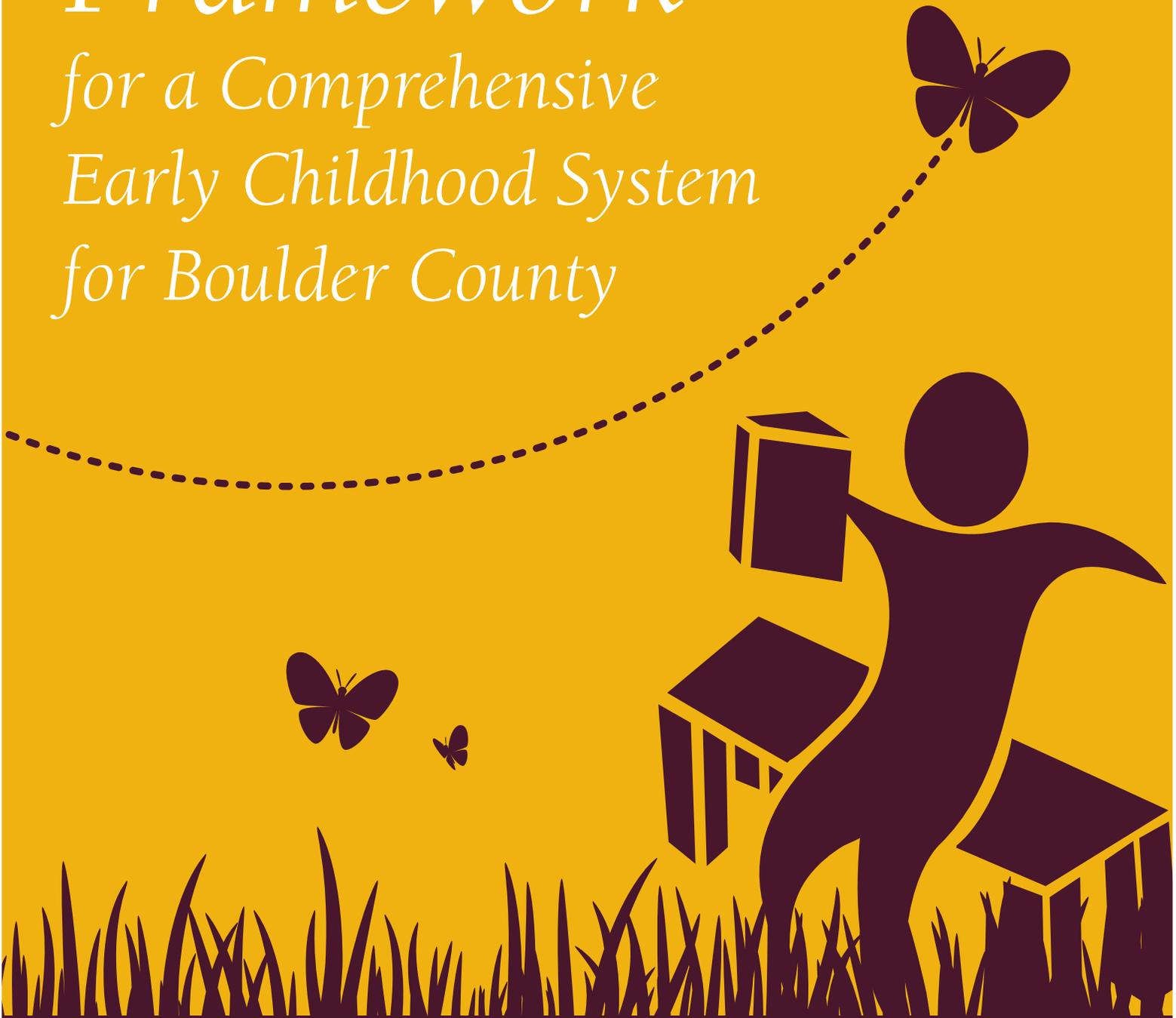


Framework
for a Comprehensive
Early Childhood System
for Boulder County



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For more than 10 years, residents of Boulder County have been working to develop a comprehensive early childhood system to serve all Boulder County's children. Spearheading this effort has been the Early Childhood Council of Boulder County (ECCBC). ECCBC is the primary forum for this countywide planning initiative.

ECCBC's strength and success lies in its diversity and scope. With over 150 members, ECCBC provides a broad cross section of view points. Some are from organizations, such as the county's school districts. Some are individuals with special skills or who are involved with programs that impact families and children. This unique forum allows ECCBC partners to work together to collaborate on programs and policies that impact families and young children and to identify gaps or opportunities to improve the existing patchwork of services.

*The **Framework for a Comprehensive Early Childhood System in Boulder County** is ECCBC's report on progress over that time. The goal has been to develop a unified and coherent system of programs and services for Boulder County's children and families. The goal of the system is to give Boulder County's children the best possible opportunity to succeed in school and in life.*

This report is just a beginning. It summarizes the work to date, including background material on which the goals and outcomes of the system are based. It describes existing resources currently supporting early childhood programs and services throughout the county. It puts ECCBC's strategic planning initiative in the context of state and national efforts to address early childhood. Most importantly, it introduces a conceptual framework for a comprehensive system of early childhood programs and services for all young children and families in Boulder County.

This report is as much an invitation to the next phase of development as it is a progress report. It also outlines the work yet to be done to implement this comprehensive early childhood system. This process will require participation from the public, both corporate and individual. ECCBC invites community members to become involved in the process of securing a bright and successful future for all the county's children.



DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED COMPREHENSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM

The proposed comprehensive early childhood system has two major parts, shown below. The upper half represents the Services component. The lower half represents the System component or administrative supports.

The Services component provides programs and services to support young children and their families. It addresses the quality of the education and the environments the children are in, at home and during care. It provides support for the parents, support for the mental and physical health of the child.

Boulder County's Model For A Comprehensive Early Childhood System



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, 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.

DESCRIPTION CONTINUED



The System component provides the infrastructure and administration to support the Services component. This is where the financing and management of the system is addressed. But also important is outreach to the community. This is a two way communication to make the system responsive to the community's needs and values. System supports would ensure that programs and services are accountable, sustainable, and of high quality and would include:

- **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:

- **Ready Child:** *A child arrives ready for school: healthy, well adjusted, and having been exposed to the fundamentals of learning.*
- **Ready Family:** *The family is empowered to nurture and grow their children; as a 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.*
- **Ready Child Care and Early Education:** *All families in Boulder County have access to high quality early childhood programs and services. A high value is placed on parental choice and all venues for child care and early education including homes, both licensed or unlicensed, centers and preschools need to be: affordable, accessible, and available and of high quality. Should a parent choose to provide in-home care for their child, they will have access to high quality family support and parent education programs and services.*
- **Ready Community:** *The community recognizes the importance of early childhood as integral to the quality of life in 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.*

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. Beginning in 2009, a Report to the Community on the progress will be released in the summer of each year.

Progress to Date

Since its inception in 1996, ECCBC has been laying the groundwork for a comprehensive early childhood system. This work has involved conducting local research as well as an exhaustive review of early childhood research, best practices as well as policy recommendations. Based on this work, ECCBC has developed a detailed understanding of Boulder County in critical areas such as:

- *Child care usage and demand*
- *Economic impact of the child care industry in Boulder County*
- *Latino school readiness*

The child care and early education debate has not been in a vacuum. Other communities, at the local, state and national levels, have been looking at the issue. ECCBC has exchanged information with these colleagues. This free exchange of ideas and information has helped develop the framework and priorities for Boulder County's system.

With the help of the Expert Committee, ECCBC has been able to identify essential early childhood programs and services to fulfill the goal of affordable, accessible and available high quality early childhood programs in Boulder County. This information has been used to:

- *Prioritize unmet needs*
- *Define a set of guiding principles*
- *Recommend program/services priorities and strategies*

A major question still to be answered involves the cost of such a system and what strategies the community wishes to adopt in order to secure sustainable funding for a comprehensive system. A Finance Task Force will be convened in 2009 composed of local finance experts, to tackle these questions. In addition, how this system will be governed and by whom, remains an open question. A Governance Task Force will be charged to address this issue further on in the system development process.

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES FACING FAMILIES & CHILDREN IN BOULDER COUNTY

Local communities are best able to respond to needs and circumstances of their own families and children. The proposed comprehensive early childhood system seeks to build local capacity to help meet these needs. There are three important local trends that have potentially far-reaching, long-term impacts and the system addresses each of these:

1. Gaps in School Readiness and School Achievement

Each year, some of the new kindergarten class arrives unready to learn. In Boulder County, this is as much as 30%. This lack of readiness often translates to a lack of 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 CSAP scores between Latino and Non-Hispanic white students, and between low-income and middle to upper-income students.

2. Quality, Affordability, and Availability of Early Childhood Programs and Services

Gaps in school readiness and school achievement can be diminished by quality early childhood programs and services. But these programs and services are not available to every child in Boulder County. About half of all households with a child aged 3-5 years in Boulder County use some form of paid child care and these families face a variety of barriers to quality care for their children. For example:

- *Child care can be prohibitively expensive. Costs for child care are updated annually and the most recent figures estimate that full-time child care can cost around \$1100 per child per month.*
- *Opportunities such as Head Start, the Colorado Preschool Program, and child care subsidy programs are filled to capacity and carry waiting lists.*
- *Only 12.2% of child care centers in Boulder County have completed a national accreditation process compared to 16.5% statewide. There is no comprehensive system for quality assurance at the state or county level.*
- *There are gaps in access to early childhood health, mental health, and family support services.*

3. A Growing and Changing Population

The population of Boulder County is growing and the composition is changing. Programs that serve children and families are challenged to meet these needs. More of the population is Latino and more children are living in poverty.



NEXT STEPS TOWARD IMPLEMENTATION

To fully address the needs of all young children in Boulder County, a Boulder County child care and early education needs assessment will be completed in June 2009. It will be necessary to continue to gather and update data for projections of unmet need within the current early childhood system. Baseline data for the proposed system indicators is being collected. Data will be reported to the community in the summer of each year.

Three committees will be convened to address specific questions within the infrastructure of a comprehensive system. The **Finance Task Force** will be convened in late 2009 to:

- **Estimate the costs for the proposed system**
- **Recommend strategies to fund the proposed system**
- **Prioritize implementation of programs based on current funding streams**

The second will be a **Leadership Committee**. It will:

- **Make policy development recommendations**
- **Lead a community visioning process that will develop early childhood as a core community value**

Finally, a **Governance Task Force** will need to be formed. It will make the 'how to' recommendations for the "infrastructure" components. These include:

- **Program operations and management**
- **Personnel and finance**
- **Program monitoring, assessment and evaluation**
- **Legal and fiduciary responsibilities**

ECCBC invites residents of Boulder County to become involved in the ongoing development of our comprehensive early childhood system. Public presentations are listed on our website as well as a listing of all reports to the community.



Additional information regarding the development of a comprehensive early childhood system for Boulder County is available on the website: www.earlychildhoodbouldercounty.org as well as by contacting:

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