

Colorado Early Childhood and School Readiness Commission
COLORADO FOUNDATION FOR FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

Final Report
May 23, 2007

The Colorado Foundation for Families and Children (CFFC) was awarded grant funding from the Colorado Department of Human Services - Division of Child Care as well as the Rose Community Foundation, Daniels Fund, Chambers Family Fund, Denver Foundation, Donnell-Kay Foundation and Buell Foundation to support the staffing, general meeting, travel and office expenses, and planning/research necessary to ensure the Early Childhood and School Readiness Commission's success (see expected outcomes below) in completing the authorized activities specified in House Bill 04-1277. CFFC is grateful for the combined efforts of the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative and CDHS for the support that has made the ECSR Commission's work highly successful.

Expected Outcomes:

- Utilize the Policy Matters Project research to define specific policy changes needed and set early childhood policy priorities based on the research while developing the tools to implement the set priorities.
- Continue to develop policy recommendations that incorporate the work of other efforts in the Colorado ECE field; the Commission will establish relationships with other ECE entities in order to effectively utilize all current or past research/audits to inform future legislation.
- Utilize "Colorado's Blueprint for an Early Childhood Care and Education System" to guide Commission work. (Please note: the Blueprint was expanded to include all four domains of the early childhood system – health, mental health, ECE and family support – and has become the working strategic plan for Smart Start Colorado.)

A significant component of the Commission's legislative charge was to study, review and evaluate school readiness and early childhood care and education and make plans for creating a comprehensive early childhood system. In the legislation, school readiness is defined as "the ability of a child to succeed in school based on the child's physical health and motor development, social and emotional development, language development, and cognition and general knowledge development from birth to age eight and also includes the ability of schools, families, and communities to support children's learning and success."

Over the course of 23 Commission meetings held from May 2005 - May 2007, numerous presentations led to policy changes as well as the beginning of the formalization of the governance structure for early childhood services and supports. National leaders, Louise Stoney and Lynn Kagan, who presented to the Commission in late 2005, made the point that first a governance structure is required in order to enable other systemic policy to have the important infrastructure in place for implementation and coherence. At this time, key people have been hired by the Lt. Governor's Office to carry out the next phase of realizing the early childhood system – institutionalizing the governance structure that will work for Colorado. The governance structure that has been recommended by the Commission is visualized as the "Three Legged Stool" in the diagram that follows.

Colorado's Early Childhood System with Stronger Governance: A Sturdy Three-Legged Stool



The Top of the Stool =
Colorado's young children and their families

Leg 1

State-Level Agency or Policy Board that exists as the central policy and coordinating board for early childhood (0 to 8) across all relevant state agencies.

The Prevention Leadership Council will continue to provide leadership in linking 0-8 efforts with broader state-level policy goals and efforts.

Leg 2

A State-Level, Statewide, Non-Governmental/Non-Profit Organization that serves to coordinate the work of state-level non-governmental organizations and support local early childhood councils to facilitate the implementation of the vision and goals of the Policy Entity.

Leg 3

Local Early Childhood Councils that provide leadership to every county and/or community in the state. Councils receive equitable recognition and support from the state. All councils held accountable for common standards and outcomes.

Cross-Bars =

- **Common Standards/Outcomes in the 4 domains**
- **A parent council that advises all three legs of the stool**

An early childhood system is defined as a collaborative, integrated system of care-givers including, but not limited to, individuals, community groups, associations, and agencies, that regularly interact in forming comprehensive partnerships and cooperatives around child physical health, child mental health, early childhood care and education, and family support with the purpose of supporting families and communities. In Colorado, this system effort has been branded "Smart Start

Colorado.” Smart Start Colorado Director, Jodi Hardin, is housed with the Early Childhood Team in the Lt. Governor’s Office. The Early Childhood and School Readiness Commission formed a close working relationship with the Early Childhood State Systems Team and the Smart Start Colorado Task Forces working on implementing the Smart Start Colorado Strategic Plan (which includes a new governance structure). The Commission functioned as the policy arm for Smart Start Colorado and supported several very important “systemic” pieces of legislation in the 2007 session.

ECSR Commission Legislation:

1. Early Childhood Commission – SB 11. (Postponed Indefinitely due to the leadership role the Lt. Governor’s Office will play in determining the governance structure.)
2. Early Childhood Councils Statewide – HB 1062. Passed both houses and is awaiting the Governor’s signature. In this legislation, 1 FTE will join the Early Childhood Leadership Team in the Lt. Governor’s Office.
3. Licensing Specialists Expansion – HB 1061. The fiscal note was too high leading to the bill being Postponed Indefinitely.
4. Private Health Insurance Coverage for Children with Developmental Disabilities – SB 4. Passed out of both houses and was signed into law by the Governor.

In the 2006 Legislative Session, the ECSR Commission sponsored the “Joint Resolution on Children with Challenging Behavior” authorizing a study and a follow-up report (*Attachment #1*) to the state legislature. Recommendations from this report have not been completed. The remaining financial support from the Daniels Fund will provide for the completion of the three recommendations in the report and follow-through with policy recommendations.

The public forum offered by the ECSR Commission served to engage numerous stakeholders statewide. Meetings were held at the State Capitol and allowed people throughout the state to listen to the proceedings online. A list of over 200 ECSR Commission partners was generated and these important partners were kept in close communication in order to build the statewide momentum we currently have for early childhood issues and Smart Start Colorado.

Leadership from the Staff Director also created strategic partnerships with CASB’s Early Childhood Task Force, CASE’s Early Childhood Panel Pre-Conference for Elementary School Principals, Metro Denver Mayors, Colorado Counties Inc., University of Colorado at Denver, Denver University; and the Early Childhood State Systems Team (ECSST). Many of these relationships will continue to be important as the early childhood system continues to evolve. This is especially true for the work of the P-20 Council which is being convened by the Governor through his recent Executive Order.

Other outcomes achieved by the Commission include:

- Regular monthly meetings were held with good participation from Commissioners and stakeholders since May of 2005. All meeting logistics are managed by the staff at CFFC.

- Completion of the First Year Report to the Colorado Legislature required by the legislation and due on November 1, 2005.
- Undertaking six pieces of legislation and one joint resolution passed unanimously out of the Commission and labeled as “Commission” bills.
- “Family Child Care Home Investigations” concerns the new requirement for legally exempt child care providers receiving public funds to have criminal background checks. Legislation passed in 2006.
- Developing a close and functional partnership with the ESST to implement policy critical to the creation of an early childhood system. Two major action items coming out of this partnership include 1) working with the Outcomes and Evaluation Task Force to develop statewide standards and child and family outcomes for early childhood programs, and 2) working with the Organizational Structure Task Force to identify the governance structure for an early childhood system that will be most effective for Colorado.

The 17-member Commission, made up of 11 Governor Appointees and 6 legislators (three from the House and three from the Senate), worked as an effective team. Challenging to the Staff Director was the “right” composition of the Commission – stakeholders who truly represented their stated constituencies and were actively involved in the work of the Commission. Some appointees needed additional support to be effective Commissioners. At other times, vacancies led to opportunities to work with organizations to ensure that they put forward a candidate to be appointed who would become an effective and involved Commissioner. Preparing Commissioners for meetings and following up with them afterwards, created a very high level group of people who were able to advocate for sensible, bi-partisan policies for Colorado’s young children and their parents.

The Early Childhood and School Readiness Commission had a very successful run building on the work of the two previous Child Care Commissions. The work has been challenging but did evolve in a most exciting and effective way!

This report is dedicated to the young children and their families in Colorado and their many champions at work to make Colorado the best place in our country to raise a family.

Respectfully submitted,

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