

## **Early Childhood and School Readiness Legislative Commission**

### **Members of the Commission**

Representative Brittany Pettersen, Chair  
Senator Nancy Todd, Vice-Chair

Senator John Kefalas  
Senator Vicki Marble

Representative Beth McCann  
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# Early Childhood and School Readiness Legislative Commission Report

## Commission Charge

Pursuant to state law (Section 26-6.5-203, C.R.S.), the Early Childhood and School Readiness Legislative Commission (ECSRLC) must meet at least four times per year to study issues concerning early childhood and school readiness. Topics to be studied include: health care, mental health, parental involvement, family support, child care, and early learning. The commission is required to solicit input from the public, especially from those who have expertise in early childhood and school readiness issues. The commission is also required to meet with the Early Childhood Leadership Commission, which is a group focused on improving outcomes for young children from birth to age eight, to discuss policy concerning early childhood and school readiness.

## Commission Activities

The ECSRLC held four meetings during the 2014 interim. Presentations were made by state departments, early childhood professionals, child care providers, medical professionals, foundations, the business community, and members of the public on a wide range of subjects related to early childhood, including:

- quality ratings and improvement for providers;
- poverty and other risk factors;
- mental, behavioral, and physical health in early childhood;
- links to the business community;
- professional development for educators; and
- family support.

The ECSRLC also divided itself into five working groups to focus on specific topics, solicit stakeholder feedback, and generate ideas for legislation. The working groups met throughout the month of August 2014, and several stakeholders participated in these discussions. The commission was divided into working groups as follows:

- Quality of Early Childhood Workforce;
- Early Childhood Collaborative Funding;
- Family Support;
- Kindergarten and School Readiness; and
- Mental, Physical, and Behavioral Health.

The following subsections discuss the ECSRLC's activities during the 2014 interim.

**Colorado's early childhood landscape.** Representatives of the Colorado Department of Education (CDE), the Colorado Department of Human Services (DHS), the Colorado Children's Campaign, the Early Childhood Summit, and the Early Childhood Education Association of Colorado briefed the commission members on the landscape of early childhood care and education in Colorado. They discussed the needs of providers, teachers, and families, as well as current efforts underway by the CDE and DHS.

The commission members were also provided with an update regarding the implementation of recent legislation impacting early childhood care and education.

**Quality ratings and improvement.** The commission heard testimony from representatives of the CDE, DHS, and Qualistar Colorado about the Quality Ratings and Improvement System (QRIS) and the use of the system to assess the quality of early childhood care in Colorado. The new system builds upon licensure as a basic level of quality and rewards facilities with higher scores for providing smaller student to teacher ratios, a more highly educated faculty, bilingual instruction for students who need it, opportunities for parental engagement, and healthier food and environments, among other factors.

**Early childhood poverty and risk in Colorado.** The commission heard testimony from the DHS, nonprofit organizations, and early childhood providers on serving low-income and at-risk children. This testimony focused on assistance that low-income families may receive to access child care and how to provide services to meet the unique needs of both children and parents. Services discussed included the Nurse-Family Partnership, parent education, assistance to friend and family care providers, and Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP). Some of the presenters discussed taking a two-generation approach to poverty and early childhood education that includes both parents and children.

**Early childhood mental, behavioral, and physical health.** A panel discussion was held that included representatives from the DHS and various health care providers and researchers who discussed the mental, behavioral, and physical health needs of children in early childhood. The commission heard about the lifelong mental and behavioral health impacts of adverse childhood experiences and how positive early interventions can be effective for many children. Testimony highlighted the experience of many children with mental and behavioral health issues who are expelled from child care settings. The commission also heard about childhood immunization efforts.

**Early childhood and the business community.** The commission heard from business groups, including Executives Partnering to Invest in Children (EPIC) and the Colorado Forum, as well as local government officials and foundations, on ways for business and community partnerships to improve early childhood education. The presenters discussed how early childhood education helps prepare the workers of the future and the availability of child care allows many parents to remain in the workforce. Testimony focused on ways for businesses, governments, and foundations to fund initiatives and work together to support early childhood.

**Professional development for early childhood educators.** The commission heard testimony from representatives of CDE, the Colorado Community College System, and the University of Colorado – Denver on early childhood educators' need for greater access to high-quality professional development programs. The offices of Educator Preparation and Early Learning and School Readiness within CDE provided information about the current availability and structure of professional development opportunities for early childhood educators.

**Family support for early childhood.** Representatives from Bright Beginnings, the Colorado Parent and Child Foundation, Invest in Kids, and the State Advisory Council for Parent Involvement in Education briefed the commission on the programs in Colorado providing support for families. Information was provided on the Nurse-Family Partnership, which is a program that introduces first-time parents to child health nurses who deliver support and knowledge to new mothers on how to have a healthy pregnancy, become a responsible parent, and care for their child.

Information was also provided on the Parents as Teachers program and the Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters model. These two programs serve parents with low educational attainment.

**Early Childhood Leadership Commission.** The ECSRLC is required, under its statutory charge, to meet with the Early Childhood Leadership Commission (ECLC), which is a group focused on improving outcomes for young children from birth to age eight, to discuss policies concerning early childhood and school readiness. The commission fulfilled this requirement during its third meeting, on September 2, 2014. Representatives of the ECLC discussed preschool and kindergarten slots, and the need to devote more slots to preschool students. They also discussed ways to improve the quality of unregulated family, friend, and neighbor care.

## **Commission Recommendations**

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As a result of commission discussion and deliberation, the ECSRLC recommends the following three bills for consideration in the 2015 legislative session.

**Bill A** — Current law requires that a recipient of assistance under the Colorado Works program must assign to the Colorado Department of Human Services (DHS) his or her right to receive child support payments for the purposes of reimbursing the state for the assistance paid to the recipient. For families eligible to receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) support, Bill A requires the DHS to pass through to the recipient the current child support payments collected by the state. The DHS must annually report to the Joint Budget Committee the amount of child support passed through to recipients. In addition, the amount of child support pass through will not be included as income in calculating the recipient's basic cash assistance payment under the Colorado Works program.

**Bill B** — This bill creates a new refundable income tax credit for certain early childhood education providers who hold a Colorado early childhood professional credential recognized by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE). To be eligible for the income tax credit, the individual must also be:

- a) employed for at least six months during the year for which the credit is claimed by a child care center that accepts Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) children; *or*
- b) a child care home provider who has held a Family Child Care Home License issued by the Colorado Department of Human Services (DHS) for at least six months, and do business as a family child care home provider for at least six months during the year for which the credit is claimed.

The credit is equal to:

- \$1,600 for a Level I Colorado early childhood professional credential;
- \$2,000 for a Level II Colorado early childhood professional credential; and
- \$2,500 for a Level III, or higher, Colorado early childhood professional credential.

The income tax credit is refundable and is not limited by the person's actual tax liability. The credit will be available beginning with the 2015 tax year, which commences on January 1, 2015.

**Bill C** — Current law authorizes funding for 20,160 children to participate in the Colorado Preschool Program as half-time or full-time preschool students. Additionally, current law authorizes funding for 8,200 children as Colorado Preschool Program students or as full-day kindergarten students, when combined with a school district's other funding for kindergarten students. This bill authorizes funding for an additional 3,000 children to participate in the program as either half-time or full-time preschool students only.