

HB 21-1304: Enhancing Child, Parent, & Provider Experiences with a New State Department of Early Childhood

Rep. Sirota & Speaker Garnett/Sen. Buckner & Majority Leader Fenberg

Early childhood is a critical period in child development that dramatically shapes a child's subsequent education and life experiences. The early years of life are when the foundation of brain architecture is being put into place and the quality of a child's early experiences can either positively or negatively change their academic and life outcomes. Despite the long-term impact of the early years, this is the time when families have the least support and children face the greatest hurdles to opportunity. Our youngest children are most likely to live in poverty, most likely to experience homelessness, and least likely to have access to child care and preschool. We can do far more to support children's development in the early years, beginning with addressing the fragmented governance of the early childhood system.

Colorado is an exciting position to support early childhood and family success now and in the future!



Unprecedented and hugely popular investments in early learning, including Proposition EE which was supported across the state by a 2-1 margin, and new federal funding targeted to child care, provide Colorado with a unique opportunity to emerge from the pandemic stronger than before, better supporting our state's families and significantly bolstering our economic recovery.

Community leaders, parents, and educators are asking us to end the fragmentation of the system.

The early childhood years are a mixture of both formal and informal learning. This time period is about both care and education. It is about both family support and child development. The unique combination of programs that support this "whole child, whole family" approach to early childhood learning and development does not fit cleanly into any of our existing state agency and programmatic structures.

Through the Preschool Policy Development Process, **nearly 1,000 Coloradans have engaged in policy discussions** about the future of preschool in the state. We have heard loud and clear that things are just too hard for children, families, and providers to navigate and that we need to lift up early childhood to a more systemic level of governance. With multiple state agencies simultaneously advancing different funding, regulatory, and policy-making decisions, the experience on the ground of families seeking opportunities for their children, and providers trying to serve them, is overly complex. As such, Coloradans support aligning early childhood services in a single state agency by a more than 3-1 margin.

Despite progress, this critical period in the lives of children and families lacks a systematic approach to **governance and funding**. Just like K-12 education and higher education, early childhood is a critical phase in a child's healthy development, yet the current environment lacks the same level of stature, coordination, and systems-level alignment that it deserves. As a result, Colorado's statutorily-created Early Childhood Leadership Commission, with representation from K-12, counties, business, providers, parents, state agencies, and philanthropy, has **unanimously recommended the creation of a new, cabinet-level state agency focused on early childhood**.

What would this legislation do?

To promote alignment and quality, and improve access to high-quality early childhood experiences and to implement Proposition EE, this bill would do three things:

1. **Consolidate various early childhood programs currently scattered across multiple state agencies into the Colorado Department of Early Childhood** with a mission to expand access to high-quality, voluntary, affordable early childhood opportunities, support parents in accessing programs & services, coordinate the availability of services, promote equitable delivery of resources, and unify the fragmented administration of early childhood services to reduce duplicative oversight and administrative burden on families, providers, and educators.

2. **Initiate a community-informed process** to unify early childhood services in the new department via engagement of the Early Childhood Leadership Commission, existing agencies, and affected organizations and individuals. The plan must align funding sources, reduce duplicative oversight and regulation to promote administrative efficiency, ensure alignment with K-12 education and other existing departments, and create a plan for the transition of services and programs as appropriate.

3. **Require a plan to implement voluntary universal preschool statewide** in alignment with voter intent in Prop EE and ensure that the preschool program aligns existing and new funding, supports community-based and school-based preschool options, blends funds as appropriate, integrates with local systems including Early Childhood Councils, supports the needs of diverse learners, including those with special needs, and is evaluated for child



Now is the time to advance child and family-focused changes in the early years. These changes will:

- Ensure Colorado is a place where a supportive array of childhood experiences, across a variety of settings, are available to all families who want them
- Improve provider supports that strengthen our early care and education system
- Ensure a seamless experience for families in getting what they need, when they need it
- Elevate a well-supported, adequately compensated early childhood workforce
- End fragmentation and misaligned and duplicative standards and requirements
- Reduce bureaucracy by reducing the fragmentation and the governance oversight roles that multiple state agencies currently play in the system

Supporters

Alliance for Kids, El Paso County
Assuring Better Child Health & Development
Aspen Skiing Company
Bell Policy Center
Bruce Atchison, Early Childhood Expert
CAFCC (Colorado Association of Family Child Care)
Colorado Association for the Education of Young Children (COAEOYC)
Counties and Commissioners Acting Together (CCAT)
Charlotte M. Brantley, Early Childhood Expert
City of Aspen
City of Denver
Clayton Early Learning
Colorado Child Care Consultations
Colorado Children's Campaign
Child Care Connections
Colorado Head Start Association
Colorado Home Visiting Coalition
Children's Hospital Colorado
Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition
Colorado Succeeds
Council for a Strong America
CPCD...giving children a head start
Delta Dental of Colorado Foundation
Democrats for Education Reform
Diana Herrera, Director of Education, Bal Swan Children's Center
David McMurtry
Early Care and Education Consortium
Early Childhood Education Association of Colorado (ECEAC)
Early Childhood Council of Boulder County
Early Childhood Council Leadership Alliance
Early Childhood Council of the San Luis Valley
The Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County
Early Connections Learning Centers
Early Childhood Summit
Early Learning Ventures
Executives Partnering to Invest in Children (EPIC)
Education Reform Now
The Efshar Project
Evans Early Childhood, Fort Morgan
Florence Crittenton Services
Family Resource Center Association
Gary Community Investment Company
Happy Haynes, Early Childhood Leadership Commission
Healthier Colorado
Healthy Child Care Colorado
Illuminate Colorado
Invest in Kids
Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC)
Junior League of Denver
Kempe Foundation
MANAUS
Merle C. Chambers
Mile High Early Learning
Mile High United Way
MyVillage
National Black Child Development Institute Denver Affiliate
New Horizon Academy
Opportunity Coalition
Parent Possible
Pro 15
Public Education and Business Coalition (PEBC)
Rocky Mountain Early Childhood Council
Rose Community Foundation
Save the Children Action Network
Sue Renner
Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning
Stand for Children Colorado
Ty Johnson
Westminster Public Schools
Wildflower Schools
The Women's Foundation of Colorado
Wonderschool

