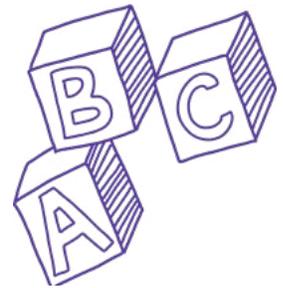




DEPARTMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD TRANSITION PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Colorado has a decades-long commitment to improving the early care and education experiences of young children and families. In June 2021, HB21-1304 established the state Department of Early Childhood (DEC) and required the creation of a Transition Plan to be presented to the Early Childhood Leadership Commission (ECLC), the Governor, and the Joint Budget Committee of the Colorado General Assembly. This Transition Plan is the culmination of months of work by stakeholders, the Transition Advisory Group (TAG), Subgroups, and the Transition Working Group (TWG). A second report with recommendations on the new statewide universal, voluntary preschool program will be presented to the ECLC on January 1, 2022, and will be submitted to the legislature no later than January 15, 2022.



Key Recommendations

The Transition Report recommends DEC:

- **Adopt mission, vision, values, and guiding principles.** These statements will help ground the new department in a vision set forth by stakeholders across the state.
- **Maintain the advisory role of the Early Childhood Leadership Commission (ECLC).** The ECLC should serve in a key advisory role to the leadership of DEC, as well as continuing its advisory capacity to state policymakers, other departments, and the Governor's office.
- **Establish a Rules and Regulations Advisory Council.** This diverse and well-supported group should develop meaningful advice, consultation, and collaboration regarding DEC rulemaking guidance. DEC should also be advised by the ECLC and existing advisory structures. To maintain a unified and cohesive vision, the Executive Director should hold final rulemaking authority for the DEC programs.
- **Build an equity-focused leadership team.** Under an Executive Director, with significant experience in early childhood and systems management, the Department of Early Childhood should have a culturally diverse leadership team with a comprehensive set of skills, a strong equity focus, and significant expertise. Program delivery should be organized around functions of the early childhood system and user experience, rather than around administration of individual programs and grants, to create more cohesion for the field.
- **Administer the following programs beginning July 2022:**
 - All programs currently located in the Department of Human Services - Office of Early Childhood (OEC)
 - All services administered by the Early Childhood Workforce Development team
 - Colorado Preschool Program (CPP)/Early Childhood At-Risk Enhancement (ECARE), which will be unified with the new statewide universal, voluntary preschool program by the start of the 2023-2024 school year.

- **Acquire the legislative authority and regulatory power of the funding streams tied to the programs moving to the department.**
- **Reconsider additional programs by July 2025.** In coordination with relevant departments and stakeholders, DEC should review legal requirements and, if federal law allows, review the cross-agency partnership and reconsider the transition of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B, and potentially other early childhood programs to DEC.
- **Address stakeholder feedback on Preschool Special Education Services.** Ensure strong coordination and collaboration to address the concerns raised by stakeholders before the new statewide, universal preschool program begins in the 2023-2024 school year.
- **Establish close collaboration with other departments to strengthen coordinating functions and to promote alignment.** To best support children and families, collaboration is needed among higher education, health care, oral health care, mental health care, human services, and education.
- **Address funding challenges identified by families and providers by:**
 - Revising rules and regulations to ensure more flexibility with funds and reduce administrative burden while ensuring equitable use of those funds.
 - Creating and utilizing a single application and eligibility verification for families.
 - Blending and braiding state dollars before releasing allocations to localities. Empowering communities to lead and innovate based on their local context.
 - Evaluating and building community readiness for launching the universal preschool program.
 - Ensuring DEC is prepared to advocate for and strategically use future additional investments in an historically underfunded system, including ensuring adequate funding of DEC.
- **Utilize technology and data to make informed decisions for children and families in Colorado by:**
 - Collecting data that provides additional information on system capacity, including number of open or closed classrooms, number of current teachers and workforce shortages, and overall availability of slots and current vacancies.
 - Implementing a child count process that provides insight into the unique number of children served at every publicly-funded site, across programs and funding sources, including unique identifiers when available, to encourage seamless K-12 integration while fully respecting the privacy of every student and family.
 - Ensuring the child count process captures the number of children served by Colorado Shines quality level.
 - Coordinating and requiring the collection of data in a way that does not burden providers and families.
 - Ensuring the data privacy and security of all data collected by all participants in early childhood systems.
 - Leveraging technology in innovative ways to create digital transformation in the system.
- **Prioritize supporting the growth and development of its early childhood workforce.**



DEC has an opportunity to change the way families and children interact with government systems. The unification of early childhood programs and services under one governing structure meets families and children where they are, offering them a single place where they can gain access to all aspects of the early childhood system. While these recommendations will require state support, if they are fully funded and implemented, the community envisions a future in which all Colorado children, families, and early childhood professionals are valued, healthy, and thriving.