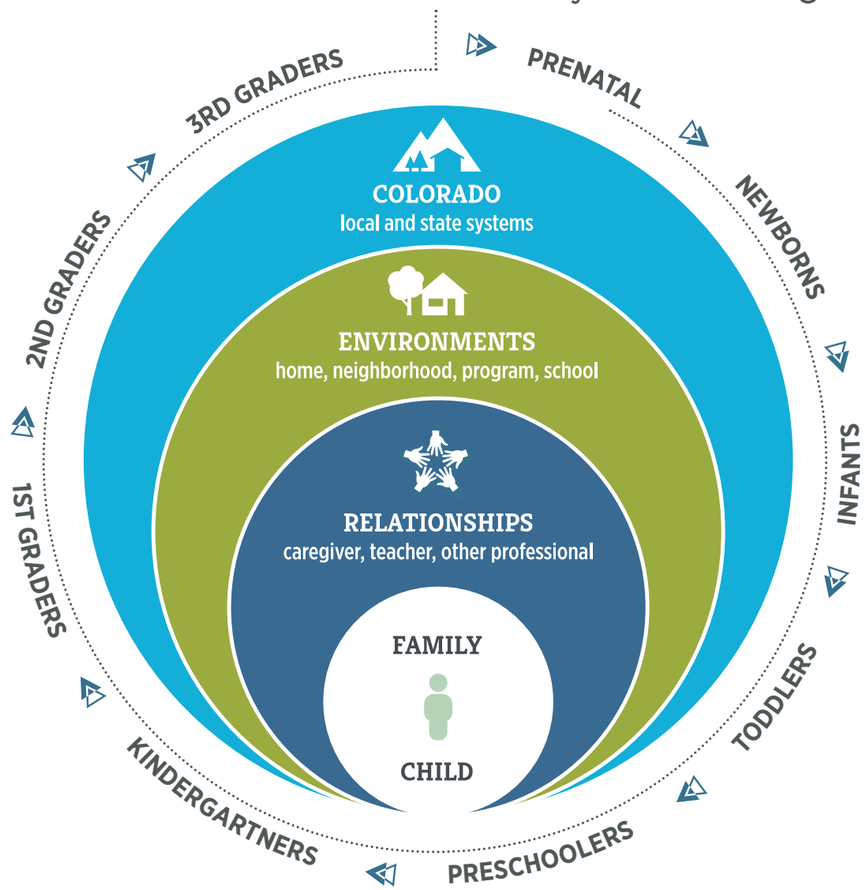
All Children are Valued, Healthy and Thriving



Results

CHILD
Young children reach their developmental potential and are ready to succeed in school and in life

ENVIRONMENTS
Environments that impact children are safe, stable and supportive

RELATIONSHIPS
Adults are knowledgeable, responsive and interact effectively with and on behalf of children

COLORADO
Localities and the state attain economic and social benefits by prioritizing children and families

LESSONS LEARNED
and Policy Considerations

EARLY MILESTONES COLORADO

While Colorado has made remarkable progress in shaping an effective early childhood system, the work is not finished. Persistent barriers stand in the way of improved family stability, health and well-being, and learning and achievement goals. Thoughtful policy making that starts with the considerations detailed here can support the most effective and equitable approach to serving Colorado's young children and their families.

Context Considerations

The Early Childhood Colorado Framework (Framework) shows how children and families are impacted by relationships and the communities, cultures, and local and state systems surrounding them. The following factors should be considered when crafting or revising policies, rules, or regulations.

Child and Family

Child and Family needs aren't siloed, but most programs and funding streams are. Lack of on-the-ground coordination can be a major barrier to accessing needed supports and services. Focus on coordinated communication, enrollment, outreach, and service delivery to increase the chances that families will reap the intended benefits.

Equity and fairness are not just good policy – they are essential to meeting intended outcomes. Consider how the policy will affect the full range of Colorado children, whose needs may vary significantly from family to family.

Relationships

All efforts should include attention to developing the knowledge and skills of the adults who care for children. Additionally, a focus on recruitment, retention, and compensation is important to address workforce shortages.

Environments

Early Childhood is a multi-sector, mixed delivery system.

- Broad public and private stakeholder input is critical to address varied service delivery needs and lessen unintended consequences.
- Different segments – local businesses, working families, faith-based communities – are often needed to achieve sustainable change.
- Multiple funding streams with differing requirements often support a single program. Effective policy must address the limits and opportunities of each.

Recognize the gap between service cost and affordability. The gap between what services cost to deliver and what families' can afford is a major problem in both health care and child care. Policies that work in other free market sectors may not be successful in these sectors.

Don't separate access and quality, address these together. For optimal results for children and families, ensure ongoing quality improvement is included — and funded — in new or expanded programming.

Colorado's Local and State Systems

Early Childhood is a system of systems. Because Early Childhood spans five state agencies and a multitude of local entities, interdependencies are common. Horizontal coordination — through Memoranda of Understanding, shared governance structures, and coordinated data, standards, and monitoring — can help ensure the effective use of resources.

Intermediaries are an important tool. In limited government, great progress can be made by partnerships with intermediaries, organizations that build local capacity around program implementation. Intermediaries can pilot new efforts, support implementation, and track progress, letting public entities focus more on administration and oversight.

Foundations are foundational. In Colorado, many major advancements in early childhood have occurred in partnership with philanthropic organizations. Foundations can serve as initiators, influencers, educators, innovators, and guardians of the larger vision.

Speak their language and broaden the tent. Many stakeholders – military and defense, law enforcement, business and workforce, education – all gain from efforts to promote child well-being. To build and maintain public support, communicate the connection between early childhood efforts and other goals – *in language that resonates with a diverse group of stakeholders.*

Early Childhood Policy Checklist

Informed by Colorado's history of accomplishments for young children and their families, the following checklist highlights key considerations for successful policy.

The past 30 years of progress in Colorado have indicated the following are important considerations to create impactful policy solutions for young children and their families.

1 Equity and Fairness Considerations

- ☐ Are supports and services adequate to address need?
- ☐ Has a broad vetting process been conducted to anticipate unintended consequences?
- ☐ Does the design include ongoing family and community input and feedback?
- ☐ Is the program optimally designed to connect and empower families?
- ☐ Does the design remove unnecessary access barriers unique to certain groups?
- ☐ Does the design include the ongoing use of data to address disparities in access and impact?

2 Efficiency Considerations

- ☐ Does the implementation design support intended outcomes across various types of communities?
- ☐ Once in place, can people use it; does policy promote consumer access and affordability?
- ☐ Does the policy support efficient and sustainable practices for small businesses (example: local care and learning providers)?

3 Efficacy Considerations

- ☐ Are desired outcomes clearly articulated and operationalized?
- ☐ Are the practices that lead to desired outcomes incentivized in design and implementation?
- ☐ Is accountability for desired outcomes tied to a quality improvement process?
- ☐ Is there appropriate support for data, technical assistance, and workforce education, training and capacity needs to support successful implementation and monitoring?
- ☐ Does the policy adhere to relevant research and best practices?
- ☐ Are innovative approaches appropriately promoted and supported through use of pilots or other measures?
- ☐ Do required reviews allow adequate time for development, implementation, and evaluation?