

**Jeffco Bright Futures Roadmap**  
**Share & Connect Event: Key Themes**  
**July 2019**

**Background**

On July 29, 2019, the Jeffco Bright Futures Roadmap Operations Team, with support from Early Milestones Colorado and the Adelante Network, hosted two simultaneous family focus groups with 25 Jeffco parents in attendance. The Share & Connect events provided opportunities for Jeffco families to inform the development of the Roadmap, share their experiences as parents, and make new connections with each other. One focus group was conducted in English, and another was conducted in Spanish. The events were held at Jeffco Head Start from 5:30 – 7:30 pm. As incentives for families to attend, we provided on-site child care, dinner, and held drawings for gift cards. Families were recruited through multiple communication channels including Jeffco Public Schools, Adelante Network, word of mouth, and home visitation providers to ensure diversity among participants.

Each table of 3-5 parents was staffed with a table facilitator and a notetaker. We organized the questions around the four Roadmap cornerstone areas to hear from parents regarding their experiences with early care and education, home visitation, mental health services, and screening, assessment, and referrals. Below are key themes from parents' discussions and direct quotes from parents during the event. Detailed transcripts and notes from the event are available for those interested in additional information.

**Not included in the themes below, but of significant importance:** the parents participating in the focus group conducted in Spanish emphasized the need for more culturally and linguistically responsive resources, programs, and services across each of the four cornerstones. This includes advocates, navigators, and providers who are bilingual, understand nuances of culture and language, and/or have lived experience navigating systems cross-culturally. A theme across all topic areas was lack of trust in the system and in providers.

**Early Care and Education**

- Parents in attendance relied on a variety of types of early care and education providers including family, friend, and neighbor care, licensed family child care providers, faith-based providers, Head Start, center-based community providers, and preschool.
- When asked what characteristics parents looked for in early care and education providers for their children, parents described the following factors: safety, cleanliness, their ability to trust providers, the curriculum used by the provider, the responsiveness of the provider, the education and experience of the provider, and the location of the provider in relation to the distance from their home or workplace.
- Some parents value the ability to trust that their children are in safe, trusted environments over the quality of learning experiences offered by the providers. Some parents do not consider schools or child care centers as safe, trusted environments.
- Many parents stated that their ability to afford the care played a major role in their decision-making and expressed that the high cost of care created barriers to access the quality of care they ultimately wanted for their children.
- Parents described frustrations with being unable to find care, long wait lists, operating hours that did not provide care during their work hours, affordability of care, and provider turnover leading to inconsistent care of their children.

- Finding care for infants and toddlers was also a major struggle for parents in attendance. In fact, some parents decided not to re-enter the workforce based on the lack of affordable infant-toddler care in the county.
- Many families indicated a preference for one parent to stay at home with their children based on cost of child care and safety concerns.
- Parent Recommendations:
  - Partner with apartment complexes to provide on-site child care for families to utilize
  - Partner with large employers to provide on-site child care for employees
  - Provide support services to educators to prevent burnout and turnover
  - Provide education and training to educators regarding trauma-informed care, social-emotional wellbeing, and behavior management

*"I have never used child care to go to work, because my earnings would just barely cover the cost of child care for me to work. My income wouldn't be enough to buy food or clothes or help us save to get ahead. Everything I would make would go straight to child care."*

*"I was working in a restaurant, and I left my daughter in a van because I couldn't find child care that I could afford and could trust."*

### **Home Visitation**

- Parents in attendance had varying degrees of experiences and knowledge about home visitation services. Some had never heard of home visitation, one thought that home visitation was only associated with child protective services, and others had actual experience with home visitation programs in the county.
- Parents who had received home visitation services described their experiences as positive and beneficial to them and for their children. Parents said that home visitors were helpful in connecting them to other community resources, explaining typical child development milestones, supporting their child's social-emotional and cognitive development, providing lactation support, occupational, speech and physical therapy, and providing tips for babyproofing the home.
- Many parents who had not received home visitation services expressed interest and said that they wish they had known that kind of support existed so they could have utilized it.
- Some parents also noted that information regarding home visitation services available to them would have been helpful during prenatal doctor appointments. Others mentioned that income eligibility criteria were barriers for receiving home visitation services.
- Parent Recommendations:
  - Offer home visitation services to all parents who want to participate, regardless of income or number of children
  - Have mental health consultants accompany home visitors to provide guidance and strategies to parents and children within the home
  - Raise public awareness about existing home visitation services within the county by promoting these opportunities in venues like OB/GYN offices, at changing stations in heavily frequented stores, apartment complexes, and other nontraditional settings

*“Jeffco has great services to offer, but it’s a shame people don’t know about the (home visitation) programs available here. If you know about them, you can try to use them. Jeffco is user-friendly, and their programs are great, but parents need to be aware of what programs are available to them.”*

*“As a new mom, I participated in a home visitation program, and it was so helpful. They helped us understand baby proofing, how to read to and interact with our kid, and helped me feel more confident as a parent. On a scale from 1 – 10, I’d give them and 11. It was a great experience.”*

### **Mental Health Supports and Services**

- Parents noted that the stigma, judgement, and shame around accessing mental health services is difficult to overcome.
- Parents described experiences when they tried to find mental health help for their children and were faced with inconsistent information, couldn’t find a provider, long wait times until they could see a provider, unaffordable options, and found it difficult to navigate the systems.
- Parents who had positive experiences said it was helpful when they were able to see their mental health provider within their pediatrician’s office.
- Parents mentioned that the heavy caseloads of school-based counselors limited their ability to have time to serve the children within their schools.
- Parents expressed concern about the mental health supports available to educators and asked how educators’ mental well-being is promoted so that they can better support the children they serve.
- School violence was given as an example by several parents as a top concern and justification for investing in mental health supports at all levels within schools (e.g. educators, support staff, parents, and children)
- Parents mentioned that educational pamphlets are available on cognitive and fine-motor development at their pediatrician’s office, but many of them had never seen any type of information regarding early childhood mental health within that setting.
- Parent Recommendations:
  - Provide education and training to families, educators, and the community at large regarding the importance of early childhood mental health and healthy social-emotional development to reduce societal stigma
  - Provide training and information to parents regarding the importance of self-care
  - Hire more mental health consultants to serve children, educators, and staff in schools

*“When it comes to mental health issues, timely accessibility is key. If it takes months and months to get the help you need right now, smaller issues turn into bigger problems. It’s frustrating and stressful for a parent, who is seeking help for their child, to be referred to different providers, not hear back from them, or be placed on long waiting lists for the help they need now.”*

*“We need more education in general around the fact that the behavior is the child’s way of expressing their needs. I don’t think most parents and teachers actually understand that. This is so important because early childhood is the time when children develop fastest and is a fundamental foundation for the rest of their lives”*

### **Screening, Assessment, and Referral**

- Many parents seemed to be aware of the importance screening and assessment tools and understood how they were typically used in primary care practices.
- Parents recalled rushed visits and limited time with their pediatricians, which led to:
  - Issues with obtaining timely screening and assessment within their primary care setting
  - A lack of understanding of the screening or assessment tools and their child's results
  - Inadequate time to ask questions about typical developmental milestones and how to help their child improve
- Parents also expressed frustration with lack of follow-up by providers, inconsistency in processes and referrals, being sent from one provider to the next, and not hearing about issues in a timely manner.
- Some parents asked about the use of screening and assessment tools in other settings, like child care or schools.
- Parent Recommendations:
  - Build stronger connections between pediatricians and community support services
  - Include support staff within pediatric offices to explain results to families and how to access resources
  - Ensure screenings are coupled with consultation/discussion with pediatrician and not just self-report

*"Pediatricians are really busy and a lot of times the visit seems rushed. Our time with pediatrician is 15 minutes so there is not time for discussion. I want to understand where my daughter should be (developmentally) so I can support her. What should I know or do to help her? The pediatrician just walks through these check-lists, and there is hardly any time for these conversations or for me to ask questions."*

*"I knew my child needed help, but it took over six months to get him assessed. I knew he could only receive the intervention until he was three, and we had to wait for six months to see if he qualified. We missed six months of the intervention due to the assessment wait time. I called and asked for earlier appointments but couldn't get one. I felt powerless even though I tried everything I could."*