



COLORADO CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Contracted Slots Pilot

A strategy to increase supply and expand
access to quality child care

March 2020



EARLY MILESTONES
COLORADO



About the Pilot

Hundreds of Colorado's child care providers have closed in recent years due to financial burdens. To address child care shortages and increase access to quality providers, state law allows for contracted child care slots. Contracted slots ensure financial stability by offering providers monthly Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) payments that are not tied to child attendance.

In 2019, three counties (Denver, Arapahoe, and Gunnison) participated in a six-month pilot to test this innovative approach. A total of 27 slots were contracted to seven child care providers. Early Milestones Colorado studied the benefits and costs for families, providers, and county-level administrators.

What Pilot Participants Are Saying

"Consistent care is everything to my family. It means that I can provide for my children. Without CCCAP and a consistent child care center, I couldn't go back to work."

Parent

"It allowed us to have some consistency, to know that the kids are paid for every day. We also could be more flexible with families struggling with medical or personal issues."

Child Care Provider

"This pilot opened our eyes to attendance. Is there something else we can do with CCCAP to reach out to any family — not just contracted slots families — to help with attendance?"

County Representative

Pilot Findings

Contracted CCCAP slots could have a lasting, positive impact on access to quality child care for Colorado families. However, challenges need to be addressed to fully maximize the benefits of contracted slots if implemented on a broader scale.

1

INCENTIVIZE PROGRAMS TO MEET FAMILY NEEDS.

Families that rely on CCCAP to help with the cost of child care often can't find providers that offer high-quality, consistent care. Pilot results suggest more providers may accept CCCAP through contracted slots because it provides additional stability.

3

ATTENDANCE IS AN ONGOING CHALLENGE.

Regular attendance is a challenge for many families with CCCAP. Contracted slots neither positively nor negatively impacted children's program attendance.

2

PROVIDERS BENEFIT FROM CONTRACTED CCCAP SLOTS.

More consistent funding allows providers to invest in program improvements that benefit staff. Contracted slots also strengthened relationships between providers, families, and county administrators.

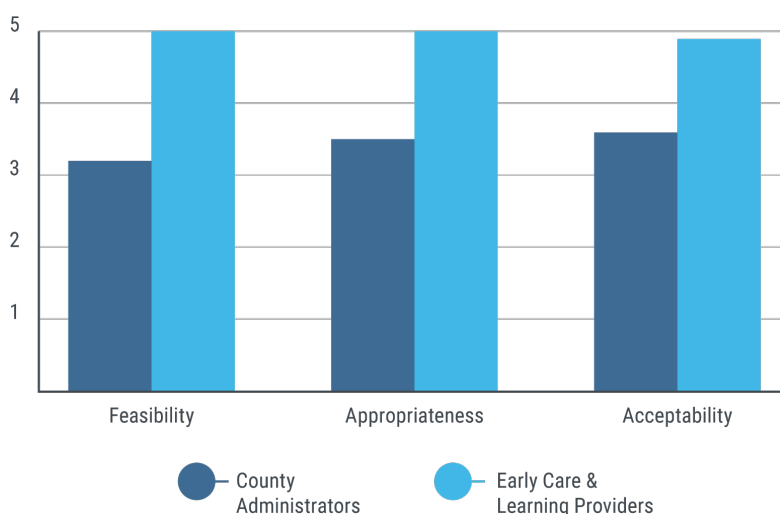
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SYSTEM BARRIERS PREVENT BROADER IMPLEMENTATION.

Contracted slots are designed to help counties address specific needs such as increasing infant care availability. While contracted slots provided clear benefits for providers and families, county administrators experienced challenges, including limitations in Colorado's Child Care Automated Tracking System (CHATS) and navigating multiple policies.

Reactions to the Pilot

Participating providers and county administrators rated the feasibility, appropriateness, and acceptability of contracted slots on a scale of 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree).



Pilot Highlights



**of providers
said the pilot
improved
relationships
with families**



**children in
contracted
slots were
under the
age of 3**

Short-Term Opportunities

SUPPORT OVERBURDENED, UNDER-RESOURCED FAMILIES.

Counties should work with specialized programs to understand how contracted slots can help increase care options for families with specific needs (e.g., providers that serve outside traditional hours).

BETTER ALIGN PROVIDER AND COUNTY SELECTION CRITERIA.

Once a county decides to use contracted slots, administrators should collaborate with providers and local early childhood councils to develop shared criteria for selecting CCCAP-eligible families.

CREATE PROACTIVE ATTENDANCE STRATEGIES.

Providers and counties agree that a more proactive approach is needed to support families with attendance. All stakeholders should work together to clarify roles and establish a shared vision to address persistent attendance challenges.

STRENGTHEN ORIENTATION PROCESS FOR PROVIDERS.

A clear and detailed orientation process will help ensure strong initial implementation of contracted slots for providers and county administrators.

Long-Term Opportunities

UNDERSTAND IMPACT ON LICENSED FAMILY CHILD CARE HOMES.

The pilot successfully identified what works for child care centers. Future efforts should also focus on home-based care, which is in short supply in Colorado.

SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION IN CHILD CARE DESERTS.

Contracted slots could be most impactful in communities where no child care providers accept CCCAP or where there is a severe shortage of infant and toddler care.

INCREASE RESOURCES FOR CONTRACTED SLOTS.

Support, including both technical assistance and funding, is needed for large-scale implementation.

FOCUS ON EQUITABLE ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY CHILD CARE.

The financial benefits of contracted slots can stabilize CCCAP providers who serve priority populations like children with disabilities and incentivize those who do not.

UPGRADE DATA SYSTEMS.

Since the CHATS data system does not currently support contracted slots, attendance tracking for this approach must be managed through a burdensome manual process.

Partners

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