Progress Report

Colorado communities advancing children’s social-emotional health

May 2020
LAUNCH Together is a unique partnership between Early Milestones Colorado, eight Colorado-based foundations, 13 counties, and the Butler Institute for Families. It is designed to improve social-emotional and developmental outcomes for Colorado’s young children and families. The initiative supports system-level collaboration to improve local infrastructure, streamline services, and infuse knowledge around early childhood mental health (ECMH).

Building on earlier work in Weld and Adams counties under the Project LAUNCH initiative, communities were selected in 2015 to create local, shared visions for early childhood social-emotional health with a focus on reducing mental health disparities among vulnerable populations. In 2016, five counties received four-year implementation grants to execute their visions. This report covers the first three years of implementation.

Communities in Action

**MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION IN ECE**

To ensure early care and education (ECE) providers can support children's social-emotional development and manage challenging behaviors, 10,463 hours of on-site mental health consultation services were provided to 69 ECE programs and 2,369 ECE providers were trained in social-emotional well-being and behavioral health.

**ENHANCED HOME VISITING**

Home visitors increased their ability to support the mental health of the families they serve through 2,920 mental health consultations, 2,834 hours of reflective supervision, and 1,702 hours of case consultation.

**SCREENING, ASSESSMENT, & REFERRAL**

Nearly 13,500 screenings of children’s social-emotional development, maternal mental health, and adverse childhood experiences were completed, with 925 screenings resulting in a referral to additional services.

**FAMILY STRENGTHENING**

The relationship between young children and their parents or other primary caregivers is a strong foundation to support healthy development. Through this initiative, 9,882 hours of parenting education and skills training was provided to 1,084 families.

**BEHAVIORAL HEALTH IN PRIMARY CARE**

80 pediatricians, family physicians, and primary care providers received training on children’s social-emotional health, and 1,894 primary care visits involved an early childhood behavioral health consultation.

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Highlights from Communities

Local leaders focused on ECMH have come together to coordinate community systems and enhance services across five strategies to better serve children and families. The community champions leading this effort are Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Pueblo, Chaffee County Early Childhood Council, Denver’s Early Childhood Council, ECHO & Family Center Early Childhood Council, and Jefferson Center.

MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION IN ECE
A new suspension and expulsion policy in **Pueblo** encourages ECE staff to include a mental health consultant when working with a child facing expulsion.

In **Southwest Denver**, family, friend, and neighbor providers are participating in ECMH trainings and consultation services.

An adaptation of the Kid Connects ECMH model is implemented at ECE sites in **Chaffee** and **Fremont**.

SCREENING, ASSESSMENT, & REFERRAL
All early childhood welfare cases in **Fremont** are assigned a personal coordinator to streamline access to screening and referral services.

**Pueblo** developed a shared-decision making tool to improve the coordination of screening, assessment, and referral practices across the community.

A successful pilot within **Jefferson’s** early intervention program resulted in increased navigation support for families with children at risk of child welfare involvement.

FAMILY STRENGTHENING
Caregivers in **Southwest Denver** have participated in trainings to increase their awareness of children’s social-emotional health and improve their skills to lead community change.

**Jefferson** and **Pueblo** created local websites to provide resources on children's social-emotional development.

**Chaffee** and **Fremont** implemented Seedlings, a program intended to break the link between parental history of toxic stress, and the effects of that stress on children.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH IN PRIMARY CARE
A primary care practice in **Chaffee** integrated a Behavioral Health Care Manager to participate in well-child exams and weekly care conferences with expansion to other practices underway.

All **Fremont** medical practices now use the same form for referring children to community services to streamline the process for families.

**Denver Health** created a new position tasked with ensuring all community clinics have capacity to deliver high-quality mental health services to families with young children.
Local Lessons

- **LEADERSHIP IS ESSENTIAL.** Leaders from every level of participating organizations must be engaged, from knowledge-building through system change. This will ensure a commitment to sustainability and develop stronger community partnerships.

- **READINESS TAKES TIME.** More time than expected was needed to develop meaningful relationships and build the necessary knowledge to motivate behavior and system-level change.

- **REFLECTIVE SUPERVISION BENEFITS EVERYONE.** Consistent time for collaborative reflection is a valuable and essential practice for almost all providers working with young children and their families.

- **DATA IS POWERFUL.** Shared data and common metric goals are crucial for effective and sustained system coordination.

- **GROW YOUR OWN.** Investing in and building capacity among local residents who have personal, long-standing community ties is one solution to shortages within the ECMH workforce, particularly for rural areas.

- **BUILDING PUBLIC WILL IS HARD, BUT IMPORTANT.** In order to achieve meaningful policy change, more awareness of ECMH and its connections to overall health and school readiness is needed.

> The whole community is trying to make sure that any place that families go, they get an opportunity for what they need to succeed, and we’re all working at it together.

> – Community Partner

What’s Needed

- **ELEVATE LOCAL VOICE.** Include and promote the voices of LAUNCH Together partners, including families, who have a deep understanding of local resources and challenges to support the development of any legislation or implementation strategies for statewide ECMH-related efforts.

- **BUILD A SKILLED WORKFORCE.** Ensure a variety of pathways to achieving higher education are available to support all Colorado communities as they work to grow their own.

- **ENSURE STATEWIDE ALIGNMENT & COORDINATION.** Create an ECMH leadership group to identify and promote shared priorities for collaborative work, and ensure ECMH is elevated within broader mental health prevention and promotion initiatives.

- **MAKE ACCESS CONSISTENT.** Increase public funding to ensure availability of ECMH services in urban, rural, and frontier areas of the state.