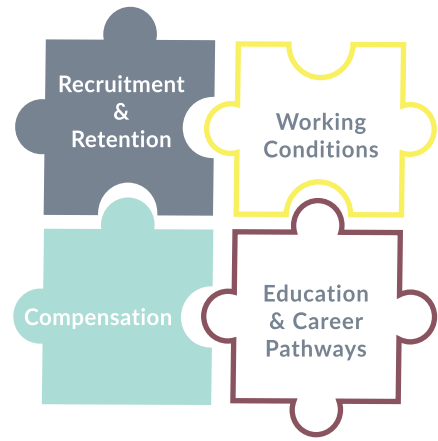


# Transforming the Early Childhood Workforce in Colorado



## INVESTING IN EARLY EDUCATORS

Colorado continues to struggle with finding and keeping quality early care and education (ECE) teachers. Summit County and the City of Durango in La Plata County took innovative steps to promote and strengthen local ECE careers. These approaches not only offer long-term value – they proved instrumental in meeting community needs during the COVID-19 crisis.

### SUMMIT COUNTY

With support from local leadership and voters, Summit County has improved salaries, workplace benefits, and other resources. The County's early childhood council, Early Childhood Options, also created an HR Shared Services manager position in 2019.

### CITY OF DURANGO

The Durango 9-R School District retrofitted classroom space in its high school to create an infant and toddler ECE center for children of district teachers.

## RISING TO THE CHALLENGES OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic forced widespread closure of schools, child care centers, and various everyday support programs. Beginning in March, children and teachers alike were sent home as school districts scrambled to find critical resources. Through the innovative practices supported by Early Childhood Workforce Innovation Grants, Summit County and the City of Durango were able to adapt to the needs of their communities during the crisis.

Summit County's HR Shared Services Manager was key in helping child care centers navigate personnel challenges, such as Paycheck Protection Program loans, staff furloughs, and unemployment. This position also offered support to furloughed workers and helped programs develop safe reopening plans.

Teachers in Durango's infant and toddler center were also able to shift quickly and support school-age children and the children of essential workers. Forty children between 4 and 12 years old were served at an elementary campus, which was also used as the central site for free lunch distribution.

## SUMMIT COUNTY

**While Summit County offers a lifestyle appeal, low pay and high cost of living make it hard to keep quality teachers. ECE careers are demanding and require access to paid time off and mental health care. Meeting this need offered a great way for the County to recognize the value of its workforce.**

### Community Support

County leaders and voters have a long history of supporting policies for a strong ECE network with reduced cost to families and better teacher salaries. Recent policies include funding for universal pre-kindergarten and Right Start and a Breckenridge stipend program.

### Raise Funds, Not Local Tax Burden

The County could benefit from its strong tourism industry and raise the lodging tax. This would add funds for ECE without raising property or sales taxes for local residents.

### Valuing Teachers with Better Benefits

District teachers are paid based on experience and education. A new teacher with 12 semester hours of graduate coursework starts at \$45,327/year. Benefits include summer breaks, insurance, and access to PERA and 403(b) plans.

To improve benefits, the County launched the Peak Health Care Alliance. This program negotiates directly with insurers and health care providers to reduce costs. Some ECE centers can provide workplace benefits to teachers. One center covers 50% of insurance costs. Another provides health clinic access. Both centers also offer matching funds for IRA plan contributions.

## CITY OF DURANGO

**After learning the impact of access to child care on retention, the Durango 9-R School District created an ECE center housed in its high school to serve teachers with young children. The center is committed to making slots available first to district teachers and staff, and all 15 slots are currently full.**

### Community Support

Passage of a school mill levy and support from local leaders were critical to the center's launch.

### Recruit Locally

Pueblo Community College Southwest, located on the Durango High School campus, offers ECE courses at the high school. The infant and toddler center has become a designated lab classroom where high school students can take classes with the certified instructor and receive college credit. A first cohort of 20-25 students has already participated in this program. School leaders now expect to see this level of student interest each year. In a short time, the center has sparked interest and become a home-grown pipeline for recruiting high school students into ECE careers.

### Low Cost, Great Results

Modifying classroom space and supplies for the center cost an initial \$100,000. After tuition revenue, the cost to the district is about \$25,000 per year. Adding this benefit for district teachers far outweighs the low price tag.

### Adding and Demonstrating Value

The center opened in 2018 and is licensed to serve seven infants and eight toddlers. Tuition is also lower than other local centers, giving Durango teachers a convenient and affordable ECE option.

Center teachers receive summers off, insurance (health, dental, vision, life, and disability), and access to PERA.



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