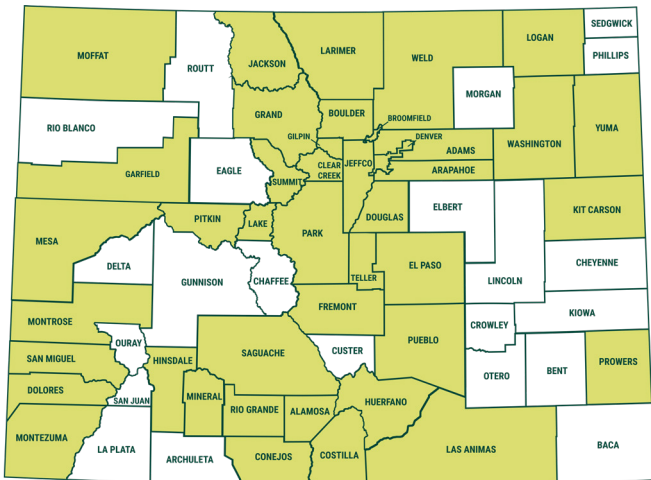




COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS: COVID-19 & EARLY CHILDHOOD

As part of Colorado's COVID-19 Early Childhood Research Partnership, Early Milestones Colorado conducted five virtual conversations in July and August 2020. These discussions deepened our understanding of how the pandemic is impacting early childhood services and what supports are needed to rebuild the sector.



107 PARTICIPANTS REPRESENTING **41** COUNTIES

37 early childhood educators

23 family support professionals

19 early childhood council staff

10 local and state government staff

9 early childhood advocates

9 other professionals, including health care and higher education

Data from the **Colorado Shines Brighter Needs Assessment** and preliminary data from the **COVID-19 EC Research Partnership** provider survey were shared. Participants were asked seven questions on the impact of the pandemic and three questions on **Colorado Proposition EE, Tobacco and E-Cigarette Tax Increase for Health and Education Programs Measure**.

IMPACT OF PANDEMIC.

Participants are deeply committed to supporting young children and families and have been providing critical services despite lacking much support. For more information on the COVID-19 EC Research Partnership, contact Courtney Thornton (cth Thornton@earlymilestones.org).

“I’ve been feeling so isolated. It was helpful to share ideas with people from other areas.”

PRESCHOOL EXPANSION.

Many participants were unaware of Proposition EE. However, they shared that families trust community-based providers for the expansion of preschool. Communities also provide supports to ensure expanded preschool will be housed in quality programs. Some potential barriers that were brought up included workforce shortages, lack of facilities, and families’ needs for infant and toddler care. Feedback on preschool expansion will be used to inform future community input sessions. Contact Melissa Mares (melissa@coloradokids.org) for more information or if you would like to host a community input session.

COMMUNITY INPUT

CHILD CARE SUPPLY & DEMAND.

Participants reviewed regional data from before the pandemic. They were asked how much supply and demand has changed and if they expect changes over the next three months. They also discussed whether providers are ready to respond to evolving family needs. Generally, supply and demand decreased, and there is a lot of uncertainty on what will happen next. Geographic location and age of children are also key factors.

“Although reopening was slow, now demand for child care is again much larger than we can accommodate. We have families moving to our region looking for care.”

“We are expecting an increase in full-day school-aged care due to schools not returning to in-person learning. Still need to determine how to make that work and support remote learning.”

ACCESS TO INFORMATION & SUPPORT.

Participants shared a need for reliable, up-to-date information to ensure health and safety for children and themselves, while also providing quality services. While most are using multiple resources at the national, state, and local levels, about 20% said it was “not easy” to access information and they were unsure of the best resource. Early childhood councils were the most common source of information. Others included the Colorado Office of Early Childhood, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, local public health departments, Governor’s Office, and families.

“I’m very overwhelmed with information at times, and at other times I feel like I’m not getting anything.”

Statewide Child Care Enrollment Estimates August 2020

Age of Child	2019	2020	Change
Infant	4,650	2,709	- 42%
Toddler	27,300	18,610	- 32%
3 Years	40,000	23,640	- 41%
4 Years	41,300	24,346	- 41%

Sources: Child Care Model, Colorado Health Institute, August 2019, and COVID-19 EC Research Partnership Provider Survey, Early Milestones Colorado, August 2020

TOP PRIORITIES

More than anything else, participants stressed the need for easy, flexible access to funding in order for the early childhood sector to recover.

FUNDING

“We need public and private financial support for all things: operations, staff incentives or hazard pay, PPE, cleaning supplies, supports for children, CCCAP [subsidies] to pay for absences, and on and on.”

FLEXIBLE REQUIREMENTS

“We need more freedom to offer the rapid support families need rather than waiting on state partners to mobilize resources and clarify how to implement the latest guidelines.”

SHARED VISION

“We need to be clear about our goals around recovery. Is it about getting parents back to work? Is it about school readiness? Until we are clear on our goals, it is difficult to talk about recovery.”

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

“Social and emotional supports for teachers and children are needed statewide.”

SUBSTITUTES

TRAINING

SPACE

