



# Systems Building in Early Childhood Mental Health

May 2021



EARLY MILESTONES  
COLORADO

[earlymilestones.org/launch-together](https://earlymilestones.org/launch-together)



# About the Initiative

**LAUNCH Together** (the Initiative) worked to improve social-emotional and developmental outcomes for Colorado's young children and their families. A unique partnership between Early Milestones (lead agency), eight Colorado-based foundations, five counties, and the Butler Institute for Families supported community health prevention and promotion and systems building.

For more information about the Initiative, visit [earlymilestones.org/launch-together](https://earlymilestones.org/launch-together).



## About the Communities

Partners in **Chaffee and Fremont counties** created a model to improve delivery of social-emotional supports that targeted regional equity challenges.

In **Jefferson County**, partners in several cities - Lakewood, Wheat Ridge, Arvada, Golden, and Edgewater – built a system of community-based services for children from birth through age five.

Leaders in **Pueblo County** communicated the importance of social-emotional development and improved access to early childhood mental health (ECMH) services to reduce the deep-rooted stigma around mental health.

**Southwest Denver** partners leveraged community assets to create a trauma-informed system that supports social-emotional development.



# Success Through Collaboration

**Building on prior success.** LAUNCH Together expanded on previous Project LAUNCH work at the state level and in Weld and Adams counties. The Initiative created a Colorado-specific model by leveraging federal tools, processes, experts, and community champions.

**Leveraging cross-sector partnerships.** Funding partners with different priority areas successfully brought an idea to implementation through collaboration and a shared vision. The Initiative's cross-sector approach improved communication and understanding of services and systems.

**Coordinating local resources to meet immediate needs.** Stronger relationships between local agencies, organizations, and individuals improved system coordination. During the pandemic, communities were better able to quickly respond to family needs.

**Increasing awareness of ECMH.** LAUNCH Together amplified the importance of ECMH and its impact on school readiness, health and education outcomes, and long-term success. Communities also better understand the negative impacts of trauma, toxic stress, and adverse childhood experiences.

## STORY OF IMPACT: JEFFCOFAMILIESCOLORADO.ORG

LAUNCH Together Jeffco launched its Jeffco Families Colorado website in early 2020. When COVID-19 hit, its marketing and content plans shifted to meet emerging needs of parents, caregivers, and providers. This included website resources for children's growth and development, such as "How to Talk to Kids about Coronavirus" and "Transitioning Back to School." Other content offered information for emergency child care, peer-to-peer support, and medical care.



**Building state-level momentum.** More social-emotional supports are now infused into statewide programs, including work within Colorado Shines Brighter.

**Supporting the early childhood workforce.**

LAUNCH Together trainings reached more than 3,500 attendees. Communities directed significant resources toward workforce capacity and saw increased training participation. The Initiative also facilitated and, in some cases, directly funded ECMH positions in the community.

**Prioritizing workforce mental health.** LAUNCH Together promoted the mental health and well-being of early childhood professionals and their families by providing reflective supervision and other supports.

**Partnering with families for stronger program design.** Families were engaged as essential partners in creating effective programs. As a result, services became more accessible, community-focused, and culturally responsive.

## Southwest Denver

### BY THE NUMBERS

2200

Early care and education (ECE) providers received more than 2,200 hours of early childhood mental health consultation support in 2020, including transition to virtual services during COVID-19.

134

In 2020, social-emotional coaches provided 134 hours of direct coaching on Conscious Discipline to support educators at 14 different sites, including 8 Denver Public School locations.

41

41 ECE partner sites were supported between 2017 and 2020.

### STORY OF IMPACT: PUEBLO

*A strengthened partnership between Health Solutions and Children First resulted in a continuum of services for ECE providers, including training, coaching, and mental health consultation. 33% of community children were reached with supports, and coaches and consultants were embedded into 90 classrooms.*



# Far-Reaching Impact

**Inspiring systems change.** The Initiative inspired local systems change outside its implementation communities. For example, the Early Childhood Council of Larimer County established a fully-integrated ECMH program in 2020.

**Supporting ECMH policy efforts.** Lessons from implementation communities informed the policy work of the Colorado Children's Campaign, Mental Health Colorado, and other organizations. In 2020, legislation was passed to codify the ECMH Consultation Program and develop a model of consultation with standards and guidelines for practice.

**Expanding ECMH consultation.** LAUNCH Together inspired an expansion of scope for ECMH consultants, broadening their ability to serve children in more settings.

**Envisioning a Consultation Hub.** LAUNCH Together informed development of a statewide Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Network Hub (Network Hub), primarily through funding of a feasibility study. The Network Hub will work in partnership with the Office of Early Childhood to provide coordination, professional development, and technical assistance to consultants working within ECE, home visiting, primary care, and other settings.

**Securing relief funding for ECMH consultation.** In part because of momentum generated during the Initiative, CARES Act and American Recovery Act funds were allocated toward supporting children who are dealing with COVID-related anxiety, trauma, and other social-emotional challenges.

## STORY OF IMPACT: FREMONT

An ECMH social worker in a pediatric setting helped a “difficult to reach” family bring their two children to a screening. It was apparent the children were loved and had good care, but the family had limited resources. Both children demonstrated significant delays in development and received individual education plans. The family was able to obtain a waiver for their older child to attend Head Start for one year before going to school. The children are doing well, and the older child will be more prepared for kindergarten. Thanks to the dedication of this ECMH social worker, a family in need was able to take an important first step.

## STORY OF IMPACT: CHAFFEE

“Thanks to support from the [Early Childhood Council] and LAUNCH Together, we are weaving [Conscious Discipline] into our daily practice. It is inspiring to see the difference it makes. Before the program, we had a child who was having many difficulties. This child has become the ‘ambassador’ of Conscious Discipline by sharing the calming techniques with the other three-year-olds when he sees they are in need.”

ECE PROVIDER IN CHAFFEE COUNTY





*"We're not all aligned all the time, but...even with lots of different opportunities and lots of different constraints, we've been able to establish relationships, because we're working together towards this larger goal."*

STATE SYSTEM STAKEHOLDER

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# Systems Building Opportunities

Ongoing evaluation of the ECMH system confirmed strong relationships, a shared vision, and commitment among state-level stakeholders. Feedback called for future efforts to focus on decision-making and accountability standards. Below are specific opportunities identified through LAUNCH Together.

**Build a skilled workforce.** Ensure a variety of pathways to achieving higher education are available for ECMH providers. Exponentially more clinicians are needed to provide consultation and reflective supervision across the state. Investing in building capacity among local residents with long-standing community ties is a promising solution to shortages in rural areas.

**Prioritize culturally informed workforce development.** Children and families do best when supported by people who represent them culturally and linguistically. A commitment to better representation in early childhood is essential to improving child outcomes, increasing employee retention, and strengthening communities.

**Create a continuum of care for prevention and promotion.** State and local leaders should prioritize alignment across all ECMH services. An improved system of care would guide health promotion, early identification, triage referral, and intervention.

**Invest in data system infrastructure and coordination.** Shared data and common metric goals are crucial to system coordination. A unique identifier for all Colorado children would accelerate this goal and support privacy.

**Maximize impact of IECMH Consultation Network Hub.** The Network Hub should coordinate closely with state and local agencies to ensure consultants in the field have access to best practices, technical assistance, and professional development supports.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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