



Transforming the _____
Early Childhood Workforce
_____ in Colorado

2020-2021 Grantee Report Summary

An innovative public-private partnership to advance
the early childhood workforce in Colorado

October 2021



EARLY MILESTONES
COLORADO

Accomplishments

Five Early Childhood Workforce Innovation Grants supported local solutions to compensation, recruitment, education and career pathways, and working conditions. These projects were chosen based upon readiness, quality partnerships, flexibility, and promise for sustainable systemic change. The 2020 cohort of grantees generated many positive results and lessons for future efforts, despite challenges created by the pandemic.

Integrating Older Adults into the Early Childhood Field

Boomers Leading Change (BLC)

Pathways to Teaching (P-TEACH) Expansion Project

St. Vrain Valley School District (SVVSD)

Pamoja Early Childhood Education Professional Pathway Program

Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains in partnership with Empowering Communities Globally

Creating Pathways to Early Childhood Training for Rural Latinx Caregivers

Valley Settlement

Designing for a Diverse Workforce

University of Colorado Denver (CU Denver)

Education & Career Pathways

CU Denver created a new pathway to a bachelor of arts degree (B.A.) in early childhood education (ECE). In this place-based model, instruction occurs in the workplace, allowing professionals to learn as they earn with the support of a cohort, mentoring, and scholarships. Seventeen of 20 professionals in the cohort were educators of color.

Pamoja, Valley Settlement, and SVVSD used Child Development Associate degree (C.D.A.) scholarships, apprenticeships, and concurrent enrollment as alternate pathways into the field. These programs were particularly beneficial for women of color, dual-language learners, and first-generation college students. Each grantee provided wrap-around supports to help candidates navigate the complex higher education system. Pamoja identified system-level barriers for dual-language learners and candidates who were educated outside the United States. Advocacy from Pamoja led to an amendment of C.D.A. testing rules and new resources to support dual-language learners.

Recruitment & Retention

Valley Settlement and SVVSD focused on recruiting diverse candidates. Valley Settlement maintained a Spanish-language C.D.A. program with more targeted recruitment, utilizing high school counselors and one-on-one interviews to identify students excited about early childhood. A former student served as a mentor to help retain candidates, a difficult task as the COVID-19 pandemic delayed classroom hours and internships.

Building upon **prior Innovation Grant successes**, SVVSD recruited high school and first-year college students to take courses and get hands-on experience in diverse school settings. SVVSD focused on retaining candidates through responsive mentorship and community building.

Working Conditions

Boomers Leading Change (now *Experience Engaged*) trained older adult volunteers to offer business management expertise to child care providers. Volunteers also served as advisors to C.D.A. candidates as they moved through the Pamoja program and adapted to new cultural norms. Following this successful work, BLC partnered with CU Denver and Denver's Early Childhood Council to build mentorship capacity and increase substitutes for early childhood centers.

Compensation

CU Denver, Valley Settlement, Pamoja, and SVVSD prioritized securing scholarships to reduce financial barriers for current ECE professionals to earn career-advancing degrees and certifications.

Local Lessons

SYSTEMIC INEQUITIES KEEP DIVERSE CANDIDATES OUT OF THE WORKFORCE.

- Complicated application processes, inequitable requirements, and a lack of resources in languages other than English are key barriers for diverse candidates.
- Retaining a diverse workforce requires cultural responsiveness and welcoming environments.

CAREER ADVANCEMENT REQUIRES NAVIGATING COMPLEX SYSTEMS.

- Difficulty navigating pathways and higher education can prevent diverse candidates from entering the field. This is especially true for dual-language or first-generation students, as well as those with prior tuition debt, international transcripts, or a low grade point average.
- Candidates need ongoing and individualized guidance.

STUDENT-INFORMED AND WORKPLACE-BASED PROGRAMS MAKE DEGREES MORE ATTAINABLE.

- The place-based model reduced common barriers, such as transportation, scheduling courses around work, and access to child care.
- CU Denver helped apply students' prior work experience and earned credits toward the B.A. program.

RECRUITING WITHIN NEW AND DIVERSE POPULATIONS BENEFITS THE WHOLE ECOSYSTEM.

- Early Childhood Teacher (ECT) qualified substitutes and retired volunteers bring experience and broader availability. Building these human resources into programs benefits children, educators, administrators, and the volunteers themselves.
- About 120 culturally and linguistically diverse candidates participated in grantee programs. Languages spoken include Swahili, Kinyrwanada, Karen, Burmese, Farsi, Arabic, and Spanish.

IT IS ESSENTIAL TO MEET STUDENTS WHERE THEY ARE.

- Active counseling improves recruitment and engagement, especially for undocumented and first-generation college students.
- Involving program alumni in ongoing efforts can improve capacity, strengthen leadership skills, and create professional connections.

Policy Considerations

Based on grantee experiences, Early Milestones has identified several state-level opportunities to support Colorado's ECE workforce.

- Expand access to linguistically and culturally diverse materials, resources, and trainings. Offer mandatory trainings in multiple languages.
- Simplify enrollment processes and requirements. Make sure enrollment is equitable for diverse candidates.
- Leverage new funding streams to incentivize attaining degrees and other credentials. Increase the use of waivers and make wrap-around supports and career navigation more accessible.
- Encourage all Colorado community colleges to accept the C.D.A. for college credit (ECE 101).
- Ensure portability and transfer of credits between four-year and two-year higher education programs.

"This program is...collaboration at its finest—bringing together diverse groups mobilizing around a common goal and moving toward incredible impact in our community."

Lisa Armao, reflecting on the BLC/Pamoja collaboration

"The amount of time and effort I put into the C.D.A., the hours of homework, the dedication to my studies, shows my neighbors, families, the parents of children in my care the value of the work I do every day"

Valley Settlement C.D.A. Recipient

Responding to a Crisis

Each grantee adapted uniquely to COVID-19 related challenges. Pivoting required vision and creativity, especially for projects with in-classroom components. These partnerships showed resilience through ever-changing health and safety regulations.

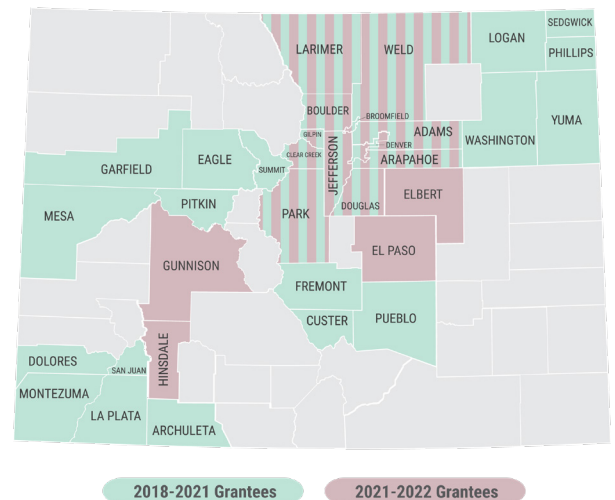
Pandemic conditions demonstrated how essential the child care industry is to the stability of families, communities, and the economy. In 2021, the American Rescue Plan Act became the largest-ever investment to strengthen the industry. Colorado now has an opportunity to support the ECE workforce through significant public funding.

The public-private partnership of the Transforming the Early Childhood Workforce Initiative has created proven mechanisms and trusted relationships for promoting long-term systemic change. We have modeled strategies to target areas of compensation, recruitment, working conditions, and education and career pathways. Colorado's early childhood sector can use stimulus funding to build upon our grantees' innovative approaches to create a system that meets the needs of a diverse ECE workforce.

About the Initiative

Early childhood educators are critical to a child's healthy development. Yet, many Colorado communities still lack an effective workforce and the need is growing.

The **Transforming the Early Childhood Workforce in Colorado Initiative** (the Initiative) was created to develop sustainable solutions to strengthen the state's early childhood education workforce. This map displays the reach of the Initiative's work in pursuing creative solutions for the state's most significant EC workforce challenges. Fifteen partnerships have been awarded **Early Childhood Workforce Innovation Grants** between 2018 and 2021. For more information about the Initiative, visit coloradoecworkforce.org.



Partners

Thank you to the many partners who make this initiative successful, including local communities implementing the work, the state agencies that serve as resource partners, and the two Colorado-based foundations that provide funding and serve as the Initiative advisory team.

