



Recovery  
Summer  
Coalition

POWERED BY EARLY MILESTONES COLORADO  
& COLORADO EDUCATION INITIATIVE

## 2021 RECOVERY SUMMER

The COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented challenges for families, students, and schools. Families across the state have worried about their children's care plans, learning loss, and mental health. School leaders saw the need for stronger family engagement and social-emotional supports for students, and stakeholders seized the opportunity to use the summer months of 2021 toward recovery.

This led to the creation of the Recovery Summer Coalition (the Coalition) by Colorado Education Initiative (CEI) and Early Milestones Colorado (Early Milestones) in January of 2021. Nearly 100 nonprofit and education organizations,

communities, and individuals came together to develop and recommend strategies for state and local leaders to address the needs of all Colorado children. In an open letter in February, the Coalition called on state and local leaders to fund and prioritize:

- supporting families through direct investments, stronger partnerships, and guidance; and
- adopting strategies that provide wrap-around supports, leverage existing community systems and assets, and emphasize course recovery in fostering success beyond high school.

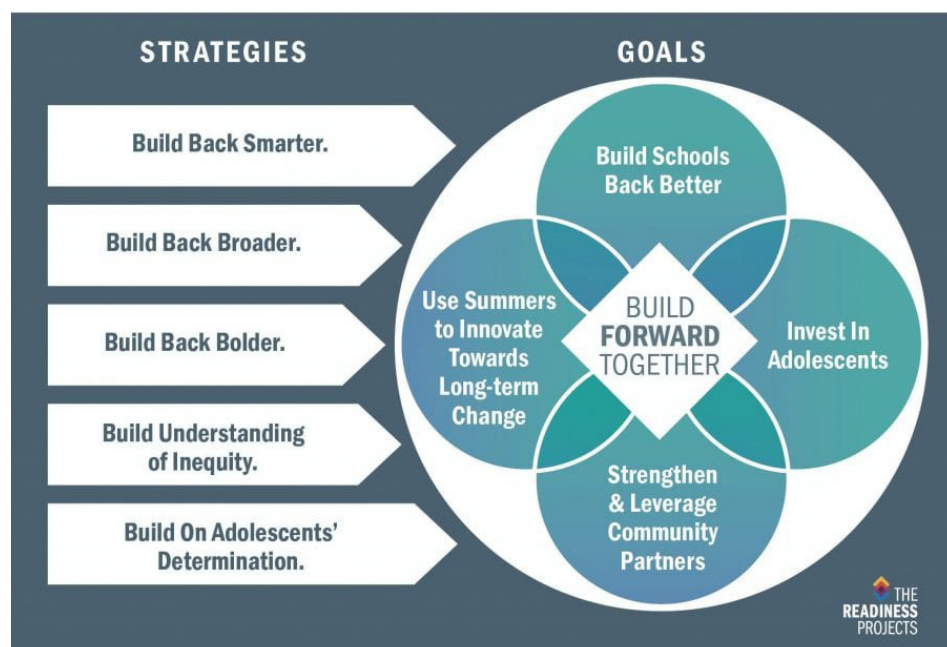
The Coalition worked with the Forum for Youth Investment to discuss a larger framework around opportunities unique to the summer of 2021. This strengthened our commitment to *build back better* so that communities can thrive far beyond addressing short-term recovery needs.

Data from Learning Heroes also confirmed the need for innovative partnerships that leverage the overlap of out-of-school time (OST) and time spent in school or at home.

Eleven regional partnerships received grants through the Coalition to implement innovative summer programs, enabled through additional funding by Caring for Colorado Foundation and Rose Community Foundation. These efforts reached more than 4,100 individuals and families across 13 Colorado counties through collaboration by more than 70 partner organizations. Grantees served families from a range of diverse communities, including families of color, immigrant/refugee families, low-income families, single-parent families, dual-language families, and those with children with special needs. Most programs served more children in 2021 than 2020 or saw an increase in family involvement.

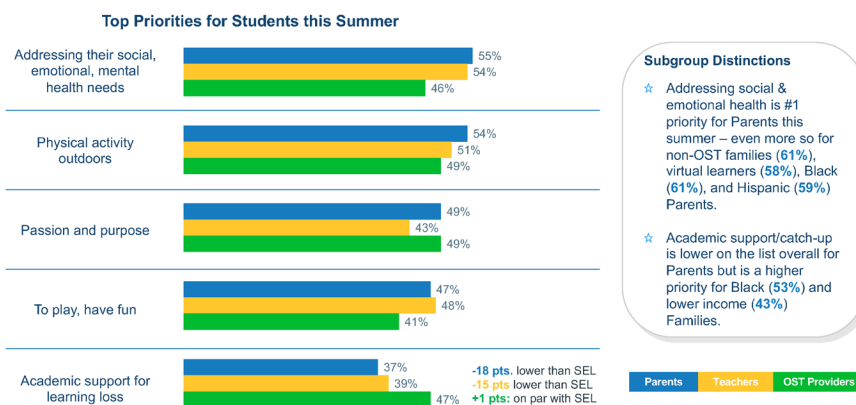
Grantees shared a belief that the COVID-19 pandemic positively changed the landscape of community partnership forever.

## Toward Equitable Learning and Development Ecosystems



THE FORUM FOR YOUTH INVESTMENT<sup>1</sup>

## Consensus | Social & Emotional Health Is a Priority



LEARNING HEROES<sup>2</sup>

Front cover image courtesy of You be You Early Learning.

Back cover image courtesy of Convivir Colorado.



## GRANTEES

### Adams 12 School District/ Summer Explore

Provided families and students with technology support, academic enrichment, and resource referral. Partnered with community health organizations to increase access to COVID-19 testing, vaccination, and other health services.

### Boys & Girls Clubs of Pueblo

Expanded program hours to serve more children and meet the needs of working families with affordable summer care aimed at improving math, literacy, social-emotional wellness, and confidence.

### Catholic Charities of Pueblo, Family Resource Center

Supported 50 families in individualized summer enrichment that focused on connections between children and their caregivers.

### Center for High School Success (Stand for Children)

Supported high school students with enrichment and credit recovery. Increased transition support for incoming ninth and tenth graders in five Colorado communities.

### Convivir Colorado

Supported immigrant and refugee children and families with leadership training, self-advocacy, systems navigation, and social-emotional health.

### Mountain Family Center and Grand Beginnings

Expanded access to healthy food and social-emotional wellness in their rural community and partnered with local libraries for increased summer literacy programs.

### The Powerhouse Durango/ La Plata County

Expanded access to summer enrichment and science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) learning for low-income families through partnerships between community organizations and the local school district.

### Pueblo School District 60 (Pueblo 60) and State of Grace Counseling

Partnered to increase access to mental health supports for at-risk high school students with virtual or on-site counseling support, credit recovery, and graduation support.

### Summit 54

Provided outdoor experiential learning for low-income students and supported social-emotional well-being through intensive teacher training, on-site social workers and child psychologists, and evidence-based stress reduction activities for young children.

### United Way of Southwest Colorado

Addressed pandemic learning loss, stress, and isolation through innovative enrichment opportunities, leadership training, and student empowerment.

### You be You Learning

Partnered with the Aurora Housing Authority and the Community College of Aurora to provide flexible child care, STEAM-based learning, and healthy food assistance at no cost to low-income families.



Image courtesy of United Way  
of Southern Colorado



## KEY FINDINGS & LESSONS LEARNED

Early Milestones and CEI held three convenings and led monthly one-on-one meetings with grantee teams. Grantees used these times to share progress and resources, discuss barriers, and solve problems together. The convenings served as a learning community for grantees to build new partnerships. These findings were compiled from assessment surveys completed at the end of the summer.

### Community Partnerships

Recovery Summer grantees leveraged existing partnerships and forged new ones across their communities to offer comprehensive programs that met the unique needs of students and families.

**Pueblo 60** expanded its summer credit recovery program to include mental health support through a partnership with **State of Grace Counseling**. Students participated in-person or remotely, receiving counseling, stress management tools, and other learning supports. The success of this program is credited to the embedded **State of Grace**

counselors, deeper teacher relationships, and efforts to approach student needs holistically. **Pueblo 60** plans to expand this program to more grade levels and continue the partnership during the school year.

**United Way of Southwest Colorado** partnered with Medicine Horse Ranch, the Piñon Project, and Montezuma Youth Alliance. These partners strategically shared participants to increase enrollment, meet unique family needs, bridge program gaps, and honor the specific expertise of each organization. For example, the Piñon Project focused on bilingual learning support and tutoring, adding mental health supports from Medicine Horse Ranch. All four organizations partnered with AmeriCorps to increase available staff and provide students with more comprehensive services and activities.

**Stand for Children** and **Boys & Girls Clubs of Pueblo** delivered more comprehensive programming in 2021 through strong partnerships with local schools. Both organizations were able to access additional funding, classroom space, and staffing assistance. **Stand for Children** expanded its summer transition program to include rising tenth-grade students in addition to rising ninth-grade students. This was especially beneficial for ninth-grade students who struggled with online learning and feeling connected in a new high school setting.

**Boys & Girls Clubs of Pueblo** expanded its nutrition program and created a partnership with local libraries to offer unique enrichment opportunities and a much-loved field trip. Including the libraries helped engage older children through a book club and discussion group.

**The Powerhouse Science Center** in Durango, in partnership with **La Plata County**, used school facilities for programming. The school district promoted the program to potential student participants, making it possible for **Powerhouse** to serve students from all of the district's elementary schools. Two families elected to bring their children to the host school after feeling a strong connection with the school and its staff.

### Authentic Family Engagement & Empowerment

The Coalition's whole-child focus required a commitment to strong family engagement practices. Grantees included and empowered families to better address each student's unique social-emotional needs.

**Convivir Colorado** was able to improve family engagement despite the challenges of shifting to outdoor meetings. Parents, siblings, and other family members of participating students were able to join bilingual summer sessions to share thoughts on immigration, activism, and empowerment. Mothers of students in the program were especially influential, sharing their experiences as adult immigrants or refugees and helping recruit

"COVID-19 has created a great deal of anxiety for our students and families. I do not anticipate this leaving anytime soon. Creating easily accessible resources within our schools can help wellness for the whole student and their families."

ANDREW BURNS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES, PUEBLO 60

participants. **Convivir** intends to contract some of the parents for planning a resource fair and a multilingual outreach campaign in 2022.

“One mom acted as an ambassador for the program and helped bring entire families together to participate and share a meal. It made it feel more like a family affair.”

TANIA CHAIREZ, FOUNDER & CEO,  
CONVIVIR COLORADO

Knowing that empowered families are the best, most knowledgeable advocates for what their children need, **Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Pueblo** co-designed its summer program with parents and caregivers. Parents identified a need for fun, family-oriented outings during the summer to address isolation, increased stress, and missing social-emotional supports. Flexible direct-to-family funds helped 50 families enjoy activities across the state, covering costs for visits to zoos, water parks, and museums. Some used the funds to pay sports participation fees.

### Equity, Access, & Place

Location and transportation have long stood out as barriers to adequate supports for families living in rural areas, low-income families, working parents, and other diverse groups. Pandemic-related closures, income losses, and isolation created new challenges as families found themselves

with reduced access to the services they desperately needed. By increasing access and meeting families where they are, grantees were able to help those most in need and build new relationships with harder-to-reach families.

Through an innovative partnership with Aurora Housing Authority, **You be You Learning** launched a learning bus between two low-income housing complexes. The bus provided children between three and five years old with two sessions of science-focused learning per day for eight weeks. The program also included snacks and take-home nutrition kits for 17 families. **You be You** intends to continue this program and hopes to expand to full-day preschool.

**Adams 12 School District's** mobile technology center helped parents register their children for school, complete free and reduced-price lunch applications, schedule appointments for COVID-19 vaccines and testing, and fill out job applications during outdoor family-friendly events. **Adams 12** also partnered with bilingual community health providers to bring Spanish language COVID-19 information and vaccinations to families.

**Mountain Family Center** and **Grand Beginnings** in Grand and Jackson counties utilized a new mobile food pantry and multiple distribution sites to reach many rural families. Partnerships with local libraries, Early Childhood Councils, health and human services, and local child care providers helped this partnership deliver social-

emotional kits, healthy food baskets, and other resources to geographically and linguistically diverse families who may have otherwise been overlooked during the pandemic.

**Summit 54** leveraged a new partnership with Mountain Family Health Centers to increase access to affordable health care. To meet increased family needs, these partners staffed and operated the health centers closest to their program sites, which otherwise would be closed during the summer.

### Unmet Need & Existing Barriers

Grantee organizations stressed the increased level of food insecurity plaguing their communities and the need for expanded food assistance, mobile food pantries, and healthy food delivery on weekends and during out-of-school time. Reports from state food banks and a survey by Hunger Free Colorado found that one-third of families struggle with food insecurity, compared to one in ten pre-pandemic.<sup>3</sup>

Many families who participated in Recovery Summer programs struggle to access needed technology for their children's

“Many of the families are eligible for the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program, but they have no transportation so they can't use it. For it to be equitable you have to make it accessible to where they live.”

ROYA BROWN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
YOU BE YOU





# LEVERAGING RECOVERY SUMMER TO FOSTER OPEN SYSTEMS

High-quality early education and out-of-school time are proven to have a lasting and positive impact on children's academic and social outcomes.

Early education, school-based, and out-of-school programs are essential services in Colorado. During the pandemic, professionals in these fields were instrumental in keeping youth safe, engaged, and learning. However, Colorado historically has lacked the integrated systems and infrastructure needed to offer the broad and comprehensive wrap-around supports exemplified by Recovery Summer grantee initiatives.

Following the passage of the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), Colorado's policymakers and education leaders have unprecedented resources with which to explore and build upon these successes.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

The Coalition believes that education and other family-focused services should be reflective of their communities. This means that systems should be co-created and designed with diverse stakeholders to ensure equitable access and outcomes. The following recommendations are intended to help state and local policymakers, district leaders, and funders foster open systems that serve children from early childhood through and beyond high school. (See [\*Appendix A: Fostering Open Systems to Transform Education\*](#) for potential implementation strategies and examples for each recommendation.)

### **Prioritize family partnership and streamline responsiveness to family needs**

Community-based organizations and out-of-school programs can leverage shared resources to recruit, engage, and retain families. Promoting family access to tax credits to offset the cost of out-of-school programs, after-school care, and child care.

### **Create and maintain comprehensive programs that meet whole child needs**

Integrated and reciprocal partnerships can grow the capacity of existing programs and expand academic and enrichment experiences. Cross-sector partnerships can alleviate staffing challenges. Communities should explore hunger relief and social-emotional supports outside of the school system.

### **Ensure equitable outreach and opportunity for all families**

School districts and out-of-school program leaders can partner to provide creative solutions to funding, space, and transportation challenges. Communities should focus on bridging gaps in language availability and staffing with dedicated funding for programs that address achievement gaps and increase equity.

### **Develop funding streams that promote collaboration and sustainability**

Communities can leverage new and existing funding sources to support summer enrichment and develop comprehensive after-school and learning recovery programs. Partnerships like those created during Recovery Summer can use one-time funding opportunities, such as ARPA and local grants, to pilot or implement strategies for meeting the needs of children and families inside and outside school settings. It is essential that these efforts are financed for long-term success, rather than relying solely on temporary funding sources.

### **Invest in statewide systems that promote quality, connection, and alignment**

Communities may begin by evaluating data to identify gaps in service to tailor, disseminate, and train local practitioners in offering quality learning programs outside of school time and during summer months. ARPA may offer an opportunity for greater investment in local workforce development, alignment between in-school and outside-of-school programs, and stronger data collection and evaluation processes to reduce access and opportunity barriers.



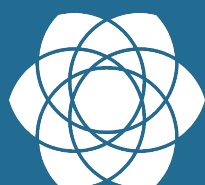


## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Early Milestones and CEI would like to thank **Caring for Colorado Foundation** and **Rose Community Foundation** for providing the funds essential to creating a Recovery Summer for Colorado children and families. We are also grateful for the support and contributions of our many statewide partners who signed our initial open letter to state education leaders and policymakers. These partners, as well as many other community members, participated in valuable conversations that established the framework of Recovery Summer. Finally, thank you to the 11 grantees whose efforts directly impacted the lives of thousands of Colorado children and families.

## SUGGESTED CITATION

Thornton, C., Olson, S., & Mascareñaz, L. (2022). *2021 Recovery Summer*. Denver, Colorado: Early Milestones Colorado and Colorado Education Initiative.



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## APPENDIX A

# Fostering Open Systems to Transform Education

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Leaders across Colorado have created rapid and innovative responses to unique challenges presented throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the systems that support students, families, and communities are still near a breaking point. Staffing shortages are crippling essential services. Mental health is a concern for both children and the adults who support them, and children are presenting with behaviors that current systems are not designed to address. We must establish new and stronger partnerships to meet the rising social-emotional wellness needs of our children, parents, and workforce.

The recommendations presented in the *2021 Recovery Summer* report are designed to accelerate change through open systems that focus on the whole child; center those furthest from opportunity; and promote dedicated, reciprocal partnerships between families, schools, and community organizations. Below are potential strategies for promoting change within each recommendation in the report, as well as relevant examples of these strategies in action.

## Prioritize family partnership and streamline responsiveness to family needs

Strategy for change	State and national context
Leverage out-of-school time (OST) and community-based organization (CBO) collaboration to expand and strengthen authentic family engagement.	Colorado is home to several forward-thinking initiatives that engage and empower families and caregivers to be advocates in their children's learning and development.
State-level advocacy organizations, such as <u>Colorado Children's Campaign</u> , family resource centers, and other support organizations, can partner with school districts to identify and address unique local needs.	<u>Parents as Teachers</u> engages parents from pregnancy through kindergarten with home visitation and parent education. <u>Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY)</u> empowers caregivers from diverse backgrounds to be active participants in preparing children for school success.

## Create and maintain comprehensive programs that meet whole child needs

Strategy for change	State and national context
<p>Grow the capacity of existing programs and create new programs that expand academic, enrichment, and social-emotional development experiences.</p> <p>Leverage OST and CBO partnerships to create local solutions to staffing shortages, needed supports for working families, and insufficient resources for students outside of school settings.</p>	<p>A 2021 report from Denver Afterschool Alliance highlights the collective impact of 10 comprehensive OST organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic. It offers recommendations for funders, advocates, and partners to address post-pandemic challenges and ensure OST providers have the resources to support Denver's most vulnerable children and families.</p> <p>American Institutes for Research's Building Quality in Afterschool project summarized statewide efforts in the development of OST quality improvement systems in its <u>2020 annual report</u>. The report examines seven areas: afterschool quality standards, assessment tools, core competencies for staff, credential systems, school-age quality rating and improvement systems, aligned professional development, and skill-building initiatives and frameworks.</p> <p>Colorado Education Initiative's <u>Social Emotional Ecosystem Framework</u> offers a systems approach for designing and implementing integrated social-emotional development supports from within classrooms to family and community partnerships.</p> <p>The LAUNCH Together initiative led by Early Milestones summarized community efforts to build comprehensive early childhood mental health systems and opportunities for statewide impact.</p>

## Ensure equitable outreach and opportunity for all families

Strategy for change	State and national context
<p>Create and leverage shared resources and funding to help school districts, OST program leaders, and community partners provide creative solutions, address achievement gaps, recruit and engage families, and increase equity while prioritizing communities with the most need.</p>	<p>State education agencies are using Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to incentivize school partnerships with CBOs and increase the reach and capacity of programs. This approach is locally rooted and can improve equitable access to culturally responsive programming.</p>



Use existing and trusted communications channels to streamline resources and services to make access and use easier for families.	<p>Some organizations in Colorado are reaching more families by promoting access to additional funding, providing comprehensive resources, utilizing mobile tools (e.g., <a href="#">Bright By Text</a>), and involving families in system-level decision-making. The <a href="#">Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition</a> and <a href="#">Valley Settlement</a> are supporting schools to develop more intense parent engagement plans, recruiting parents from diverse backgrounds to parent leadership teams, and providing bilingual resources for their primarily Spanish-speaking communities.</p> <p><a href="#">Parent Possible</a> is focusing on parent education and empowerment through outreach programs that meet caregivers where they are and using technology solutions to promote positive adult-child relationships.</p>
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Develop funding streams that promote collaboration and sustainability

Strategy for change	State and national context
Use stimulus funding to pilot, learn from, and build sustainable financial models that encourage cross-system collaboration.	<p>The U.S. Department of Education has underscored the importance of supporting community-based afterschool and summer providers in their guidance to state and local education agencies. In its <a href="#">Handbook to Reopening Schools</a>, allowable funding activities include providing students with evidence-based summer learning and enrichment programs, including through partnerships with CBOs.</p> <p>The Afterschool Alliance is actively tracking how American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) federal funding is being used at the state level to support summer enrichment, comprehensive afterschool, and learning recovery programs.</p> <p>Earlier this year, Colorado lawmakers authorized \$24.8 million for the Community Innovation and Resilience for Care and Learning Equity (CIRCLE) Grant program, which will be open to child care providers, community groups, education entities, Early Childhood Councils, and government agencies.</p>

## Invest in statewide systems that promote quality, connection, and alignment

Strategy for change	State and national context
<p>Partner with existing organizations, such as Colorado Afterschool Partnership, Boys &amp; Girls Clubs in Colorado, and Denver Afterschool Alliance, to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build an infrastructure of training, support, and resources for program providers, schools, and staff to drive sustained, quality learning experiences in OST settings.</li> <li>• Identify data-collection opportunities, gaps in services, and state and local policy barriers.</li> <li>• Launch a continuous quality improvement system that includes technical assistance, professional development, and peer learning opportunities.</li> <li>• Enhance support for the OST workforce to ensure providers can attract, retain, and develop staff.</li> <li>• Tailor, disseminate, and train staff in using evidence-based practices and tools in ARPA-funded programs.</li> </ul> <p>Conduct national research to learn from other state-level efforts and inform the planning of sustainable statewide systems.</p>	<p>Current Colorado-based OST infrastructure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Colorado Afterschool Partnership</u></a></li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Denver Afterschool Alliance</u></a></li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Boys &amp; Girls Clubs in Colorado</u></a></li> <li>• 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers leadership and providers, Scholar's Unlimited, Adams12 Five Star, Douglas County BASE, CSU Extension, Rec4Kids, COAerolab, and many more</li> </ul> <p>National examples of successful state-level afterschool networks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Utah Afterschool Network</u></a></li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Illinois Afterschool Network</u></a></li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Connecticut After School Network</u></a></li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>New Mexico Out-of-School Time Network</u></a></li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network</u></a></li> </ul> <p>The <a href="#"><u>Forum for Youth Investment</u></a> and <a href="#"><u>50 State Afterschool Network</u></a> offer comprehensive OST leadership, advocacy, and resources.</p>