



Trust for
Learning

October 21, 2021

Colorado Early Childhood Leadership Commission (ECLC)

Attn: Co-Chairs Susan Steele, Tom Massey, and Pamela Harris, PhD

Re: Comments on Department of Early Childhood DRAFT [Transition Plan](#)

Dear Commissioners,

On behalf of [Trust for Learning](#) (the Trust) and the early learning providers that we support, I wanted to express my gratitude for the thoughtful and robust outreach that the ECLC has done to engage stakeholders across the state about its Department of Early Childhood Transition Plan DRAFT. As an early childhood educator, advocate and administrator with over 25 years of experience here in Colorado, I believe that the passage of universal preschool and creation of a new cabinet level department have created positive energy and renewed enthusiasm for early learning. The number of participants in meetings, town halls and listening tour gatherings has been inspiring, and the draft plan certainly takes those voices into consideration. Additionally, the opportunity for [feedback](#) on the plan will make sure that all voices have a mechanism to be heard. It is in this spirit of collaboration that the Trust offers its thoughts and recommendations on the draft document, [building on our letter from last month](#).

1. First, we are delighted that much of the transition plan aligns with the first principle of [ideal learning](#) environments for young children: **“decision-making reflects a commitment to equity.”** The vision of “all Colorado children, families, and early childhood professionals are valued, healthy and thriving” and the accompanying mission, values and guiding principles reflect a commitment to equity that will help serve Colorado’s children, families, practitioners and communities well.
2. We applaud the recommendation that “program delivery should be organized around functions of the early childhood system, rather than around administration of individual programs and grants, to create more cohesion for the field.” This will help to reduce inefficiencies and, conceivably, encourage more caregivers to stay in the field and attract others who may be interested in serving children and families. Let us hope that the amount of attention that is being given to the field will convince others of the importance of the first

five years, economically and socially, and will strengthen people’s views of the vital nature of the teachers and other professionals who work with young children in order to support a livable wage for our workforce.

3. We support the plan’s recommendation that the new department address funding challenges identified by families and providers. We hope a commitment to ensure flexibility and reduce administrative burden in this area will lighten the load on families, programs and providers, and provide a much needed reprieve from the many rules and regulations that are currently in place.
4. We agree that it is important for the department to have rulemaking authority to ensure a unified and cohesive vision, and the development of regulatory guidance focusing on the importance of providing not just time in a preschool classroom, but quality programming that takes into account the needs of the whole child. As outlined in the Ideal Learning in Colorado Advisory Team’s letter to the ECLC dated September 30, 2021, “It is imperative that we provide a clear vision for what high-quality early learning opportunities look like at the programmatic level—in schools, child care centers, and other community-based settings across the state.”
5. As the Department considers rulemaking, we encourage the adoption of the [principles of ideal learning](#) framework to ensure that programming is equitable, play-based, individualized, creates options for family choice and is based on strong, nurturing relationships between children and the adults who care for them. The principles of ideal learning environments are not prescriptive – rather, they offer a common-language set of core elements that we know align with the science of child development, the expertise of early educators, and the desires of parents from all backgrounds. Otherwise, we may see an increase in solely “academic” programming by well-intentioned communities who assume that flashcards and worksheets are what children need to achieve school and life success.
6. Thoughtful and purposeful data collection will help the department serve all children and families equitably. We recommend collecting demographic and socioeconomic data on the children and families served in all programs, settings, and quality levels. This will make it easier to identify and address systemic inequities in access to high-quality programs. The same holds true for our workforce, which has been largely made up of women of color in the lowest pay tiers of preschool programming. Collecting racial and SES data on teachers in all settings, as well as wage data, will help to identify pay gaps and determine whether Colorado can provide these workers with livable wages.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this draft and provide feedback on the website. I am optimistic about building a future in which all Colorado children, families, and early childhood professionals are valued, healthy, and thriving, and look forward to working with you to bring this vision to life.

With my appreciation and thanks,

Cathrine

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