

# ISSUES IN THE DESIGN OF EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS

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DIALOGUE WITH CSFP CFOS

3-11-22



# FOUR TOPICS TO COVER IN THE 45 MINUTES OR SO WE HAVE TOGETHER

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- How do other states think about designing an EC System
  - What are the Key EC System Design Questions?
  - What are some interesting existing state design examples?
- Where is Colorado in the creation of a Department of Early Childhood and the related Early Childhood infrastructure?
  - DEC Context
  - What is meant by EC Infrastructure? (Funding Flow, Local partners, program alignment and mixed delivery)
- What are the opportunities and concerns presented by the soon to be created “local Lead” effort in Colorado?
  - High Level (coordinated application process, universal access, mixed delivery, equitable funding, common understanding of high quality, supported local workforce and appropriate community capacity).
  - Detail level (special education coverage, impact on student count, curriculum consistency and continuity, accounting for all revenues locally, EC District funding opportunity).
- What is known about the timeline??



# KEY EC SYSTEM DESIGN QUESTIONS

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- 1) Who decides the shape of the program?
  - 1) What is the desired mix of public and private providers?
    - 1) Are “micro-providers included (for example, Family, Friend and Neighbor care and co-ops)?
  - 2) What children should be included in the program?
    - 1) Infants, toddlers and preschoolers?
    - 2) Universal, selective or voluntary?
    - 3) Should special attentions be paid to certain students (like students from poor families or with special learning needs)?
- 2) What evidence of quality must providers collect and document?
- 3) How is all of this paid for?

# INTERESTING STATE EXAMPLES

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- North Carolina
  - County based system, much autonomy and authority given to each county to raise funds, engage local businesses and provide programs.
  - Programs vary county by county.
- Maryland
  - Focused exclusively on children in the year before kindergarten and children from low-income families two years before kindergarten.
  - Committed to a mixed public and private system, costed out the quality of the system they wanted and are working to fund it.
- Colorado before UPK
  - These are the number of pre-K slots we can afford. School districts and private providers can apply for funding some of those slots. For most public and private providers this requires the braiding of multiple funding streams.

# EARLY CHILDHOOD POLICY IN COLORADO

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## Highlights of the Early Childhood Policy Context

- **Colorado Preschool Program** (1988) is a state-funded, district-run, preschool program. CPP is intended to serve preschool-aged children who are at risk of starting elementary school unprepared.
- The **Child Care Assistance Program** (CCAP) provides financial assistance to eligible low-income families who need child-care benefits for children from birth to age 12.
- **Colorado Early Childhood Taxing Districts** established in 2019. Targets children birth through eight. Services can include early care and education, health, mental health, and other developmental services.
- In November 2020, voters passed 2 to 1, **Proposition EE**, a state tax on Tobacco products with 73 % devoted to EC.
- For the past year, Advisory groups have been working to plan for UPK implementation and the **Department of Early Childhood**.

# OTHER IMPORTANT “FACTS” ABOUT THE PROPOSED DEPARTMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD (DEC)

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- Things to know about DEC
  - In the 2021 legislative session took the recommendation of several state and national organizations and established the following charge.
    - “the creation of a department that would “consolidate the various authorities, programs, and funding streams that currently exist across state agencies and focus on a unified vision of comprehensive early childhood service delivery for all children birth to age 5.” 201.”
  - The result is a new Cabinet Level Department
  - As currently described, the new EC Commissioner has no board to which he or she reports.
  - This work is currently being guided by three advisory groups – a Transition Advisory Group (TAG), the Special Education Services Delivery group, and the Transition Working Group (TWG).
  - In addition, the new Department is charged with helping local communities create the needed local EC Infrastructure.

# CREATING THE ENVISIONED LOCAL EARLY CHILDHOOD INFRASTRUCTURE

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- Colorado will invest in the following.
  - Local leads empowered and charged to solve local challenges, foster partnerships, create alignment across all local entities, and plan for the allocation of funding equitably across providers in their communities.
  - A demonstrated commitment from DEC to provide resources to local leads and communities, to help build their capacity to execute their charge including fiscal capacity, and to ensure Colorado's aligned early childhood vision is executed successfully across the state.

# THE ROLE OF THE “LOCAL LEAD”

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- Local leads, which could be any public agency (e.g., a county), nonprofit organization (e.g., an Early Childhood Council), or newly created organization, should serve as the coordinator of birth to 5+ early childhood services in regions across Colorado, beginning with universal preschool. Geographic areas covered is defined in the lead application.
- The local lead creates EC infrastructure by coordinating the following.
  - Funding flow
  - Local Partnerships
  - Program alignment
  - Mixed delivery
- Application for the role of Local Lead to be published soon.

# A “LOCAL LEAD” IS CHARGED WITH:

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- ***Ensuring there is no wrong door.*** Reduce steps and burdens for families and providers and ensure there is no wrong door for entering the early childhood care and education system.
- ***Coordinating the application process.*** Recruit and support families through the streamlined application process coordinated across all local partners.
- ***Ensuring universal access to the preschool program.*** Ensure every 4-year-old is offered a high-quality preschool slot, in alignment with family choice.
- ***Managing mixed delivery.*** Ensure universal preschool is implemented in licensed settings, such as public schools, community-based organizations, and family childcare homes, and dollars are allocated in accordance with the community plan and family demand. Local leads should also recognize the important role school districts play in administering IDEA and ensuring access to high-quality preschool environments for children with disabilities in this process.

# A “LOCAL LEAD” IS CHARGED WITH: (CONT.)

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- **Planning for the allocation of funding equitably.** Plan for the allocation of all available early childhood funding in an equitable manner and ensure children experiencing risk factors receive appropriate services.
- **Ensuring understanding of quality.** Ensure leaders and workforce clearly understand the state’s definition of quality care and education across the birth to 5+ continuum and provide supports to achieve that definition.
- **Increasing community capacity.** Where too few slots exist, grow capacity of quality providers over time to better meet family and community needs.
- **Supporting local workforce.** Support providers in the recruitment, development, and retention of a quality early childhood workforce.
- **Collecting local level data.** Work with providers to collect key systems level data for their catchment area to report to DEC, while also reducing burdens and duplication.

# WHAT ARE IMPLICATIONS OF THE LOCAL EC INFRASTRUCTURE FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS

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- Special Education
- Counts of students, including sudden increases or decreases
- Curriculum alignment and curriculum choice
- Impact on local school district revenue
- Role of EC Taxing districts
- The EC Workforce across all age groups
- Facilities

# IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT DEC

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- Just getting under way, executive director will be hired by March.
- Local Lead RFP to be released soon.
- The local lead selection process is a competitive bid process.
- Since the preschool for four-year-olds is the initial focus and the initial emphasis, school districts that currently provide preschool may have an advantage.

# LOCAL LEAD TIMELINE AS OF THIS DATE

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- RFP for LCOs
  - Issued – live in late spring
  - Plan due – ???
  - Chosen – in early summer
- Four-year-old program Implemented – School year 2023-24
- Planning year for infants and toddlers??