

Human Services Alliance Policy Statement on Early Childhood Education

Value Statement

All young children in Boulder County should be able to access high quality early care and education environments and experiences.

Problem Statement

Educational experiences - whether they are acquired from parents or child care providers - during a child's early years are critically important to their healthy development. What happens during the first five years can have a significant influence - either positive or negative - on a child's chances for success later in life. During this period the brain grows to 90% of its adult size, children learn the basics about language and numbers, how to get along with others, how to concentrate on a task, and how to solve problems – all essential ingredients for success in school¹. It is also a critical time to support children's healthy physical development, and to ensure that health problems do not interfere with learning the necessary skills for school success. Decades of research clearly demonstrate that high-quality early childhood programs produce short- and long-term positive effects on children's cognitive, social, emotional and physical development.

However, as much as high quality experiences help foster positive development and good outcomes later in life, poor quality care can significantly impede development. This has been shown to be a particularly acute problem for low-income families, and families with other socio-economic and familial risk factors. Much progress has been made recently in Colorado and Boulder County to improve the quality of early childhood environments, but many remain mediocre at best.

Child care programs of all types are expensive, and there is a lack of capacity to care for all the children who need it. Even low-quality programs are out of reach for many working families. In order for families to be self-sufficient, parents must have access to jobs and the ability to consistently go to work to keep them. One barrier that prevents many working parents from maintaining employment and supporting their families is access to child care². A strong child care industry is a cornerstone not only of these families, but of Boulder County's economic development and prosperity.

Historically, early childhood programs and systems have taken a fragmented, piecemeal approach to the complex issues facing children and families. Effective policies have seldom been funded at sufficient levels to provide adequate support to all families who might benefit. An integrated and comprehensive system of early childhood care and education that directly involves families and communities in program design, implementation, and evaluation must be developed. Without this coordination, and as long as the economics and development of early care and education are left to the market, we will have a dysfunctional system that fails to meet the needs of a large percentage children and families in the community.

If we invest in children and families now, as a society we will enjoy long-term savings, and a more vibrant nation of healthy, achieving children and more stable families. Or, we can fail to make these investments and pay the price: increased delinquency, greater educational failures, lowered productivity, less economic competitiveness, and fewer adults prepared to be effective, loving parents to the next generation of children.

Policy Statement

The Human Services Alliance supports state and local policies that encourage or facilitate:

- Equitable opportunities for access to high quality, inclusive programs and services that are provided for all children from birth through age five and their families.
- Comprehensive, inclusive and adequately financed systems design that meets the needs of all children and families.
- Coordination between the various public sector jurisdictions at the state and local levels.
- Coordinated and integrated systems that promote seamless and flexible service delivery, prevent gaps and duplication, maximize resources, and leverage the strengths of the existing system.
- Community accountability for the quality of early childhood programs provided to children through monitoring of outcomes and indicators and a commitment to continuous quality improvement.
- Education opportunities for ECE providers and compensation commensurate with their qualifications and experience.
- Effective early education programs that are challenging and appropriate to young children's ages, individual needs, ability and culture; are asset-based and child/family centered; and, focused on prevention through integrated health services.

- Expanded opportunities for full-day kindergarten, Head Start, and Colorado Preschool Program.
- Public sector funding mechanisms in early childhood similar to those made for K-12 and higher education that allow for sustainable and stable funding mechanisms, governance, and infrastructure.
- Cross-sector collaborations that make ECE a true community-wide investment.
- Programs that are affordable, accessible and available and give parents choices in utilizing high quality, culturally proficient care and family support services.

1 - NAEYC "Critical Facts About Young Children and Early Childhood Programs in the U.S.", RFW, 2009

2 - Colorado Children's Campaign "Quality Child Care: An Investment in Families...". RFW, 2009