



Advisory Brief — May 2009

Colorado Early Childhood System Planning *A Functional Analysis of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies and Early Childhood Councils*

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Introduction

Consistent with the national effort of encouraging states to create systems that connect services and leverage resources for families and children, Colorado is dedicated to building a comprehensive early childhood system that addresses the needs of the whole child and family. Colorado has defined its early childhood system to be comprised of four domains representing early learning; family support and parent education; social, emotional, and mental health; and health. This brief focuses on the developing early learning system and the efforts of two entities that are working to move the state closer to a truly integrated early learning system for young children.

Colorado's network of Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies has been an important resource for families and child care providers for nearly twenty years. Under the management and coordination of Qualistar Early Learning, the state's CCR&R agencies share their extensive expertise and experience in early childhood, particularly early learning, with parents, child care providers and their communities.

CCR&Rs offer technical assistance to child care providers, leading the way in improving the quality of child care. They help parents locate child care, choose the best situation for their child and find resources such as child care subsidies. They collect the child care data in their communities and share it with local, state and national partners to advocate for Colorado's families and the child care providers who serve them. The CCR&Rs have developed targeted services around the Qualistar Rating, providing technical assistance to child care programs implementing the quality improvement plans that result from that rigorous assessment. They access community support by leveraging additional local dollars for the important work they do. Their knowledge of early childhood development and the early learning system runs deep, and their commitment is strong. Child Care Resource and Referral built the foundation of early learning supports in Colorado and led the way in

changing the discussion from one about increasing the number of slots to one about measuring and improving the quality of early learning programs.

The second entity is the statewide system of Early Childhood Councils created by legislation in 2007 (previously the Consolidated Child Care Pilots created in 1997.) This organization of Councils affirmed Colorado's commitment to funding a mechanism for local public and private stakeholders to come together "to create a seamless system of early childhood services representing collaboration among the various public and private stakeholders for the effective delivery of early childhood services to children five years of age or younger in a manner that is responsive to local needs and conditions." (House Bill 07-1062, Section 5, 26.6.5-103.5) Councils are charged with convening early childhood stakeholders in their communities to develop and sustain a comprehensive early childhood system across the aforementioned four domains.

Meanwhile, the State Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Initiative grant from the U.S. Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Bureau called upon state MCH agencies to work together with teams of public and private partners to develop a strategic plan to foster the development of cross-service systems that serve all the needs of children and families. Colorado used that opportunity to collaboratively develop a document called the *Early Childhood Colorado Framework*. The *Framework* was created to ensure that all Colorado's young children are valued, healthy and thriving. This *Framework* is built upon access, quality and equity outcomes in the four domains of early learning; family support and parent education; social, emotional, and mental health; and health. Early childhood agencies and organizations in Colorado are committed to aligning their work to achieve the outcomes outlined in the *Framework*.

In a continuing effort to stay true to the premise of this *Framework*, Qualistar Early Learning hosted an opportunity for the CCR&R agencies and Early Childhood Councils to come together to jointly examine the effectiveness of the coordination of these two entities' efforts as they work to achieve the outcomes within the early learning domain.

Why the Work Was Needed

Early childhood systems building in Colorado has been undertaken in a variety of ways at the local level. Services and supports have been designed within each community as needs have been identified and as funding has been available. As is the nature of such organic, need-prompted growth, organizations have stepped in for a variety of reasons to offer needed services that were not necessarily a part of their original mission or their charge.

As the resources of early childhood organizations have been stretched and the numbers of families with young children and child care providers have grown, the need for streamlining has grown as well. In these challenging times, policymakers and funders expect and will demand a system that is clearly defined and accountable, a system that uses sound business practices and technology to better manage resources.

Systems development work is difficult because it takes a clear and common vision of what the system should look like and the role of each individual organization or program within

the system. It takes an agreement among all the organizations and programs about the scope of their individual roles within the system. It takes a persistent adherence to those roles and resistance to organizational drift. It is beneficial to all organizations involved in systems development to periodically pause to examine current practice and confirm that resources are managed in an integrated fashion that is true to their charge and intended functions and roles.

The Work That Was Done

Qualistar Early Learning began with an effort to assess the effectiveness of the operations of the CCR&Rs agencies in meeting the ever-changing needs of Colorado's early learning field with respect to the delivery of both parent and provider services. The primary motivation for conducting this assessment and considering changes in the service delivery model was to improve the equity and efficiency of services across the state and to create a system that is better positioned to act as a reliable conduit for getting resources to families and providers. A secondary motivation was to mitigate the impact of inadequate funding for the CCR&R network and the need for the Early Childhood Councils to use their own funding to perform CCR&R functions at the expense of Council work.

It therefore was clear that any efforts to redesign, improve and expand the work of the CCR&Rs must take into account the intersection between CCR&R work with the work of the Early Childhood Councils. When looking at Colorado's emerging early childhood system including the expansion of the Early Childhood Councils, the need to examine the distinction between the intended functions and roles of the CCR&Rs and Councils was apparent if we were to build a CCR&R infrastructure that will both support growth and meet local community needs.

With this in mind, Qualistar Early Learning hosted two meetings facilitated by a national early learning consultant where representatives of the CCR&R agencies and the Early Childhood Councils came together to re-examine the functions and roles each was intended to fulfill in the early learning system. Each entity chose three representatives plus an alternate to attend the meetings. The group worked to achieve consensus around each entity's respective contributions to the early learning domain including the following:

- Defining the intended functions and roles of each entity;
- Identifying the existing gaps, coordination, and overlapping of roles currently happening in some communities;
- Determining which pieces of a particular function should be the responsibility of which entity in order to achieve the common goals and outcomes detailed in the *Early Childhood Colorado Framework*;
- Identifying the recommended actions to be taken to shift responsibility of functions and roles accordingly; and
- Identifying opportunities for increasing effectiveness and efficiencies through use of technology, shared resources, and intentional coordination and consolidation.

The results of the current functions and roles discussion were organized into a chart and broken into six main functional areas within the early learning domain:

- Leadership,

- Establishing, Interpreting and/or Maintaining Early Learning Standards,
- Data,
- Technical Assistance,
- Communication/Marketing/Public Awareness, and
- Child Care Capacity Building.

The chart, which is attached at the end of this brief, was developed at the first meeting, and reviewed and refined at the second. Every attempt was made at both meetings to hear everyone's thoughts, deliberate respectfully, and achieve consensus.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The goal of this effort was to better serve children and families with a more integrated early learning system that aligns efforts of the CCR&Rs and the Early Childhood Councils with each other and with their originally intended functions and roles. This alignment is even more critical in a time when families are under tremendous stress because of the current economic crisis. We believe that increased integration and alignment can be accomplished if the following is achieved in the early learning system under the leadership of the Colorado Department of Human Services, Division of Child Care:

- Make better use of resources by eliminating duplication, identifying cost savings opportunities, pooling resources, increasing efficiencies, and making more consistent use of technology among and between the two entities.
- Consolidate and centralize work where practicable within both the Early Childhood Council and the CCR&R systems.
- Simplify the system so that families can easily identify the place to go for help.
- Create and broadcast one consistent message from both entities to families, child care providers, policymakers and funders regarding the specific functions and roles of each.
- Realign funding to support more comprehensive and thorough CCR&R services, such as professional development and coaching to early learning professionals, thereby freeing Early Childhood Councils to continue to evolve into strong cross-domain coordinating bodies. For example:
 - Move the implementation of the Expanding Quality in Infant/Toddler Care program activities from Early Childhood Councils to CCR&R agencies.
 - Contract with the CCR&R system to perform the quality improvement activities of the School Readiness Quality Improvement program. This will take advantage of the existing infrastructures for early learning coaching and professional development.
- Encourage Early Childhood Councils to continue to build the capacity of their *community partners*, including the capacity of the CCR&Rs, to fill identified early learning needs appropriate to each partner's functions and roles.
- Develop a transition plan to implement the recommendations for change detailed in the attached, jointly created *Child Care Resource and Referral/Early Childhood Council Functions and Roles* chart.
- Continue to strengthen the accountability system to ensure that both the CCR&R agencies and Early Childhood Councils are achieving the results, and producing the measuring outcomes, for which each is responsible.

Implementing these recommendations would begin to address the growing overlap of the functions and roles fulfilled by the CCR&Rs and Early Childhood Councils, instead of fixing each individual overlap or gap in each local community. Committing to adhering to this new way of doing business also would prevent the problems caused from organizational drift from recurring.

In closing, we believe there are some important questions that need to be asked about the work in the early learning domain. Since the answers to these questions may need to come from multiple sources we simply pose the following questions for consideration.

- What can we do to make this system easier for parents and providers to navigate?
- How can we make it clear at the state and local level what each entity is responsible for?
- Would it be more efficient and effective if CDHS contracted with *one* state level organization to manage both the Early Childhood Councils and Child Care Resource & Referral systems? If not, can we develop an intentional and productive way to communicate between the two organizations?
- How can we truly determine where duplication exists and what are the real reasons for that occurring?
- How are the Early Childhood Councils and CCR&R agencies being held accountable for the work they do? What are the quality assurances we need from both systems?
- Are local and state stakeholders willing to effect changes in both policy and practice in order to support the continued development of an effective and efficient early childhood system?

Systems change is difficult. It is human nature to become invested in our work taking ownership in the functions, roles and projects we nurture and accomplish, especially when that work has direct and positive impacts on children and families. However, we live and work in a time when resources are shrinking and needs are growing, and we must work smarter in order to maximize every dollar put into the system. Continuing to foster organizational drift and do things because they've always been done a certain way does not move the system forward. It is challenging to contemplate giving up a function or role we are comfortable doing to another entity, and yet giving some things up creates the space and builds capacity to do others better. Gaps in service, duplication, and overlap of efforts further fragment an already fragmented early learning system. Ensuring the intended functions and roles are managed and fulfilled by the appropriate entity strengthens the early learning system by offering our customers—child care providers and families—clarity around where to go for services and supports. In the end, working to streamline the early learning system by filling gaps and reducing duplication and overlap helps meet the shared goal of the Child Care Resource and Referral agencies and the Early Childhood Councils to ensure the children and families in Colorado have what they need to be valued, healthy and thriving.

Addendum One

Child Care Resource and Referral/Early Childhood Council Functions & Roles: An Assessment of Current Practice for Early Learning and Recommendations for Change

Qualistar Early Learning hosted two meetings where representatives from Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) agencies and the Early Childhood Councils (ECC) came together to identify the functions and roles each fulfills in the early learning system. This chart is the result of that group’s work.

The **Function/Role column** lists activities that the group members indicated are being performed by some CCR&Rs and/or some Early Childhood Councils in six broad categories within the early learning domain.

The **Objective column** groups together like functions/roles according to the overall goal.

The **R&R** and **ECC columns** indicate the entity identified by the group as the entity that *should* perform that function/role.

The **Current Landscape column** describes what is *currently happening* at the local level regarding that particular function/role.

The **Recommended Change column** describes the group’s recommended actions that would facilitate improvements in that part of the system.

Leadership

Objective	Function/Role	R&R	ECC	Current Landscape	Recommended Change
Convene the appropriate stakeholders to the table to develop and implement an action plan for comprehensive early childhood services.	Build partnerships.		X	Often informal.	Develop an intentional and formal way for sharing strategies, successes, and peer-to-peer learning.
	Link domain-specific partners with other domain-specific partners to inform the development of the local early childhood system.		X		

Objective	Function/Role	R&R	ECC	Current Landscape	Recommended Change
	Serve as/provide content knowledge experts for the early learning domain.	X		Varies from one area to another. Sometimes ECC fills this role.	Determine why there is not more consistency about who should play this role.
	Serve as a voice for families and providers at local, state and national levels.	X			
Make informed, data-driven decisions.	Use data to drive decisions regarding the development of a comprehensive early childhood system.		X	Often informal.	Develop an intentional and formal way for sharing strategies, successes, and peer-to-peer learning.
	Use data to drive decisions regarding the early learning domain.	X			Convene partners to develop a statewide system of technical assistance on how to use data effectively to drive decisions, share information about data that is available from CCR&R system.
Ensure early childhood teachers are recognized as professionals.	Address workforce issues – compensation, insurance, working conditions, etc.	?	?	No entity is currently a leader in addressing these issues.	Convene stakeholders to develop an action plan.

Establishing, Interpreting and/or Maintaining Early Learning Standards

Objective	Function/Role	R&R	ECC	Current Landscape	Recommended Change
Establish and communicate standards in the early learning domain for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Data Collection and Use o Training and Education o Technical Assistance o Communications, Marketing and Public Awareness. 	Promote the use of existing standards.	x		A variety of current standards or no standards are being used.	Statewide support and implementation of established standards.
	Inform parents about early learning standards.	x			
Support the implementation of standards.	Identify barriers to meeting standards and/or need for changes to standards.		x	Both entities identify barriers to meeting standards. ECCs have the authority to submit waivers to alleviate barriers.	
	Identify conflicting standards across the four domains.		x		
Know, reflect and coordinate multiple program standards to identify supports needed to assist entities in accomplishing their work.			x	CCR&Rs and ECCs coordinate multiple program standards within the early learning domain; ECCs coordinate multiple program standards across domains.	

Data

Objective	Function/Role	R&R	ECC	Current Landscape	Recommended Change
Identify the early learning data that is needed for early childhood community assessment & planning	Identify existing data to be gathered		X	ID numbers for all children (CDHS/CDE Legislation)	Develop a statewide system of technical assistance on how to locate, analysis, and use data effectively. Share information about data that is available from CCR&R system. Explore the possibility and feasibility of gathering broader data elements in existing databases.
Collect and maintain early learning data.	House and maintain a supply & demand database.	X		Not always timely. Greater impact on rural communities.	Statewide CCR&R & Licensing discuss strategies available to improve the current system.
	Maintain data collection standards and integrity.	X			Ensure all stakeholders are aware and informed regarding data collection standards and integrity in CCR&R system
	Collect early learning supply data, including capacity, availability, quality and affordability data.	X		Some ECCs are collecting data.	Identify reasons or rationale for ECCs to collect data and address any concerns or weakness in the CCR&R system.
	Collect early learning demand data such as referral requests and wait lists.	X			Ensure CCR&R data is being shared with ECCs on a regular basis.
	Collect professional development and child outcome data.	?	?		Assess the current system and create a plan for better efficiency and accountability Based on assessment convene appropriate stakeholders to determine best place to build the capacity for collection and develop a plan to implement the plan.
Share early learning data.	Provide others with available data.	X			Ensure requests are made and reported in a timely fashion
	Analyze and report on collected data. Package for specific audiences.	X			
Synthesize early learning data with	Gather data from multiple sources across		X		Send packaged data back to communities.

Objective	Function/Role	R&R	ECC	Current Landscape	Recommended Change
data from other domains.	the domains, then assimilate & analyze it in the form of a community assessment.				
	Aggregate, interpret, analyze and package data to specific audiences (communicate information of the community assessment).		X		
Establish standards for collecting data regarding the early learning standards domain.	Responsible for establishing or communicating the national standards for data collection in the areas of consumer education, data collection, and provider services.	X			Inform councils and other stakeholders of existing data being collected and explore potential for expanding the use of existing data systems. Establish data elements to be shared with councils and other stakeholders. Create a list of shared data elements Ensure that all CCR&R's are sharing these data elements in a timely fashion and upon request.

Training and Formal Education

Objective	Function/Role	R&R	ECC	Current Landscape	Recommended Change
Identify and facilitate coordination of early learning training and education needs.	Participate in assessment of needed professional development.		X	Access not consistent statewide.	Establish best practices to be shared with stakeholders.
	Determine and develop early learning training based on needs.	X			
Create and implement a work force development	Facilitate professional development plan (system).		X		Examination of EC system of professional development. Bring together key players at state level to determine the best way to

Objective	Function/Role	R&R	ECC	Current Landscape	Recommended Change
plan across all 4 domains.					track.
	Assure that training is being provided and occurs according to funding requirements, either direct or through sub-contract.		X		
	Participate in statewide professional development planning and system development.	?	?		Assess the current professional development system statewide and the role of ECC and CCR&R in the system.
Promote and provide access to professional dev.	Communicate, market (training calendar) and recruit for professional development.	X		Multiple training calendars exist at different levels.	Streamline the system by using only one Training Calendar for early learning trainings. Convene stakeholders to ensure that Calendar meets all needs.
Coordinate and/or provide scholarships for early childhood professionals.	Identify and provide resources to access professional development (scholarships).	X	X		Evaluate the efficiency of the current delivery system for scholarships.
	Market and promote T.E.A.C.H. scholarships.	X			Qualistar- Broaden outreach about T.E.A.C.H. and its flexibility.
Coordinate and/or deliver early learning professional development opportunities.	Provide training in Core Knowledge Areas.	X		Both ECC and CCR&R are doing this. There is a lot of collaboration but some duplication. Who is the primary intended audience?	Examine the professional development system and determine the appropriate roles for each entity to play. The first step is to identify whether a training's audience is strictly early learning or cross-domain.
	Deliver EQIT training locally.	X		ECCs are funded to coordinate and deliver this training.	
	Serve as and provide expertise and content knowledge experts for early learning standards.	X		This is provided by many without consistent coordination.	Create a system to ensure better coordination, communication and capacity building.

Technical Assistance

Objective	Function/Role	R&R	ECC	Current Landscape	Recommended Change
Ensure access to quality TA.	Provide planning and capacity for TA across the four domains as they relate to early childhood.		X	Access is not consistent statewide.	Make ECC aware of best practices, including equity of access and content knowledge standards.
	Provide expertise and content knowledge for the early learning domain.	X			
	Identify appropriate providers of TA, whether at the local, regional or state level.		X		
Identify community and provider TA needs in the early learning domain.	Identify community-specific TA needs.	X		Currently both ECC and CCR&R doing this.	Identify reasons or rationale for ECCs to provide TA and address any concerns or weakness in the CCR&R system.
	Identify quality improvement needs.	X			Coordinate resources.
Coordinate, broker and/or implement TA to meet identified needs.	Provide and/or broker quality improvement resources to providers.	X		Currently both ECC and CCR&R doing this.	Identify reasons or rationale for ECCs to provide TA and address any concerns or weakness in the CCR&R system.
	Primary contact for provider TA.	X		This is provided by many without consistent coordination.	Better coordination and communication to ensure efficiencies. Explore creating statewide registry for training and technical assistance.
	Primary contact for coaching and mentoring.	X		This is provided by many without consistent coordination There are not consistent standards for coaching. ECCs are funded to provide School Readiness Quality Improvement coaching.	Explore feasibility of creating and implementing coaching and mentoring standards statewide.

Communications/Marketing/Public Awareness

Objective	Function/Role	R&R	ECC	Current Landscape	Recommended Change
Assure that there is a communication mechanism between state early childhood systems work and local, state, federal and other stakeholders for early childhood systems work.	Communication from state/regional level to community level and vice versa in terms of the four domains (intermediary role).		x		Ensure that this process is formalized and there is a process to make it happen.
	Communication from state level to community level and vice versa specific to current CCR&R functions.	x			Ensure that this process is formalized and there is a process to make it happen.
Create and become a clearinghouse for information about what's happening (policymakers, libraries, etc) across the domains.	Synthesizing information across the four domains for a broad audience.	x	x	There is some overlap and potential for more efficiency here. Marsico/DU Clearinghouse implemented.	Determine who is the best entity to operate this function to reduce duplication.
Communicate with parents, providers and the community on early childhood knowledge, consumer ed, best practices and training.	Various communication media (newsletters, emails, websites) to providers and parents.	x		Some but not consistent intentional collaboration among CCR&Rs and ECCs.	Develop master templates of information to be customized locally, collaborative sharing of information across all domains.
Advocate for community needs.	Advocacy linked to community needs and strategic plans.		x	CCR&Rs and others are providing info about community needs that can feed into strategic plan.	Formalize the process for data requests to CCR&Rs, including standards for response time.
	Represent the voice of families and providers	x		Clear flow of info from CCR&R to ECC about	

Objective	Function/Role	R&R	ECC	Current Landscape	Recommended Change
	in places where they cannot be present themselves.			advocacy and from ECC to CCR&R (in some communities).	
Educate and advocate to local, state and federal officials.	Represent child care issues.	X		Existing national vehicle. There is a strong collaboration through the Summit.	

Child Care Capacity Building

Objective	Function/Role	R&R	ECC	Current Landscape	Recommended Change
Identify and promote child care capacity need.	Collect and provide data.	X			
	Identify the child care supply need as part of a community assessment.		X	The data for identifying that need comes from CCR&R, CCCAP, and Licensing.	Build capacity so that all data sources are reliable, non-competing, and non-conflicting.
	Communicate child care capacity issues.	X		Levels of communication vary across the state.	Increase consistency around communication efforts regarding child care capacity.
	Identify the specific need (what kind of care, age, affordable, accessible, etc.).	X			
Build child care capacity where needed.	Convene local stakeholders and develop scope of work for increasing capacity.	X	X	This is a shared responsibility.	Develop an intentional and formal model for local communities to use when building capacity.
	Identify and convene the project coordination team.	X	X		
	Identify funding and other resources, including opportunities for blending resources.	X	X		

Objective	Function/Role	R&R	ECC	Current Landscape	Recommended Change
	Recruit new providers to fulfill staffing needs for new facility.	X			
	Provide training and TA around licensing and other identified needs.	X			
	Inform providers of available resources.	X			
Connect child care supply and demand.	Help providers assess the market.	X			
	Help providers market their services.	X			
	Provide referrals, enhanced referrals (working with employers).	X			
	Provide consumer education.	X			

Addendum Two

Child Care Resource and Referral and Early Childhood Council Joint Meeting Participants

Child Care Resource and Referral Representatives

Patricia Bolton, Child Care Innovations
Lucinda Burns, Early Childhood Options
Tami Havener, Family Development Center
Shirley Ritter, Kids First

Early Childhood Council Representatives

Cindy Bernal, Pueblo Early Childhood Council
Kris Ingram, Alliance for Kids
Maria Sims, Park and Teller Early Childhood Council
Tamara Volz, Early Childhood Council of La Plata County

State Level Stakeholders

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Stacy Buchanan, Qualistar Early Learning
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