

Early Learning Content for ESSA State Plan

January 2017

Section 1 - Long Term Goals

Of the Colorado Department of Education's four strategic goals: Start Strong, Read by Third Grade, Meet or Exceed Standards, and Graduate Ready, the first two directly acknowledge the importance of a child's early years in preparing students to be successful in school and in life.

Section 2 - Consultation and Performance Management

2.1 Consultation

B. Outreach and Input

i. Early Childhood educators and leaders – CDE met with and sought input from the following early childhood educators and leaders:

- The **Colorado's Early Childhood Leadership Commission (ECLC)**. The ECLC is statutorily authorized body which serves as Colorado's state advisory council for early childhood. Its role is to be a statewide leader, subject matter expert and advocate for best and promising practices throughout the state. The ECLC consists of 20 Commissioners representing a full spectrum of advocates and leaders, including parents, early childhood professionals, Head Start, school districts, local municipalities, foundations, nonprofits, businesses and five state departments: Education, Health Care Policy and Financing, Higher Education, Human Services, and Public Health and Environment.
<http://www.earlychildhoodcolorado.org/meet-our-commissioners/#>
- The **Early Childhood Councils Leadership Alliance (ECCLA)**. ECCLA is a nonprofit membership organization formed to support Colorado's local early childhood councils. It provides leadership, innovation, influence and local perspectives at the state level to ensure Colorado has a comprehensive, quality early childhood system.
<https://sites.google.com/a/ecclacolorado.org/eccla/home>
- CDE's **Preschool Special Education Advisory** Committee. This advisory committee consists of representatives from school districts, parents, higher education, child advocates, and others.
- **CDE's ESSA Early Learning Stakeholder Committee**. CDE established this stakeholder committee specifically to provide input on Colorado's ESSA state

plan. Members represent school districts, early childhood advocates, higher education, Colorado Department of Education, Colorado Department of Human Services, Head Start, and other interested parties.

- **Colorado’s Early Childhood Professional Development (ECPD) Advisory Committee.** The ECPD Advisory Committee provides input to the development, implementation and revision of Colorado’s Early Childhood Professional Development Plan. <https://www.cde.state.co.us/early/ecpdadvisory>
- **Early Childhood and School Readiness Legislative Commission (ECSRLC).** The ECSRLC is a bi-partisan legislative committee convened to study issues of early childhood and school readiness. <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cga-legislativecouncil/2015-early-childhood-and-school-readiness-legislative-commission> .
- **Early Childhood Summit.** The Early Childhood Summit is a collaboration of state-wide organizations focused on programs and services for children from birth to age eight. Members represent education, social services, physical and mental health, child care providers, child advocates, and others.

CDE is committed to **ongoing meaningful consultation** with early childhood educators, school and community leaders, and families.

- To support ongoing implementation of early childhood priorities in Colorado, CDE will establish a P-3 Advisory Council, engaging early learning leaders and partners in the implementation of its state plan. The council will be comprised of key early learning stakeholders and work in collaboration with Colorado’s Early Childhood Leadership Commission.

2.2 System of Performance Management

A. Review and Approval of LEA Plans.

- Early learning and early literacy staff will be involved in the development of the Consolidated Application as well as the review and approval of LEA plans.

B. Monitoring

C. Continuous Improvement

- Continuous improvement of outcomes for students is directly connected to continuous improvement of teaching practices and making services available to meet the needs of young children. District early learning staff and administrators, community based early childhood providers, and parents will be able to access professional learning opportunities via the Colorado Professional Development Information System (PDIS).
<https://ecpd.costartstrong.org/ets/welcome.aspx>

D. Differentiated Technical Assistance

- Technical assistance for programs serving young children through 3rd grade will be planned and delivered by staff and community partners with early childhood/early learning expertise.

Section 3 – Academic Assessment

Section 4 – Accountability, Support, and Improvement for Schools

4.3 State Support and Improvement for Low-performing Schools

B. Technical Assistance Regarding Evidence-Based Interventions

In building a strong foundation for learning, research and evidence demonstrate the essential role of a child’s earliest years.

- CDE’s P-3 Advisory Council will include a focus on support and improvement of low performing schools.
- CDE will recommend that districts and schools use an aligned preschool through third grade (P-3) early learning approach as a core school turnaround strategy.
- CDE will include early learning in the needs analysis for targeted and comprehensive support to elementary schools identified as low performing.
- Early learning and early literacy staff will be included in the process of reviewing and monitoring LEA plans, and providing training to school and district staff.

Section 5 – Supporting Excellent Educators

Young children who are nurtured and taught by effective, caring and well-trained teachers are more likely to progress toward both developmental and academic goals. Strengthening and supporting all teachers and leaders is critical to student success in preschool through 3rd grade and will provide lasting impacts throughout students’ lifetime of learning. In our efforts to support excellent educators, CDE will:

- Fully include early childhood licensed educators in educator licensing supports, talent development and recruitment programs.
- Support training, and other opportunities, for teachers, principals, other school leaders, paraprofessionals, early childhood education program directors, and other early childhood

education program providers to participate in joint efforts to address the transition to elementary school, including issues related to school readiness.

- Use a portion of the 3% set aside for professional development to build capacity of PreK-3rd grade educator, administrators and other school leaders consistent with early learning best practices.
- Establish an ESSA Early Learning Work Group internal to CDE to ensure coherence across state and federally funded early childhood programs. The work group will include members representing teams from across the department, such as: Unit of Federal Programs Administration, Office of Early Learning and School Readiness, Office of Learning Supports, Exceptional Student Services Unit, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Education Office, State Library, School and District Performance.
- Provide information on the educator competencies required to identify and fully include students with specific learning needs and provide instruction based on developmentally appropriate practices for children in preschool through 3rd grade.
- Track and support the alignment of our two- and four-year early childhood preparation programs with Colorado's Early Childhood Competencies for educators and administrators (P-3).
- CDE will work with Higher Education partners to support elementary educator and school leadership (principal and superintendent) preparation programs to include training on early learning and child development.

Section 6 – Supporting All Students

6.1 Well-Rounded and Supportive Education for Students

A. The State's strategies and how it will support LEAs to support the continuum of a student's education from preschool through grade 12, including transitions from early childhood education to elementary school, elementary school to middle school, middle school to high school, and high school to post-secondary education and careers, in order to support appropriate promotion practices and decrease the risk of students dropping out; and

Research and evidence point to the importance of a child's earliest years in building a strong foundation for learning. High quality early learning experiences provide a lifetime of benefits. Colorado has a long history of embracing the importance of early learning and has developed a strong foundation supporting the growth of a P-3 system. CDE's commitment to supporting education for all students is built on this foundation. Some of the major successes include:

- Alignment of organizational structure with CDE's Division of Student Learning to promote greater alignment of programs and services for students across the P – 12 system with a focus on P – 3. The division includes the Teaching and Learning Unit (including the Office of Early Learning and School Readiness, Office of Literacy, Office of Learning Supports, and Office of Standards and Instructional Support), the Unit of Federal Programs Administration, and the Exceptional Students Service Unit. Aligning the work across these offices will provide greater coherence in policies across the P – 3 continuum.
- Expansion of Colorado Preschool Program (CPP). CPP is a state funded preschool program serving children with risk factors in their lives which have been shown to be associated with later challenges in school. It started 28 years ago as a small project

and now serving more than 26,000 children.

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cpp/2017legreport>

- Colorado's Early Childhood Leadership Commission. The work of the Commission has led to the development of Colorado's Early Learning and Development Guidelines <https://www.cde.state.co.us/early/eldgs>, the Early Childhood Colorado Framework, <http://earlychildhoodframework.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/ECLC-FRMWRK-062415-LORES.pdf>, and Colorado's Early Learning Professional Development System Plan, <https://www.cde.state.co.us/early/copdplan>.
- Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) Office of Early Childhood (OEC). This office brought together numerous programs from health and human services. The work of OEC includes the Child Care Assistance Program, Head Start Collaboration, and Family Resource Centers. <http://www.coloradoofficeofearlychildhood.com/>.
- CDE and CDHS have had interagency agreements for 25 years. These agreements focus primarily on implementation of the Child Care and Development Block Grant and the Race to the Top, Early Learning Challenge Grant. Results of this partnership include:
 - Colorado Shines – Colorado's new Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), a new rating system for early childhood education programs. Colorado Shines links quality assessment to child care licensing. <http://coloradoshines.force.com/ColoradoShines>
 - Colorado's Professional Development Information System (PDIS) <https://ecpd.costartstrong.org/ets/welcome.aspx> The Professional Development Information System (PDIS) is a competency based online system supporting professional development and career pathways for Colorado's early childhood workforce. The PDIS is used to review and award an individual's Colorado Early Childhood Professional Credential, to provide high quality online professional development and to support career growth and development.
 - Colorado Early Childhood Councils and the Early Childhood Councils Leadership Alliance (ECCLA) – The Early Childhood Councils are local community collaborative organizations including key stakeholders representing health, education, human services, and numerous other community partners. The Councils consolidate their expertise and resources to support an aligned system of programs and services for children from birth through age eight, and their families. ECCLA is a statewide network of Council leadership and other resources. <https://www.coloradononprofits.org/membership/nonprofit-member-directory/nonprofit/4588>
 - School Readiness – Kindergarten guidance/TA/training <http://www.cde.state.co.us/schoolreadiness> and P-3 approaches to learning <http://www.cde.state.co.us/early/p-3education>. Early Learning Challenge

grant funding provided support for a school readiness team at CDE, directly supporting two of CDE's four overarching goals – Start Strong, and Read by Third Grade. The work of this team includes:

- Training and technical assistance on child development and how it relates to early learning and early childhood assessment practices
- Development and distribution of the “Kindergarten School Readiness Guide”.
- The Ready Schools grant program. CDE's definition of school readiness addresses ready child, ready schools and ready communities. Funding was made available to help schools address learning environments, improve teaching practices, and access resources that increase their ability to support young learners.
- Support for P-3 approaches to learning including convening of the P-3 Leadership Cadre – principal lead teams from elementary schools interested in building a P-3 system.
- Working collaboratively with CDE's federal programs staff and others to identify ways to support early learning in Colorado's ESSA state plan, and to prepare guidance for school districts to consider as they complete their comprehensive applications and unified improvement plans.

As part of next steps CDE will:

- Ask districts to describe their existing plans and services for children transitioning into preschool, and transitioning from preschool into kindergarten, as part of the LEA's needs assessment.
- Provide guidance on developmentally appropriate assessment and teaching practices for children in preschool through 3rd grade. This will include resources and technical assistance on the use of Colorado's Early Learning and Development Guidelines.

B. The State's strategies and how it will support LEAs to provide equitable access to a well-rounded education and rigorous coursework in subjects in which female students, minority students, English learners, children with disabilities, or low-income students are underrepresented. Such subjects could include English, reading/language arts, writing, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, geography, computer science, music, career and technical education, health, or physical education.

Equitable access to a well-rounded education and rigorous coursework for our youngest learners requires deep knowledge and understanding of the essential domains of the

following; child development, content and standards, and instructional strategies. Academic and developmental learning must be balanced. Young children learn holistically. Physical, social and cognitive development happens simultaneously. Teaching practices must be responsive to developmental, individual and cultural variation.

Data from the Colorado Preschool Program and Preschool Special Education demonstrates the connection between academic and developmental domains. Assessment data is collected annually and reported to the Colorado General Assembly. These data show that learning gaps for our highest need children narrowed, and these gains continued throughout elementary school and beyond.

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cpp/2017legreport>

It is important that teachers and administrators understand that children from “underrepresented populations” have a greater chance of success if they have experienced high quality early learning. It is also important that preschool teachers (including those who work in community settings) are included in professional development, program planning, and data review at the school and district level.

D. Does the SEA intend to use funds from Title IV, Part A or other included programs to support strategies to support LEAs to **engage parents, families, and communities**?

Yes. If yes, provide a description below.

No.

A child’s early years provide a unique opportunity to help parents and families connect directly with their child’s school experience. As their child’s first and most important teacher, they are essential partners in facilitating their child’s success. CDE will continue to provide training and technical assistance for LEAs, suggesting strategies to engage parents, families, and communities, including the following:

- Establish family engagement as a priority throughout the P-3 years.
- Routinely include families in planning and developing materials.
- Incorporate meaningful family engagement into evaluations of district/school leaders and other educators.
- Support schools and community partners in providing professional development jointly for teachers and community early childhood educators, focused on family engagement.
- Identify and implement family engagement strategies in collaboration with early childhood educators.
- Develop and implement effective, ongoing and two-way communication practices.