



# UNIVERSITY *of* DENVER

## COLORADO EVALUATION AND ACTION LAB

### Colorado Lab Newsletter

April 2022

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### Building Evidence with COVID Recovery Stimulus Funds

Over the past two years, Congress has approved trillions of dollars in funding to support recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of these resources are being distributed by states with the aim of addressing education, economic, social, and health hardships and creating sustainable innovations to address long-standing racial and economic inequities that the pandemic exacerbated. This month's newsletter highlights some of the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab's (Colorado Lab) work with the Governor's Office, state agencies, and other partners like school districts, charter schools, and higher education institutions to guide the effective use of these stimulus funds.

### Learning from ARPA Investments



Through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA), the federal government provided \$3.8 billion to Colorado in support of pandemic-related recovery efforts across health, education, economic development, housing, and other public sectors. The Colorado Lab is supporting the state in identifying opportunities to learn from these investments. The goal is for evaluation processes and findings to inform and advance each agency's immediate public benefit efforts and provide learnings to target future innovation and investments.

In meetings with agency and program leaders, the Colorado Lab is supporting creative thinking about evaluation strategies that meet short- and long-term agency needs as well as how to fund and execute those evaluations. A sampling of efforts we are partnering on includes:

- **Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing** - Developing a Theory of Change for ARPA investments and aligning reporting for grant programs to that conceptual framework.

- **Colorado Workforce Development Council** - Consulting on the development of an RFP for the Workforce Innovation Act Evaluation. *Check out this opportunity with an application deadline of May 9—posted on [VSS](#) and [Bidnet](#).*
- **Colorado Department of Human Services** - Designing a study that leverages cross-system data to inform strategies to identify and address disproportionality, equity, diversity, and inclusion in child welfare.
- **Colorado Department of Higher Education** - Developing an evaluation framework for the Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative (COSI), a program that has grown from \$6 million to \$90 million in just eight years. COSI addresses the Colorado Paradox—the high proportion of adults with college degrees being due to credentialed people moving to Colorado rather than reflecting an educated homegrown workforce.

The evaluation and [evidence-building](#) activities for ARPA investments are aligned with the decision-making goals of the Governor’s Office and state agencies, as well as cross-agency collaboration. Emphasis is being placed on:

- Maximizing actionability within and across projects;
- Building capacity within state government to sustain evaluation or performance management tracking beyond the ARPA investments; and
- Ensuring the burden on direct service providers is minimized.

In addition to advancing the efforts and capabilities of state agencies, these coordinated, cross-sector evaluation and evidence-building activities offer Colorado the unique opportunity to test drive the utility of this type of service. We hope to learn more about the extent to which:

- Facilitating trusted partnerships among the Governor’s Office, agency leadership, legislators, and independent researchers can advance collaborative, strategic decision-making guided by research;
- Using rigorous evidence informs the sustainability, scaling, and expansion of services to maximize the public benefit; and
- Providing guidance and support to tailor evidence-building activities supports innovation as well as proven practices.

The Colorado Lab is conducting this project in partnership with the Colorado Office of State Planning and Budgeting, with additional support provided by the Pew Charitable Trusts.

To learn more, please contact [Dr. Kristin Klopfenstein](#).

## Early Childhood Stimulus Funding Evaluation

The Office of Early Childhood (OEC) at the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) received a \$119 million increase in Child Care and Development Fund grant funding, authorized through the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act. The funds will be used to help support the recovery and growth of the child care industry. Additionally, OEC received over \$280 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds to support additional recovery efforts for the child care industry. CDHS’s spending priorities focus on strengthening and expanding the early childhood sector in Colorado to ensure all children have access to high quality child care.

OEC is partnering with the Colorado Lab to support evaluation planning of the stimulus-funded activities so the best possible evaluation strategies are pursued, including performance metrics, a Theory of Change, and recommended evaluation strategies best suited for stimulus-funded activities. The Colorado Lab will bring in key research and evaluation experts from across Colorado universities and research organizations to engage in this planning effort.



To learn more, please contact [Dr. Whitney LeBoeuf](#).

## Funds Approved to Implement OEC Data & Technology Plan

The Colorado Lab’s Director of Data Integration & Analytics, Dr. Whitney LeBoeuf, led a process last fall to develop an integrated knowledge-building strategy for Colorado’s new Department of Early Childhood. Based on recommendations in the Colorado Lab’s [report released in September 2021](#), the [Joint Technology Committee](#) has unanimously approved recommendations from the plan and authorized \$16.9 million to fund implementation. The goal is to ensure that data and technology solutions transform the family and provider experience from fragmentation to unification.

Please contact [Dr. Whitney LeBoeuf](#) to learn more.

## Supporting Centennial BOCES to Implement Project READY



[Centennial BOCES](#) (CBOCES), home to the state’s largest Migrant Education Program, provides educational services and opportunities to school districts across northern Colorado to support both small and large school districts in partnering on innovation. With funding support from the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Funds ([RISE](#)) and implementation support from the

Colorado Lab, CBOCES is addressing many of the pandemic-caused education, economic, social, and health challenges that have affected so many students, families, schools, and districts, especially in rural communities.

Through the creation of Project READY (Resources for Education and Development for Youth), CBOCES is taking a community-based, comprehensive response to building extended learning opportunities for migrant families. Their approach consists of three interconnected initiatives born out of community needs and centered on forming connections:

- **READY for Technology** partners with the Immigrant and Refugee Center of Northern Colorado to provide hot spots, computers, and training on technology skills and English language development to families in some of the most remote parts of northern Colorado where reliable internet access is limited.
- **READY for School** prepares immigrant and migrant children and their parents to be “preschool ready.” Graduate students at the University of Northern Colorado facilitate sessions to build early literacy skills among young children and families, and build parent-self efficacy among parents and guardians.
- **READY for Graduation** pairs first generation Colorado State University students with K-12 students in the Migrant Education Program to provide near-peer mentoring and social-emotional support across schools in northern Colorado, preparing young students to be ‘ready’ for college and career.

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Working with the Colorado Lab has been an amazing experience. I have really appreciated their professional insights, knowledge, and support for us to reflect on our project challenges and successes. Their staff is knowledgeable and makes it seem so simple to bring the projects all together and have a clear visual of our progress and where we need to go next in order to complete our projects successfully.

- Maria Castillo, Director, Northern Colorado Migrant Education Program

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The Colorado Lab supports CBOCES to sustain implementation of these efforts, including:

- identifying key program elements and intended outcomes,
- developing tools for data collection,
- identifying and troubleshooting barriers to implementation,



- integrating lessons learned into next steps, and
- examining data to make meaning of progress and celebrate successes.

CBOCES and the Colorado Lab are co-developing a brief on the processes and strategies used to cultivate effective community partnerships, highlighting the model of Project READY to bring together migrant education programs and local organizations to build robust programs that serve the community. A guide is also being co-developed, featuring an “organizing framework” to support ongoing implementation for the READY for School program. These resources and lessons learned through this innovative approach will be shared with stakeholders across the state later this year.

If you have questions, please contact [Dr. Lauren Gase](#) to learn more.

**Watch: Colorado’s Evidence Continuum**



A recording of the recent webinar on Colorado’s Evidence Continuum is now available for viewing ([watch recording](#)). Hosted by The Pew Charitable Trusts through its Results First initiative, the presentation explores how Colorado is incorporating research standards that support program evaluation, implementation, and impact. Colorado Lab Director Dr. Kristin Klopfenstein presented, together with experts from

Colorado’s Office of State Planning and Budgeting, legislative staff of the Joint Budget Committee, and members of the Colorado Evidence-based Policy Collaborative. Collectively, the panel of experts addressed:

- How state budget planners use research criteria embedded in an innovative tool called the “evidence continuum” to inform funding choices for effective public programs, and
- How collaboration across the executive and legislative branches, along with external stakeholders, have improved the evidence standards and are sustaining the continuum.

Pew’s new report, [Colorado’s ‘Evidence Continuum’ Promotes Efficient, Effective Public Programs](#), provides additional information. If you have questions or want to explore this further, please reach out to [Dr. Kristin Klopfenstein](#).

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