

## **Early Childhood Stimulus Evaluation: *Spotlight on Workforce Activities***

### **Background**

Between 2021 and 2022, the Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC) received over \$700 million in state and federal stimulus funding to strengthen and expand the early childhood (EC) sector in Colorado. CDEC is distributing stimulus funds between February 2022 and September 2024 based on feedback from over 2,300 child care providers, families, and other stakeholders.

CDEC is dedicated to evaluating the stimulus-funded activities to ensure the goals of the funds were met and to identify opportunities for ongoing learning, scalability, and sustainability. CDEC partnered with the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab (Colorado Lab) at the University of Denver to facilitate this complex work as the EC Evaluation Hub. The Colorado Lab is contracting with evaluation partners, as appropriate, to conduct high-quality evaluations of prioritized stimulus activities.

### **Evaluation of Workforce Activities**

Together with CDEC and EC experts, the Colorado Lab prioritized 18 activities - comprising about 90% of stimulus funds - that have significant potential for meaningful and actionable evaluation, including:

- **Recruitment & Retention Scholarship Program**
- **Free 101 and 103 coursework**
- **Child Development Associate (CDA) Support Specialist Program**
- **Apprenticeship Program**

All four activities target new and existing EC professionals in existing licensed programs to offer equitable qualification opportunities for professional advancement and growth. Evaluation efforts include:

- Understanding how programs were designed and implemented, including outreach and participation.
- Tracking performance metrics such as trends in program enrollment and completion, qualification levels, role advancement and compensation, workforce additions, and retention.
- Unearthing challenges, success factors, lessons learned, and promising grant uses to guide future investments.

The evaluation will include interviews with institutions of higher education, surveys with EC professionals participating in the workforce programs, and analysis of administrative data.

### **Evaluation Team**

The Colorado Lab selected Dr. Meg Franko to evaluate these stimulus-funded activities. Dr. Franko, who recently re-joined the Butler Institute for Families as Co-Director of Early Childhood Initiatives, has decades of experience studying the EC workforce and systems issues in Colorado and brings deep experience in the methodological areas needed for evaluation of EC workforce activities. She recently guided the CDEC's refreshed EC workforce strategic plan and is well-situated to ensure EC stimulus evaluation efforts are aligned and actionable with these broader strategic planning efforts.

This evaluation is being conducted on behalf of the State of Colorado Department of Early Childhood under the coordination of the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab to build evidence for stimulus-funded early childhood activities.