

## **Early Childhood Stimulus Evaluation:** *Spotlight on Intermediary Organization Support Activities*

### **Background**

Between 2021 and 2022, the Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC) received over \$700 million in federal and state 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 Intermediary Organization Supports**

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:

- **Substitute Pool Fund**
- **Family Child Care Home (FCCH) Navigator Program**
- **Availability and Outreach of Child Care (AOC) Navigator Program**
- **Staffed Family Child Care Home Network (SFCCN)**

All four activities are implemented by intermediary organizations between the state and EC providers. The Substitute Pool Fund aims to allow EC professionals to take paid time off and create a supportive work environment to retain a qualified and diverse workforce. The FCCH Navigator, AOC Navigator, and SFCCN activities are implemented via Early Childhood Councils to incentivize FCCHs to operate licensed EC programs, support FCCHs to improve business and quality, and support families in accessing available child care. Evaluation efforts include:

- Understanding how the activities were designed and implemented, with a focus on support provided.
- Tracking performance metrics such as trends in workforce additions and retention, child care slots, substitute hours/days utilized, and types of support utilized.
- Unearthing challenges, success factors, and lessons learned to guide future investments.

The evaluation will include interviews and surveys with child care providers, Early Childhood Councils, and Navigators, along with analyses of administrative data.

### **Evaluation Team**

The Colorado Lab selected Marzano Research to evaluate these stimulus-funded activities. Marzano has significant experience in EC program evaluation. The team is led by Dr. Carrie Germeroth who has expertise in EC development and learning with under-resourced populations and supported implementation of the Preschool Development Grant Plan. The Marzano team is coordinating with the Early Childhood Council Leadership Alliance (ECCLA) in their aligned evaluation efforts for the FCCH and AOC Navigator activities.

To ensure alignment, the Colorado Lab is also coordinating with Marzano on their evaluation related to the following stimulus-funded activities:

- **CIRCLE Grants**
- **Early Literacy & Family Engagement: Bright by Text**

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.