



Colorado Evaluation & Action Lab
UNIVERSITY OF DENVER

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► Project Include: Early Childhood Access through Adaptive Technology

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*with actionable insights,
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Center for Inclusive Design and Engineering (CIDE)
Project Include

Early Childhood Access through Adaptive Technology
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO DENVER | AURARIA CAMPUS



This brief represents evaluation work funded and managed outside of the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab's Early Childhood Evaluation Hub. Findings from this aligned evaluation do not necessarily reflect the contribution of stimulus funding.



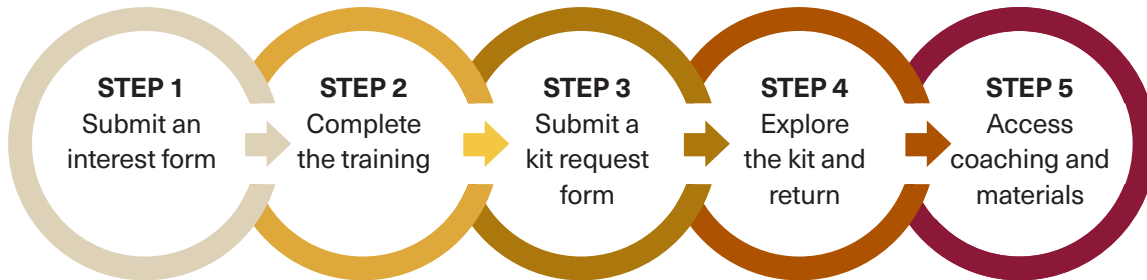
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Overview

The Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC) used federal and state stimulus funding to increase inclusivity and access for all children, provide more equitable and culturally relevant care, and continue investing in professional development opportunities through [Project Include](#). The [Colorado Birth Through Five Needs Assessment](#) found that 1 in 7 Colorado parents identified their child as having a delay, disability, or special need; of those, 34% indicated that their preferred child care provider was unable to accommodate their child. In addition, the [2022 Workforce Survey](#) found there is an opportunity to increase provider confidence to serve children with special learning needs. In response, Project Include scaled up a program piloted by the Preschool Development Grant (PDG) to all licensed providers in the state. The project began in October 2021, with training and deployment starting in Spring 2022. The Project Include website can be found at <https://bit.ly/picide>.



Project Include features a 5-step process in which providers can engage at their own pace.



Project Include supports [CDEC's strategic goal](#) #1 to ensure all families, regardless of background or circumstances, have equal access to Colorado's comprehensive system of early childhood services.

CDEC has engaged the [Center for Inclusive Design and Engineering \(CIDE\)](#) at the University of Colorado Denver to implement and evaluate Project Include. CDEC has also partnered with the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab (Colorado Lab) to coordinate the evaluation of stimulus-funded activities, and the Colorado Lab is reporting out on findings from CIDE's ongoing evaluation efforts to synthesize findings across stimulus evaluation activities.



What We Will Learn by the End of the Evaluation

- Reach and engagement in Project Include across Colorado.
- Satisfaction of participants.
- Effectiveness in changing care providers' understanding and comfort when including children with different abilities in their child care program.

This brief represents early insights from the initial phases of implementation and evaluation. Interim findings are communicated monthly to CDEC, and final findings will be delivered in Fall 2024.





Actionable Insights

- There is a high level of demand and engagement among providers across counties, child care settings, and populations served.
- There is a high level of satisfaction with materials and coaching provided, and providers view Project Include as a valuable professional development opportunity.
- Overburdened providers serving children with delays and disabilities need on-demand, digestible, and flexible support.
- Partnerships with local communities through the library courier system and local ECCs are essential to widespread availability throughout Colorado.

Evidence-Based Decision-Making

Evidence-Based Decision-Making (EBDM) recognizes that research evidence is not the only contributing factor to policy and budget decisions. EBDM is the intersection of the best available research evidence, community needs and implementation context, and decision-makers' expertise. Actionable insights across these domains are highlighted in the box above, with supporting evidence and additional information detailed for each in the sections that follow.



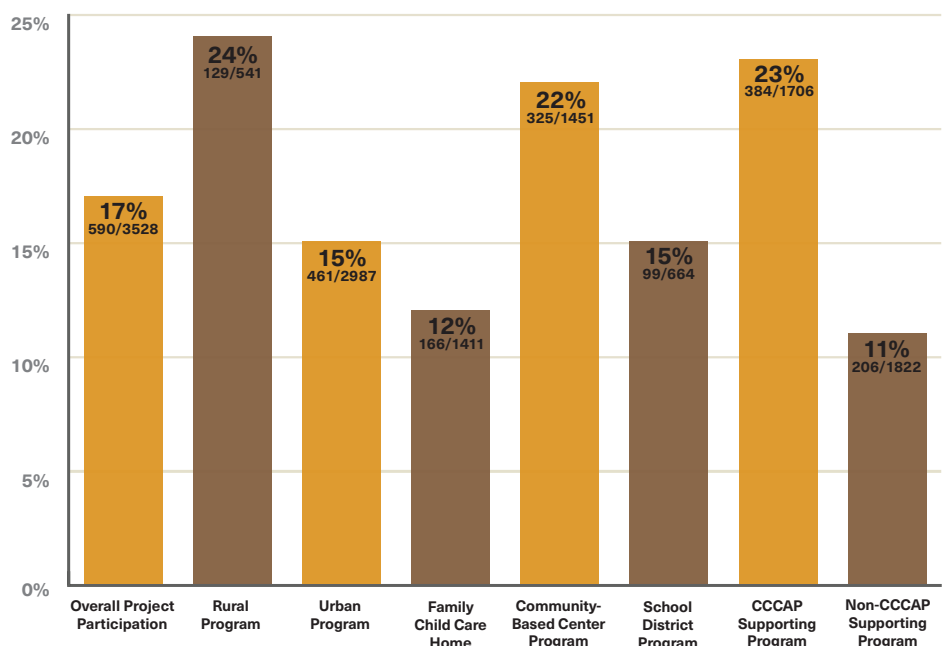
Best Available Research Evidence

Project Include builds on existing research that shows [inclusive classrooms are beneficial for all children](#). [Universal Design for Learning is a research-based model](#) that has shown improved outcomes for children. Data in this section come from project surveys collected to date.

There is a high and growing level of demand and engagement among providers across counties, child care settings, and populations served.

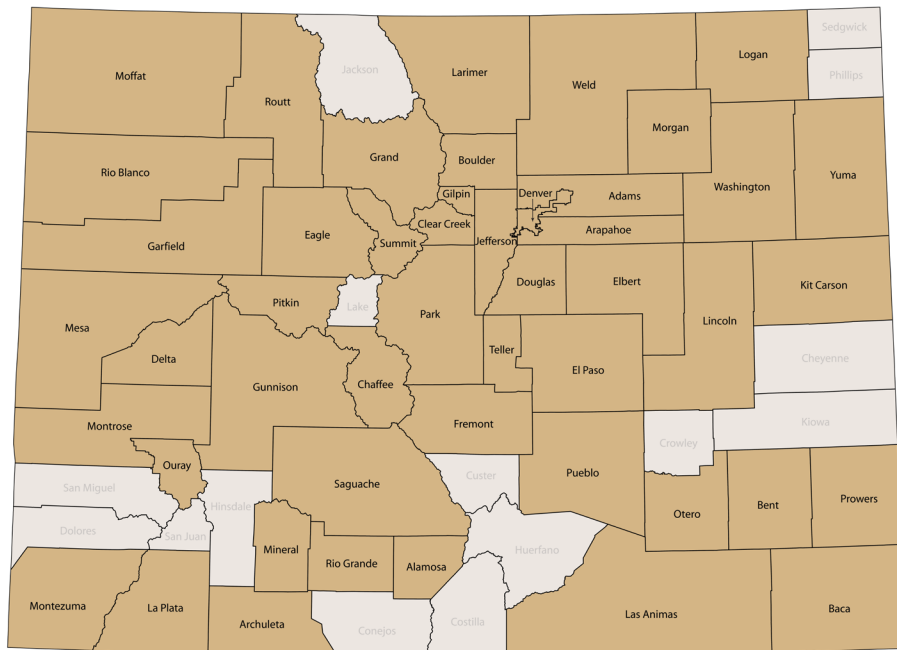
- Over 590 licensed providers have completed interest forms (17% of licensed providers). The highest interest was among rural (24%), CCCAP participating (23%), and community center-based (22%) providers (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Interest by provider type, as % of all licensed providers



- The program has engaged with providers in 49 counties (77%) that support over 35,000 children (Figure 2).
- More than 140 Universal Design and Inclusion Kits have been circulated for loan, reaching more than 7,000 children, approximately 12% of children estimated to be enrolled in childcare programs in Colorado (Table 1).
- Over 230 individuals have completed the introductory training course.
- Tutorial videos on implementing inclusive practices have been viewed nearly 1,700 times, indicating strong interest in the field.

Figure 2. Map of participating providers by county



There is a high level of satisfaction with materials and coaching provided, and providers view Project Include as a valuable professional development opportunity.

- Participants reported a high level of ability to accommodate various needs of children in their program. 98% of participants said they felt more confident supporting children with delays and disabilities.
- Over 90% of providers indicated they will use the knowledge gained from the introductory training either often or most days in their daily practice.
- Participants reported a high level of satisfaction (97%) with the Universal Design and Inclusion Kits. 100% of respondents said the items in the Universal Design and Inclusion Kits were beneficial to the children they serve.

Table 1. Populations served by participating providers

CCCAP	384
English Language or Dual Language Learners	271
Receiving preschool SPED services under an IEP	235
Colorado Preschool Program	149
Receiving EI Services under an IFSP	159
Early Head Start/Head Start	85
Migrant Head Start	19
None of the above	62
Other	8



I would recommend Project Include to any Early Childhood professional. The ability to have access to so many beneficial resources at no cost to the program, coaching specific to your classroom, and the additional step of materials that actually work for you and your students is a tremendous benefit.

- Participating Provider

- 100% of technical assistance participants were satisfied with the coaching and resources received. Providers found the content easy to acquire and immediately applicable. Providers are able to fulfill required professional development hours on a flexible schedule, with quick self-paced learning that is available online.
- Resources and professional development minimize the burden on providers of caring for children with a variety of needs.

Community Needs & Implementation Context

Data in this section come from meetings with the [Project Include team](#), composed of multidisciplinary professional expertise from CDEC and CIDE.

- Project Include is developing **procedures for replication**, with over 50 videos available on YouTube and kit flash drives with resource guides, additional resources, and adapted materials.
- Collaborations have been established with 16 of 35 **Early Childhood Councils (ECCs)** to support sustainable kit distribution, with partnerships with remaining ECCs planned for the coming year.
- Project Include partners with the **Colorado State Library interlibrary loan courier system** to distribute kits to local communities, which likely explains some of the success reaching rural communities.
- In response to demand, an **Infant Kit** that was not originally in the project plan is under development and will be available for loan before the end of this year.



I...thought this was going to be a one-time training on inclusion that was going to give me some strategies and resources that would be great in theory but I would struggle to implement... What my actual experience has been is the complete opposite!

- Participating Provider

Decision-Maker Expertise

Project Include team takeaways from the evidence compiled to date include:

Overburdened providers serving children with delays and disabilities need on-demand, digestible, and flexible support.

- Providers are desperate for support in serving children with delays and disabilities, but they are very challenged for time. They need on-demand, digestible content, with flexibility in the level and rate of learning to keep high levels of participation.



I saw children playing with dolls with different ethnic backgrounds and disabilities and developing empathy. I heard children say people can be different and that some people need help.

- Participating Provider

Partnerships with local communities through the library courier system and local ECCs are essential to sustainability.

- Partnerships with local communities through the library courier system and local ECCs are essential to success. Unfortunately, there are still areas of rural CO that have been challenging to reach, and the ECCs are burdened with too many responsibilities to own this project full time.
- Funding is necessary to continue to support the initial investment of kit creation and dissemination as well as coaching and technical assistance to ensure all Colorado children with delays, disabilities, and differences are included in their child care settings.



The OT [Occupational Therapist] was in my class and witnessed a boy with limited verbal abilities take a Talking Brix to a group of friends to ask if he could play. He pushed the button, the group responded to his request, and they all began to play together. The OT said out loud, 'That was the most beautiful thing I have ever seen! That was amazing!'

- Participating Provider



I have a child who is bilingual who did not talk much or interact with his peers in the fall. I started working with Project Include coaches in February to learn how to use different types of communication support. In April, he began to approach his peers to play with them, and I heard him use small phrases to communicate with them. What a rewarding experience!

- Participating Provider