Colorado Evaluation & Action Lab
UNIVERSITY OF DENVER

Colorado Lab Newsletter
March 2024

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LINC Project Publishing Opportunity (unfunded)

The Colorado Lab seeks a highly qualified research team to analyze data from an existing **Linked Information Network of Colorado** (LINC) project to determine the degree-attainment and labor-market effects of **Reverse Transfer**. This program allows students who transferred from a Colorado two-year institution to a four-year institution to combine credits and apply them toward an associate degree. Colorado Re-Engaged Initiative (CORE), enacted into law as part of House Bill 21-1330, expanded the reverse transfer program to the entire university population by allowing any four-year student to apply for an associate's degree after accumulating enough credit hours. Findings from the evaluation will help policymakers and higher education officials forecast the likely effects of CORE and adjust its implementation in order to maximize net benefits for students.

If interested, please email Val Henderson at **val@coloradolab.org** to learn more. Please note this is **NOT** a funded opportunity.

Interdisciplinary Representation for Parents Improves Outcomes in Complex Child Welfare Cases

The Office of Respondent Parents' Counsel (ORPC) issued a **press release** sharing findings of an independent evaluation conducted by the Colorado Lab. The **evaluation** shows that using an interdisciplinary team to serve parents with complex needs leads to greater success in their child welfare case. Colorado's ORPC is an independent state agency that provides legal advocacy for parents in dependency and neglect cases with the goal of protecting the fundamental right to parent.

Interdisciplinary representation pairs an attorney with a social worker or parent advocate to better serve families experiencing challenging circumstances such as substance use, homelessness, domestic violence, and previous child welfare involvement. Tailored support allows the attorney to focus on legal aspects of the case while other team members provide care and guidance to help set families up for success.

The evaluation used the **Linked Information Network of Colorado** to connect legal representation data from the ORPC to Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) child welfare data over a two-year period (cases closed in 2021 and 2022). The linked dataset provided a first-ever opportunity to use CDHS's child welfare data to measure outcomes for children and families with parent representation by the ORPC.

"To effectively support the well-being of children and families, our Office prioritizes evidence-based decision making. This is why an independent evaluation was a top priority," said Melissa Michaelis Thompson, ORPC Executive Director. "This evaluation tells us the use of an interdisciplinary team for families with complex cases helps to keep more kids safely with their family or kin, decreases the likelihood of further involvement in the child welfare system, and provides more equitable outcomes."

To learn more, please contact **Dr. Courtney Everson**.

Key Evaluation Findings
Among families with parent representation by the ORPC: • A majority of kids (60%) were safely kept with their parents during the case. • Most children (81.3%) were reunified with parents or family following their case. • Fewer families (2.84%) were re-involved with the child welfare system. • Parents of color (45%) and parents with disabilities (50%) were served at high rates.

Updated Glossary! Evidence-Based Decision Making

New terms have been added to the **Evidence-Based Decision Making (EBDM) Glossary**. This resource provides terms that promote a shared understanding of key EBDM concepts.

> **EBDM is the intersection of the best available research evidence, decision-makers' expertise, and community needs and implementation context. EBDM recognizes that research evidence is not the only contributing factor to decisions. Other equally important factors include resourcing, cultural values, community voice, and feasibility of implementation.**

The glossary is updated periodically. Definitions are based on literature reviews with input from subject-matter experts and practitioners. Newly-added terms address issues related to equity in research and evaluation, such as "disparity," and those related to research design, such as "mixed methods research."

Learn more about the Colorado Lab's facilitation of a commonly accepted vision for **Colorado's approach to EBDM in policymaking**, and check out our **EBDM blog series**. For additional information or to schedule a Colorado Lab-hosted EBDM 101 Learning & Dialogue Session, please contact **Dr. Courtney Everson**.

Simplify Language

State agency and research partners recently joined us for a workshop on simplifying language.

Building on a wealth of experience working with immigrants and English learners to communicate clearly, Lee Shainis developed the workshop to help nonprofits, government, and others communicate in a way that is easier for people to quickly understand. He walked our teams through a series of enlightening exercises to reduce text by 20-50% without changing content.

Lee emphasized the importance of approaching our communications with humility, recognizing that growth requires vulnerability and an openness to feedback. With that in mind, we humbly—and sincerely—invite you to let us know when our communications aren't clear.

We highly recommend this session and encourage you to join us in the journey to

Why It Is Important to Communicate Clearly *Simplify Language by Lee Shainis*

• Information overload means communications need to be brief.
• Jargon, idioms and overly wordy communications pose literacy and language barriers.
• When we don't understand, we might:
  • pretend to understand,
  • avoid and ignore, or
  • misinterpret.

simplify language! Learn more at **www.simplifylanguage.com** and reach out to Lee Shainis directly at **lee@simplifylanguage.com**.

The Colorado Lab, state agency and research partners took part in the Simplify Language workshop. We had great engagement, shared many aha! moments, and enjoyed learning together!

Welcome to Courtney Thornton

Courtney Thornton joins our team as a research and evaluation coordinator for the Early Childhood Evaluation Hub. She is passionate about elevating the voices of those directly impacted by policy decisions with the goal of increasing equity in Colorado.

Before joining the Colorado Lab, Courtney worked as a mixed methods researcher and project manager at Early Milestones Colorado where she supported projects in the early childhood workforce space. Courtney holds a BA and MA in Sociology as well as a certificate in Family Policy and Social Welfare from the University of Colorado Denver.

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