

Early Childhood Stimulus Evaluation: *Spotlight on Stabilization & Sustainability 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 Stabilization & Sustainability Grant 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:

- **Workforce Sustainability Grants**
- **Child Care Stabilization & New Provider Success Grants**
- **Stabilization Grant Family Financial Relief**

The Sustainability and Stabilization Grants target all licensed and qualified exempt child care providers, and Family Financial Relief targets families in participating child care programs. Sustainability Grants aim to support increased compensation and a supportive work environment for early childhood professionals to reduce turnover. Stabilization Grants aim to address revenue gaps so child care providers remain open and maintain availability of licensed care. Family Financial Relief aims to support families by reducing child care costs.

Evaluation efforts include:

- Understanding grant program implementation, including outreach, participation, and use of grant funds.
- Tracking performance metrics such as trends in workforce retention, wages, benefits, operating status, enrollment, tuition, and operational expenses.
- Unearthing challenges, success factors, lessons learned, and promising grant uses to inform future investments.

The evaluation will include interviews with state administrators, partners, and child care providers as well as analyses of administrative data.

Evaluation Team

The Colorado Lab selected the Butler Institute for Families at the University of Denver to evaluate these stimulus-funded activities. The Butler Institute team is an essential partner of CDEC in the Preschool Development Grant evaluation work and has contributed expertise to understanding the complexities of early childhood programs and systems in Colorado. Their systems-wide expertise will be critical for aligning the evaluation of these large-scale stimulus activities with broader early childhood efforts.

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

- **Business Training**
- **Access to Inclusive Care**

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.