

## **Early Childhood Stimulus Evaluation: *Spotlight on Child Care Expansion 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 Child Care Expansion 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:

- **Employer-Based Child Care Facilities**
- **Emerging & Expanding Grants**

Both activities involve expansion or creation of child care programs that require facility construction and significant program development. They aim to increase the availability of licensed EC programs for families in Colorado. The Employer-Based Child Care activity targets employers looking to build child care on site, and Emerging & Expanding Grants target existing licensed programs engaged in quality improvement efforts. Both activities used a competitive application process to select a small number of grantees, providing an opportunity to conduct an implementation study to develop a well-defined program model and identify promising practices. Evaluation efforts include:

- Understanding how the grant programs were designed and implemented, with a major focus on outreach and participation.
- Tracking performance metrics such as trends in costs, operating status, availability, and enrollment.
- Unearthing challenges, success factors, lessons learned, and promising grant uses to guide future investments.

The evaluation will include interviews with child care providers and employers, a social network analysis to understand system characteristics and relationships, and analyses of administrative data.

### **Evaluation Team**

The Colorado Lab selected Schultz Patel Evaluation to evaluate these two stimulus-funded activities. Schultz Patel Evaluation is founded by Dr. Maggie Schultz Patel who, together with Dr. Debbie Gowensmith, have nearly 30 years of experience conducting evaluations in program areas such as early childhood education, workforce development, and criminal justice, including evaluation projects for the former Office of Early Childhood and formative evaluations of new grant programs similar to these stimulus-funded activities.

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.