



Colorado Evaluation & Action Lab

UNIVERSITY OF DENVER

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- ▶ **Availability and Outreach of Child Care (AOC) Navigator Program**
- ▶ **Family Child Care Home (FCCH) Navigator Program**

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*with actionable insights,
synthesis, and editorial support
from the Colorado Lab*



This evaluation is being conducted on behalf of CDEC under the coordination of the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab's Early Childhood Evaluation Hub to build evidence for stimulus-funded early childhood activities.



Overview

The Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC) used federal and state stimulus funding to hire [Availability and Outreach of Child Care \(AOC\) Navigators](#) and [Family Child Care Home \(FCCH\) Navigators](#) within Early Childhood Councils (ECCs) across Colorado.



- **AOC Navigators** are designed to support parents seeking referrals for child care, and to work with providers to update real time data about open enrollment in the Colorado Shines provider search website.
- **FCCH Navigators** are designed to support FCCH providers across a range of needs such as becoming licensed to operate, navigating grant funding opportunities, offering staff healthcare benefits, and accessing the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).

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

CDEC partnered with the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab (Colorado Lab) to coordinate the evaluation of stimulus-funded activities. The Colorado Lab selected Marzano Research to evaluate the activities described above.



What We Will Learn by the End of the Evaluation

- The unique components that make up the AOC and FCCH Navigator programs and which responsibilities overlap in practice.
- Which of these components were most beneficial for child care providers and families seeking care to guide future program designs.
- Challenges in the implementation of these Navigator roles.

This brief represents early insights from the initial phases of evaluation work. Interim findings will be communicated in Spring 2024 and final findings will be delivered in Fall 2024.



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 below, with supporting evidence and additional information detailed for each in the sections that follow.





Actionable Insights

- There is potential value in combining the AOC and FCCH Navigator roles or to have a more generalized Navigator role in the future to meet the goals of both programs.
- Flexibility in funding to support Navigator staff and other resources is critical to meeting unique community needs.
- The Navigators help providers connect with other state systems like licensing, CCCAP, UPK, and early childhood workforce support, with Navigators supporting 139 FCCH providers to become licensed as of June 2023.
- There is wide variation in Navigator caseloads and intensity of engagement with providers.
- A remaining challenge for Navigators is recruiting new providers into the field.
- ECCs had difficulty hiring Navigators without pulling qualified professionals from licensed providers, leading to underspending for these Navigator roles.

Best Available Research Evidence

Data in this section come from program discovery work conducted by the evaluation team with CDEC stimulus program leads and monthly Navigator surveys conducted by the Early Childhood Council Leadership Alliance (ECCLA).

There is potential value in combining the AOC and FCCH Navigator roles or to have a more generalized Navigator role in the future to meet the goals of both programs. Early findings suggest that there is some overlap in activities performed between Navigators (Figure 1). While AOC Navigators seem to perform their intended child care resource and referral activities more frequently than FCCH Navigators, duplication does exist. This may also be because 13 Navigators (38% of 34 total respondents) serve both the AOC and FCCH Navigator role and separation of the responsibilities is artificial for those individuals. As funding for each role expires or is reduced, it will be important to understand the unique gaps the Navigator positions fill.

Flexibility in funding to support Navigator staff and other resources is critical to meeting unique community needs. Across ECCs, program funding has been used to support Navigator time and effort differently depending on total amount of funding received, how successfully they were able to hire a new staff member, or assignment of Navigator duties to existing staff where sensible.

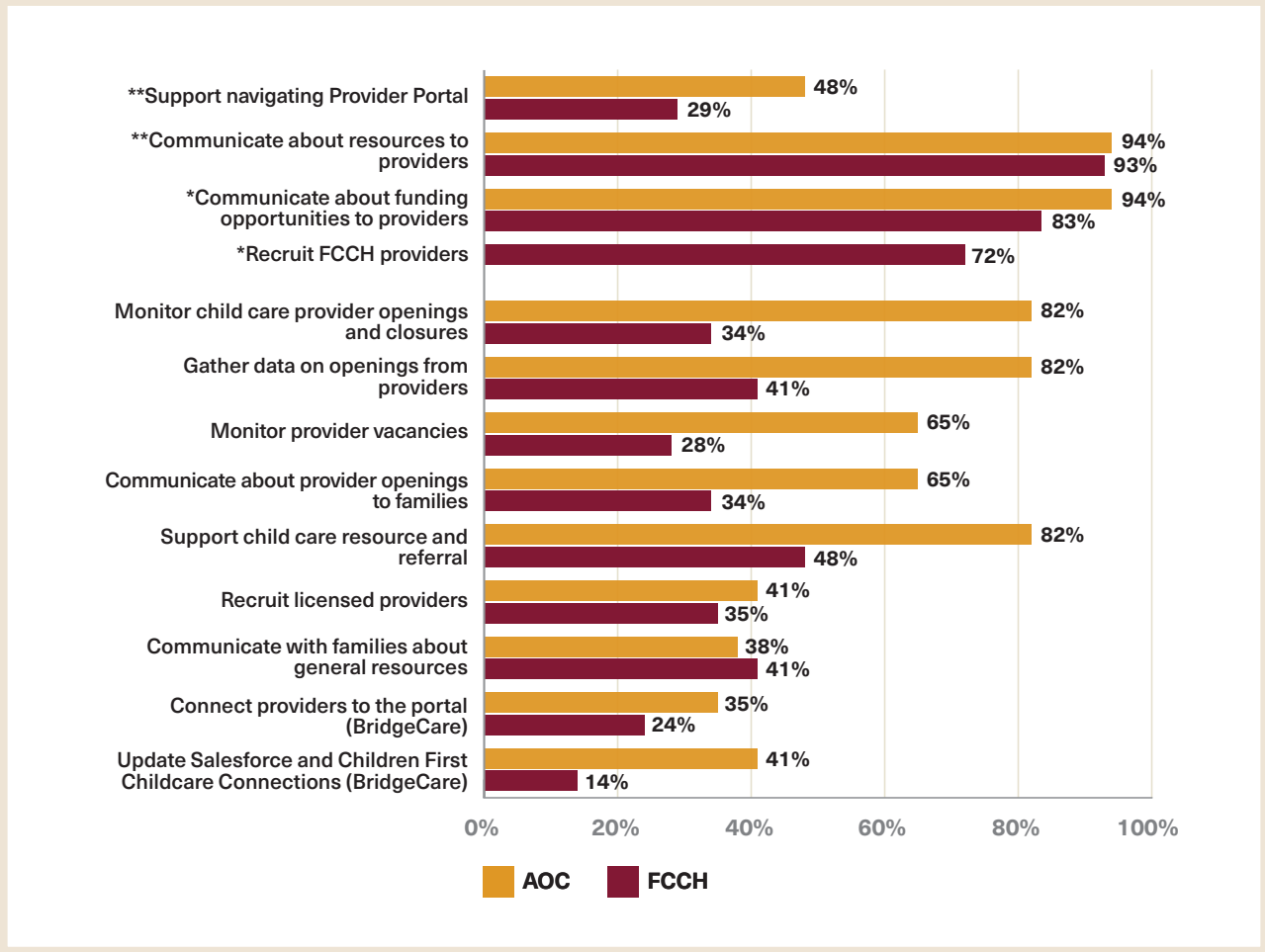
- Thirteen Navigators responding to the June monthly survey (38% of 34 total respondents) serve in both the FCCH and AOC Navigator role. Seven are employed part-time. Three are temporarily filling in until someone is hired permanently. Three are full-time.
- Five navigators serve only in the AOC Navigator role, and all are full-time.
- Sixteen Navigators serve only in the FCCH Navigator role, with 11 full-time and 5 part-time.



Our recruitment and support through the licensing process has created a strong relationship with providers before they are even fully licensed. Because they see us as a valuable support to their new business, they are showing up at monthly events and comfortable communicating needs and engaging with the FCCH community for support and connection. It has been really exciting to be a part of and definitely was not happening before I began this process.

- FCCH Navigator

Figure 1. AOC and FCCH Navigator activities performed, June 2023



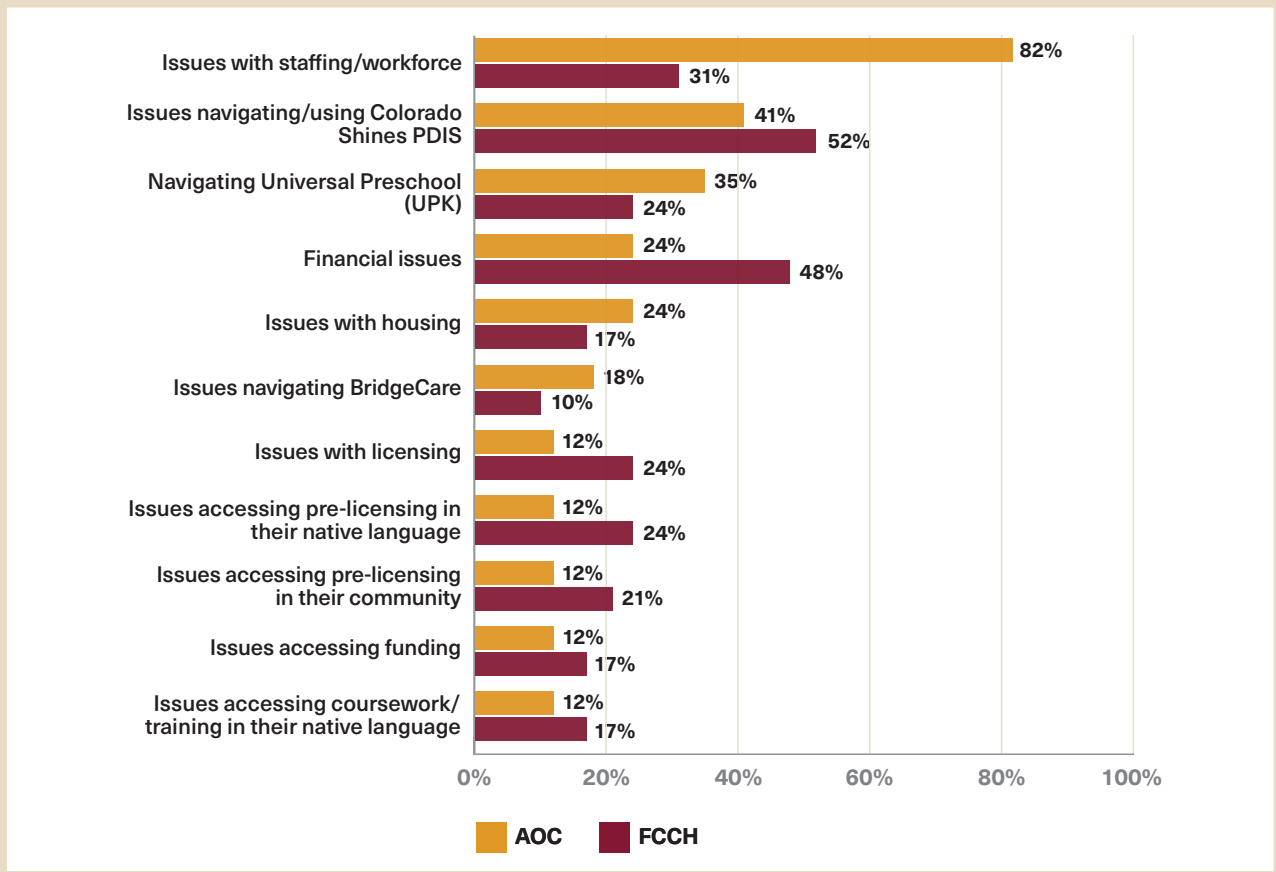
Note: *FCCH Navigator primary responsibility; ** Both FCCH and AOC Navigator responsibilities; AOC Navigators were not asked about recruiting FCCH providers on the June monthly survey.

The Navigators help providers connect with other state systems like licensing, CCCAP, UPK, and early childhood workforce support, with Navigators supporting 139 FCCH providers to become licensed as of June 2023. The Navigators’ regular contact and engagement with providers in a broad range of areas is hypothesized to have value for provider recruitment and retention. Navigators offer communication and relationship building between providers and many early childhood systems like licensing, the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP), the Universal Preschool Program (UPK), and the early childhood workforce’s Professional Development and Information System (PDIS) (Figure 2). As the early childhood system grows and becomes more complex, the importance of these Navigator roles will grow as well.

“They helped me with the steps to take, signing up for classes and zoning issues. I have been plugged into all the classes I need to be the best provider I can be and to become licensed. There are no changes, I feel this program has been very helpful. Yes, I would like to see the FFCH navigation assistance continued.”

- FCCH Provider

Figure 2. Provider challenges observed by Navigators, June 2023



Community Needs & Implementation Context

Data in this section come from meetings with CDEC program leads and ECCLA, as well as monthly Navigator surveys.

There is wide variation in Navigator caseloads and intensity of engagement with providers.

How ECCs utilize staff to match provider needs in a particular catchment area depends on the size and nature of the provider population. The number of licensed and pending licensed providers in catchment areas that Navigators report engaging with during the month of June varied greatly, ranging from 2 to 302 for AOC Navigators and 1 to 170 for FCCH Navigators (Table 1). Both AOC and FCCH Navigators noted challenges engaging with potential providers, with FCCH Navigators more frequently identifying language barriers as a challenge commonly faced.

Table 1. Sample comparison of ECC navigator engagement in two catchment areas, June 2023

| Council | # Licensed providers in catchment area | Navigator FTE structure | Navigator communication with providers | # Providers engaged in previous month |
|--------------------------------|--|---|--|--|
| ECC of Archuleta County | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 centers • 3 FCCH | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0.5 FTE AOC & FCCH combined | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email every 2 weeks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 centers • 2 FCCH |
| Denver’s ECC | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 468 centers • 82 FCCH | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 FTE AOC • 1 FTE FCCH | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily emails; calls every 2 weeks • Daily emails; daily calls | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14 centers • 8 FCCH |

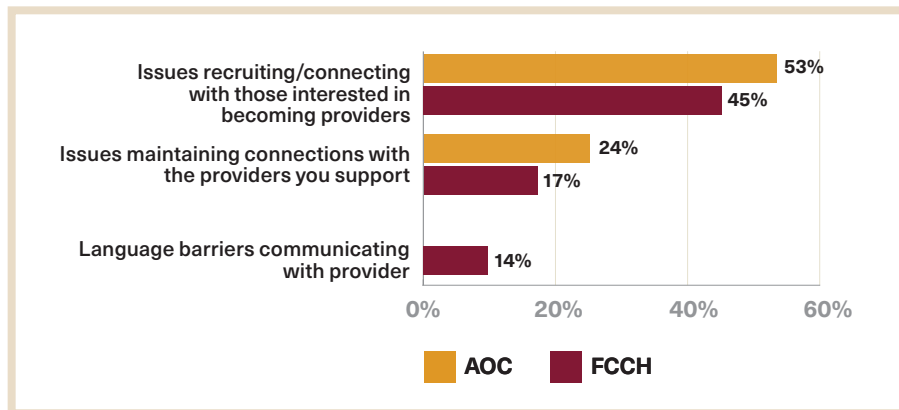


Consistent communication and positive relationships...have contributed to the success of the Navigator program in our area. Providers are comfortable and confident to reach out for assistance when needed.

- FCCH Navigator

A remaining challenge for Navigators is recruiting new providers into the field (Figure 3). This is a longstanding engagement challenge in the early childhood field, and early findings indicate that dedicated Navigators continue to struggle with recruiting new providers.

Figure 3. Most frequent Navigator challenges, June 2023



Decision-Maker Expertise

Data in this section come from meetings with CDEC stimulus program leads.

ECCs had difficulty hiring Navigators without pulling qualified professionals from licensed providers, leading to underspent funds for Navigators. Smaller ECCs report not hiring additional staff and are instead absorbing the Navigator roles into other positions. This may be because they are unable to find qualified individuals. Other ECCs report that they do not want to recruit qualified staff away from existing child care programs in their catchment area. CDEC program staff report that stimulus funding for these Navigator roles are very underspent as the funding solely covers salaries, while it is possible that there are other costs being absorbed by ECCs to fulfill the Navigator functions that are not related to salary alone.

The currently available data may under-represent the cost and coverage needs to sustain Navigator programming. CDEC program leads anticipate a critical loss of support for providers getting through the licensing process and the warm handoff to Licensing Specialists if underspending of funds puts these Navigators at risk for sustainability in the future. This work would inherently get absorbed by Licensing Specialists, and they do not have the bandwidth to provide the depth of support needed by many providers.