



Colorado Evaluation & Action Lab

UNIVERSITY OF DENVER

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bridge to the research community

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► Staffed Family Child Care Home (FCCH) Network

► Substitute Fund

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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 have intermediary organizations implement two activities: a [Staffed Family Child Care Home Network](#) (Network) and a [Substitute Fund](#).

- The Network is implemented through Early Childhood Councils (ECCs) in 3 pilot sites to support Family Child Care Homes (FCCHs) to operate licensed child care programs, improve business and quality, and support families in accessing available child care. This supports [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.
- The Substitute Fund is implemented by an intermediary organization to support Substitute Placement Agencies (SPAs) to place substitute early childhood teachers in the classroom so staff teachers can take time off for personal or professional development needs. This supports [CDEC's strategic goal](#) #2, to recruit, support, and retain highly competent, caring, and diverse professionals across early childhood care and education settings through cost reduction of substitutes.



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 core design components of the Network and Substitute Fund necessary for each to meet their intended purposes.
- How these two activities were implemented in the field and what helped or hindered the implementation process.
- The top needs of FCCH providers and early childhood teachers that were met by the Network and Substitute Fund, respectively.

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.





Actionable Insights

- Both the Network and Substitute Fund were slower to launch than other stimulus-funded activities in the CDEC portfolio.
- While the Network continues to roll out business training opportunities, there are other FCCH provider needs that could be met and incorporated into the evolving Network model.
- There is a strong desire from CDEC stimulus program leads to understand what the Network is accomplishing above and beyond what individual FCCH Navigators can do alone.
- It is important to understand whether the key program components currently envisioned for the Substitute Fund are the right ones to address the substitute shortage issue.

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

The Network and Substitute Fund do not yet have available research evidence as they had extended planning phases.

Community Needs & Implementation Context

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

Both the Network and Substitute Fund were slower to launch than other stimulus-funded activities in the CDEC portfolio.

- **Network Implementation Progress:** Thus far, the Network has implemented a train-the-trainer model in the All Our Kin (AOK) Business Series to support FCCH providers in implementing sustainable business practices so they can remain open and operating for the families they serve. FCCH Navigators at the 3 ECC pilot sites have successfully become AOK Business Series trainers, and CDEC has included a backup trainer at the state level in the case of turnover among FCCH Navigators. FCCH providers have limited access to computers and broadband to connect with AOK business training opportunities which led CDEC to seek fiscal approval to distribute 10 laptops along with the facilitation of access to free high-speed internet. Pilot sites are preparing to launch a Business Series cohort of FCCH providers. Relatedly, the CDEC has more broadly invested in a [Business Training activity](#) that connects Small Business Development Centers and ECCs to provide training courses and business

consultation to providers across the state, including FCCH providers. There are potentially [lessons learned from this project](#) that began in 2020 that can inform Network strategies.

- **Substitute Fund Implementation Progress:** The Substitute Fund has not yet been launched. CDEC released a Request for Proposals (RFP) in March 2023 to identify the intermediary organization for the Substitute Fund responsible supporting the SPAs to place and pay substitutes. The first RFP process was not successful, and a second RFP was released in June 2023. CDEC successfully selected Early Learning Ventures (ELV) in the second round to administer the Substitute Fund. CDEC is currently working with ELV to launch this activity in Spring 2024.

While the Network continues to roll out business training opportunities, there are other FCCH provider needs that could be met and incorporated into the evolving Network model. The Early Childhood Council Leadership Alliance (ECCLA) gathers monthly information from FCCH Navigators across Colorado about the types of support FCCH providers need from them. This rich source of information should be leveraged to continue shaping ways the Network can continue offering in-depth business support while also meeting top challenges faced by FCCH providers with a supportive community for them to feel less isolated.

It is important to understand whether the key program components currently envisioned for the Substitute Fund are the right ones to address the substitute shortage issue. A big motivation for the Substitute Fund is that CDEC observed substitute usage dropping during the pandemic, and the use of substitutes continues to remain low. Is it best to train new substitutes versus supporting retired teachers to remain engaged in the field through substitute positions? It is also not yet known whether the subsidy structure (e.g., offering stable hours, wages, and sign-on bonuses) of the Substitute Fund is motivating for all or only some of the individuals wanting to serve as substitutes. Fully understanding the root causes for the substitute shortage will have great value in improving the Substitute Fund model over time.

Decision-Maker Expertise

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

There is a strong desire from CDEC leadership to understand what the Network is accomplishing above and beyond what individual FCCH Navigators can do alone. CDEC is interested in understanding a sustainable path forward for the Network. To this end, the FCCH Navigator surveys collected monthly by ECCLA are a useful tool to identify value-add areas for the Network to respond with targeted supports.

CDEC program leads recognize that access to substitutes is critical in supporting the wellbeing of early childhood professionals as they allow for time off and professional learning opportunities. The current focus of the Substitute Fund is to make it easier to place substitutes and to offer financial incentives for potential substitutes to participate. CDEC program leads anticipate that there will be some extended funding through State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) for the Substitute Fund to continue, which could allow for improvements to the Substitute Fund model based on the learnings from the current evaluation.