



**ECPAC**  
EARLY CHILDHOOD  
PARTNERSHIP  
OF ADAMS COUNTY



DENVER'S EARLY  
CHILDHOOD COUNCIL



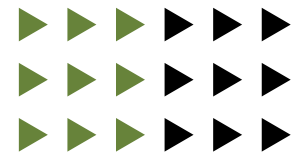
**Joint Initiatives**  
FOUNDATIONS



# EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR

CAREER NAVIGATION  
TOOLKIT

# INTRODUCTION



The purpose of this Toolkit is to share the process that three Colorado Early Childhood Councils ~ Denver Early Childhood Council, the Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County, and Joint Initiatives Alliance For Kids ~ completed in developing an Early Childhood Educator Career Navigation Model and to provide examples and tools that might be helpful for others to consider as they create this position in their community.

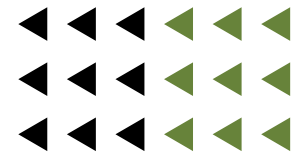
It is encouraged that communities spend time working with partners and ECE professionals to design career navigation programs that best meet the unique needs of the community. To that end - we have provided examples of how we designed a career navigation model with supporting documents for you to consider and adjust as needed to design yours! The process of going through each step was very beneficial.

**! Click on objects highlighted in green to read additional linked information!**





# INTRODUCTION



The first year of this project was funded through the Early Milestones Workforce Innovation Grant (2021-2022) with the second year funded through the CIRCLE (Community Innovation and Resilience for Care and Learning Equity) grants.

It is important to note that while some of the areas of this Toolkit may be valuable in and of themselves, the collective toolkit is designed to ensure that communities design and implement their career navigation model in the way that best supports the unique challenges and successes of their respective communities. Therefore, we encourage you to read the toolkit in its entirety and consider which links to supporting documents are most valuable to go deeper in your learning.



# OUR VALUES

## The Problem We Sought to Improve

We know there are not enough qualified professionals in the early care and education field. Compensation is lower than other sectors and the demands of the job can be high. This lack of workforce is causing programs to close classrooms, shift staff between rooms, and placing overall stress on the field.



Colorado already faces a dramatic shortage of at least thirty-nine thousand spots for infants and toddlers and is likely going to be further challenged by Universal Pre-K (Early Milestones COVID-19 EC Research Partnership). Unfortunately, there are overly complex systems to navigate for professionals who seek to become qualified as an early childhood teacher.

## Why We Felt This Was Important

Qualified professionals are critical for supporting children's overall physical and cognitive growth, as 90% of the brain development happens in the first five years of life. Infants and toddlers rely upon healthy relationships with caregivers. Through the provision of Universal Pre-K, equitable access will support more children to be ready for kindergarten. Furthermore, without early childhood educators, there is a shortage of available child care, which in turn challenges our economy because parents cannot rejoin the workforce. Further undue stress is placed upon working families.

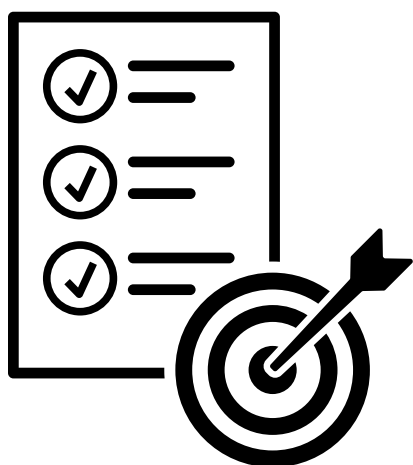


# OUR VALUES

## The Strategies We Employed

The three aforementioned Early Childhood Councils came together to develop a best practices career navigation model to both recruit new professionals to the field and to support those in the field to advance towards a higher level of qualification. This Collaborative:

- Developed a relationship-based career navigation model in collaboration with community partners, with guiding principles that can be replicated in different communities and respond to diverse cultural needs.
- Provided career navigation support to professionals entering or growing in the field of early childhood education.
- Demonstrated a proof of concept aligned with state priorities with data highlighting community needs, greatest barriers, effective supports, and promising practices. Identified and helped to address system complexities and policy barriers.



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*We would love your feedback on the usefulness of this toolkit and supporting resources provided. **SURVEY***



# GETTING STARTED

## THE PLANNING PHASE

Developing a career navigation model through a community driven process was important to this 3 Council Collaborative as a way to ensure what was developed met the community's needs and to honor the contribution of our community in being leaders in this field.

Additionally, the value of diversity, equity, and inclusion was intentionally considered in each phase of this process. Prior to starting the planning phase, each Council had a group of partners engaged in supporting overall ECE workforce issues. "Partner groups" included:

- The El Paso County Workforce Task Force working groups includes ECE providers, the Workforce Development Center, Pikes Peak Community Foundation, School Districts, Pikes Peak Community College, and the University of Colorado Colorado Springs.
- Denver Human Services SNAP to Success, Denver Economic Development and Opportunity (DEDO) Workforce Services, Denver Public Schools Career and College Success, Denver Director Equity and Advocacy Group, Empowering Communities Globally (ECG), and the Community College of Denver ECE Advisory Group.
- ECPAC's ECE Workforce Action Team, Schools Districts, Front Range Community College, Workforce and Business Center, ECE providers, and the Child and Family Support team (connects ECE providers to other resources).



## The Planning Phase

The Council Collaborative began the process of developing an early childhood educator career navigation model with a **Landscape Analysis**. The Collaborative was particularly interested in hearing from current ECE professionals and prospective professionals on what were the greatest barriers and greatest supports in helping them meet career goals and what would be most beneficial in the provision of career navigation. This input was provided through a survey (Summer 2021) which was filtered by demographics to determine any cultural differences to be considered as well as possible disparities. The survey questions can be found **HERE**. Focus groups were held specifically with ECE professionals already in the field to dive deeper into issues facing the workforce. Focus group questions can be found **HERE**.



In **determining outcomes** for our career navigation model, the survey and focus group results were analyzed both at individual community levels as well as a collaborative. The collaborative data provided themes to consider as we designed the common model components, while the individual community level data provided unique considerations to ensure responsiveness to community needs and resources, which were reviewed by the local individual council “partner groups.” Furthermore, the Council Collaborative received technical assistance by Mathematica, through the Early Milestones Workforce Innovation grant, who provided guidance on the development and analysis of the survey and focus groups as well as other resources.





## The Planning Phase

At the time of the 2021 survey, the following trends supported the design of the career navigation model:


Career navigator **roles and responsibilities** should respond to community needs by:

- Creating accessible career navigation services to address lack of time and schedule needs;
- Providing relationship-based and culturally responsive career navigation services;
- Gaining knowledge of state and local early childhood systems and community-specific career pathways;
- Developing materials to break down information into steps and offer individualized plans;
- Maintaining and develop strong community partnerships to facilitate connecting to resources

Early childhood educators need the following **supports** to enter, remain, or advance in the field:

- Financial opportunities, for example scholarships and incentives;
- Access to formal and informal supports, including coaching, advisors, mentors, families and friends;
- Mental health support;
- Access to information/resources to understand requirements and next steps.

Early childhood educators face the following **challenges** to enter, remain, or advance in the field:

- Low compensation/benefits;
  - Lack of respect and value for the profession/lack of professionalism;
  - Lack of time to complete professional development and collaborate with colleagues;
  - Access to technology and low confidence/competence with using technology.
- 

## The Planning Phase

The survey and focus group results, as well as discussions with local partners, were used by the Council Collaborative to develop **Guiding Principles and Values** to guide the design, implementation, and evaluation.

1. Provide relationship-based and culturally and linguistically responsive support.
2. Provide individuals with all options for pathways to help them make informed career decisions.
3. Co-develop individualized career plans.
4. Provide support in multiple formats to accommodate adult learning styles- i.e. both written and verbal support.
5. Collaborate with partners to reduce barriers to career entry and advancement (financial, health/well-being) and leverage existing career supports.
6. Engage the community/early childhood workforce to inform, design, and evaluate the career navigation model.
7. Integrate project with quality improvement efforts to strengthen the strong early childhood education system.
8. Engage in continuous quality improvement.

Based on the Roles and Responsibilities for the ECE Career Navigator and the Guiding Principles and Values, the following shared **Outcomes** were determined - keeping equity in mind as results are analyzed:

1. Increase the number of ECE professionals entering the field;
2. Increase the number of ECE professionals meeting career goals (towards advancement or otherwise);
3. Increase in career navigation participants' knowledge in how to meet career goals;
4. Increase in career navigation participants' confidence in meeting career goals;
5. Show progress on identified barriers for career navigation participants; and
6. Show progress on identified systemic barriers and policy solutions.

## The Planning Phase

Areas of focus and/or other outcomes specific to individual Councils based on community needs include:

- Use of gift cards to incentivize and reward individuals for meeting career goal milestones.
- Secure funding to support individuals experiencing hardships that prevent progress in career goals.
- Partner with local community colleges to collaborate on improved processes that support ECE providers' learning/progress
- Seek funding for the early childhood council to provide funds and scholarships to remove barriers locally.
- Create partnerships with local high schools and workforce business centers.
- Ensuring all materials were translated into commonly used languages.
- Partner with local community colleges to start a free Earn & Learn Model CDA+ Training.
- Create a Wages + Stages Workforce Program to support workforce recruitment, training and qualification support, and leadership development and support.
- Teacher Pipeline Building
  - Through sophisticated and targeted digital marketing outreach, new professionals will be recruited into the field of early childhood education, through the El Paso County workforce recruitment website, [www.buildmyeccareer.com](http://www.buildmyeccareer.com).
  - New professionals will be linked with the Early Childhood Career Navigator who will not only provide a relationship-based, culturally responsive intake process but will also determine goodness of fit for the field through You Science aptitude testing provided by the Pikes Peak Workforce Center.
  - Those professionals determined to have the aptitude to succeed in the field of early childhood will be linked with high quality programs in the community that have current openings and have agreed to following guiding principles of employee onboarding and workplace culture.
  - Each new professional will receive the community-designed toolkit "Early Childhood Education: Building Your Future Starts by Building Theirs" packed with information on the field of early childhood education, job-seeking strategies, interview guidance and information on how to find a great place of employment.



# START-UP OF ECE CAREER NAVIGATION SERVICES

Based on the roles and responsibilities identified during the Planning Phase - each Council developed **job descriptions**.

Once career navigators were hired, outreach for recruitment to the community to advertise became critical. Various forms of **outreach** were developed and have been used throughout the project. When possible, ECE professionals provided feedback on the messages included in the outreach messages.



Recruitment strategies focused on both those who may be interested in entering the field as well as those already in the field looking for support in meeting career goals. Outreach was geared towards those already in the ECE field and interested in meeting career goals and those who have not yet entered the field. Partners engaged for those potentially interested in entering the field included: High Schools, County Workforce Development Centers, Community Colleges, and partners as noted above from our committees, as well as internal staff such as ECE Coaches and Navigators. Word of mouth quickly became a successful strategy.

**Outreach** venues included:

- Social Media
- Flyers
- Events/Conferences
- Career Fairs

Several forms developed to support career navigation sessions:

- **Intake**
- **Session forms**

# ECE CAREER NAVIGATION RESOURCES

While there are many resources to support the career navigation process with a participant, several resources are used frequently.

The Council Collaborative as well as each individual Council developed materials to support participants in understanding the various **career pathways**. It is recognized that there are close to 50 possible career pathways and that navigating the requirements for each one can be daunting. It quickly became clear that even those who have been in the field for years struggled to navigate the various pathways and struggled to navigate them. The toolkit includes multiple examples of the materials developed to help explain the pathways and the various requirements.

The Colorado Department of Early Childhood Division of Early Care & Learning offers a **verification worksheet** to determine if a person qualifies as a teacher according to the State Rules & Regulations.

Recognizing the most common **career pathways**, the toolkit is broken down into:

- **High School Pathways**
  - The high school pathway to a career in Early Childhood Education (ECE) begins with your school district's Career and Technical Education (CTE) program. Availability of all high school programs varies by school district. Contact the high schools in your community to see what they offer. You can find good general information about concurrent enrollment at The Colorado Department of Education website **HERE**. The **career pathways folder** includes some examples of information on non-degree pathways as they exist as of the creation of this toolkit (March 2023).

## ECE Career Navigation Resources

- **Non-Degree Pathways**

- There are several non-degree pathways. The Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential is the most widely recognized credential in early childhood education in the U.S. The credential is awarded by the Council for Professional Recognition. Also, the Early Childhood Professional Credential 3.0 that is awarded by the Colorado Shines Professional Development Information System (PDIS). The **career pathways folder** includes some examples of information on non-degree pathways as they exist as of the creation of this toolkit (March 2023)

- **Degree Pathways**

- There are several degree pathways. Contact your local community or four year institution for program details. The **career pathways folder** includes some examples of information on non-degree pathways as they exist as of the creation of this toolkit (March 2023).

### Higher Education scholarships

Having up to date information on available funding for individuals to engage in any pathway that included higher education level courses was critical. You can The following are commonly used resources: **PDIS Scholarships Information, Financial Aid Opportunities for Early Childhood Educators, ECE Educator Stipends / Scholarships / Loan Forgiveness.**

### Other Career Navigation Resources:

There are other resources that the career navigators found to be helpful and can be found **HERE**.

### Family Child Care (FCCH) Home Resources:

Family child care homes are an important early care and education option. Local Family Child Care Associations are often places of support for the FCCH community as they provide trainings, monthly meetings, and support providers in operating a quality FCCH.



## ECE Career Navigation Resources

### Family Child Care (FCCH) Home Resources:

Many communities have access to a Family Childcare Home Navigator to support access to available program benefits and consultative support, provide technical assistance in completing applications for grants, and staying up-to-date on government changes that impact FCCH business. Many FCCH navigators work closely with licensing specialists to support individuals seeking to open a Family Child Care Home business, and can answer any questions before or after completing Pre-Licensing training.

While most ECE professionals requesting support from the career navigators worked in Center-based care, the FCCH providers working the career navigator often requested support with the Professional Development Information System (PDIS), as well as requesting and receiving hours of experience letters for their licensing specialists, connecting them with scholarships and CDA renewals.

### Supporting Professionals Job Search

The Career Navigator can assist with job search as well as providing resources of sites of local ECE positions. **HERE** are various resources and examples you can modify to fit the needs of your community including information on how to begin a work search, applying for a job, and the interview process.

### Wrap Around Supports

The Career Navigator supports providers on an individualized basis, including the identification of community resources to fulfill additional needs that may have an impact on meeting goals. This might include public assistance benefits, small loans, transportation, technology, food banks, and housing. Being aware of these types of resources is critical. Several online options exist - including 211 and [www.findhelp.org](http://www.findhelp.org).

# ECE CAREER NAVIGATION EVALUATION



Based on our determined outcomes identified during our Planning Phase, the Council Collaborative developed several mechanisms and timeframes for gathering data.

Through the **intake** process, we ask Career Navigation clients for information about themselves that we use in evaluating our programming. This information is useful both for the Career Navigator in their ongoing work with the client and for evaluation purposes that are used to inform continuous program improvement.

**Tracking** services provided include what type of support requested and received, number of sessions and hours each individual receives, barriers and how these were addressed, if a provider is new or returning to the field, progress on goal achievement.

A **Client Experience** survey is important so that your Navigator knows they are providing excellent service. The results can also be used to demonstrate the importance and effectiveness of the program to your Council and to potential funders.

Google Forms and Microsoft Forms are free survey **platforms**, but they both lack some of the more sophisticated question types and logic functions. A subscription to Microsoft 365 unlocks more features and an increased number of respondents for Microsoft Forms. There are many online survey platforms that allow a limited number of questions and respondents for each survey with a free account as well.

# ECE CAREER NAVIGATION SYSTEMS AND POLICY

The Council Collaborative recognized that while the delivery of career navigation for early childhood educators is critical to address the shortages of the workforce, addressing the systemic barriers and advancing policies is equally important to create a deeper impact and sustainable changes. Systemic barriers and policy improvements were considered at both state and local levels.

Partnerships to consider for working together to break down barriers include but are not limited to Early Childhood Education providers, the Workforce Development Center, Community Colleges and Universities and their Foundations, School Districts, Department of Human Services, Economic Development Departments, Organizations that support basic needs, and State Departments of Early Childhood and Higher Education, Department of Labor, and local Small Business Development Centers.

The collaborative provided **presentations** to raise awareness about and to align efforts around Career Navigation to the Early Childhood Council Leadership Alliance (ECCLA) as well as to several staff from the Office of Early Childhood - now the Department of Early Childhood. [LINK](#) to folder.

In terms of **policy** at the **state level**, relevant legislation in 2022 included: **HB22-1010 Early Childhood Educator Tax Credit**, and **SB2201213 Child Care Support Programs** and thus far in 2023: **HB23-1091 Continuation of the Child Care Tax Credit**. All three of these pieces of legislation had a direct impact on support for the ECE workforce.

Additionally at the state level, the Colorado Department of Education hosts a Community of Practice for Career Navigators. Contact **Jennifer** to learn more.



## ECE Career Navigation Systems and Policy

At the **local level**, most system and policy efforts to date have been related to supporting identified challenges and barriers for individual providers, with some need to work directly with community partners to adjust processes or make processes more clear.

Career Navigators and Supervisors collected information on experienced barriers monthly and these were discussed as a collaborative in regards to possible action.

Examples of barriers that Navigators helped problem solve included:

Common Barrier	Common Solution
Access to or ability to use technology	Funding for equipment and meeting in person
Preferred language other than English	Funding for interpretation and translation
Funding for ECE classes and trainings	Researching scholarships / grants to assist with the cost of ECE classes and trainings
PDIS system bugs	Provide tutorials for the navigation of the system. Direct clients to the Help Desk / Chat with Petey
Confusion navigating the community college system	Providing step by step instructions on how to apply to the college and share the tutorials that are provided by the college.

## ECE Career Navigation Systems and Policy

Common Barrier	Common Solution
Support in getting CDA certification	Consistent ongoing support to complete the certification.
Service delivery and communication	Relationship based work takes time and navigating of HOW to communicate (e.g., texting, phone calls, etc.). QR codes were helpful!
Lack of time to engage in professional development and career navigation supports	Meeting after hours; Support in finding substitutes
Scheduling appointments with the career navigator and the client does not show up	Provide Calendly options for the client to choose from. This eliminates the time on trying to schedule a time that works for both people.
Burnout	CN meets with the client bi-weekly to discuss reasons and provide encouragement and resources that pertain.

# OUR MISSION



Career Navigation work seeks to boost the early childhood workforce by attracting, developing, and supporting those who are enthusiastic about working with children by developing high-quality professionals in a field that is truly struggling. An increase in providers and staff would strengthen access to high-quality care, supporting the well-being of children and families in the community.

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*We would love your feedback on the usefulness of this toolkit and supporting resources provided. **SURVEY***