

# Colorado Early Childhood Councils Quarterly Report: SFY2010—Fourth Quarter



SFY2010, Fourth Quarter (April 1-June 30, 2010)

September 2010

## Does Place Matter?

What difference does location make when developing a local system of early childhood services? Is systems-building easier to accomplish in a small rural community because there are fewer stakeholders to coordinate? Or perhaps large urban areas have the advantage because they have easier access to a bigger pool of partners?

Since 2007, Colorado has had Early Childhood Councils that cover almost the entire state. Some Councils serve multiple mountain or high plains counties, with total young child populations (under 5 years) of less than 1,500 children. Others are in the state's most urban areas along the front range, addressing young child populations between 20,000 and 50,000 in a single county.

Do these population or geographic differences fundamentally change the work of developing a four-domain system of ser-

Region	Councils
High Plains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Childhood Council of Bent, Otero and Crowley Counties</li> <li>• Elbert County Early Childhood Council</li> <li>• Early Childhood Council of Huerfano and Las Animas Counties</li> <li>• Early Childhood Council of Logan, Phillips and Sedgewick Counties</li> <li>• Morgan County Early Childhood Council</li> <li>• Early Childhood Council of Yuma, Washington and Kit Carson Counties</li> </ul>
Metro Denver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County</li> <li>• Arapahoe County Early Childhood Council</li> <li>• Broomfield County Early Childhood Council</li> <li>• Denver Early Childhood Council</li> <li>• Douglas County Early Childhood Council</li> <li>• Triad Early Childhood Council (Jefferson, Clear Creek and Gilpin Counties)</li> </ul>
Mountains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chaffee County Early Childhood Council</li> <li>• Connections 4 Kids (Moffat and Rio Blanco Counties)</li> <li>• ECHO &amp; Family Center Early Childhood Council (Fremont County)</li> <li>• Early Childhood Council of Gunnison and Hinsdale Counties</li> <li>• Montelores Early Childhood Council (Montezuma and Delores Counties)</li> <li>• Teller/Park Early Childhood Council</li> <li>• Early Childhood Council of the San Luis Valley (Alamosa, Conejos, Cotilla, Mineral, Rio Grande and Saguache Counties)</li> </ul>
Rural Resort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bright Futures (Delta, Montrose, Ouray and San Miguel Counties)</li> <li>• Early Childhood Council of La Plata County</li> <li>• First Impressions (Routt County)</li> <li>• Rural Resort Region Early Childhood Council – Northeast Division (Summit and Grand Counties)</li> <li>• Rural Resort Region Early Childhood Council – Western Division (Eagle, Lake, Garfield and Pitkin Counties)</li> </ul>
Urban: Non-Metro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Childhood Council of Boulder County</li> <li>• Alliance for Kids (El Paso County)</li> <li>• Early Childhood Council of Larimer County</li> <li>• Mesa County Partnership for Children and Families</li> <li>• Pueblo Early Childhood Council</li> <li>• Promises for Children (Weld County)</li> </ul>

vices for young children and their families? For evaluation purposes, the State has

assigned Councils to geographic regions, which are

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Special points of interest:

### As of the fourth quarter:

- ALL 30 COUNCILS HAD STRATEGIC PLANS
- 27 COUNCILS HAD BY-LAWS AND OPERATING PRINCIPLES
- 24 EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCILS HAD PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS
- 16 COUNCILS HAD PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PLANS
- 7 COUNCILS HAD RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT PLANS

### Inside this issue:

DOES PLACE MATTER? **1**

AMERICAN RECOVERY AND REINVESTMENT ACT PROJECTS **4**

# Colorado Early Childhood Councils

## Does Place Matter? (continued)

(Continued from page 1)

reflected in the table on the front page.

These groupings reflect similarities in geography, population density and, in the case of “Rural Resort,” economic base. Taken together, they help facilitate the analysis of geographically-related trends among the 30 Councils.

To answer the question: “Does place matter?”, we looked at several indicators of Council functioning by regional grouping:

- Council membership (numbers, level of involvement and organizational authority)
- Strategic priorities (domain and functional focus)
- Physical characteristics (geographic size, number of young children, number of counties covered)

The results of this analysis show plenty of commonalities across Councils, regardless of place. But they also reveal some unique characteristics by “place.”

*Physical Characteristics:* Without question the most notable differences between Councils are their geographic and population features. The regional groupings that are

more rural (High Plains, Mountains and Rural/Resort) have larger geographic boundaries to navigate and smaller populations of young children. Generally, these regions also have more counties (and

related county offices and agencies) to coordinate.

Likewise, the more urban groupings have large populations of children, but relatively smaller boundaries and typically only single county structures.

Each of these physical and demographic realities has opportunities and challenges for Council work, some of which are detailed in the discussions below around Council membership and strategic priorities.

### Similarities

*Council Membership:* Regardless of regional grouping, Councils in each geographic category have all four domains represented in their membership. In addition, each regional category has more Early Learning representatives than membership from any other domain.

Mental Health membership

has the smallest representation of all domains across all regional groupings.

*Strategic Priorities:* Early Childhood Councils in all regional categories have more “cross-domain” priorities in their strategic plans than priorities focused on a particular domain. A “cross-domain” strategy is one that affects the entire local early childhood system, such as building partnerships or increasing public engagement in issues affecting young children.

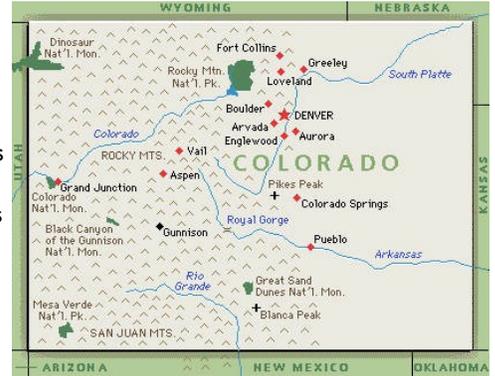
Interestingly, the most frequently cited strategic priorities by Councils across the state are:

- Impacting early childhood service quality and access; and
- Building and supporting partnerships

These priorities ranked in the top three across all regions.

### Regional Differences

*Council Membership:* Membership involvement levels and the ability of members to make decisions back at their home organizations varied by regional grouping. Of all



“IT HAS BEEN A TEAM EFFORT PULLING OUR THREE COUNTIES TOGETHER AND SEEING THE DIFFERENCES IN EACH OF THEM, BUT AT THE SAME TIME WE HAVE WORKED TOGETHER TO ACCOMPLISH POSITIVE STEPS IN ALL THREE COUNTIES .”

COUNCIL REPORTING ON LESSONS LEARNED

Region	Geographic Size (in square miles) 2000 Census	2007 Young Child Population (2009 Kids Count)	Number of Counties
High Plains	23,187	9,665	13
Metro Denver	4,306	190,174	8
Mountains	28,920	12,231	16
Rural Resort	17,701	21,879	12
Urban: Non-Metro	15,179	118,423	6

(Continued on page 3)

## Does Place Matter? (continued)

Region	Number of Council Members	Percent of Members "consistently or proactively" involved	Percent of Members with "moderate to complete" decision-making authority in their own organizations
High Plains	153	49%	63%
Metro Denver	156	67%	82%
Mountains	263	48%	70%
Rural Resort	130	63%	68%
Urban: Non-Metro	274	55%	69%

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the regional categories, members in the Metro Denver area are currently the most "consistently or proactively involved" (67% of members) and have the greatest ability to make decisions within their own organizations (82% of members). At present, the High Plains members have somewhat more limited decision-making authority and less consistent involvement (when compared to the other regional categories — see the table, above).

Domain representation on Councils also varied somewhat by regional category. As of the fourth quarter SFY 2010, the Rural/Resort category had the lowest representation from mental health partners (4% of membership), but the highest representation from "other" stakeholders (30%), including such partners as local elected officials, higher education, business and faith organizations.

The Metro Denver region had the highest Mental Health representation of all the regions, but theirs was still only 10% of their total membership numbers.

**Strategic Priorities:** A couple of interesting trends can be seen in the Council priorities when they are broken down by domain-focus. Councils that are part of more rural regional categories (Mountain, Rural/Resort, and High Plains) have relatively more priorities identified as "Family Support and Parent Education" (as a percentage of all their priorities) than do those Councils in urban regions (Urban: Non-Metro and Metro Denver).

The High Plains category, in particular, identified one-quarter of its priorities as addressing "Family Support and Parent Education." By comparison, the urban areas identified only 3-8% of their priorities as addressing this domain.

At the same time, the High Plains grouping is the only regional category that did not identify any of its priorities as addressing "Mental Health."

### Opportunities

Does place matter? Sometimes it does drive the shape of early childhood systems-building and the priority strategies a community will focus on. It may impact ex-

actly which stakeholders are available to sit at the table and what decisions they can make.

However, "place" does not change the core work of Councils. All Councils are still working to coordinate the services of the four domains into a seamless system for families and young children.

And there are some key learnings — and opportunities for strategic change across the state — that can support these efforts:

- All Councils have an opportunity to increase Mental Health representation and to continue balancing Early Learning domain representation with partners from other domains.
- Councils can also build on the strong work already being done around building partnerships and impacting quality and access by further growing use of systems building strategies such as changing policy, rethinking system funding, and calling for more shared accountability within the system.

**"IT IS MORE IMPORTANT TO HAVE A FEW OF THE RIGHT, COMMITTED PEOPLE SEATED ON THE COUNCIL, THAN AN IMPRESSIVE ROSTER OF PEOPLE WHO MAY NOT BE INVESTED OR INVOLVED."**

RESPONSE TO QUESTION ABOUT LESSONS LEARNED



## Show Me the Money: Councils' Use of ARRA Funds

“THROUGH ARRA FUNDS, THE COUNCIL HIRED A CONSULTANT TO WRITE GRANTS FOR OUR ONGOING WORK. AS A RESULT, WE RECEIVED OUR HIGHEST GRANT EVER.”

COUNCIL REPORTING ON ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In SFY 2010 (July 1, 2009-June 30, 2010), Colorado granted just over one million dollars in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds to Early Childhood Councils. This much-needed infusion of funds supported mostly one-time funding needs related to creating local early childhood systems that serve young children and their families.

Where did that money go? Almost half of the Early Childhood Councils across the state used some of their ARRA funds to upgrade their technological capacity. This included computer hardware and software up-

grades, as well as purchasing equipment to make “virtual” meetings possible for Councils that serve large geographic areas.

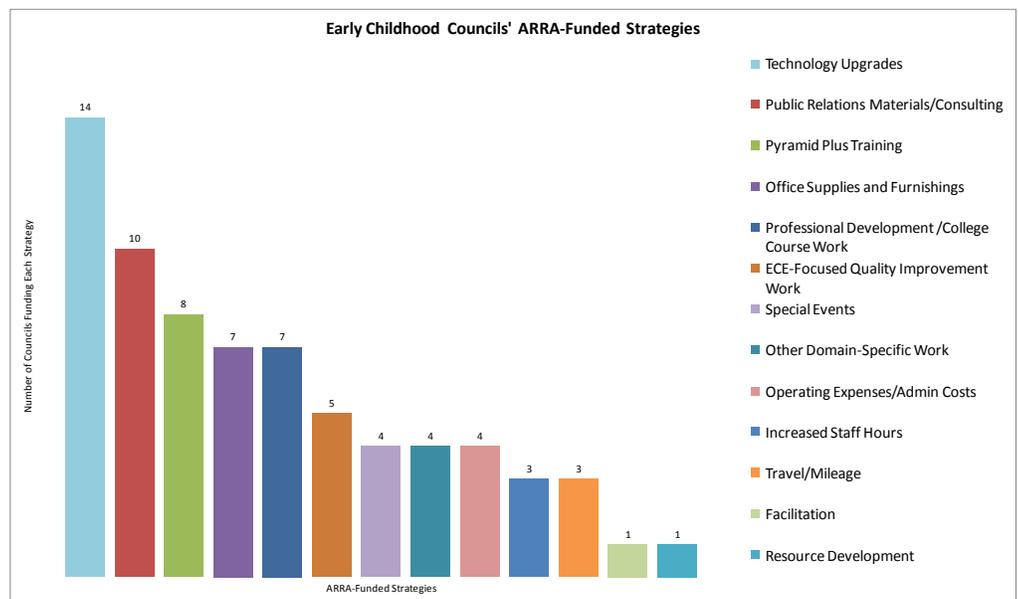
Approximately one third of the Councils invested in public engagement by updating outreach materials and/or contracting with a consultant to develop targeted public outreach strategies or to better define early childhood needs in the community.

When broken down by Councils' three primary functional roles, the use of ARRA funding reflected ongoing needs in the

Councils to simply support organizational capacity:

- Create Internal Capacity — 46%
- Build Foundations of a Local System— 20%
- Impact Services — 34%.

Funded priorities necessarily reflect the fact that the ARRA funds were only available for one year. As a result, Councils were careful to fund strategies that could be completed in one year or less and that did not need ongoing support.



“Councils by the Numbers,” a report of Council-specific data, is now available at: [www.cde.state.co.us/early/ECC.htm](http://www.cde.state.co.us/early/ECC.htm)

Colorado’s Early Childhood Councils integrate services delivered through a comprehensive early childhood system that includes quality care and education, family support, health and mental health programs. Authorizing legislation calls on the Councils “To develop and ultimately implement a comprehensive system of early childhood services to ensure the school readiness of children five years of age or younger.” (HB 07-1062)

The Early Childhood Councils program is funded by Child Care Development Block Grant/Child Care Development Funds and is administered at the state level by a partnership between the Colorado Department of Human Services and the Colorado Department of Education.