

# Colorado Early Childhood Councils Quarterly Report: SFY2011— Fourth Quarter



SFY2011, Fourth Quarter (April 1-June 30, 2011)

September 2011

## Understanding Systems Building

**W**hat does it mean for an Early Childhood Council to “build systems?” We throw this phrases around, but what does it *really* mean?

If you are a visual learner, the graphic below might be helpful. It is based on Julia Coffman’s 2007 report: *A Framework for Evaluating Systems Initiatives*, which has informed Colorado’s early childhood systems evaluation efforts via the Early Childhood Councils. According to Coffman, a system is made up of Components, Connections,

Context, Infrastructure and Scale.

**Components:** In the case of early childhood systems, components are the services and supports for young children that exist within the four domains of health, mental health, early learning, and family support. In the picture below, these are represented by the figures inside the **blue circle**.

When a Council partners with its members to identify ways to fill a service or program gap in the system, it is building the components of

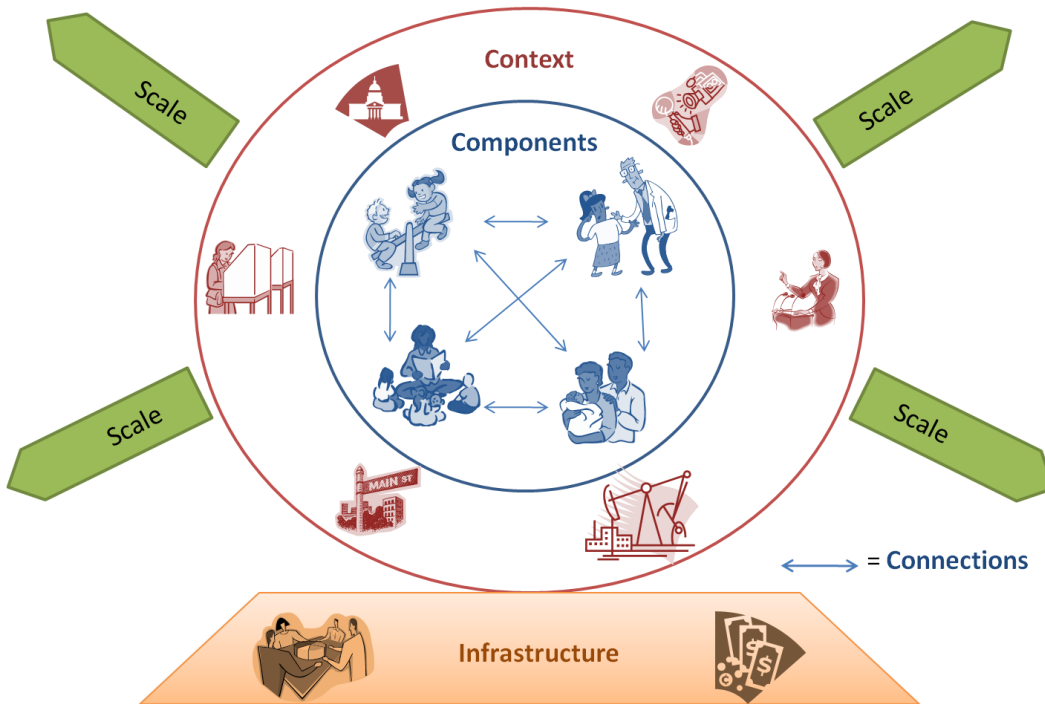
the system. Similarly when a Council works to improve the quality, efficiency, or reach of existing early childhood services in the community, it is also strengthening the components of the system.

**Connections:** Ideally, the different components within the system are working in concert to provide the best possible options to families. Within the local early childhood system,  
*(Continued on page 2)*



Early childhood collaboration in action in Larimer County.

## Coffman Systems Building Model



### Inside this issue:

<b>UNDERSTANDING SYSTEMS BUILDING</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>COUNCILS FOCUS ON 3 COMPONENTS...AND MORE</b>	<b>3</b>

# Colorado Early Childhood Councils

## Understanding Systems Building (continued)

(Continued from page 1)

connections refer to the linkages between system components, i.e., services and supports. In the graphic on the front page, the **blue arrows** represent connections between early childhood services and supports.

Early Childhood Councils build connections within and across the system when they:

- Develop shared goals among system partners,
- Coordinate programmatic activities across the system,
- Create shared standards or skill competencies across programs,
- Share data, or
- Align referrals.

When a Council creates connections, it is helping the system to operate more efficiently and making it more seamless for families to access.

**Context:** Early childhood programs and services do not operate in a vacuum, disconnected from broader community, state and national influences. Instead, the local early childhood system is impacted by

and can have an effect on the larger policy and funding context within which it operates.

In Colorado, Early Childhood Councils play a critical role in helping to

shape the context that surrounds the local services and supports. In the graphic on page one, the context of the early childhood system is represented by the **red circle**. It includes the policy environment — at all levels of government — where decisions about early childhood programs, services and supports are often made.

Context also includes the media portrayal of early childhood issues, as well as the public's understanding of and desire to make changes or improvements to the services and supports for young children.

**Infrastructure:** Of course, a seamless, high-quality early childhood system does not happen without structures to support it. The system needs an organizational and financial infrastructure on which it can rely. In the graphic, the infrastructure is shown as the **orange trapezoid** holding up the components, connections and context of the system.

Early Childhood Councils develop the infrastructure of the system when they create cross-system governance (e.g., bringing partners from different domains to the table to make joint decisions). Early Childhood Councils also create infrastructure when they leverage or braid funding and when they create mechanisms for system partners to share data.

**Scale:** The final element of a system, as described by the Coffman model, is scale. Scale refers to the breadth and depth of the system. That is, an early childhood system is broad when it serves as many young children as



Early dental health education in Grand County.

need services; it is deep when it serves children regardless of things like socio-economic status or developmental level. On the graphic, scale is represented by the **green tabs**.

When an Early Childhood Council testifies before local county commissioners on the benefits of raising Child Care Assistance Program eligibility, it is helping to expand and deepen the reach of the early childhood system. Likewise, when the Council forms partnerships with dental providers in geographically isolated parts of the community to provide needed oral screenings, it is expanding the reach of the early childhood system. That is, it is taking the system to scale.

The remainder of this issue explores examples of what some of Colorado's Early Childhood Councils are doing to build local systems, using the Coffman model to describe activities, successes and challenges.

For a complete description of this model of systems development, please visit the [Build Initiative's website](#).

**“FAMILIES CAN MAKE THE MOST EFFECTIVE USE OF RESOURCES, WHEN THE ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED ARE WORKING TOGETHER.”**

— TRIAD EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL



Former Governor Bill Ritter visited Hilltop Child & Family Center in Mesa County in 2010.

# SFY2011, Fourth Quarter (April 1-June 30, 2011)

## Councils Focus on Components ... and More

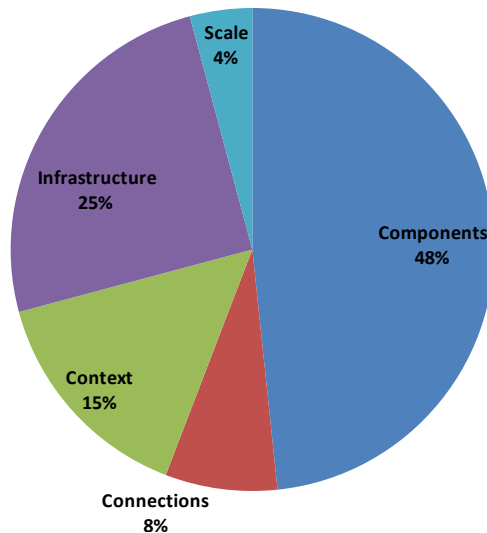
At the end of SFY2011, Colorado's Early Childhood Councils were spending the bulk of their energy on efforts to improve and/or increase the **components** of their local early childhood systems. Remember, early childhood system components include activities that establish or expand services available to young children and/or that improve the quality of those services.

Early Childhood Council component activities make up almost half of all reported priority goals. Within this category, goals generally fall into three main areas:

- **Professional development** of the early childhood workforce;
- **Quality improvement** and ratings supports for early learning providers; and
- **Parent education** offerings.

During SFY2011, 26 of the 30 Councils offered Expanding Quality for Infants and Toddlers trainings. In addition, many Councils also utilized School Readiness Quality Improvement funds to provide coaching to early

Council Priorities Coded by Coffman Systems-Building Categories as of April 2011



learning professionals at individual sites. Using leveraged funding, Councils also granted scholarship funds to providers who are pursuing college-level early childhood courses. Similarly, some Councils have begun offering specific trainings to support health and mental health objectives, e.g., Cavity Free at 3; Pyramid Plus.

Leveraged funding has also enabled Councils to focus on raising the quality of early learning environments in their communities. Typically, this takes the form of coaching providers through the ratings or accreditation process, providing mini-grants for ratings, and promoting the use of common early learning standards.

Early Childhood Council

**infrastructure** activities make up approximately 25% of their reported priority goals. Specifically, goals in this category include those that:

- Strengthen the **Council structure**;
- Improve **cross-system management** of plans, communication and data; and
- **Develop resources** for systems and component priorities.

What does infrastructure look like in practice? In El Paso County, the **Alliance for Kids** has been partnering with the regional Council of Governments to map child care capacity across the county. At the same time, they have been working with the local Resource and Referral agency to compile additional county-wide data on such issues as the child

“THANKS TO THE GROWTH IN ECE EDUCATION, WE NOW HAVE TEACHERS WHO ARE CAPABLE OF TEACHING CHALLENGING CHILDREN, IMPLEMENTING RESEARCH-BASED CURRICULA, USING APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENTS AND WORKING WITH OUR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS.”

— EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL OF SAN LUIS VALLEY

(Continued on page 4)



## Council Priorities in Action



Preschoolers enjoy the summer sun in Telluride, Colorado.

*(Continued from page 3)*

care workforce, service to military families and the capacity of the system to meet demand for quality services.

This example of a Council providing needed infrastructure for the early childhood system to collect and use data in decision making tangibly highlights the concrete value of the Council to the community.

The third largest category for Council priorities is **context**. According to the Coffman model, this area focuses on efforts to produce changes in policy, funding, and public will that are supportive of a strong

early childhood system of services.

Currently, Councils are primarily emphasizing public awareness and engagement. Councils across the state have strategic goals to increase awareness about early childhood issues and services which they accomplish through the use of websites, newspaper articles, community calendars, events, and policy forums.

For instance, this fiscal year the **Rural Resort Region—Northeast Council** (Summit and Grand Counties) planned two presentations by the Colorado Children’s Campaign on the findings of the Kids Count data. Their goal: “to raise public awareness and support for comprehensive early childhood issues” in both counties. Councils use this kind of forum to help raise the awareness of decision makers and stakeholders of issues that impact young children. Greater awareness, then, is intended to lead to an improved ability to make

policy, program and services changes to support young children and their families.

During SFY2011, a relatively smaller percent of identified Council strategies fell into the categories of **connection** or **scale**. These categories deal with creating linkages between system components and increasing the reach of available services.

In Delta, Montrose, San Miguel and Ouray Counties, **Bright Futures Early Childhood Council** is linking families to health insurance for their children. 22 local physicians have also adopted the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (a developmental screening tool) as a regular part of their well-child visits; a direct result of Council work. This serves a dual purpose of connecting early childhood services to each other and also making them easier for families to access.

By building system components, creating connections between services, providing an infrastructure, improving the public context or increasing scale, Early Childhood Councils across Colorado are pursuing goals that help to build the systems necessary to better serve families and children.

Visit us on the web 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 early learning, 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 initiative 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.