

# Strengthening Working Families Initiative Child Care Learning Community

2018-2019 CHRONICLE

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COMMUNITY  
**COLLEGE**  
of AURORA



**COLORADO**  
Department of Human Services



THE CIVIC CANOPY

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In July 2016, the Community College of Aurora and its project partners were awarded a \$3.9 million U.S. Department of Labor Strengthening Working Families Initiative grant designed to expand education and access to entry-level career pathways for working families in East Metro Denver. A key aspect of this project is to address the child care needs of working families as they seek to advance their education and career prospects through direct services and systemic policy, program and resource solutions. Gary Community Investments/The Piton Foundation is providing \$1 million in matching funds to support the Learning Community work as well as other child care-related project components. The Learning Community has met quarterly since its kick off in June 2017 focusing on the following outcomes:

- ⇒ Development of a more complete understanding of the current landscape of child care stakeholders and partnerships in the Denver-Adams-Arapahoe region.
- ⇒ Identification of barriers in the alignment of early childhood education, workforce and postsecondary systems.
- ⇒ Consideration of child care access solutions needed to promote parents' education and professional advancement.
- ⇒ Acknowledgement of system-wide challenges and prioritization of solutions through a two-generation approach which honors both parents' and children's well-being.

The Learning Community is facilitated by The Civic Canopy, informed by research conducted by The Bell Policy Center, and consists of partners inclusive of workforce, community college, human services, and early childhood education systems.

**Community College of Aurora & Community College of Denver join together to help parents access jobs in high-demand industries while addressing a common barrier parents face: child care.**

# The SWFI Learning Community Journey

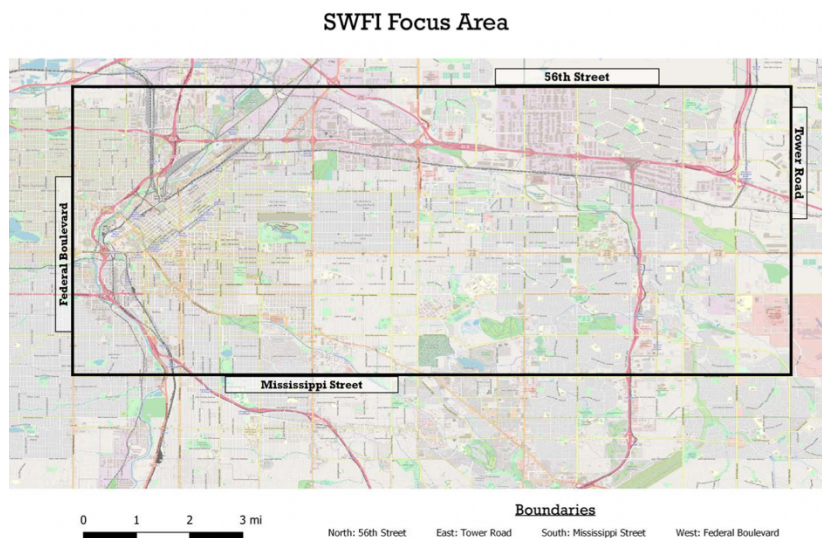
This report highlights the activities and progress of the SWFI Learning Community from July 2018-July 2019 and builds upon the foundation of a strong process and action planning, which took place in 2017-2018.<sup>1</sup>

While the first year of the SWFI Learning Community was heavily focused on creating a process and foundation for collaboration, the last year has been focused on taking action informed by the experiences of various players in the system, including parent students, formal and informal child care providers, Early Childhood Councils, and provider referral partners like community colleges and employers. The following report highlights key learnings and accomplishments of the Learning Community, as well as what is planned for its final year of formal collaboration, with the SWFI project concluding in June of 2020.

| Learning & Listening                                                                                                                            | Actions & Accomplishments                                                                                                                                                                    | Vehicles for Sustainability                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Student Parent Experiences</li> <li>○ Provider Experiences</li> <li>○ An Evolving Landscape</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Assessment of Shared Services Needs</li> <li>○ Policy Wins and Impacts</li> <li>○ Expanding Two-Gen Approaches in College Infrastructure</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Opportunities in Colorado’s Early Childhood Ecosystem</li> <li>○ Connecting with Statewide College System</li> </ul> |

## What We’ve Learned

The SWFI Learning Community spent the last year gathering and assessing information about the geographic area where SWFI is focused, along with the early childhood landscape in Colorado broadly, where there has been a lot of attention and movement around an array of child care-related issues. The group intentionally sought to hear from student parents enrolled in the SWFI program and formal and informal providers in the targeted geographic area.





## Student Parent Experiences

The SWFI project allows student parents at both Community College of Aurora and Community College of Denver to access supports including an onsite child care navigator, career advisor, and achievement coach to help them navigate the challenges of being a student parent. These services also support these students to be self-sufficient and more prepared to find jobs in high-demand and high-supply industries (i.e. health care, manufacturing, information and technology) so they can quickly enter the workforce upon graduation.

## Snapshot of SWFI Students and Support

- ⇒ 480 student parents have been involved in SWFI to-date across the two community colleges
- ⇒ 5 Achievement Coaches and 3 Child Care Navigators support SWFI students
- ⇒ 135 participants have graduated thus far and 83 of those students have gotten a job.
- ⇒ There are still approximately 100 students who remain engaged and are working on credential attainment goals.

Through focus groups with students conducted by The Bell Policy Center, along with a student panel at the SWFI Learning Community meeting in June of 2019, the group gained insights into the challenges and barriers students face in balancing school, family, and other needs, along with how SWFI has supported them in navigating these challenges. Being college students *and* parents with limited income, they are balancing a myriad of needs, resources, and systems for themselves and their children that aren't always easy to navigate.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about the background and history of the SWFI Learning Community, read the [2017-2018 report here](#).



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Key pressure points include:

- **Finding child care that can meet the needs of a complex schedule** where classes might be held in the evenings and where schedules vary from one semester to the next.
- **Accessing care for ad hoc needs.** For example, many students don't have the technology tools or space to complete their schoolwork at home, and therefore need to bring their children to libraries or to the school to study and complete online coursework or quizzes. Multiple students reported often needing to use ad hoc care from neighbors and friends to fill gaps.
- **Creating yet another child care plan for work once school work is complete.** The challenge of child care doesn't end with the completion of an academic program. Instead, the challenge shifts to finding a job that works with their family situation and care that will accommodate both.
- **Navigating multiple systems and programs simultaneously** can make balancing school, work, and parenthood overwhelming. Students expressed challenges with identifying, determining the relevancy of, and accessing services like the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP), Early Intervention, CHP+ and their corresponding systems.

**"Child care is just the biggest thing. I mean, being a single mom is the hardest thing you ever do I think, and you don't have anyone else to help." -SWFI Student**

SWFI students expressed how the SWFI program supported them to navigate these pressure points and be successful in school. Many students expressed the value of the moral support provided by the achievement coaches and child care navigators--that the encouragement and empathy alone helped them to keep going. Students also felt the help with navigating schedules and talking to professors was important, and while child care navigation and support was helpful, the lack of child care available during evening hours or for children with special needs remained a significant challenge.



“My Achievement Coach has been an emotional support and cheerleader because it has been very stressful going to school and having kids.” -SWFI Student

## Provider Experiences

One of the SWFI Learning Community’s focus areas is to explore the creation of a shared services model to address gaps in available care in areas with significant populations of low-income families that are considered child care deserts. The SWFI Economics Action Team commissioned Augenblick, Palaich and Associates to conduct a market research survey identifying barriers preventing child care providers from entering the market expanding their services to serve more children.<sup>2</sup> Through APA’s focus groups with both formal and informal providers, along with data on child care availability throughout the SWFI geographic area, the group learned a great deal, not only about the possibility of a shared services model in this area, but about the current pressure points around availability and expansion of child care. While there was significant common feedback across geographically dispersed communities (see more about the neighborhoods in the APA report), there were a lot of differences in ideas around expansion and growth between licensed and unlicensed providers. In fact, there was very little overlap in the experiences of these providers and thus, variation in perceptions of the feasibility for a shared services model across provider types.



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<sup>2</sup> Augenblick, Palaich and Associates. 2019. [\*Investigating the Need for a Shared Services Organization for Preschool Providers in Three Communities.\*](#)

## Snapshot of Findings from the APA Report

| Unlicensed Providers                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Licensed Providers                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Barriers to Expansion and Growth</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most of these providers did not express interest in becoming licensed due to cost, immigration status, discrimination, and language barriers.</li> <li>• Spanish-speaking and immigrant providers feel a lack of safety and security in their profession with a fear of being reported to law enforcement or licensing authorities.</li> <li>• These providers also had concerns about the cost of maintaining safe and engaging spaces for children in their care.</li> </ul>               | <p><b>Barriers to Expansion and Growth</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The biggest barriers for these providers were access to quality staff and limited physical space to accommodate growth.</li> <li>• The barrier of accessing quality staff is compounded a lack of funding to increase wages and benefits for staff, leading to high turnover.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <p><b>Interest in Shared Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These providers expressed concern over covering fees and costs to join a shared services model, even with potential cost savings in the longer term.</li> <li>• Many of these providers do not have access to a smartphone or a computer, limiting their options for shared services focused on online offerings.</li> <li>• There was interest in pooling referral services, but this desire was largely overshadowed by fear of government or intervention from regulatory entities.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Interest in Shared Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There was a significant interest in shared services among this group of providers, with the biggest interest around staffing.</li> <li>• A specific request that emerged from these providers was the desire for a substitute teacher pool.</li> <li>• Other supports for staffing included support in onboarding, credentialing, professional development, and benefits for staff. Additionally, there was interest in assistance in fundraising, special education, and accounting/tax, business, and director support.</li> </ul> |

## An Evolving Landscape

The last two years of the SWFI project have taken place within the context of rapidly changing political conditions in Colorado, including a new governor and increased collaborative efforts by early childhood partners across the state. What hasn't changed is the inequities that exist in SWFI communities--including lack of access to quality child care, but

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also poverty, a lack of supports for immigrant families, and the rising cost of housing and everyday basic needs for families.

- ⇒ A Changing Political Landscape: with a newly-elected governor who is highly supportive of early childhood issues, the SWFI Learning Community has been hopeful to see continued support in the policy arena for the expansion of care and investment in our youngest neighbors and their families. With Governor Polis' support and the subsequent passage of fully-funded full-day Kindergarten, SWFI hopes to see this investment continue, including a heavy focus on whole-child and family well-being with a two-generation focus.
- ⇒ Statewide Early Childhood Collaboration: Colorado has seen an increased investment in not only expanding access and availability of child care, but an increased focus on valuing the professionals who care for our children every day. With efforts like *Transforming the Workforce* and the Preschool Development Grant coming to Colorado, SWFI is eager to see increased investment in early childhood professionals in terms of pay, benefits, and increased support to provide the best care they can.
- ⇒ Two-Generation Collaboration: Thanks to national efforts through groups like the Aspen Institute and many Colorado partners, Colorado is seeing an increased focus on two-generation efforts, including engaging and serving children and the adults who care for them *together*. The positive outcomes thus far with the SWFI program have shown that the benefits of a two-generation approach in college settings has huge potential for ensuring the health and safety of young children while also ensuring their caregivers can access the training they need to enter the workforce ready to contribute.<sup>3</sup>
- ⇒ Rising Inequality: The *Shared Services* report found that almost every census tract in the SWFI geographic area is a child care desert. In fact, they found a gap of over 2,000 slots for licensed child care. Key barriers to growth of child care in these areas for providers are outlined in the section above. It is also worth pointing out the historical neglect and displacement leading to massive disparities in these

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<sup>3</sup> Find more research on the benefits of connecting early childhood and post-secondary systems from [the Aspen Institute](#).



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neighborhoods, where poverty rates are higher than in other areas of Denver, and many families accessing care are immigrant families who feel uncomfortable being connected to licensed settings and/or prefer to keep the care of young children in familial and informal settings.

## What We've Done and How We Will Sustain It

With one year left on the SWFI grant, Learning Community members are excited about the progress that has been made thus far, and are eager to continue advancing the work with an emphasis on sustainability strategies where the SWFI project elements become embedded in existing systems, processes and programs at collaborating institutions. The SWFI Learning Community has engaged in its work through three Action Teams which continuously meet to plan, strategize, and move the work forward.



### Child Care Economics Action Team

This Action Team has focused its work on commissioning the *APA Shared Services* report and pursuing the associated recommendations. The exploration of a potential shared services model in the SWFI geographic community emerged from conversations about ongoing barriers to access to care for families and the barriers for providers to expand. Shared services models have been implemented with success nationwide, including several models in Colorado.

This Action Team will focus on putting the *APA Shared Services* report into action in the SWFI geographic area and working collaboratively with other groups who are exploring or currently host programs or services that are envisioned for the shared services business. This group will also continue to explore connections with existing policy and early childhood investment efforts through the Preschool Development Grant and legislation being implemented related to family child care availability.

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## Policy Action Team

While SWFI efforts to support CCA and CCD students have demonstrated many successes, frustrations of student parents and providers in the SWFI geographic area are rooted in the challenges with a larger early childhood system that is broken. Providing child care navigation to student parents in a community with little available child care and limited resources to ensure the quality and consistency of care provides only a bandage to a much larger wound. Similarly, providers are working to expand capacity in an environment with limited resources, where early childhood professionals' salaries are not sufficient to meet basic needs. SWFI is eager to more deeply connect to and see the expansion of efforts to address these deeply systemic and policy barriers statewide.

The Policy Action Team tracked several bills which moved through the Colorado State Legislature during the 2019 session, including several tax credits benefiting families and child care providers. This team has also been active in following activity around the International Fire Code and the potential impacts for family child care homes across Colorado. With the International Building Code requirements including sprinkler systems, many family home providers feared the cost and potential closure of their businesses because of this new requirement. Arapahoe, Denver and Adams Counties have passed provisions that allow certain exemptions for family home providers, however the cities within these counties may or may not have passed such provisions. Outreach is needed on a community-by-community basis to ensure accurate information is shared. Finally, this Action Team worked closely with the Colorado Department of Human Service's Child Care Assistance team to look at implementation of past legislation for this program to consider whether counties are up-to-date on new rules and procedures. This work will continue in 2019-2020.



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## Child Care Awareness and Availability Action Team

This group's goal is to connect parents, students, and providers to increase awareness and availability of quality child care. Steps have been taken to ensure that not only SWFI and Community Colleges of Aurora and Denver (CCA/CCD) students are supported to find care, but also to inform the larger system of care navigation for families and providers.

The next phase of this group's work is to guide the creation of training and resource materials in coordination with Early Childhood Council of Adams County (ECPAC) and the support of the Aspen Institute for college advisors to take over child care resource navigation for student parents to assist them in finding and paying for child care. SWFI students have found this support valuable in helping them achieve their academic and professional goals; this team's efforts will ensure this support extends beyond June 2020. After scaling at CCA and CCD, the team will work with the Colorado Department of Higher Education to make the resource toolkit and approach to training advisors available to other post-secondary institutions in Colorado. SWFI believes that colleges can be a huge beneficiary of students having access to the support they need to thrive.

This group has also seen the Colorado Shines web platform, Colorado's quality rating and improvement system, as an opportunity to improve the experience of child care navigation for parents and providers. They are currently working to provide feedback and recommendations to the Colorado Department of Human Services to make the Colorado Shines website more accessible, along with key features it could include to meet the needs of student parents, like care provided during hours outside of a traditional work day.

## Other Vehicles of Sustainability

With a year left for this project, the SWFI Learning Community is already considering the impact of its work and how it can be sustained after the project concludes. There are key pieces of infrastructure SWFI has been able to build which will live on at CCA and CCD, along with being disseminated to the larger college system. The Action Teams and Learning Community are also working to connect and build relationships with key systems building efforts in Colorado which we believe can extend and grow efforts to support this work.

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### ***Building Early Childhood and Higher Education Partnerships as a Two Generation Approach***

The SWFI Learning Community is excited to see increased attention to the societal benefits of connecting the systems of early childhood and higher education, which have historically been siloed. Research is increasingly clear that these connections “represent a win-win-win strategy, which brings benefits to families, improves quality in the early childhood system, promotes college completion, and boosts community economic development.”<sup>4</sup> SWFI is connecting with The Aspen Institute, Two Generation partners at Colorado Department of Human Services, along with Colorado Department of Higher Education to continue conversations about how the SWFI project can offer best practices in student parent support.

### ***Statewide Initiatives with Potential for Impact***

SWFI plans to build relationships and plug into other efforts in the state which have the potential to make changes in the early childhood care and education system, including Colorado Shines Brighter through the Preschool Development Grant.<sup>5</sup> The group is eager to see a “no wrong door” approach to child care decrease barriers for families in finding and accessing care that meets their unique needs, building upon what has started with SWFI including the unique experiences of student parents as an important lens.

In addition, Colorado’s *Transforming the Workforce*<sup>6</sup> effort has a huge opportunity to support providers by increasing pay, access to professional development, and pathways to increase access to care for families. SWFI will stay connected to this work, including staying abreast of learnings and successes of communities across the state connected to this effort.

Lastly, the SWFI Learning Community has been excited to see policies focused on young children emerge as a priority for Governor Jared Polis’ office and is pleased to have Governor’s Office staff at the SWFI table. With the Governor’s Office focus on early

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<sup>4</sup> Gault B., Cruse L., Schumacher R. [Bridging Systems for Family Economic Mobility: Postsecondary and Early Education Partnerships](#). 2019. Institute for Women’s Policy Research.

<sup>5</sup> [Colorado Shines Brighter](#). 2019. Colorado Department of Human Services

<sup>6</sup> [Transforming the EC Workforce](#). 2019. Early Milestones Colorado.

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childhood, additional resources, streamlined regulations, and policy change seems increasingly possible.

To get connected to the Strengthening Working Families Initiative Network, [visit our page on Civic Network](#).

To join the email list or get more information, email [janel.highfill@cca Aurora.edu](mailto:janel.highfill@cca Aurora.edu).

