



Crafting an Early Childhood System for the 21st Century: A Technology Pathway for Colorado's Department of Early Childhood

By Kelly Pope and Louise Stoney

Major change is underway in Colorado. A new [Department of Early Childhood](#) (DEC), led by Dr. Lisa Roy, was recently established, and is quickly preparing for launch of Universal Preschool in the 2023-24 school year. Additionally, the new agency was designed as a 'one stop shop' to consolidate or align myriad early childhood programs previously spread across multiple agencies with different guidelines and funding, a complex system that is not only difficult for families to navigate but fails to offer service providers the funding and support needed to deliver top quality services.

The idea that gave birth to DEC is both simple and bold. Execution, however, is complex and will require a host of policy changes as well as state-of-the-art technology. Opportunities Exchange was engaged to help DEC staff think deeply about technology; identify needs, survey stakeholders, and craft a path forward.

Colorado, like most states, has historically collected child care data via paper reports or siloed electronic systems that require manual data entry. However, modern technology makes it possible to gather data via **transactional tracking**. In other words, each time a family searches for care or enrolls their child in early care and education (ECE), data on that transaction can be collected; each day a child enters or leaves an ECE program, data on attendance can be collected; and so forth. Collecting data via transactions is not only more reliable but much less time-consuming for everyone—consumers, providers, and government. And when the myriad public and private entities that fund, regulate, oversee, evaluate or plan ECE programs use the same data elements and automated systems, a coordinated **ECE Ecosystem** becomes possible.

Child Care Management Systems (CCMS), which are typically delivered as off-the-shelf applications with brand names like ProCare, Brightwheel, Alliance CORE, PowerSchool, and so forth, can enable transactional data collection in ECE. Thus, a first step was to learn more about CCMS use in Colorado, via a survey that was sent to all regulated early care and education programs in the state to determine how many of them currently use CCMS (or other) technology, which products are most typically used, and for what purpose. Survey results indicated that while full use of CCMS is still low, ECE service providers would likely respond well to incentives designed to encourage greater use of technology for reporting and business management. Indeed, when queried as to why they do not use CCMS, a significant percentage responded that “it’s too expensive” or “I don’t know my options”—two barriers that are relatively easy to overcome.

The report synthesizes survey and key informant interview findings, summarizes the regulatory data collection and reporting requirements that DEC must meet, and details a list of data elements and CCMS functionality needed to modernize the ECE technology landscape in Colorado, framed around five key principles for change (see below).

Colorado quickly completed an analysis of the technology landscape and is now poised to leverage the power of state-of-the-art SaaS technology, guided by key principles outlined in the report. Crafting a plan to align funding siloes—and the myriad forms, policies and procedures that keep systems apart—is a crucial next step. The state can also build on the experience of local governments (as well as other states) that have begun to modernize the ECE infrastructure, especially around coordinated enrollment, CCMS vendor selection, and data bridges (called Application Programming Interfaces, or APIs). While the process will be multi-faceted, the state can embrace a big vision and incrementally build system components.

Key Principles for Change

- 1. Simplify and modernize the user experience for families.**
- 2. Simplify systems for government and intermediary organizations.**
- 3. Incentivize all ECE providers to use a cloud-based CCMS that meets state requirements for interoperability.**
- 4. Build the capacity of Local Coordinating Councils (LCOs) to better understand supply and demand, project needs and allocate resources.**
- 5. Build capacity for coordinated enrollment in early care and education programs.**

[Click Here for the full Report](#)



©2022 Opportunities Exchange | West Palm Beach, FL 33407

[Web Version](#)

[Preferences](#)

[Forward](#)

[Unsubscribe](#)

Powered by **Mad Mimi**®
A GoDaddy® company