



# From Classroom to Career: Growing Your Own Early Childhood Workforce



Early Childhood Council Leadership Alliance

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**Fall 2024**



# Introduction

Welcome to **From Classroom to Career: Growing Your Own Early Childhood Workforce**, a comprehensive toolkit designed to empower Early Childhood Councils across Colorado in nurturing and developing local talent for the crucial profession of early childhood education. The "Grow Your Own" approach is designed to cultivate a robust and sustainable workforce in the early childhood sector by nurturing talent from within local communities. By identifying, supporting, and developing individuals, particularly high school students who are interested in early childhood education, communities can address workforce shortages, enhance the quality of early childhood programs, and create a pipeline of qualified professionals committed to serving their own communities.

In today's dynamic educational landscape, the demand for skilled early childhood professionals continues to grow. This toolkit is your guide to creating sustainable pathways that start in the classroom and lead to fulfilling careers in early childhood education. Whether you're an advocate for education, a champion for community development, or a leader in workforce empowerment, you hold the key to shaping the future of our youngest learners by investing in our local talent pool.

Explore innovative strategies for engaging high school students early through concurrent enrollment programs. Discover inspiring case studies of councils already making a difference through "Grow Your Own" initiatives. Navigate the diverse career pathways available in Colorado's early childhood sector and equip yourself with essential resources to support aspiring professionals on their journey.





# Navigating This Toolkit

**Clickable Links:** Throughout this toolkit, you'll find links highlighted in **blue**. These links are clickable and will direct you to additional resources, websites, and tools to further explore topics discussed in each section. Click on any blue link to access valuable information and support materials related to career pathways, career development, and more.



**Getting Started:** To begin your journey through the toolkit, click on the section titles in the Table of Contents or simply scroll through each page. Feel free to navigate back to this page at any time for guidance on utilizing clickable links effectively.

**Let's Begin:** Embark on your exploration of "From Classroom to Career: Growing Your Own Early Childhood Workforce," and empower your council to cultivate a robust early childhood workforce in Colorado.



Click here to **Share Your Feedback** on the usefulness of this toolkit and supporting resources!



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# Getting Started with "Grow Your Own" Approaches

## Benefits for Early Childhood Councils

Adopting the "Grow Your Own" approach offers numerous benefits for early childhood councils. By focusing on cultivating local talent and supporting aspiring early childhood professionals, councils can achieve several key outcomes that strengthen their communities and enhance the quality of early childhood education. Here are some of the primary benefits for early childhood councils:

1. **Addressing Workforce Shortages:** By nurturing and developing local talent, councils can help address the chronic workforce shortages in the early childhood sector. This ensures a steady pipeline of qualified professionals ready to enter the workforce.
2. **Enhancing Community Engagement:** The "Grow Your Own" approach fosters strong connections between your Council, local schools, and the broader community. This increased engagement helps build a sense of community ownership and investment in the success of early childhood education initiatives.
3. **Improving Workforce Stability:** Professionals who are trained and employed within their own communities are more likely to remain in their positions for longer periods. This stability reduces turnover rates and ensures continuity of care and education for young children.
4. **Building a Diverse Workforce:** By reaching out to a diverse group of students and community members, Councils can help create a more diverse early childhood workforce. A diverse workforce better reflects the communities they serve and can provide more culturally responsive care and education.
5. **Strengthening Local Economies:** Investing in local talent helps strengthen the local economy by creating jobs and supporting the career development of community members, leading to positive ripple effects throughout the community.

# Getting Started with "Grow Your Own" Approaches



## Foundational Steps

The “Grow Your Own” approach focuses on nurturing and developing local talent to build a robust early childhood workforce. This section will guide you through the foundational steps to start and sustain a successful “Grow Your Own” program within your Early Childhood Council.

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### **1. Understand the Concept**

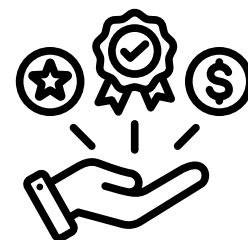
**Definition:** “Grow Your Own” refers to initiatives aimed at recruiting and training individuals from local communities, often starting with high school students, to become early childhood professionals.

**Benefits:**

- Addresses local workforce shortages
- Promotes community investment and engagement
- Provides career opportunities for local residents
- Ensures culturally responsive teaching practices

“Ever since I was younger, I have wanted to have an impact on children's life, try and be there for them in ways people weren't there for me growing up.”

-Early Childhood Concurrent Enrollment Student from Hugo, CO





# Getting Started with "Grow Your Own" Approaches



## Foundational Steps

### **2. Assess Your Community's Needs**

Before launching a "Grow Your Own" program, it's crucial to understand your community's unique needs and resources.

#### **Consider the following steps:**

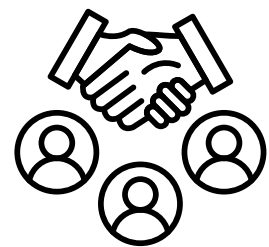
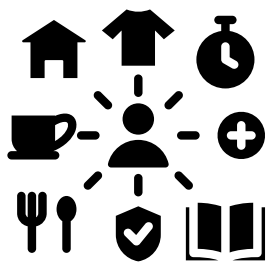
- **Conduct Surveys:** Gather data from local schools, childcare centers, and community members.
- **Identify Gaps:** Determine areas with the greatest need for early childhood professionals.
- **Leverage Local Assets:** Identify existing programs, partnerships, and resources that can support your initiative.

### **3. Develop Partnerships**

Building strong partnerships is key to the success of a "Grow Your Own" program.

#### **Consider collaborating with:**

- **Local High Schools:** Establish concurrent enrollment or dual credit programs.
- **Community Colleges and Universities:** Create seamless pathways to higher education.
- **Community Organizations:** Engage local nonprofits and community groups for support and outreach.
- **Local Businesses:** Secure funding and resources through corporate partnerships.



# Getting Started with "Grow Your Own" Approaches



## Foundational Steps

### 4. Provide Ongoing Support and Development

Sustain your program by offering continuous support and development opportunities:

- **Professional Development:** Offer workshops, training sessions, and certification courses.
- **Scholarships and Financial Aid:** Provide financial assistance to reduce barriers to education.
- **Career Navigation:** Offer guidance on career pathways, job placement, and advancement opportunities.

### 5. Measure and Celebrate Success

Track the progress and impact of your program to ensure its effectiveness:

- **Collect Data:** Monitor participant progress, program completion rates, and employment outcomes.
- **Evaluate Impact:** Assess the program's contribution to addressing workforce needs and improving early childhood education quality.
- **Celebrate Achievements:** Recognize and celebrate the successes of participants and partners through events and communications.





# Case Studies

This section showcases real-world examples of successful "Grow Your Own" initiatives implemented by Early Childhood Councils across Colorado. These case studies highlight innovative strategies, best practices, and the positive impact of engaging local high school students in early childhood education pathways. By exploring these examples, councils can gain valuable insights and inspiration to develop and enhance their own programs, ultimately fostering a robust and sustainable early childhood workforce within their communities.

## COMMON THEMES

- ✓ **Collaboration:** Councils emphasize partnerships with schools, colleges, and community organizations to support students entering the ECE profession.
- ✓ **Barrier Removal:** Efforts focus on identifying and overcoming challenges, such as access to concurrent enrollment and training.
- ✓ **High School Engagement:** Councils engage students through career fairs, classroom visits, and presentations to spark interest in ECE.
- ✓ **Student Support:** Ongoing guidance, mentorship, and scholarships are provided to help students succeed in ECE careers.
- ✓ **Quality and Retention:** Ensuring students are well-prepared and supported leads to higher retention and improved ECE quality.

## Case Study: Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County



When working to bring high school students into the ECE profession, the Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County (ECPAC) identified high schools that committed to strengthening career pathways for their students. A teacher at Adams 12 Five Star Schools' Northglenn High School had this strong commitment and jumped in to work with ECPAC's ECE Career Navigator to identify solutions to possible barriers students might face. ECPAC quickly learned that this teacher had been struggling for 2 years to overcome a barrier to offering concurrent enrollment for her students with a local community college. As a result she felt stuck in offering ECE classes without the college credit her students could use towards future ECE careers. Through facilitated conversations between ECPAC, the teacher, and the community college, these barriers were removed, and she can now offer concurrent enrollment.

Building on this success, ECPAC's ECE Career Navigator and this teacher have continued a partnership whereas the Career Navigator provides presentations to the class of students about the ECE profession, connected the teacher with a resource to offer students free CDA classes, and collaborated to ensure that students could attend the ECPAC ECE Career Fair, in which several students were hired as ECE staff at local programs. Furthermore, the teacher is actively supporting warm-hand off referrals to the ECE Career Navigator which has led to students receiving support in navigating the CDA pathway, and taking tours of various types of programs so they can see early care and education in action in different types of settings as they consider their future ECE career.

Through the past three years of working together it has become clear to ECPAC that all of these collaborative efforts were possible because of the willingness of the individual teacher in one specific school to collaborate for the success of her students. It only takes one person to be open to a partnership and it is clear that much more can be accomplished together!





### **“Grow Your Own” Goals and Objectives**

Alliance for Kids collaborates with the local community to provide professional development, scholarships, career navigation, and resources to support youth, students, and families in El Paso County. Their primary objectives are to:

- Ensure that every child receives high-quality support, leading to success in school and life.
- Improve the quality of early learning environments and better prepare students for kindergarten.

### **Strategies to Engage and Support High School Students**

Alliance for Kids actively engages high school students by attending career days, job fairs, and visiting classrooms to discuss opportunities in the early childhood profession. Their continued support includes phone calls, text messages, and meeting students at local libraries. To spark interest, they also showcase company swag and early childhood toys.

### **Partnerships with Local Schools, Colleges, and Community Organizations**

- Alliance for Kids offers a \$500 award to 30 high school students who complete ECE classes.
- They partner with Pikes Peak State College through the "Advancing Early Childhood Educators" program, offering two career tracks (Assistant Teacher and Early Childhood Teacher) with incentives and financial support.
- Workforce team members visit local schools to speak to students in ECE classes and assist them in creating PDIS accounts.

### **Outcomes and Successes**

After visiting a high school ECE class, Alliance for Kids connected with a student who applied for and received the their Early Childhood Career Engagement Award. With continued support from their Career Navigator, Partner Recruiter, and Workforce Manager, the student secured a job at a local center. They have also provided crucial support in resume writing and building, with many students expressing gratitude for this guidance.

### **Lessons Learned and Best Practices**

- Teamwork is essential for success; supporting each other ensures the best outcomes for everyone involved.
- Showcasing the early childhood profession, preparing those entering it, and providing ongoing support are critical for retaining professionals.

## Case Study: Teller Park Early Childhood Council



### **“Grow Your Own” Goals and Objectives**

Since February 2024, the Navigator Specialist at Teller Park Early Childhood Council has been focusing on the "Grow Your Own" initiative to cultivate and retain quality early childhood providers within school districts, centers, and family child care homes. The council aims to:

- Partner with local schools to support employees interested in advancing their careers in education, enhancing the quality of services, increasing employee retention, and empowering individuals passionate about education.
- Implement early childhood education courses in high schools, and potentially middle schools, to spark interest in the ECE field and highlight the various career pathways available.

### **Strategies to Engage and Support High School Students**

The council is working on implementing ECE courses beginning in high school, with outreach programs potentially starting in middle school. By networking with educational professionals, such as District 49 and the Colorado Department of Education’s Teacher Recruitment Education & Preparation (TREP) program, the council aims to offer high school students opportunities to earn college credit and gain on-the-job training (OJT) through internships. Additionally, they are exploring partnerships with Colorado Mountain College and Early Connections to provide students with pathways to earn ECE-related credentials, such as the CDA®.

### **Partnerships with Local Schools, Colleges, and Community Organizations**

- The council has connected with various organizations and educational institutions to explore collaboration opportunities, including District 49, Colorado Mountain College, and Early Connections.
- They are partnering with TEACH.org to host a joint webinar on ECE Career Pathways in collaboration with Red Rocks Community College and Pikes Peak State College.

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## Case Study: Teller Park Early Childhood Council



### **Outcomes and Successes**

Although in the early stages, the council has successfully built connections and partnerships to support the "Grow Your Own" initiative. Their efforts in networking and collaboration are laying the groundwork for future successes in implementing ECE programs in local schools and providing career advancement opportunities for educators.

### **Lessons Learned and Best Practices**

- Starting small and focusing on one school district initially can help build a strong foundation for expanding the "Grow Your Own" initiative.
- Networking with experienced professionals and organizations is crucial for learning what has worked for others and for gaining support in implementing similar programs locally.
- Community engagement and awareness-building are essential for successful recruitment into the ECE field.





### **“Grow Your Own” Program Overview**

Bright Futures Early Childhood Council, serving Delta, Montrose, Ouray, San Miguel, and San Juan counties, developed the Bright Futures AmeriCorps Early Childhood Teacher in Training Program to increase the number of high-quality early childhood educators in the workforce. Funded by an AmeriCorps grant, this program recruits, trains, and places full-time AmeriCorps members in select early childhood programs in Delta, Gunnison, and Montrose counties, providing an affordable option for these programs to host additional personnel.

### **“Grow Your Own” Goals and Objectives**

The primary goal of the AmeriCorps program is to support and strengthen the early childhood workforce. Key objectives include:

- Offering an affordable solution to increase the number of early childhood personnel.
- Enhancing the training and qualifications of ECE educators in licensed programs.
- Preventing burnout among existing teachers and improving retention rates.
- Establishing a sustainable pipeline of skilled early childhood educators.

### **Strategies to Engage and Support High School Students**

The Bright Futures AmeriCorps manager actively collaborates with high schools across the region to promote the program. Recruitment efforts include newsletters, career fairs, and school visits, with a particular focus on highlighting the Segal AmeriCorps education award, which can be used by graduating seniors to cover future education expenses. Additionally, the program is advertised nationally to attract qualified candidates to the San Juan region.

### **Partnerships with Local Schools, Colleges, and Community Organizations**

Bright Futures has formed a partnership with Colorado Mesa University to allow AmeriCorps members to enroll in ECE credit courses during their year of service, further enhancing their qualifications and career prospects in the field of early childhood education.

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### **Outcomes and Successes**

The 2023-2024 school year marked the first year of the program's implementation, yielding small but promising results. Two AmeriCorps members successfully completed their year of service and are now seeking employment in early childhood education. The program is expanding in its second year, with recruits for all seven available placements.

### **Lessons Learned and Best Practices**

The AmeriCorps program at Bright Futures emphasizes adult learning strategies, coaching members in research-based practices, including the Pyramid Model. This training focuses on building positive relationships and supporting social-emotional development, equipping members with the skills to effectively manage classrooms, reduce challenging behaviors, and increase overall job satisfaction. The combination of training and coaching throughout the year of service has proven essential in preparing members to become competent and fulfilled early childhood educators.

Case Study:  
ECHO & Family  
Center Early  
Childhood Council



ECHO & Family Center Early Childhood Council has been actively working to strengthen the early childhood education (ECE) career pathway within their community. They have an early childhood sector partnership led by the Fremont Economic Development Corporation, which has been instrumental in advancing their efforts. Within the county, three school districts participate in a concurrent enrollment program with Pueblo Community College (PCC), allowing students to earn college credits. However, the Council aims to expand these opportunities so that students can graduate with an Associate of Arts (AA) degree in ECE. A key challenge they face is gaining commitment from colleges to invest in these programs, as more student interest is needed to secure funding and make the pathway more robust.

Despite these challenges, the Council has implemented an apprenticeship program and requires students to complete internships at community sites in partnership with PCC. To generate interest in the ECE profession, the Council also hosted a session as part of a pathways program, which was the most engaging session of the event, although it's unclear if it led to long-term outcomes. Additionally, the Council participated in a breakout session at the CSU Pueblo ECE Summit to discuss their sector partnership with a diverse audience. They've found that utilizing scholarships and financial aid from ECCLA and colleges has been a helpful incentive for students, though it remains a hard sell given the current conditions of the profession.



# Engaging High School Students

Reaching out to high school students is a vital component of the “Grow Your Own” approach. By introducing students to early childhood careers early on, you can inspire and prepare them for future roles in our profession. High school is a formative period where students explore potential career paths and develop foundational skills. By providing them with opportunities to learn about and engage in early childhood education, you not only help fill the workforce pipeline but also enrich their educational experience. Engaging high school students with targeted programs, hands-on experiences, and supportive resources can ignite their passion for early childhood education and set them on a path to a rewarding and impactful career.





## Strategies to Engage High School Students

01

### ADVOCATE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT

Concurrent enrollment allows high school students to take college-level courses, earning credits that count towards both their high school diploma and a postsecondary degree.

#### Steps for Advocacy:

- **Build Partnerships:** Collaborate with local colleges, universities, and school districts to advocate for the creation of concurrent enrollment programs focused on early childhood education.
- **Raise Awareness:** Inform school administrators, teachers, parents, and students about the benefits and opportunities of concurrent enrollment.
- **Present the Case:** Use data and success stories from other regions to demonstrate the positive impact of concurrent enrollment on student outcomes and workforce development.
- **Support Implementation:** Offer to assist in the development and promotion of these programs once they are established.

02

### ADVOCATE FOR DUAL CREDIT OPTIONS

Dual credit programs enable students to earn both high school and college credits simultaneously, often through courses taught at their high school.

#### Steps for Advocacy:

- **Identify Courses:** Advocate for courses that align with early childhood education pathways, such as child development or education fundamentals.
- **Support Teacher Training:** Encourage professional development for high school teachers to meet the qualifications for teaching dual credit courses.
- **Promote the Program:** Help promote dual credit options through school announcements, flyers, and information sessions to attract students to the program.



## Strategies to Engage High School Students

### 03 HOST CAREER EXPLORATION EVENTS

These events allow students to learn about various career options in early childhood education through activities like job shadowing, career fairs, and guest speaker sessions.

#### Steps to Implement:

- **Plan Events:** Organize career days, workshops, and hands-on activities that showcase early childhood education careers.
- **Engage Professionals:** Invite early childhood educators, directors, and alumni to share their experiences and insights.
- **Provide Resources:** Distribute materials such as brochures, career pathway maps, and informational guides.

### 04 FACILITATE INTERNSHIPS AND PRACTICUMS

Internships and practicums provide high school students with practical, hands-on experience in early childhood education settings.

#### Steps to Facilitate:

- **Partner with Local Programs:** Collaborate with childcare centers, preschools, family child care homes, and other programs to identify and create internship opportunities.
- **Develop Guidelines:** Work with local programs to establish clear guidelines and objectives for the internship program to ensure meaningful experiences.
- **Mentorship:** Encourage partnerships between students and experienced educators who can provide guidance and support throughout the internship.





## Strategies to Engage High School Students

### 05 LAUNCH EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CLUBS

These clubs provide a platform for high school students interested in early childhood education to connect, learn, and engage in related activities.

#### Steps to Implement:

- **Form the Club:** Work with high school staff to establish an early childhood education club.
- **Plan Activities:** Organize regular meetings, volunteer opportunities, and community service projects related to early childhood education.
- **Foster Leadership:** Encourage students to take on leadership roles within the club to develop their skills and commitment.

### 06 PROMOTE SCHOLARSHIPS AND FINANCIAL AID

Financial support can help reduce the barriers to pursuing a career in early childhood education, making it more accessible to students.

#### Steps to Implement:

- **Identify Opportunities:** Research and compile a list of available local scholarships and financial aid programs specifically for early childhood education students.
- **Inform Students:** Share information about these opportunities through school newsletters, websites, and counseling offices.
- **Assist with Applications:** Partner with high schools to provide workshops or one-on-one support to help students with scholarship and financial aid applications.



## Concurrent Enrollment Opportunities

Concurrent enrollment programs offer high school students a valuable chance to start their college education early by earning college credits while still in high school. These programs allow students to complete courses that count towards both their high school diploma and their future college degree, providing them with a head start on their higher education journey. Below, you'll find a list of high schools in Colorado that currently offer concurrent enrollment opportunities in early childhood education. This resource is designed to help councils connect students with local programs, fostering early academic and career development in the early childhood profession.

**Please Note:** To discover additional high schools offering concurrent enrollment programs, contact local colleges directly to inquire about their high school partnerships.



Click here to access ECCLA's **Early Childhood Concurrent Enrollment Spreadsheet**



Click here to access the **Concurrent and Dual Enrollment** page through the Colorado Department of Higher Education



# Engaging High School Students



## Dual Credit Options and Benefits

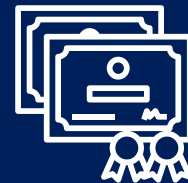
Dual credit programs allow high school students to enroll in college courses and earn credit simultaneously toward their high school diploma and a college degree. These programs are designed to provide students with the opportunity to experience college-level coursework while still in high school, enabling them to get a head start on their higher education journey.

### Types of Dual Credit Programs:

- **Advanced Placement (AP) Courses:** Courses that can lead to college credit if students pass the AP exams.
- **International Baccalaureate (IB) Programs:** High-level courses that may also count towards college credit.
- **College Courses on High School Campuses:** Courses taught at high schools by college-approved instructors.
- **College Campus Courses:** High school students attending courses directly on college campuses.

### BENEFITS OF DUAL CREDIT

- ✓ **Academic Preparation:** Develop skills and knowledge for college success.
- ✓ **Cost Savings:** Reduce college costs by earning credits early.
- ✓ **Enhanced High School Experience:** Increase engagement and academic motivation.
- ✓ **Increased College Admission Prospects:** Strengthen college applications with college-level coursework.





# Early Childhood Career Pathways in Colorado



Understanding **Early Childhood Career Pathways in Colorado** is essential for supporting “Grow Your Own” Approaches. This section of the toolkit provides a detailed overview of the diverse career options available within the profession, from entry-level positions to advanced roles. By familiarizing yourself with these pathways, you can better guide and inspire students as they explore potential careers.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD SECTORS

- ✓ Early Care and Learning
- ✓ Health and Well-Being
- ✓ Pregnancy and Postpartum Support
- ✓ Workforce and Community Support





Early Childhood Education is a rewarding and dynamic profession that offers a variety of opportunities to make a positive impact on the lives of Colorado's youngest children and their families.

From working directly with children in a classroom setting to providing support and guidance to other early childhood professionals, there are many pathways to explore within the profession.

## 01

### EARLY CARE AND LEARNING

Early Care and Learning roles encompass a wide range of individuals who play crucial roles in the development and education of Colorado's youngest children.

## 02

### HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Health and Well-Being roles are essential in ensuring that Colorado's youngest children thrive physically, mentally, and emotionally.

## 03

### PREGNANCY AND POSTPARTUM SUPPORT

Pregnancy and Postpartum Support roles are crucial for providing essential care and guidance to families in Colorado during the prenatal, birthing, and postpartum periods.

## 04

### WORKFORCE AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Workforce and Community Support roles are essential in providing guidance, training, and resources to individuals working in Colorado's early childhood profession, as well as supporting families and communities in promoting early childhood development.



Click here to access ECCLA's [Early Childhood Career Pathway Tool](#) to explore various career options, required qualifications, and potential pathways in early childhood education.

# Career Navigation



Supporting high school students in navigating their path towards a career in early childhood education involves more than just presenting career options. It requires a holistic approach that includes guiding them through the processes of college enrollment, securing financial aid, and planning their career trajectory. The journey from high school to a professional career can be complex, and students often need assistance to understand and manage the various steps involved. Councils can play a pivotal role in this process by offering tailored support and resources that address the unique needs of high school students.

By providing clear guidance on college enrollment procedures, financial aid opportunities, and career planning strategies, councils can help students make informed decisions that align with their career goals. This not only facilitates a smoother transition from high school to higher education but also empowers students to build a solid foundation for a successful career in early childhood education. This section provides essential information and resources to help students and councils navigate these crucial steps effectively.

“Being able to have coaching to keep me on track and have support in my education is a very valuable part of my success in my future.”

-ECCLA Scholarship Recipient from Pueblo, CO

# Career Navigation



## College Enrollment

### Understanding the Process

Embarking on the journey to a career in early childhood education starts with understanding the steps needed to enroll in college programs that will set the foundation for future success. By demystifying the college application process and providing practical tips, councils can support students in making informed and confident decisions about their higher education options.

#### Consider the following steps:

- **Research Colleges and Programs:** Provide students with resources to research colleges that offer early childhood education programs, including community colleges and universities.
- **Application Process:** Outline the steps for applying to colleges, including important deadlines, required documents, and tips for completing applications effectively.

#### Consider the following resources:

- **College Resources for Students**
- **Early Childhood Degrees and Certificates by College**

### Supporting Resources

Navigating the path to higher education can be overwhelming for high school students. To make this journey smoother, it's crucial to leverage a variety of supporting resources. By connecting students with these resources, councils can help them make informed decisions and successfully transition to their chosen early childhood education programs.

#### Consider the following steps:

- **College Fairs and Open Houses:** Encourage students to attend college fairs and open houses to gather information and ask questions directly.
- **High School Counselors:** Connect students with their high school counselors for personalized guidance and support throughout the application process.

#### Consider the following resources:

- **Resources for Students**
- **Resources for Career Navigators**



# Career Navigation



## Financial Aid and Scholarships

### Types of Financial Aid

Understanding the different types of financial aid available is crucial for students pursuing higher education in early childhood education. Financial aid can make college more affordable and accessible, helping students focus on their studies without the burden of financial stress.

#### Consider the following steps:

- **Federal Aid:** Explain the **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)** process and the types of federal aid available, including grants, loans, and work-study programs.
- **State and Local Aid:** Provide information on state and local financial aid options as well as grants and scholarships specific to early childhood education.

#### Consider the following resources:

- **Financial Aid Resources for Students**

### Finding Scholarships

Securing scholarships can significantly ease the financial burden of pursuing higher education. Scholarships, unlike loans, do not need to be repaid, making them an attractive option for students. By actively searching for scholarships, students can find financial support tailored to their specific needs and goals, paving the way for a successful academic journey in early childhood education.

#### Consider the following steps:

- **Scholarship Databases:** List reputable scholarship databases where students can search for scholarships based on their interests, background, and career goals. Every community/state college and university in Colorado has a scholarship database available to students.
- **Application Tips:** Offer tips for writing strong scholarship essays, gathering recommendation letters, and submitting applications on time.

#### Consider the following resource:

- **ECCLA Scholarships and Grants**

# Career Navigation



## Career Planning and Development

### Career Exploration

Exploring career options is a crucial step for high school students preparing for their future in early childhood education. By engaging in career exploration activities, students can make informed decisions about their educational and professional goals, setting the stage for a fulfilling and impactful career.

#### Consider the following steps:

- **Interest Assessments:** Recommend tools and assessments that help students identify their strengths and interests, aligning them with potential careers in early childhood education.
- **Job Shadowing and Mentorship:** Encourage students to participate in job shadowing opportunities and seek mentorship from working professionals.

#### Consider the following resources:

- **Career Resources for Students**

### Building Professional Networks

Developing a strong professional network is essential for students aspiring to succeed in early childhood education. By building a network, students can gain valuable insights, access mentorship opportunities, and enhance their career prospects. Effective networking not only supports career growth but also fosters meaningful relationships within the profession, helping students to navigate their professional journey with greater confidence and support.

#### Consider the following steps:

- **Professional Organizations:** Introduce students to professional organizations related to early childhood education, such as **NAEYC**, and highlight the benefits of membership.
- **Networking Events:** Suggest attendance at local networking events, conferences, and workshops to connect with professionals and learn more about the industry.

# Career Navigation



## Developing Essential Skills

### Academic Skills

Strong academic skills form the foundation for success in higher education and beyond. Investing in these skills now will pave the way for future success and help high school students reach their educational and career goals.

#### Consider the following steps:

- **Relevant Coursework:** Emphasize the importance of taking relevant high school courses, such as child development, psychology, and education fundamentals.
- **Study Skills and Time Management:** Identify and provide tips for developing effective study habits and managing time to balance schoolwork, extracurricular activities, and personal responsibilities.

### Soft Skills

In addition to academic knowledge, soft skills are crucial for success in early childhood education and professional settings. Developing these skills will not only improve high school students' performance in their studies but also prepare them for impactful careers in the profession.

#### Consider the following steps:

- **Communication and Collaboration:** Highlight the importance of strong communication and collaboration skills in early childhood education.
- **Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving:** Encourage students to develop their critical thinking and problem-solving abilities through various activities and challenges.



# Career Navigation



## Utilizing Community Resources

### Local Support Services

Accessing local support services can provide invaluable assistance as high school students navigate their path to higher education and a career in early childhood education. By leveraging these services, students can gain access to additional resources, receive personalized support, and connect with community experts who can help them overcome challenges and achieve their educational and career goals.

#### **Consider the following steps:**

- **Community Centers and Libraries:** Identify community centers and libraries that offer resources and support for college and career planning.
- **Local Organizations:** Partner with other local organizations that provide career counseling, college preparation workshops, and financial aid assistance if your council does not offer career navigation supports.

### Online Resources

The digital landscape offers a wealth of tools and information that can greatly enhance a high school student's journey toward a career in early childhood education. By utilizing these digital resources, students can access up-to-date information, engage in interactive learning opportunities, and connect with experts and networks that can aid in their academic and career development. Embracing online tools ensures students have the most current and comprehensive resources at their fingertips.

#### **Consider the following steps:**

- **Educational Websites and Portals:** Identify and share links to websites and portals that offer valuable information and tools for college and career planning.
- **Virtual Workshops and Webinars:** Identify and promote virtual workshops and webinars that cover topics such as financial aid, college applications, and career exploration.



# The Child Development Associate<sup>®</sup> (CDA)



The **Child Development Associate<sup>®</sup> Credential<sup>™</sup>** through the **Council for Professional Recognition** is a nationally recognized certification in early childhood education. It demonstrates a professional's competence in nurturing the emotional, physical, intellectual, and social development of children. Obtaining a CDA credential can open doors to career advancement and higher earning potential. It is often a critical first step for those pursuing a career in early childhood education, as it reflects a commitment to high standards of professional practice and lifelong learning.

## BENEFITS OF THE CDA<sup>®</sup>

- ✓ Career Advancement
- ✓ Confidence
- ✓ Skills
- ✓ Professionalism
- ✓ Knowledge
- ✓ Qualifications
- ✓ Recognition
- ✓ Community

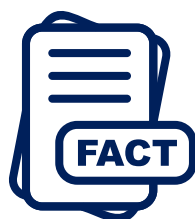
# The Child Development Associate® (CDA)



The CDA credential is based on a core set of competency standards, which guide early care professionals as they work toward becoming qualified teachers of young children. The Council for Professional Recognition works to ensure that the nationally transferable CDA is a credible and valid credential, recognized by the profession as a vital part of professional development.

CDAs have knowledge of how to put the CDA Competency Standards into practice and understanding of why those standards help children move with success from one developmental stage to another. Put simply, CDAs know how to nurture the emotional, physical, intellectual, and social development of children.

Earning the CDA credential has many advantages, including exposure to the larger community of early childhood educators. **Close to one million CDA credentials have been issued to date!** Becoming a CDA is a big commitment, but one that creates confident practitioners with command of today's best practices for teaching young children.



Click here to access the **Colorado  
CDA® State Fact Sheet**



## Obtaining a CDA® in Colorado

01

### CHOOSE YOUR CREDENTIAL TYPE

Determine which CDA credential best fits your career goals. The CDA credential can be earned in various settings, including center-based, family child care, and home visitor programs. Councils can provide information on the different credential types and help students make informed decisions.

02

### COMPLETE TRAINING

Candidates must complete 120 hours of formal early childhood education training, with at least 10 hours in each of the eight CDA subject areas. Councils can connect students with accredited training programs and resources to meet these requirements. See below for a list of recommended training programs that can help fulfill these requirements.

- **Care Courses - Colorado CDA Training**
- **National CDA Training - Colorado**
- **The Academy at NHSA CDA Training**
- **ProSolutions CDA Training**
- **Successful Solutions Professional Development CDA Training**
- **Teachstone® CDA + CLASS® Programs**

03

### GAIN WORK EXPERIENCE

Acquire at least 480 hours of professional work experience in the appropriate setting for your credential type. Councils can assist students in finding suitable work experience opportunities and placements.

04

### PREPARE YOUR PROFESSIONAL PORTFOLIO

Compile a portfolio that includes your education and work experience documentation, as well as reflective statements of competence and resource collection. Councils can provide templates, examples, and guidance on building a strong portfolio. **Learn more about the Professional Portfolio.**





## Obtaining a CDA® in Colorado

- 05** FIND A CDA PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST  
Identify a CDA Professional Development (PD) Specialist who will conduct your verification visit, which includes an observation and a reflective dialogue. Councils can help locate qualified PD Specialists in a student's area. **PD Specialists can be found through a student's YourCouncil account.**
- 06** APPLY FOR THE CDA CREDENTIAL  
Submit your application and fee to the **Council for Professional Recognition**. Once your application is approved, you will schedule your verification visit with your PD Specialist. Councils can offer support in completing and submitting the application.
- 07** COMPLETE THE VERIFICATION VISIT  
Your PD Specialist will conduct the verification visit, which includes an observation of your work with children and a reflective dialogue. Councils can help you prepare for this visit by offering guidance and support throughout the process. **Learn more about the Verification Visit.**
- 08** COMPLETE THE CDA EXAM  
After your verification visit, take the CDA exam, which is administered at **Pearson VUE Test Centers**. Councils can provide study resources and tips for preparing for the exam.
- 09** RECEIVE YOUR CREDENTIAL  
Upon successful completion of all steps, candidates will receive their CDA credential, valid for three years. Renewal requires ongoing professional development and continuing education. Councils can offer information on maintaining and renewing the CDA credential. **Learn more about renewing the CDA credential.**





## Support and Funding Opportunities

Obtaining a CDA credential can be financially challenging, but various support and funding options are available. Councils can guide students to these resources:

### **1. Scholarships and Grants**

Look for scholarships and grants specifically for the CDA. Organizations like **ECCLA** and **Red Rocks Community College** have offered scholarships that cover the cost of CDA training and application fees. **The Council for Professional Recognition also has a scholarship page.**

### **2. Employer Assistance**

Some employers in Colorado may offer financial support for employees pursuing their CDA credential. Check with local programs about available funding or reimbursement.

### **3. State and Local Programs**

Colorado offers several state-funded programs that support early childhood education professionals. Research local initiatives and programs that provide financial assistance or resources for CDA candidates.

### **4. Community Resources**

Nonprofit organizations and community programs often offer financial aid or resources for individuals seeking professional development in early childhood education.

### **5. Payment Plans**

The Council for Professional Recognition may offer payment plans to help manage the cost of the CDA credentialing process.

# College Credentials



Pursuing a college credential in early childhood education provides students with the knowledge, skills, and qualifications needed to excel in this rewarding profession. College programs offer a variety of pathways and specializations, allowing students to tailor their education to their career goals. These programs range from certificates to advanced degrees, each designed to equip students with the competencies required for various roles within the profession.



Click here to access ECCLA's **List of Colleges & Early Childhood Degrees and Certificates**

This section provides an overview of the different types of college programs available in early childhood education, helping councils support students in identifying the best fit for their career aspirations.

# College Credentials



## Overview of Colleges in Colorado

Colorado offers a diverse array of colleges and universities that provide early childhood education programs, ranging from community and state colleges to four-year universities. While most community colleges offer similar certificates and associate degrees, universities often provide unique and specialized advanced degrees. Whether students are looking for a certificate program, an associate degree, or advanced degrees, Colorado's educational institutions offer numerous opportunities to help students achieve their professional goals.

### Community & State Colleges

- Aims Community College
- Arapahoe Community College
- Colorado Mountain College
- Colorado Northwestern Community College
- Community College of Aurora
- Community College of Denver
- Front Range Community College
- Lamar Community College
- Morgan Community College
- Northeastern Junior College
- Otero College
- Pikes Peak State College
- Pueblo Community College
- Red Rocks Community College
- Trinidad State College
- Western Colorado Community College

### Universities

- Colorado Christian University
- Colorado Mesa University
- Colorado State University
- Colorado State University Global
- Colorado State University Pueblo
- Fort Lewis College
- Metropolitan State University of Denver
- University of Colorado at Colorado Springs
- University of Colorado Denver
- University of Northern Colorado





## Types of Degrees and Certificates Available

Early childhood education programs in Colorado offer a range of degrees and certificates that councils can guide students toward, helping them advance their careers. From entry-level certificates to advanced degrees, each program equips individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge for various roles within the profession.

### Certificate Programs

- a. **Early Childhood Education Certificates:** Focuses on foundational knowledge and skills for entry-level positions in early childhood settings.
- b. **Specialized Certificates:** Offers targeted training in areas such as infant/toddler care, preschool education, and special needs support.

### Associate Degrees

- a. **Associate of Applied Science (AAS) Degrees:** Combines practical training with academic coursework, preparing students for immediate employment or further study. Typically, AAS Degrees are **NOT** transferrable to four-year programs.
- b. **Associate of Arts (AA) Degrees:** Emphasizes a liberal arts education, often designed for transfer to a four-year program.

### Bachelor's Degrees:

- a. **Bachelor of Science (BS) Degrees:** Provides comprehensive education in child development, curriculum design, and teaching methods.
- b. **Bachelor of Arts (BA) Degrees:** Includes broader liberal arts coursework, preparing graduates for diverse roles in education and administration.

### Advanced Degrees:

- a. **Master's Degrees:** Focuses on advanced concepts, research, and leadership skills, ideal for career advancement or specialization.
- b. **Doctoral Degrees:** Prepares professionals for leadership roles in education policy, research, and higher education.





## Early Care and Learning Qualification Requirements

Early Childhood Councils can offer [Pyramid](#) (Qualifies as ECE 1031) and [EQIT](#) (Qualifies as ECE 1111) to support students as they work to become qualified. Early Childhood Councils can also advocate for Concurrent Enrollment and Dual Credit Options for the [10 courses needed for Director Qualifications](#).

### Staff Aides

- No experience, education, or credentials are required for this role. Infant Staff Aides must be eighteen years of age and Toddler, Preschool, and School Age Staff Aides must be sixteen years of age.
- Staff Aides must work directly under the supervision of the Director or an Early Childhood Teacher. Staff Aides may be alone with and supervise no more than two preschool age children while assisting children with diapering and toileting.
- [Learn More About Staff Aid Roles](#)

### Assistant Teachers

- [Assistant Teacher roles have multiple pathways that require combinations of experience, education, and credentials.](#)
- Like Assistant Teachers, paraprofessionals must work directly under the supervision of the Director or an Early Childhood Teacher. Paraprofessionals may be alone with and supervise children during certain times of the day (like opening hours, nap time, closing hours, toileting, etc.).
- [Learn More About Assistant Teacher Roles](#)

### Paraprofessionals

- [Paraprofessional roles have multiple pathways that require combinations of education and assessments.](#)
- Like Assistant Teachers, paraprofessionals must work directly under the supervision of the Director or an Early Childhood Teacher. Paraprofessionals may be alone with and supervise children during certain times of the day (like opening hours, nap time, closing hours, toileting, etc.).
- [Learn More About Paraprofessional Roles](#)



## Early Care and Learning Qualification Requirements

### Early Childhood Teachers

- **Early Childhood Teacher roles have multiple pathways that require combinations of experience, education, credentials, and certifications.**
- Early Childhood Teachers are leaders of a classroom and may be alone with and supervise children according to their established group size and ratio. Under the direction of the Director, Early Childhood Teachers can also supervise/mentor classroom Staff Aides, Assistant Teachers, and Paraprofessionals. Early Childhood Teacher Credentials do not expire and do not require renewal.
- **Learn More About Early Childhood Teacher Roles**
- **Guide to Becoming an Early Childhood Teacher**

### Early Childhood Special Education Teachers

- Early Childhood Special Education Teacher (ECSE) roles in Colorado are required to be either licensed or endorsed in Early Childhood Special Education. Licensure/endorsement candidates are required to:
  - Hold a bachelor's degree or higher from a regionally accredited college or university.
  - Complete 24 hours of ECSE specific coursework.
  - Pass required PRAXIS Exams (5024, 5692, and 5205)
  - Complete an approved Traditional Educator Preparation Program.
- **Learn More About Early Childhood Special Education Teacher Roles**

### Infant Program Supervisors

- **Infant Program Supervisor roles have multiple pathways that require combinations of experience, education, licenses, and certifications.**
- Infant Program Supervisors must be at least eighteen years of age and are required to be present for 60% of the hours of operation of the infant program.
- **Learn More About Infant Program Supervisor Roles**



## Early Care and Learning Qualification Requirements

### Program Administrators

- Certain Program Administrative roles have specific pathway requirements:
  - **Assistant Director Pathways**
  - **Small Center Director Pathways**
  - **Large Center Director Pathways**
- Most other Program Administrative Roles only require related experience and education. Depending on the specific administrative role, annual training may be required (like medication administration, immunizations, transporting children, etc.).
- **Learn More About Administrative Roles**

### Assistant Directors

- **Assistant Director roles have multiple pathways that require combinations of experience, education, credentials, and certifications.**
- Assistant Directors must be at least 18 years of age and work directly under the supervision of the Director.
- **Learn More About Assistant Director Roles**

### Directors

- **Small Center Director roles have multiple pathways that require combinations of experience, education, credentials, and certifications.**
  - Center Directors must be present at the center at least 60% of the hours of operation of the center.
- **Large Center Director roles have multiple pathways that require combinations of experience, education, credentials, and certifications.**
  - Center Directors must be present at the center at least 60% any day that the center is open. If the Center Director of a Large Center cannot be 60% of any day, an Assistant Director must be on site acting in the capacity of the Center Director.
- **Learn More About Director Roles**

**Learn About Additional Qualification Requirements**



## Scholarship and Financial Aid Opportunities

Navigating the financial aspects of pursuing a college credential in early childhood education is crucial for many students. Understanding the available scholarships and financial aid options can make a significant difference. Here's an overview of the key opportunities:

- 01 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)**

The FAFSA is the first step for most students seeking financial aid. By completing this application, students can access federal grants, loans, and work-study opportunities based on their financial need. It's important to submit the FAFSA as early as possible to maximize your aid potential.
- 02 Colorado Application for State Financial Aid (CASFA)**

The CASFA provides financial aid opportunities for students who are not eligible for the FAFSA, including undocumented and DACA students. This application opens doors to state-funded grants and scholarships specifically for Colorado residents.
- 03 College-Specific Scholarships**

Each college in Colorado offers its own scholarships tailored to the needs of its students. These scholarships can be based on academic achievement, financial need, leadership, community service, or specific fields of study. It's essential to check the scholarship database of each college you are interested in to find the opportunities available:

  - **Community and State Colleges:** Many community colleges offer scholarships for students pursuing early childhood education certificates and associate degrees.
  - **Universities:** Universities provide a broader range of scholarships, including those for advanced degrees and specialized areas of study.





## Scholarship and Financial Aid Opportunities

- 04 Private Scholarships and Grants**  
In addition to institutional scholarships, numerous private organizations and foundations offer scholarships for early childhood education students. These can be based on various criteria, including demographic factors, career goals, and academic achievements. Students should research and apply for these scholarships to increase their financial aid options.
- 05 Work-Study Programs**  
Work-study programs provide part-time employment opportunities for students, allowing them to earn money while gaining valuable work experience. These programs are often part of the financial aid package determined by the FAFSA and can help offset educational expenses.
- 06 Loan Options**  
While grants and scholarships are ideal, loans can also be a necessary part of financing education. Federal student loans typically offer lower interest rates and more flexible repayment options compared to private loans. Understanding the terms and responsibilities of taking out a loan is crucial for long-term financial planning.

By leveraging these financial aid opportunities, students can reduce the financial barriers to obtaining their early childhood education credentials, paving the way for a successful career. Early Childhood Councils can support students by providing information, resources, and guidance on navigating these financial aid options effectively.

# Additional Resources and Tools



This section is designed to equip Early Childhood Councils with additional practical materials and actionable tools to support the implementation of "Grow Your Own" initiatives. Whether you're looking for templates, guides, or additional reading, this section provides a curated collection of resources to help councils effectively engage high school students, navigate career pathways, and build a sustainable early childhood workforce. Explore these resources to enhance your programs and ensure the success of your local initiatives.

## Resources and Tools

### Career Navigation

- [Resources for Career Navigators](#)
- [Resources for Students](#)
- [Early Childhood Career Pathways in Colorado](#)
- [Early Childhood Degrees and Certificates by College](#)
- [Early Childhood Educator Career Navigation Toolkit](#)
- [Colorado Workforce Centers](#)

### Recruitment and Retention

- [TEACH Colorado: Early Childhood Recruitment and Marketing Kit](#)

## Additional Resources and Tools



### Professional Development and Training

- Professional Development Information System (PDIS)
- Colorado Department of Early Childhood: Training
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC): Trainings & Webinars
- Colorado Association for the Education of Young Children (COAEC): Professional Development

### Colleges and Universities

- T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Colorado® Scholarship: College Resources
  - List of Colleges
  - T.E.A.C.H. Tuition Calculator
- Early Childhood Community College Course Code Changes
- Colorado Statewide Early Childhood Articulation Agreement
- Qualifying Courses that Satisfy ECE Elective Credit Hours

### Financial Aid & Scholarships

- ECCLA's Scholarships and Grants
- Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)
  - FAFSA Resources
- Colorado Application for State Financial Aid (CASFA)
  - CASFA Resources
- Colorado Department of Higher Education: Financial Aid for Students

### Child Development Associate (CDA)

- Council for Professional Recognition
  - Educator Pathways
  - High School Pathways
  - Advanced Career Pathways



## Conclusion

This toolkit has provided a comprehensive guide to the various pathways, resources, and opportunities available for students interested in pursuing a career in early childhood education in Colorado. By highlighting concurrent enrollment programs, college credentials, scholarships, and real-world case studies from Early Childhood Councils, we aim to empower both students and educators to navigate the journey toward a fulfilling career in this critical field.

As you explore the tools and strategies outlined in this toolkit, remember that collaboration and support from local schools, colleges, and community organizations are key to success. Whether you're a student just beginning your journey or an educator looking to guide others, there are abundant resources and partners ready to help you succeed.

Together, we can continue to build a strong, diverse, and skilled early childhood workforce that will positively impact the lives of young children and their families across Colorado. Thank you for your commitment to this important work, and we look forward to seeing the difference you will make in our communities.



Click here to **Share Your Feedback** on the usefulness of this toolkit and supporting resources!





# Acknowledgements

This toolkit was made possible through the collaborative efforts of many individuals and organizations dedicated to advancing early childhood education in Colorado. We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to everyone who contributed their time, expertise, and insights.

## **Early Childhood Councils:**

Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County  
Joint Initiatives for Youth + Families  
Teller Park Early Childhood Council  
Bright Futures  
ECHO & Family Center Early Childhood Council

## **Partners:**

Thank you to our partners in education, including community colleges, universities, school districts, and community organizations. Your commitment to providing quality education and resources has played a crucial role in shaping the content of this toolkit.

## **Career Navigation Community of Practice:**

A special thank you to the members of the Colorado Department of Education's Career Navigation Community of Practice, who provided guidance and feedback throughout the development of this toolkit. Your expertise has been instrumental in ensuring that this resource is comprehensive and practical.

*The Early Childhood Council Leadership Alliance (ECCLA) is a collective impact leader with strong relationships among all of Colorado's 35 Early Childhood Councils serving all 64 counties. We are a collective voice and statewide hub that leverages the expertise and network of Early Childhood Councils to advance shared outcomes for young children, families, and the early childhood workforce. As the membership association for Early Childhood Councils, ECCLA provides technical assistance and capacity building, leverages policy and advocacy, scales innovation, improves workforce supports for early childhood professionals, advances collective impact, and facilitates partnerships. To learn more, visit us at [www.ecclacolorado.org](http://www.ecclacolorado.org).*

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