

RESEARCH BRIEF: SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCILS IN COLORADO

University of Colorado Denver, School of Public Affairs Center on Network Science

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Project Background

In partnership with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), the Colorado Trust, and the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS), the PARTNER Team conducted a 3-year project with Early Childhood Councils (ECC) throughout the state of Colorado. The project was conducted in 12 Home Visitation (MIECHV) and Health Integration funded communities with the aim of identifying ECC network relationships, developing a map of the “ideal” system, and collecting data to assess system relationships.

What are the ECCs?

There are currently 30 Early Childhood Councils in the state of Colorado; these ECCs work to create local collaboratives in order to improve accessibility and quality of early childhood services throughout Colorado. These services include: education; social, emotional, and mental health; physical health; and family support/parent education.

<https://www.cde.state.co.us/early/ecc>

What communities participated?



Year 1

- Introductory webinar for ECC coordinators
- On-site meetings with stakeholder groups
- Survey design and administration
- Debrief meetings:
Reports with personalized coalition assessment and recommendations for action steps to engage in systems building, as well as a highlights document.

Year 2

- Revision of survey
- Re-distribution of survey to collect comparison data

Year 3

- Building capacity for Evidence-Based Network Leadership
- Development of documents focusing on home visitation and program sustainability
- In-depth analysis of Year 1 and 2 data

This Research Brief is an overview of the three year project, emphasizing data collected during year two.

In This Brief

- Evaluation Questions & Methods
- Summary of Findings
- Information on Partnerships
- Next Steps

Funded by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, the Colorado Department of Human Services, and the Colorado Trust.

Evaluation Questions

1. How are Early Childhood Councils in Colorado strengthening the EC system in their county?
2. What parts of the network are strong and weak?
(Specifically in Health Integration & Home Visitation)
3. How is this system inter-connected? Which parts of the system are impacted by which factors?
(Specifically in Health Integration & Home Visitation)

Methods

How Did We Collect Data?

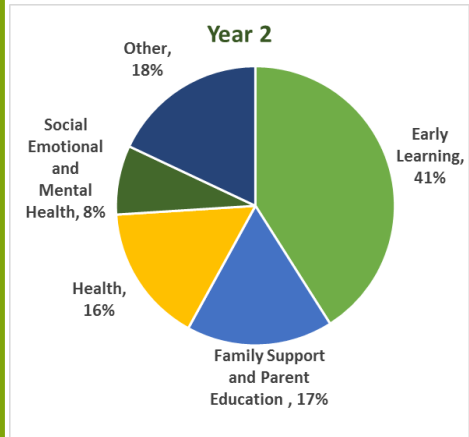
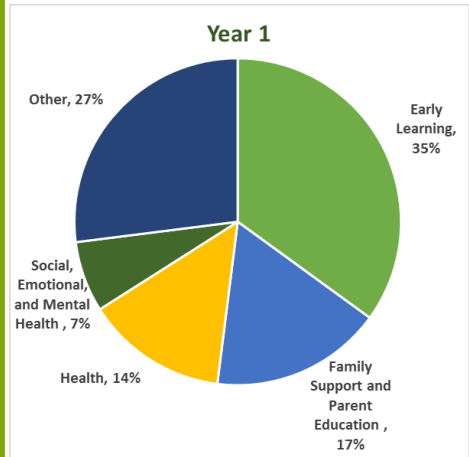
A customized PARTNER survey was distributed to the participating ECC communities in April of 2013 and again in September of 2014; this survey had 394 respondents in total from all 12 communities. Each ECC had a Coordinator that was responsible for administering the survey to their collaborative members.

What Did We Ask Them?

We asked **30 in-depth questions** including but not limited to level of partnership, group decision making, and changes in their county related to health integration and home visitation.

Who Did We Survey?

% of respondents from each early child



service category.

Summary of Findings

- ⇒ There were **5,975** Early Childhood Partnerships in Colorado which were recognized by the 394 survey respondents.
- ⇒ **3,755** of these 5,975 partnerships were attributed to the Early Childhood Councils
 - 2,615 new partnerships were developed by the ECCs
 - 1,159 pre-existing partnerships were strengthened by the ECCs
- ⇒ **Thus, 63% of all partnerships in the Early Childhood System in Colorado can be attributed to the ECCs.**

Information on the Partnerships

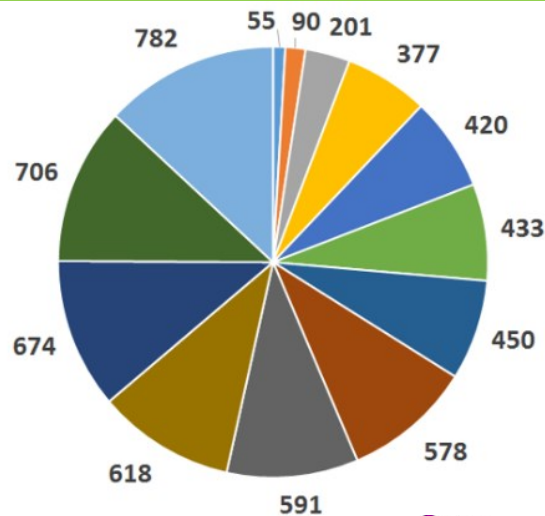
Quote from an ECC Coordinator:

“Collaboration and systems reform are essential to our mission, and the PARTNER Survey has given us the opportunity for the first time to examine our community-building skills in both a qualitative and quantitative way. The results have been very useful in understanding our community’s perceptions of us as supporting the emergence of a comprehensive and coordinated early childhood system, and as a result, we have taken additional steps to improve our skill-set in collaborative facilitation.”

-Jenna Bannon Davis

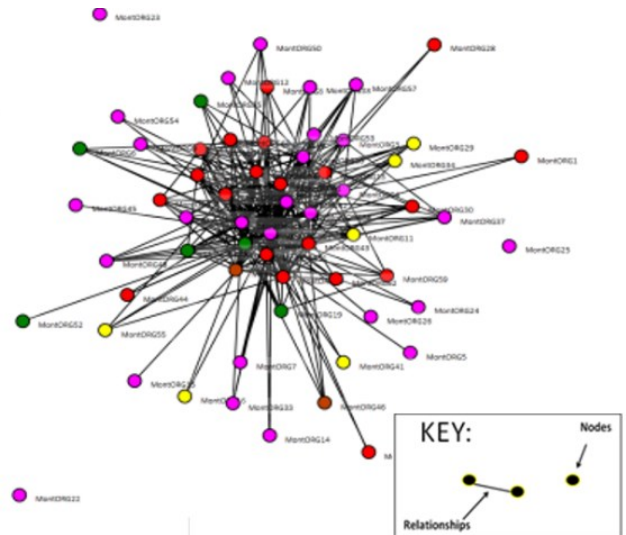
Denver Early Childhood Council

How many partnerships were identified across the state?

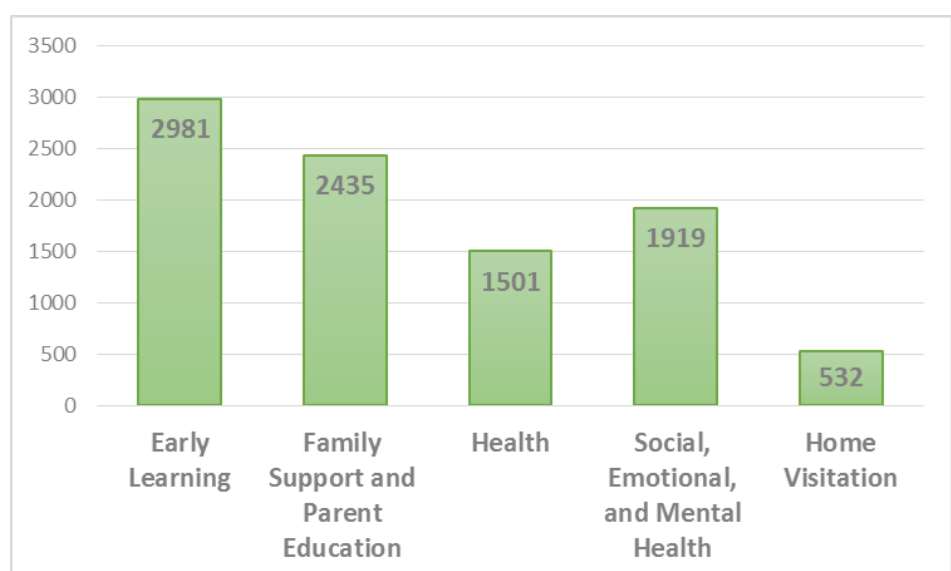


The chart (left) represents the total number of partnerships reported by each of the 12 participating counties.

The network map (right) represents the county that reported 674 partnerships.



How many partnerships exist in each Early Childhood domain?



**Quote from an
ECC Coordinator:**

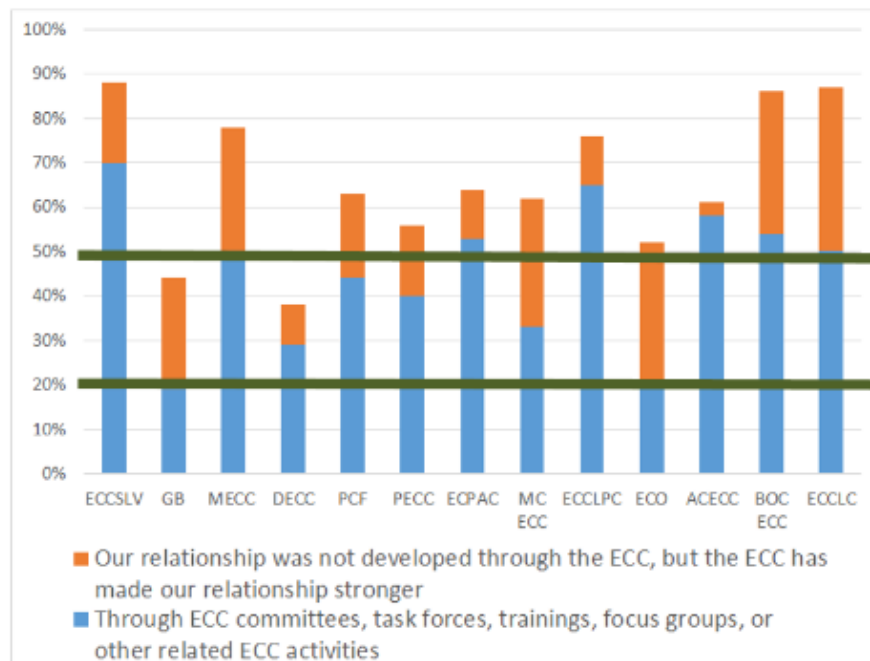
“Results from the PARTNER survey provide valuable insight about the Council’s roles and relationships within the local community and its early childhood system... The results summary has been shared with Council members in an effort to inform future capacity building and service delivery.

Sheryl Shushan

**Rural Resort Region
Northeast (RRRNE)**

What role did the ECC play in the development or growth of these partnerships?

Responses to “Please describe how your relationship with each of these partners was developed.”



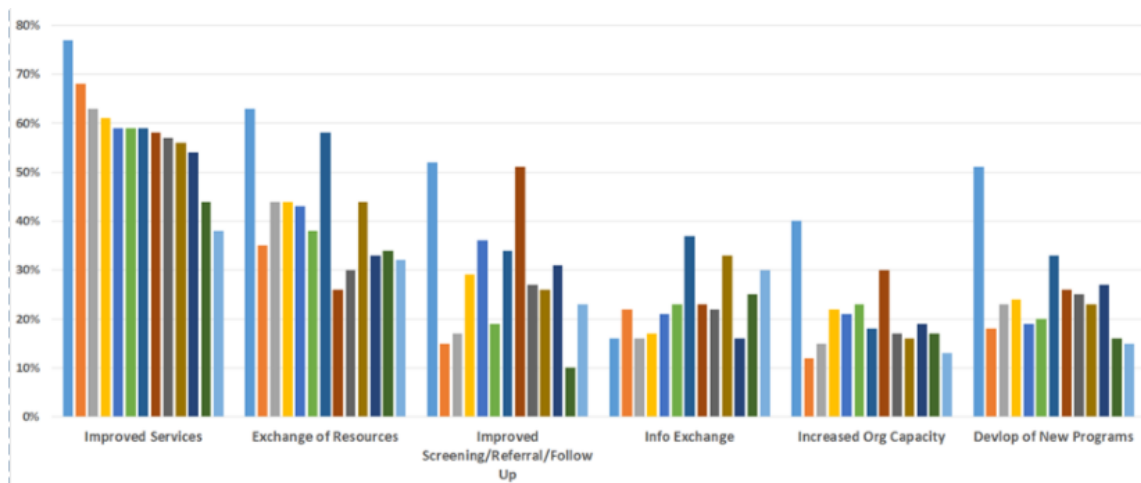
In all but 2 counties, at least **50%** of all partnerships were attributed to the ECC.

At least **20%** of all partnerships were attributed directly to the work of the ECC.

The Early Childhood Councils are extremely successful at building relationships and coordinating the early childhood systems in their counties. The data that we collected during this project demonstrates a clear role for the Early Childhood Councils in connecting disparate parts of the Early Childhood system and nurturing partnerships. They are highly trusted and valued in all of their communities and are seen as responsible for much of the coordination among services by their partners.

What types of outcomes have these partnerships lead to?

The graph below shows the most common responses on activities or outcomes from ECC partnerships including: Improved Services, Exchange of Resources, Improved Screening/Referral/Follow Up Processes, Exchange of Information, Increased Organizational Capacity, and the Development of New Programs.



Quote from an ECC Coordinator:

We utilized data from the PARTNER survey to explore the issues of value and trust within the La Plata County ECC, this aspect of the report has been most helpful...This has helped to provide the council with feedback regarding each council member's authority and ability to impact changes within their partner agency, especially with regard to aligning the partner agencies goals with that of the ECC.

-Tamara Volz
Early Childhood Council of La Plata

Project Limitations

The Early Childhood Councils play an important role in their communities, as bridging organizations to coordinate the many diverse sectors. Most of this “systems building” work is anecdotal and based on mutual stated goals of building partnerships. There is an intuitive nature to this work and a common understanding of what systems building is resulting in a motivated group of Early Childhood Council coordinators and partners that persist in their efforts to build a strong system for children and families in their communities.

The Early Childhood Councils have accomplished substantial work in building partnerships around the state. It is difficult for them to demonstrate that, or leverage that work to build a stronger system, given the limitations in having the resources and time to absorb what is a rather complex data analysis and reporting.

Next Steps:

1) Early Childhood Councils and stakeholders need to use quantifiable data in order to:

- ⇒ Communicate to stakeholders, funders, and policy makers about the work they do and its impact on the state of Colorado
- ⇒ Create action steps to improve the Early Childhood System and their partnerships.

2) Put this network data to use:

- ⇒ For example, Mesa County used the findings from this project in their annual reports.
- ⇒ Many of the Early Childhood Councils have used these findings in their grant applications. Part of the final reports we created for each participating Early Childhood Council included specific grant language for this purpose.

3) In order to both collect and implement data on a broader level, we believe the following things are necessary:

- ⇒ Building capacity within the Early Childhood Councils to collect, digest, and translate data into practice
- ⇒ Developing a simplified methodology for data collection
- ⇒ Implementing standardized measures among Early Childhood Councils across the state to make evaluation simpler and more effective
- ⇒ Training the Early Childhood Councils in network data and analysis; Network analysis data is complicated in nature, and can be difficult to translate to practice without sufficient understanding.

Quote from an ECC Coordinator:

“The results of the PARTNER tool will be used to inform community partner outreach and increase participation from current and new community partners. ACECC would like this data to inform the current ACECC Partner meetings, with the goal of increasing meaningful participation.”

*-Ashleigh Kirk
Arapahoe County
Early Childhood
Council*

Contact Us

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