

# Children at Risk in the Child Welfare System: Collaborations to Promote School Readiness



Office of Children, Youth and Families  
Colorado Department of Human Services

Cutler Institute for Health and Social Policy  
Muskie School of Public Service  
University of Southern Maine

# Promoting School Readiness of Children in the Child Welfare System: a Colorado Case Study

NRCOI Webinar  
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*Presented by:*

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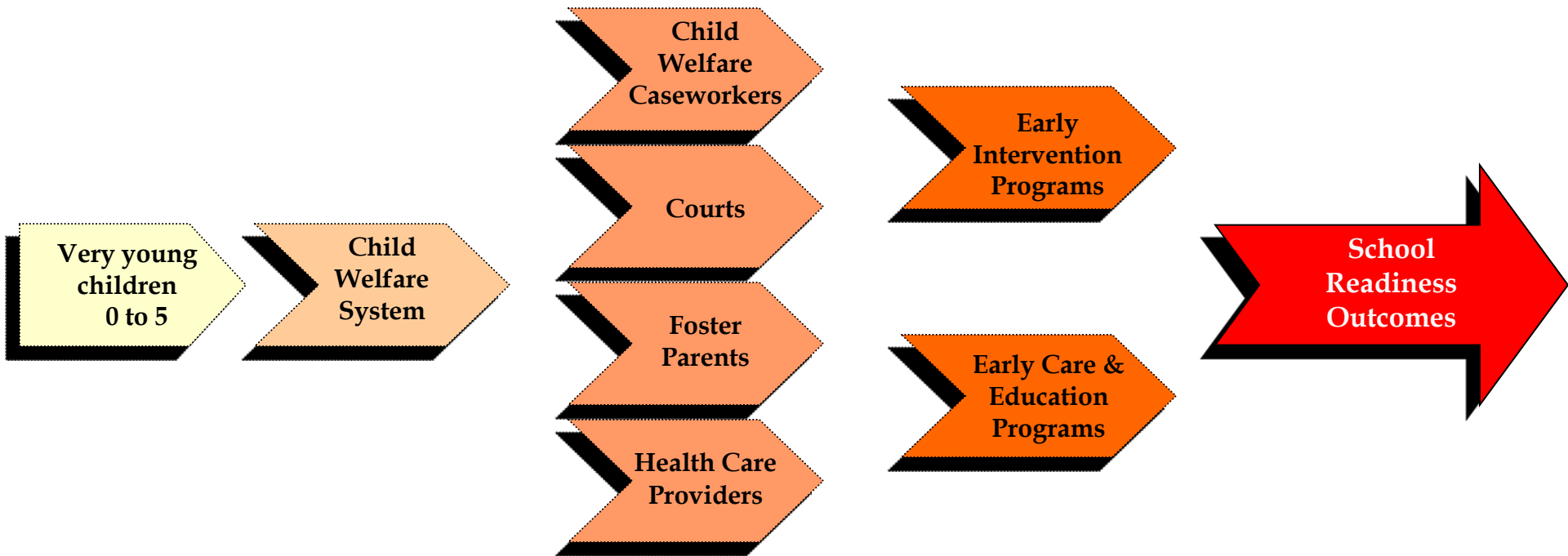
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and

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# Cross-System Collaborations



# Study Methods

- ***Field Study*** – 134 interviews with key stakeholders in five counties (El Paso, Adams, Arapahoe, Alamosa and Conejos)
- ***Statewide Foster Parent Survey*** – 266 foster parents from 34 counties responded to the survey (38% response rate)
- ***Statewide Child Welfare Caseworker Survey*** – 339 caseworkers from 52 counties completed surveys (32% response rate)

# Field Study Interviews

## **Child Welfare Key Players:**

- State DHS Child Welfare Div. officials
- County DSS child welfare caseworkers and supervisors
- Family Court Judges
- Guardians ad litem (GALs)
- Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs)
- Education surrogates
- Foster Parents
- Custodial Biological Parents

## **ECE Key Players:**

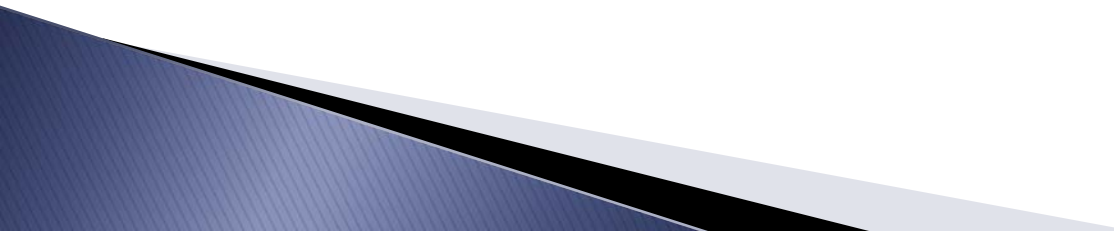
- State DHS Child Care Div. officials
- Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies
- Early Head Start/Head Start Directors
- Public Preschool Program Directors
- Child Care providers with subsidized slots

## **IDEA/Early**

### **Intervention/Preschool Special Ed. Key Players:**

- State DOE Early Connections and Preschool Special Education Officials
- Early Connections Case Managers in regional offices
- Medical professionals performing EPSDT screenings
- Preschool Special Ed. Coordinators in school districts
- Therapists (OT, Speech, etc.)

# Selected Findings

- ▶ Levels of Awareness/Training
  - ▶ Assessment, Referral and Access
  - ▶ Interagency Collaboration and Information Sharing
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# ECE: Missed Opportunity for a Partnership

- ▶ “There needs to be more coordination. Sometimes early childhood feels like the least significant part of the team. Early childhood people have a lot to give – they know a lot about the child.”

–ECE Provider

# Levels of Awareness / Training

- ▶ Majority of caseworkers and foster parents reported receiving basic training on child development.
- ▶ Supervisors expressed concern that this training may be too basic to enable caseworkers to accurately identify developmental concerns.





# Levels of Awareness/Training (cont'd)

- ▶ Caseworkers and foster parents were much less likely to report receiving training on the role ECE can play in enhancing child development and how to identify and access quality care.

# Level of Awareness / Training (cont'd)

- ▶ Yet when that training was provided it seemed to make a difference. There was a significant correlation between caseworker training on *the benefits of ECE* and:
  - higher reported levels of knowledge about child development in general
  - greater knowledge about EI and ECE resources
  - higher reported levels of enrollment in ECE programs

# Levels of Awareness/Training (cont'd)



- ▶ Caseworkers often didn't see ECE programs as important for children involved in the child welfare system unless a parent requested it or a child already had a diagnosis of a disability or delay and was placed there through IDEA.

# Levels of Awareness/Training (cont'd)

- ▶ “Not many of my caseload are in a [ECE] program. I don’t know that they need it.”  
–Child Welfare Caseworker
- ▶ “Most kids in foster care are not in Head Start or another [ECE] program. They’re usually at home. A lot of times, I don’t know if it’s even been brought up.”  
–Part C Case Manager

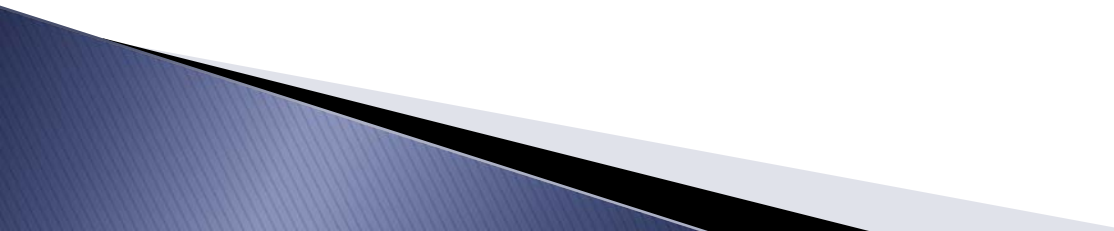
# Levels of Awareness/Training (cont'd)

- ▶ There was a lack of basic information for ECE providers and EI staff about the needs of children in the child welfare system.

“I don’t know what to say to a child who says, ‘I don’t see my Mommy because she hits me.’ We usually send him over to play with blocks.”

–Child Care Provider

# Level of Awareness / Training (cont'd)

- ▶ Head Start providers were more likely to receive this training than other ECE providers.
  - ▶ ECE providers suggested that local county child welfare offices open up the training they provide for foster parents so that ECE providers can attend.
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# Assessment, Referral and Access

- ▶ Confusion about who is primarily responsible for assessing the development of the child and referring the child if concerns are identified
- ▶ In surveys, most caseworkers thought the foster parent was primarily responsible. Most caseworker supervisors, however, thought the caseworkers were. Foster parents identified medical providers.

“You have Early Childhood Connections, [Colorado’s Part C Program] Child Find, child welfare caseworkers, Medicaid, medical providers, hospital child development clinics, foster parents. It’s so confusing – there’s no clearly identified chain of command.”

–Child Welfare Caseworker

# Assessment, Referral and Access (cont'd)

- ▶ Barriers to enrollment in ECE programs included:
  - Holding foster parents to the same eligibility requirements (work status and income) that other parents must meet for child care assistance
  - Foster parents not eligible for assistance with child care costs through child welfare
  - A lack of awareness on the part of caseworkers and foster parents that many ECE programs give priority in enrollment to this population
  - In some areas, a lack of quality ECE programs



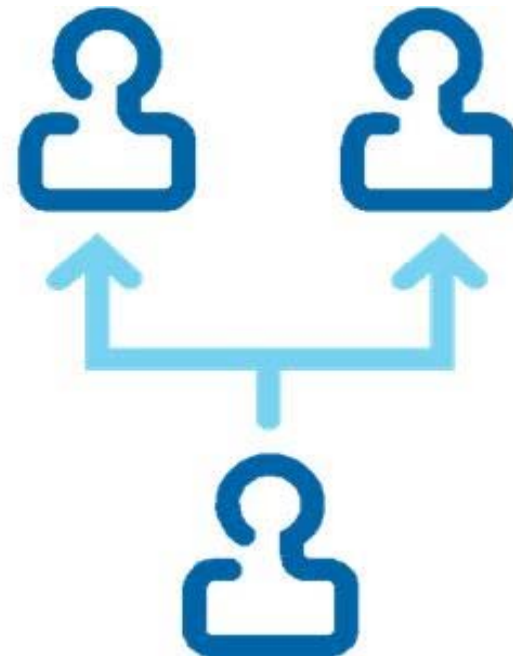
# Interagency Collaboration, Information Sharing

- ▶ Collaboration seemed stronger between child welfare and EI systems than between child welfare and ECE.
- ▶ Information sharing about children was inconsistent, with foster parents, ECE providers and medical providers in particular, expressing frustration at not receiving the information they felt they needed to adequately care for the child.



# Interagency Collaboration and Information Sharing (cont'd)

- ▶ In counties where formal Memoranda of Understanding were developed between agencies, referral processes seemed to go more smoothly and consistently and there was less confusion about roles.

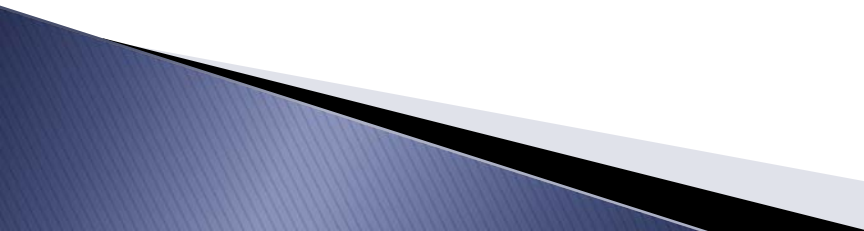


# Selected Policy Recommendations from Study

- ▶ Expand capacity of quality ECE programs to enroll children who are involved in the child welfare system.
- ▶ Urge that more publicly funded ECE programs give priority to enrolling this population.
- ▶ Expand eligibility for child care assistance for this population.



# Selected Policy Recommendations (cont'd)

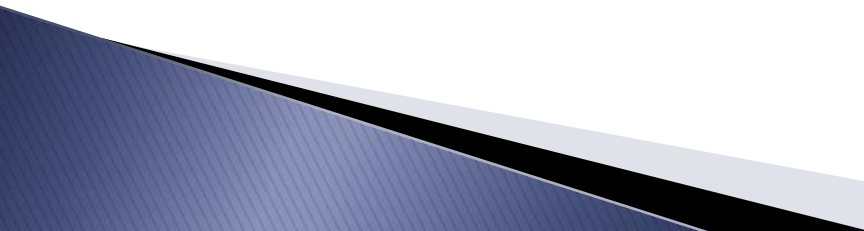
- ▶ Extend the requirement now under CAPTA and IDEA for providing developmental assessments so that it applies to children ages 0 to 5 instead of 0 to 3.
  - ▶ Provide cross-training opportunities for caseworkers, ECE providers and EI/Preschool special education staff on how to collaborate to address the developmental needs of this population.
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# Selected Policy Recommendations (cont'd)

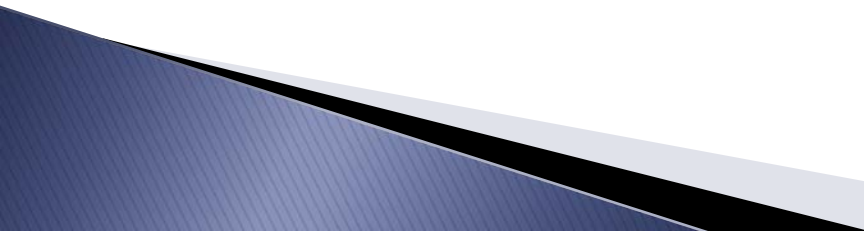
- ▶ Interagency effort at the state level to clarify policy and strengthen information sharing



# Initiatives in Colorado Since the Study

- ▶ Passage of a state law that extends the requirement for developmental assessments to children ages 0 to 5 (instead of 0 to 3)
  - ▶ In some counties, training is now provided to child welfare staff in use of Ages and Stages questionnaire.
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# Initiatives in Colorado (cont'd)

- ▶ Increasing use of checklists by court personnel to address developmental needs
  - ▶ Increased collaboration, interagency agreements to make policies more uniform across counties
  - ▶ In the next state fiscal year, development of a cross-disciplinary, cross-systems curriculum for multiple audiences on meeting the developmental needs of young children in the child welfare system
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# Initiatives in Colorado (cont'd)

- ▶ DVD on developmental needs as training tool for multiple audiences
  - Appearances by a Judge, caseworker, child development experts
  - Developmental milestones
  - Role of courts
  - Importance of ECE
  - Resources for EI and ECE



# Contact Information

For more information, please contact:

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For more information and to download the full study report go to:

<http://www.muskie.usm.maine.edu/schoolreadiness/>