

# EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL OF ARCHULETA COUNTY YEAR-END REPORT 2023-24



The 2023-2024 year was one of significant progress and continued dedication for the Early Childhood Council of Archuleta County (ECCAC). Our efforts were focused on expanding access to quality early childhood education, supporting providers, and engaging with our community to meet the diverse needs of families in Archuleta County.

## 01. Strategic Engagement and Public Meetings

Throughout the year, ECCAC remained committed to transparency and accessibility by holding monthly council meetings open to the public both in-person and via Zoom. Director Laura Mijares published agendas monthly, ensuring stakeholders could stay informed and participate in discussions. These meetings were carefully aligned with our strategic plan, allowing us to measure progress in specific areas and address essential action items, such as budget revisions, through majority votes. The fiscal year ended with \$25,082.08 in reserves, a healthy improvement over last year. Laura and Jan submitted IRS paperwork to become a 501(c)(3) and wait further guidance from the IRS. There was a change in the Council membership, with Ashley Wilson replacing Marcy Mitchell when she resigned. In addition, there were several other council resignations and new appointments. The year ended with a robust council that accurately reflects Archuleta County.

## 02. Collaboration with CDEC

Our collaboration with the Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC) was central to our operations. Laura held monthly meetings with a CDEC representative to address ongoing challenges in the Early Care and Education (ECE) system. These meetings are central to the accountability protocols established by the state contract. ECCAC received an unexpected Local Organizational Capacity grant focused on Infants and Toddlers. With this grant, we completed a Community Assessment that has been widely distributed and quoted. In addition, Laura met monthly with our fiscal agent to solidify reimbursement protocols. These efforts ensured that financial processes were handled efficiently and accurately, significantly improving our budgetary relationship with the Community Foundation.

## 03. Quality Improvement Support for Early Care and Education Providers

ECCAC continued to support local ECE centers through various initiatives. Coach Michelle Carpenter held monthly director meetings to discuss system-wide challenges and to problem-solve ongoing challenges. Quality Improvement Memos of Understanding were signed with Tri-County Head Start and Seeds of Learning. Michelle provided on-the-ground coaching in schools, working hourly beyond the contracted hours (7 hours per week). We successfully assisted one program in increasing its CO Shines quality rating and another. We explored the Expanding Quality in Infant Toddler Care (EQIT) program for educators, demonstrating our commitment to continuous improvement. Additionally, we organized an in-service literacy event, hosted a teacher appreciation dinner, and facilitated bilingual literacy initiatives with Director Laura Mijares, reading Spanish books to students twice a month. Laura provided Spanish translation services for intake and Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for preschools.

## 04. Community Outreach and Resource Distribution

Our outreach efforts continued regarding the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP). We published an article in a local newspaper and sent detailed information about CCCAP to approximately 50 families who requested it, broadening access to this essential resource. We conducted a family survey regarding childcare with over 150 respondents and three well-attended focus groups. Laura attended three community fair events and two Healthy Archuleta meetings to share resources and to speak about the UPK program. The results of the community outreach were shared with the Archuleta County Commissioners.

## 05. Enhanced Communication and Professional Development

Effective communication was a cornerstone of our efforts. We distributed periodic email blasts, sent monthly agendas via email, and used phone calls, texts, and emails to keep stakeholders engaged. We also offered various in-service training opportunities, enhancing professional growth among providers. The year began with a home provider training session highlighting the importance of CCCAP and CACFP. Laura and Michelle hosted two family provider dinners and trainings, focusing on licensing and available resources to home providers. Additionally, council meetings featured a monthly resource highlight to share resources commonly available in Archuleta County. ECCAC partnered with the Durango Adult Education Center and Fort Lewis College to offer a three-credit college-level course in Pagosa Springs in June. This was taught by Michelle Carpenter, who successfully worked with 12 teachers from the area preschools and Pagosa Springs Elementary School.



## 06. Expansion of ECE Program

One notable achievement for Tri-County Head Start was the successful opening of an Early Head Start classroom with a CCCAP agreement, creating new slots for early childhood education. This expansion significantly impacted the local childcare landscape, providing more opportunities for young children to receive high-quality care and education. There was one additional licensed home provider that is currently not caring for children in their home. There has been an active construction project at one of our centers in order to care for infants and toddlers. Lastly, an area charter school is exploring the possibility of opening a Universal Preschool (UPK) program or a private preschool. The school has been in contact with CDEC and has submitted a grant application for startup costs.

## 07. Quality and Accessibility of Services

ECCAC ensured that a significant portion of the available childcare slots met high-quality standards, with 129 of the 183 licensed slots in facilities with a Quality Rating of 2 or above. Additionally, 42% of students served in Archuleta County were enrolled in centers or homes that accept CCCAP, ensuring that children from diverse economic backgrounds could benefit from quality early education. Both childcare homes and centers are charged with the Colorado Shines Professional Development Information System. With available systems, the ECE providers may increase their Colorado Shines Levels.

### Future Challenges

Despite our successes, we faced challenges in growing the number of available slots, staff turnover at the various ECE programs, and ECE affordability. When focusing solely on licensed daycare centers and home-based providers, Archuleta County had 183 slots dedicated to early childhood care, highlighting the ongoing need for additional resources. From the community survey, we recognize that there is demand for double that amount that is unmet. In addition, families have approached ECCAC with a variety of requests including drop-in care, parent care cooperatives, and care with financial assistance. All forms of care remain at the forefront of ECCAC's community agenda.

### summary

The 2023-2024 year was one of growth, progress, and dedication for the Early Childhood Council of Archuleta County. We expanded access to quality early childhood education, supported providers through various challenges, and engaged with our community to meet the diverse needs of families. As we look ahead, we remain committed to addressing the ongoing challenges and building on our achievements to shape a brighter future for Archuleta County's youngest members.

