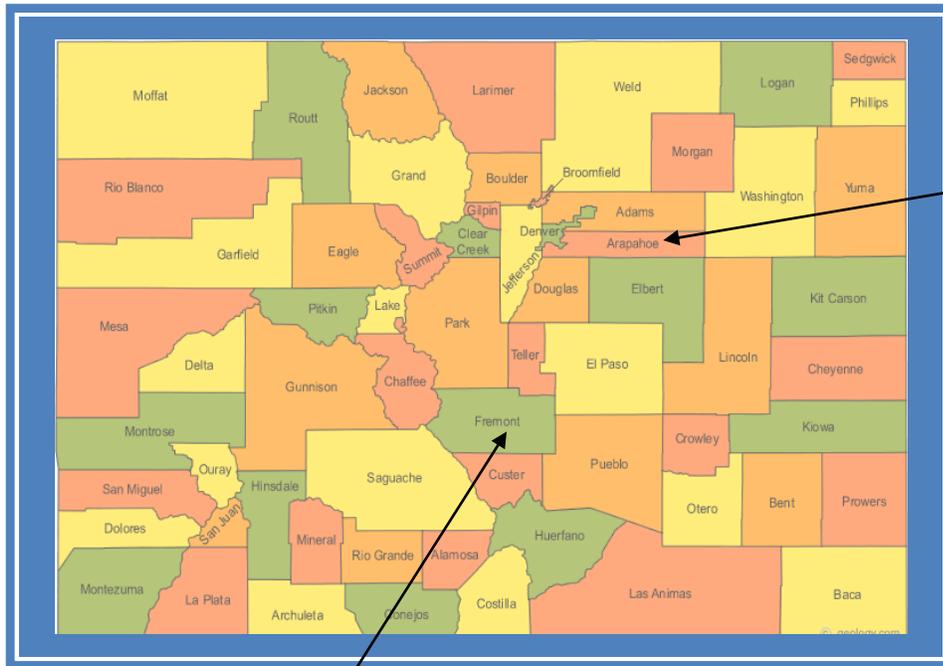


Building a Local System for Early Childhood: Case Studies on Arapahoe and Fremont Counties



ARAPAHOE COUNTY
Early Childhood Council



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Prepared for the Early Childhood Council Team,
Colorado Departments of Education and Human Services

By Alison S. Birchard. M.P.H.
Consulting for Health Communities
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Introduction

What does an early childhood system look like and what does it take to build a system at the local level? What difference does having an early childhood system make for children and families, for providers, and for the broader community? These questions were explored through research on two entities in Colorado: The Arapahoe County Early Childhood Council (ACECC) and the ECHO & Family Center Early Childhood Council of Fremont County. ACECC and ECHO are among 30 Early Childhood Councils in the State of Colorado that provide community-based infrastructure to support a local system of learning, health, mental health, and family support services.

The ACECC and ECHO Council were selected to participate for their commonalities as well as their differences. Both Councils have made significant progress in building early childhood systems in their communities as evidenced by a high degree of collaboration, leveraging of resources, successful implementation and expansion of programming, policy development, and increased leadership, accountability, and public engagement. They have done so along different timelines, under different organizational structures, and in communities which differ greatly in terms of size. This work is intended to explore what is unique as well as universal about system development, in order to inform other local communities engaged in system building and those who impact funding and policies regarding these efforts.

Methodology

The case studies involved four strategies for information gathering:

- Assembling basic data on demographics and Council characteristics
- Review of key Council documents to create a timeline of major developments
- Attendance at Council meetings and events

- Key informant interviews regarding significant milestones, major accomplishments, challenges, and lessons learned

This report is presented in sections corresponding to the information-gathering techniques, concluding with a final section on observations regarding similarities and differences between the Councils and the implications for system building in general. Several appendices which provide more detail on each Council and the methods used for gathering information are also included.

The Councils: A Brief Overview

The Arapahoe County Early Childhood Council

Since its inception in 1997, the Arapahoe County Early Childhood Council (ACECC) has pursued a mission of promoting high quality programs and services which support a Safe, Smart, and Healthy Start for young children and their families in Arapahoe County. ACECC works with families and early childhood service providers, both directly and indirectly, through programs that address four main areas: education, health, mental health and family support (also known as the 4 Domains). In addition, ACECC has a variety of leadership opportunities through membership on various Council committees.

The ECHO & Family Center Early Childhood Council of Fremont County

The ECHO and Family Center Early Childhood Council consists of representatives from key community agencies serving infants, toddlers, and preschool children. Members of the Council have worked collaboratively over the past 32 years to develop a comprehensive early childhood system that addresses the gaps in services and funding for children prenatal to kindergarten entry and their families. The Council and its action teams serve as advisory

bodies for a network of programs serving families and providers in Fremont County and support the implementation and development of programming by collaborating to identify and procure grants and other funding sources.

Arapahoe and Fremont Counties: Variations in Size, Density, and Composition

The table below summarizes key characteristics of the Councils and the populations they serve.

Arapahoe County has nearly twenty times the number of young children as Fremont County. While the population is smaller in Fremont County, it is spread over an area nearly twice the size of Arapahoe County in square miles. The populations also differ in their socioeconomic distribution as well as composition by race/ethnicity. Sources for these data can be found in Appendix A.

County Demographics at a Glance

	Arapahoe County	Fremont County
Total Population	554,282	47,259
Proportion of population that is Hispanic or Latino	17.2%	12.4%
Households with children under age 18	66,716 (31.5% of all households)	4,706 (28.3% of all households)
Geographic area of Council in square miles	803	1,533
2007 Young Child Population (under age 5)	40,465	2,134
Young Children in Poverty	19.5%	29.5%
Number of School Districts in Council area	6	3
Number of Licensed Child Care Centers in Council area	198 ¹	9
Number of Licensed Child Care Homes in Council Area	359	23
Professionals with Credentials²	203	39

¹ Arapahoe County also has 81 before and after school programs

² Numbers were provided by the Colorado office of Professional Development and are current as of March 2010.

Council Characteristics at a Glance

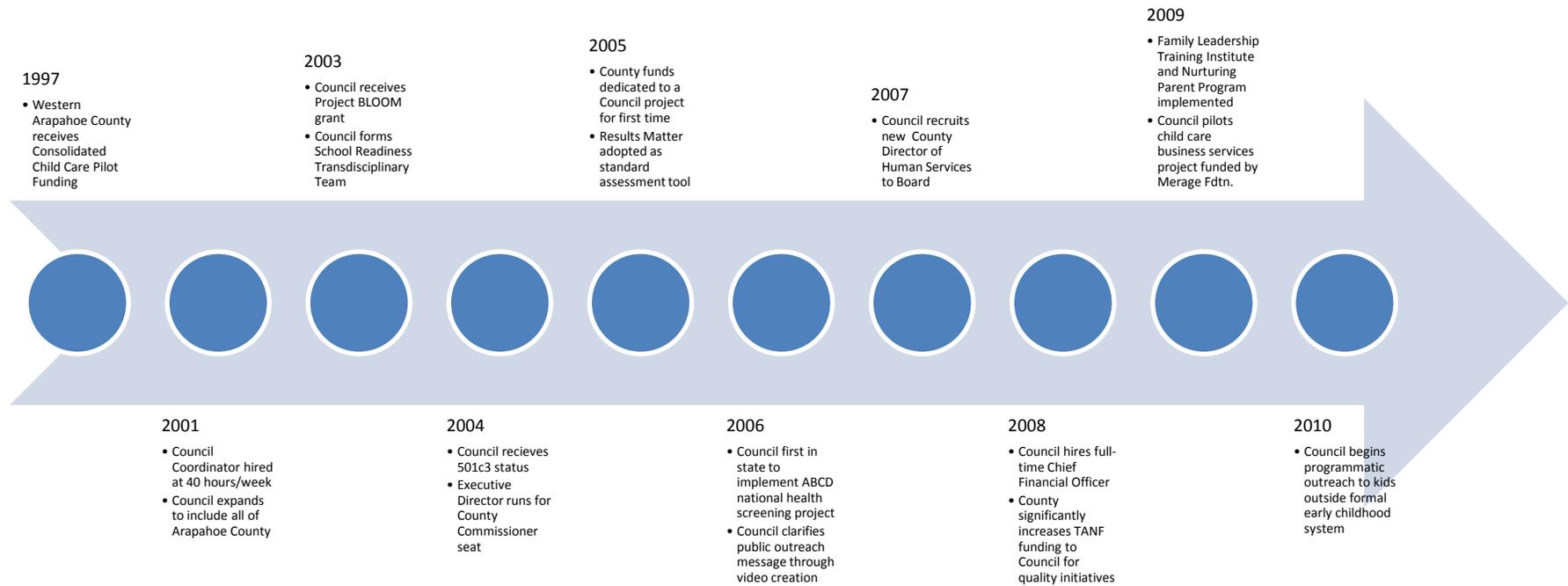
	Arapahoe County	Fremont County
Year Council was Formed	1997	1977
Definition of Early Childhood	Birth to 8 years old	Birth to 5 years old
Current Council Structure	Independent 501c3	Several Fiscal Agents
Current Council Staff	14 staff positions totaling 13.5 FTE	5 staff positions totaling 4.23 FTE
Funding Sources for Council Staff Positions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EC Councils Grant • Invest in Quality • School Readiness • Colorado WIN/LAUNCH • Pinpoint/Navigator • Buell Foundation • Colorado Children’s Trust • Colorado Health Foundation • Kaiser • Merage Foundation <p style="text-align: center;">TOTAL = 10</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TANF Reserves • Colorado Preschool Program (2 Districts) • EC Councils Grant • Early Head Start • School Readiness • Special Education funding <p style="text-align: center;">TOTAL = 7</p>

Time Lines

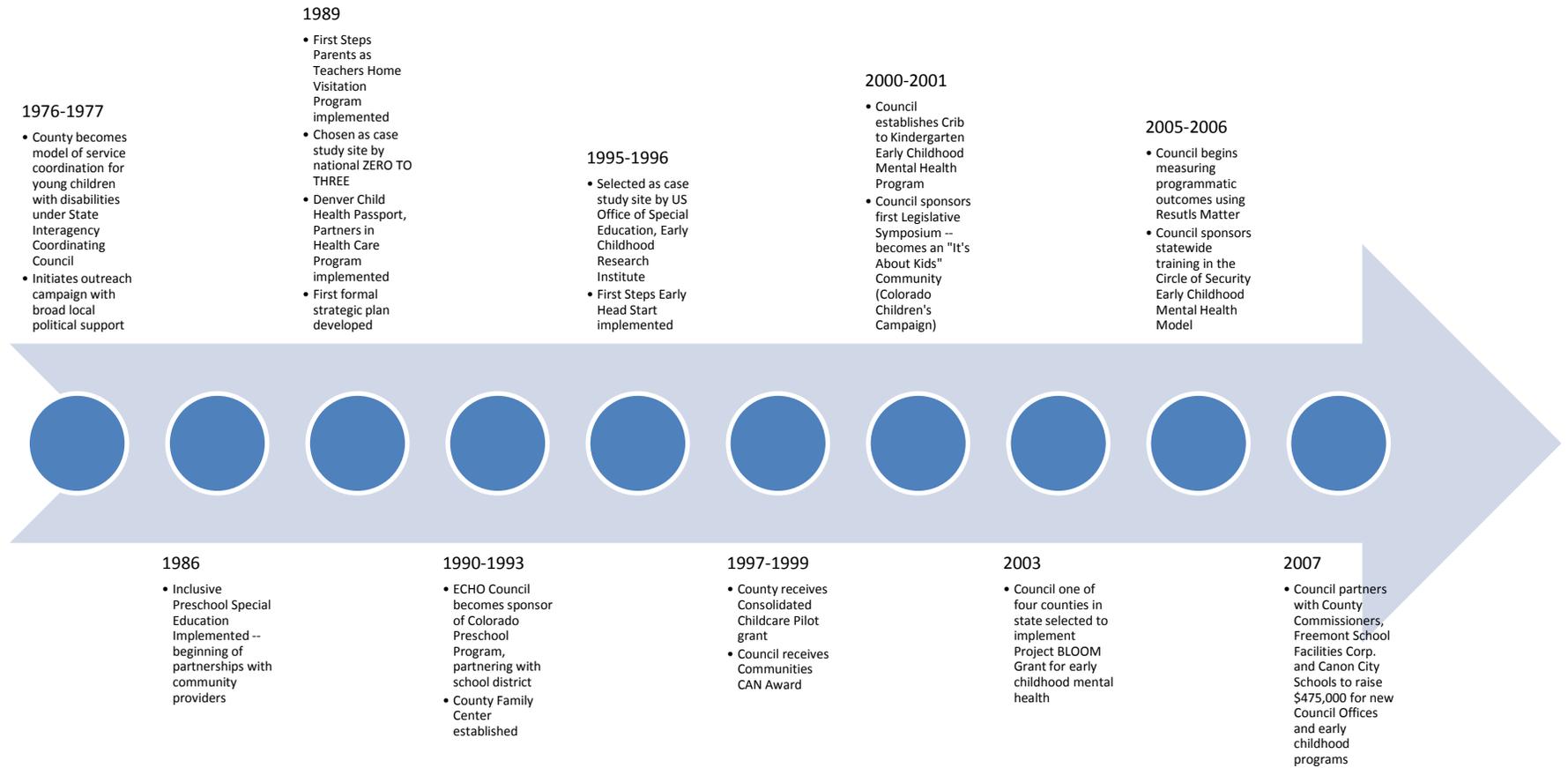
A Snapshot of Key Milestones in the Development of Early Childhood Systems in Arapahoe and Fremont Counties

The following time lines were developed through review of various Council documents including annual reports and reports to funders as well as information gleaned during key informant interviews. The timelines were reviewed by each Council Director for accuracy and comprehensiveness. Expanded timelines with additional detail can be found in Appendix B.

Arapahoe County Early Childhood Council Timeline

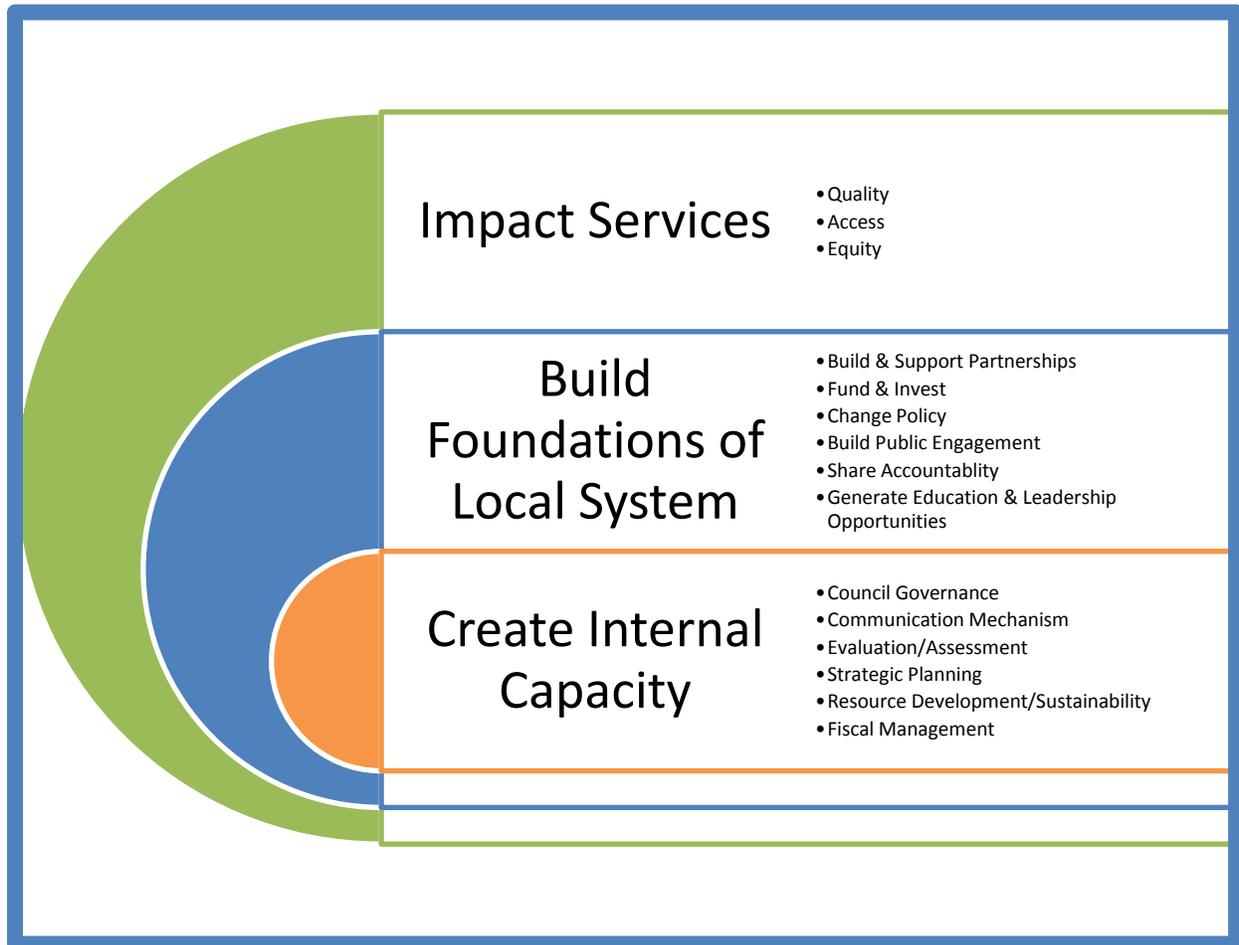


ECHO & Family Center Early Childhood Council Timeline



General Observations Regarding Timelines

Timelines were considered within the context of the graphic below that was developed by the State Early Childhood Councils Team to illustrate the role of Early Childhood Councils:



Major milestones were categorized in one or more of the major role areas: Impacting Services, Building Foundations of Local System, and Creating Internal Capacity. A general observation about the differences in the evolution of each Council relates to the early years. Arapahoe County focused more on Building Foundations and Creating Internal Capacity as preparation for Impacting Services. Fremont County began by Impacting Services which facilitated Building Foundations and Creating Internal Capacity. Some of the most significant milestones defy a single

categorization, e.g., both communities were selected as Project BLOOM recipients which allowed the Councils to have an effect on all three realms by impacting access to mental health services, building and strengthening partnerships and shared accountability, and providing internal capacity to sustain efforts in the mental health domain.

While the overall duration and sequence of events vary between Councils, there are several similar “tipping points” that have been summarized in the table below:

Common Tipping Points For Councils in Arapahoe and Fremont Counties

Impact Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serving as model communities for program implementation • Increasing accessibility to comprehensive services through program integration
Build Foundation of Local System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated funding for Council work • Developing functional partnerships across all four domains • Forming influential relationships with policymakers • Strong financial support from local government
Create Internal Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated personnel and space for Council work • Creating an organizational structure that promotes financial sustainability • Adoption of standard assessment tools to measure outcomes across programs

Key Informant Interviews

Several interviews were conducted with staff and members of both Councils. Council coordinators were asked to identify folks to be interviewed, including someone who had been with the Council a short time, someone who had been there a long time, and someone whose participation was challenging to secure. Interviews were conducted with individuals as well as with groups as part of standing staff and Council meetings. A list of questions can be found in Appendix C. Below is a summary of responses from each Council.

ACECC Interviews

What has been the biggest success of ACECC?

An overarching theme regarding success is the financial and programmatic growth of ACECC over the past several years. While the initial efforts of the Council were focused on the early learning environment, the past ten years have produced great evolution in the other domains of health, mental health, and family support. Successful partnerships and collaboration across multiple agencies continue to be key in making this expansion possible.

ACECC's budget has nearly doubled each year over the past few years. With each new or increased funding stream, ACECC considers how the money can be administered most effectively. This has created an upward spiral in better understanding and meeting the needs of the community, and solidifying partnerships in order to channel services most effectively. ACECC members cited an ability to maximize resources as a key to success in continuing to increase funding and expand programming.

"The ability to maximize resources has been a key to ACECC's success."

Implementation of the Assuring Better Child health and Development (ABCD) Program is one example of a programmatic success for ACECC. The ABCD Program was designed to improve the delivery of early child development services

for low-income children and their families by strengthening primary health care services and systems that support the healthy development of young children. A Council Partner (Early Childhood Connections for Arapahoe and Douglas) learned of ABCD at the National Smart Start Conference, brought it back to Colorado, then transferred it to ACECC when that organization dissolved. ACECC now serves as technical advisor and fiscal agent as the program is replicated across the state.

What has been the biggest challenge?

Demographics present a tremendous challenge. Arapahoe County is home to over 500,000 people with a good deal of cultural, language, religious and socioeconomic diversity. The economic downturn has increased the challenge for many families to meet basic needs such as transportation and housing, in turn increasing the challenge for those who are serving families with young children. Within the 850 square miles that make up the county there are six school districts, nine municipalities, and three library districts, thus increasing the complexity of cultivating and maintaining true county-wide partnerships.

“We used to BE the community, now we are an organization that needs to stay in touch with the community.”

ACECC’s successful expansion has not been without challenges. Finding adequate space to accomplish the work has been difficult and time-consuming. Staffing, administering, and integrating more and expanding programs is an ongoing challenge. Administrative costs required to support Council work are not fully supported by funders. ACECC often absorbs these costs, which members lament has given the impression that funding for infrastructure is

adequate, when really it means that there is a price paid elsewhere. Maintaining ACECC’s great reputation is a challenge if staff and partners are spread too thin. This is a major focus for the Council at present as they are aware that if their reputation were to get damaged it could be very difficult to repair.

While ACECC demonstrates strong partnerships with key agencies, these relationships have endured rocky periods and have had to change and evolve over the development of the Council. Staying in touch with partners and the community is an ongoing challenge that has increased over time. As one member put it, “We used to be the community, now we are an organization that needs to stay in touch with the community.” Another member identified all the current tools and technology as a challenge. While these things can be beneficial they can also consume precious time and hinder what is irreplaceable: sitting down and having a conversation.

What has changed in your County as a result of shifting from a program approach to a system approach?

Respondents were shown a graphic developed by state staff at the Colorado Department of Human Services illustrating the shift from a programs approach to a systems approach (see Appendix D), and asked to provide examples of how the shift has occurred in Arapahoe County. The most common theme of responses was that a systems approach has allowed the Council to achieve a consistent vision and a strategic planning process for carrying out that vision. In the early years, Council activities were driven by what funding was available and more heavily influenced by the vision of other agencies. With the evolution of a systems approach has come a shift to a clearly defined vision of doing what is best for children and families in Arapahoe County. That vision, in turn, drives what resources are sought rather than the other way around.

“Holding a vision is easier with a systems approach. If a program or initiative doesn’t serve the vision, it drops away.”

In terms of concrete examples, a shift to a systems approach has allowed ACECC to make more services available to a greater number of children, families and providers (such as the Parents as Teachers program, mental health consultation, and expansion of library and literacy programming) through increased awareness of the range of services available and greater coordination of services and referrals. The systems approach has enabled expansion into what one member called “collateral areas” such as the Family Leadership Training Institute. Training people to become community leaders not only helps individual participants and the Council, but it leads to exponential expansion as each trained person takes on community projects in their own area of interest.

What are some lessons learned that might benefit other communities doing this work?

- Keep inviting new people and keep talking. This is the only way to find the right mix of partners. Don’t be afraid of conflict as it is inevitable. Consider mediation if necessary in order to be able to form positive and productive partnerships.
- Take what you can get from partners (even if it is not all that you want). “We had a chance to apply for a grant with partners who were reluctant. We agreed to write the grant if they would write a letter of support, which they did. We got the grant which strengthened the partnership, and we have been able to sustain much of the

collaborative effort even though the grant has ended.”

- “Coordinators need to step up, to view and convey themselves as the experts they are. Sometimes Coordinators get hired as administration to a Board of Directors and are held back, perhaps not on purpose, by the strong leadership of the Board. There needs to be a paradigm shift to let Coordinators lead, and Coordinators need to know that ‘no one knows it better than you.’”

Key Lesson

Start where you are, with something that makes sense to the people who are at the table. If there are only a few collaborators, start with one project you can agree on and complete that project. It may not seem like much but will give the group confidence and experience upon which to build.

- “Our first question with new funding is always, ‘Who should handle this?’ We work closely with Tri-County Health Department, Arapahoe Library District, two community colleges and other partners to administer our programs and have found that it works well to ‘let the agencies who do it best do it.’ Sometimes they have the funding and we have the expertise, sometimes vice versa. We don’t know everything, but somebody in the community does.”

What aspects of Council development in Arapahoe County may or may not be applicable to a smaller community and/or a newer Council?

- “Becoming a 501c3 is not necessary, though it was an excellent step for Arapahoe County.”
- No matter the size, a Council needs to have leadership and vision and find the right mix of folks for their community.
- Utilize your peers. The support of other Council Coordinators was a big benefit for ACECC, especially as it transitioned to a 501c3. Mentoring is beneficial for Councils of any size and stage of development. Respondents thought there should be a more formalized approach to mentoring between Councils.

Universal Truth

Turf issues exist across the board and moving beyond them is crucial in developing a systems approach.

- One participant also mentioned that settling turf issues is not just a lesson for local communities, but for the state level as well, noting that even though state departments have encouraged partnership and collaboration, they don’t necessarily model that behavior and have not overcome some of their own turf issues.

“If they could do at the state level what they’ve encouraged us to do at the local level, Colorado could be much further along.”

Who is not “at the table” that you would like to see? What are the barriers to securing the partnerships(s)?

Participants noted that getting parents to the table is always a challenge. Their time is so limited and the learning curve is often very steep. Faith communities were also identified; ACECC connects with a few faith-based programs but there are many programs that use faith-based curricula, prohibiting ACECC from serving them with public funds.

“We are our own barrier in this regard. We are early childhood people and we don’t know how to talk to the business community.”

Engaging the business community was identified as a perpetual challenge. ACECC hosted a well-attended business roundtable breakfast with Bill Millett as the keynote speaker. So the challenge now is determining a specific charge for business leaders and sustaining their interest. ACECC is optimistic about establishing their business credibility through the implementation of a Shared Services model with help from the Merage Foundation.

Where would you like the Council to be in five to ten years from now?

Since space has been an ongoing challenge with recent expansion, many respondents interpreted this question quite literally and said they would like to be in a different building. They envision their own site which would include a resource center for families and providers, a computer lab, and training space. Child care could also be provided in a model setting that could demonstrate quality and serve as an incubator for new initiatives.

Overall, respondents indicated a desire to keep expanding the efforts, reach, and visibility of ACECC. Though the rapid expansion has been difficult at times, the Council is getting more used to it and more confident, thanks in large part to exceptional leadership. In particular, the Council would like to implement programming specifically for fathers. The Coordinator of ACECC’s Family Leadership Training Institute provided encouraging news on this front—three out of the four recently-trained facilitators are men.

ECHO Council Interviews

What has been the biggest success of the ECHO Family Council?

Several respondents identified the significant number of children served through universal access to screening and early intervention services as a major success. The Council determined long ago that what is good for kids with special needs is good for all kids, and what is good for all kids is good for kids with special needs. Success is identifying and addressing the developmental needs of children early on so that they can be successful in school.

The partnership and collaboration that exists in Fremont County is also identified as a success. To be able to bring so many different groups together has enabled the community to maximize resources, not duplicate services, and create an integrated system that is accessible for educators, parents, and children. This expectation for collaboration is communicated across the early childhood community. As one new Council member explained:

“When I started my job as a newcomer in Fremont County, I was told I needed to be part of certain groups. I was strongly encouraged to become involved in bigger projects.”

The annual Legislative Symposium was also identified as a success. For the past 9 years the Council has hosted a forum to keep local and state legislators informed. This enables them to educate new legislators and to maintain active support from policymakers. When things like Colorado Preschool Program or Council legislation come up, state legislators are champions for the Council. Local policymakers have said “let’s use what flexibility we have” (particularly with regard to funding decisions) to support early childhood. Respondents described interactions with policymakers as friendly and ongoing.

“Collaboration has enabled the community to maximize resources, not duplicate services, and create an integrated system that is accessible to all.”

Measuring programmatic outcomes through Results Matter and Qualistar was also identified as a success. While these developments were seen as somewhat stressful for partners, it was seen as “positive stress” that strengthened partnerships and the overall vision of the Council.

What has been the biggest challenge?

While respondents indicated that their track record as a model community for collaboration strengthens their ability to secure funding, they also noted that with the economic downturn they may be less likely to get a grant or to get funded in the amount requested.

Key Challenge

Funding and ensuring financial sustainability is an ongoing challenge. Grants and soft money comprise the majority of funding for Council work, and piecing it together is a challenge every year.

Trust and turf issues were identified as a challenge. In the beginning, the community had to overcome major turf issues in order to implement universal screening. Programs such as Head Start had concerns about dismantling existing processes and how they would fit into a new approach. The transition took time and recognition that “there are enough children to go around.” Overcoming these issues had tremendous benefit as the efficient approach freed up resources that were needed elsewhere, and conveyed to parents and families that the system is integrated. However, trust and turf challenges are ongoing as leadership changes in various agencies and they can be particularly difficult when an agency is not part of the Council:

“When there are disputes between agencies on the Council, they can be worked out. When people aren’t sitting at your table it can be more contentious. New turf issues surface as we get new money. This is an ongoing challenge”

Engaging new ECHO members was identified as a challenge. While new members described the Council as inclusive, both newer and long-time

members concurred that it can be hard for new folks coming in. The learning curve is steep with lots of talk in acronyms and jargon. New members can feel as if they are slowing down the process and may feel discouraged from participating. However, ECHO has proven capable of surmounting this challenge as evidenced by the “revitalizing” participation of new members from public health, St. Thomas More Hospital, and the business community. “Even as a well established Council we need new blood and new faces so we don’t get stuck in our ways.”

Several respondents identified sustaining the efforts of the Council through transition of leadership as a forthcoming challenge. Pam Walker, the current Executive Director, has provided strong and exceptional leadership for decades, and will likely retire in the not-too-distant future. While some folks indicated there were emerging leaders and succession planning in place, one respondent expressed concern that she wasn’t sure if the people who are being “groomed” to step in know they are being groomed or were even interested in that level of involvement.

What has changed in your County as a result of shifting from a program approach to a system approach?

Respondents were shown a graphic developed by the Colorado Department of Human Services illustrating the shift from a programs approach to a systems approach (see Appendix D), and asked to provide examples of how the shift has occurred in Fremont County. Several respondents referenced the universal access for families and seamless integration of services as the most significant evidence of a systems approach. The integration makes programs ongoing and sustainable and prevents the stopping and re-starting of services that wastes resources and is devastating to families. As one respondent surmised,

“When we were a single agency focus, we were

trying to address really tough issues, such as abuse and neglect, as one agency, and it was an almost insurmountable challenge. There were so many things we would have to train our staff to be able to do. Now we can partner and we're not duplicating, we can provide so much more for families, and it ends up saving money. We are getting tremendous bang for our buck."

Another member noted that "we never had a single program approach, but we were initially a single population approach serving children with disabilities who qualified for special education services. Through screening we were identifying many children with developmental delays who did not qualify for special education services. We shifted to a more global vision of developing and sustaining programs for a comprehensive system that prepares all children for school success and supports all families."

According to respondents, a systems approach allows ECHO to not just develop programs, but to sustain and integrate them, to identify additional needs and gaps and to address them in a non-duplicative way.

Respondents provided additional, specific examples of a systems approach in Fremont County including:

- When Part C shifted (at the state level) from the Department of Education to the Department of Human Services, Fremont was one of the few communities that did not have to make a major shift. It was a smooth

transition because of the systemic approach in place.

- Prior to implementing Results Matter, Council members decided to identify a method to measure child outcomes. After reviewing many tools, Council members selected the tools that are used today. When Results Matter was mandated by CDE, Fremont's early childhood community had already chosen one of the assessment tools recommended by CDE.

"When we decide to do something we think systematically and we do it as a community."

- The decisions regarding who would be Qualistar-rated were made collectively based on what is best for the community overall and what makes the most sense - given the funding available.

ECHO respondents believe that the systems approach cultivates trust and vice versa:

"The trust formed between agencies builds trust with families. If families are receiving the same information from various sources they are going to feel much more comfortable with it."

What are some lessons learned that might benefit other communities doing this work?

- Be willing to try anything, but be mindful of staying true to your mission and vision. “There were times when we took on too much and started too many things at the same time. While these times were stressful, our Council culture is to take advantage of opportunities when they come along. One thing we won’t do is give up something we have in place to try something new.”
- A key to Fremont’s success has been its focus on birth to five. “Funding and services are always pulled toward older children, and we are sometimes encouraged to branch out into that realm, but we have held firm to birth to five.”
- Find creative ways to surmount barriers and persevere through road blocks. One Council member did a stint on the school board for purposes of getting early childhood issues on the district radar. “In order to get our Family Center approved, we debated whether someone should get on the planning and zoning committee.”
- Flexibility of the fiscal agent organization and support of the organization’s Board of Directors is key.
- Having a Chief Financial Officer (CFO) who understands the importance of early childhood is critical. The CFO must find ways to maximize resources while maintaining accountability. “We don’t give financial managers enough credit for their role, for when they value this work it makes a huge difference in what we are able to accomplish.”

"Openly embrace new people."

- Find the hook to get key champions and move beyond the usual suspects. “The CEO of the Hospital has been a great addition to our Council. She was also a Head Start and WIC parent so awareness of the value of those programs was a hook for her.”

Key Lesson

Let each community determine who should be part of the collaboration. This is likely to have a more successful outcome than mandating a particular partnership.

- Engaging in program development to build a comprehensive system is key to our success as a Council.

What aspects of Council development in Fremont County may or may not be applicable to a larger community and/or a newer Council?

Several respondents noted that there are advantages to the size and composition of their community. In terms of relationships, many of the members have known each other since they themselves were children, having gone to school or church together. There is very little turnover in the community overall, and when folks shift positions they are highly likely to stay involved in the Council, and can bring an even richer perspective having served different roles. Providing children and families with universal services is greatly facilitated by the size and stability of Fremont County’s population.

“We have access to all of our providers, and they know who we are.”

Respondents also noted that their smaller size presents challenges. There is a smaller professional pool from which to draw so Fremont has to commit resources to growing their own professionals. Similarly, much of Fremont’s collaboration has been driven by a need to pool resources to increase its access to resources. Several years ago Fremont County collaborated with both Chaffee and Custer Counties to access Part C funding. “At that time if you had a certain number of children you could receive a base amount of funding, which the counties were able to access jointly.” This increased the amount of funding for Fremont, and provided funding for the other two counties who were previously receiving none.

Several respondents felt that what has been accomplished in Fremont is quite possible in larger communities, but that issues of turf and trust are often bigger and harder to overcome.

“There are more resources and more competition [in larger communities]. You’d have to have a lot more people involved, but I am not going to let bigger communities off the hook. They need to find a way to make it work for the sake of children and families.”

Several respondents noted that one thing that transcends community size is the importance of good leadership.

Universal Truth

Effective leadership brings people in and energizes the whole to become more powerful than the sum of its parts.

Who is not “at the table” that you would like to see? What are the barriers to securing the partnership(s)?

- Prisons and the Department of Corrections—they represent a big proportion of the workforce in Fremont County with significant child care needs, including non-traditional needs such as evening care. “The relationship is not there. They are very involved with their own issues and ECE is not really on their radar.”
- Home child care providers are underrepresented. “Fear is a barrier, as they fear being judged and perceived as lower quality than center providers. Time is also a barrier for this group.”
- More involvement from physician, mental health, drug and alcohol, and domestic violence sectors. Turnover of directorship in some of these fields was cited as a barrier.
- Participation from elementary education. “Having them at the table would bolster our school readiness and transition efforts.”

“It is a challenge to recruit and retain parents.”

- More parent engagement is needed. “They are there, but not as consistently as they could be.”
- More business participation: “It is hard because we don’t have big industries here. And although business is not at the table at every Council meeting, they have really come forward repeatedly with donations. Fremont County is currently renovating a school into an early childhood center with many local businesses donating money and supplies to the effort.”

Where would you like the Council to be five to ten years from now?

Perhaps a sign of the times, the most frequent response to this question had to do financial stability and sustainability to maintain the effort:

“We spend our money well, administrative costs are low. I wish we could spend more time on the system and less time scrambling for dollars to keep things going, less time on where we will need to

make cuts. Some emergency reserves would be nice to have.”

The inevitable change in leadership was another major theme in comments about the future. Many folks expressed hope that the passion and commitment would be maintained and that the Council would keep evolving to meet the changing needs of the community. One Council member referenced broader generational differences that will impact Council work: ““We are turning it over to a new generation who are more comfortable working alone, less into the partnership, it is less appealing. We believe the relationships and trust are what have kept it going. The positive piece is the technology— data collection will be a piece of cake. In five years we will have more people in charge who will have much more ability and comfort with the technology. They may take some of what we have built for granted, but they will want to have their own children screened and that will be a driving force. It may break down somewhat and they will have to put it back together in their own way.”

Councils at a Glance: Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

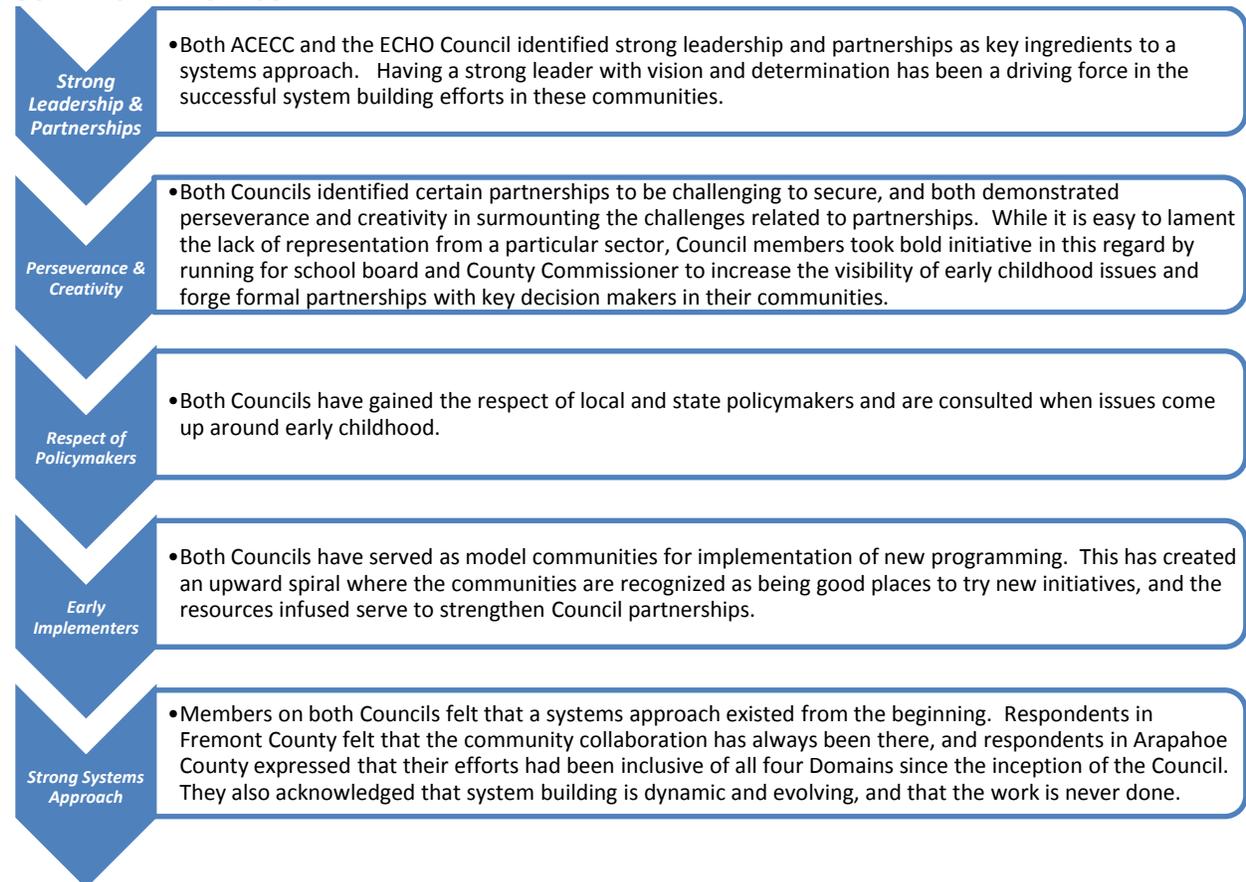
	Arapahoe County	Fremont County
Successes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial and programmatic growth • Ability to maximize resources • Understanding and meeting needs of the community • Strong partnerships • Serving as a model community to pilot new programming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal screening and early intervention • Legislative symposium and relationships with policymakers • Measuring programmatic outcomes • Strong partnerships • Serving as a model community to pilot new programming
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Size and demographics • Increasing needs in economic downturn • Maintaining quality and reputation while expanding rapidly • Staying connected with partners and the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring financial stability • Trust and turf issues • Bringing new members onto the Council • Surviving leadership transition is a forthcoming challenge

	Arapahoe County	Fremont County
Lessons Learned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership and vision are key • Start small and build confidence over time • Keep inviting new people • Don't be afraid of conflict • Take what you can get from partners, even if it is not all that you would want • Moving beyond turf issues is critical • Council Coordinators have a wealth of wisdom and expertise that should be tapped across all Early Childhood Councils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership and vision are key • Be willing to try new things but stay true to mission and vision • Persevere through road blocks • Openly embrace new people • Having support of fiscal agents is key • Let local communities determine effective partnerships • Engaging in program development has been key to success

Conclusions

What is similar, what is unique, and what are the implications for system building work?

Common Themes



Distinctive Traits

Core Services	Organizational Structure	Length of Existence	Council Culture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on this investigation it seems that the core service around which the system is built is different in each community. In Fremont County, the anchor for the system seems to be the universal access to developmental screening that then guides appropriate referral to programs and services. In Arapahoe County, it seems to be the work with early care and education providers through an integration of programming that is presented as a menu of choices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The organizational structure is quite different in each community, and both communities identified pros and cons of their structures. The 501c3 approach in Arapahoe County is seen as beneficial in that it has established the independence of the Council and increased its identity and visibility, though some members were resistant to this development as it seemed risky. Fremont identified their approach with multiple fiscal agents as key to allowing them to expand safely and in a financially sustainable way, with various Boards of Directors coming to the aid of the Council in times of crisis. However, a representative from one fiscal agent said that this approach has also presented challenges for their agency in that they have had to rewrite their bylaws and expand somewhat from their original mission and identity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Councils have been in existence for significantly different lengths of time and are in different stages of growth. Fremont has been an organized Council for over 30 years and much of the sentiment members expressed was a desire for survival and sustainability. This is likely heavily influenced by the fact that the Council existed before early childhood issues were “on the radar” in the way they are today, and it has weathered several years of ebbs and flows in funding. Arapahoe has the advantage of “coming of age” in an era when the importance of early childhood is more recognized and prioritized, and they have seen substantial increases in funding with each of the past several years. Their desire is to keep growing while sustaining the quality of their efforts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The culture of each Council seemed different with regard to change. Council members in Fremont indicated that it can be difficult for newcomers to participate in Council activities, and that filling early childhood positions is often done more successfully with candidates from within the community. The impending turnover in leadership was depicted as somewhat of a monumental shift, with several key partners approaching retirement. In contrast, ACECC seems to be in a perpetual state of shifting due to rapid expansion and somewhat younger staff and a larger population from which to draw talent and expertise.

Implications for System Building Work

What defines an early childhood system? Exploration of the Councils in Arapahoe and Fremont Counties revealed the following key components:

- A commitment to a bigger vision – a whole greater than the sum of its parts – that can transcend and minimize turf issues;

- A concept of a system even when it is in the very early stages ;
- A commitment to the ongoing journey of system development;
- Continuous evolution in the realms of Impacting Services, Building Foundations of a Local System, and Creating Internal Capacity;
- Collective decision making regarding allocation of resources across a community;

- Demonstrated ability to maximize existing funds and leverage additional resources for early childhood efforts;
- An ability to adjust to external (state or federal level) changes;
- New programming that has a place to plug into
- Implementation of programmatic and policy changes in a way that minimizes the negative impact on families;

- A single point of entry and/or many open doors to a multitude of services and programs for families and early childhood professionals;
- An ability to impact policy and recognition of the expertise and input of the Council by local and state policymakers; and,
- An ability to weather change and to see opportunities for system development that are presented by change.

Impact of an Early Childhood System

	Pre-System	The System Today
Arapahoe County	Served part of the County	Serves the entire County
	Priorities driven by visions and mission of other agencies	Clearly defined vision to do what is best for children and families in Arapahoe County
	Funding opportunities drive efforts	Vision drives what resources are sought
	Emphasis on Early Learning Domain	Incorporation of all 4 Domains
Fremont County	Single population focus	Comprehensive approach serving all families
	Single agency focus in addressing needs, gaps, and concerns	Cross agency collaboration to address needs, gaps, and concerns
	Independent decision-making based on interests of each stakeholder	Collective decision-making based on what is best for community overall
	Measuring different outcomes for different programs	Measuring consistent outcomes system wide

“An early childhood system is not just one system. Rather, Early Childhood Councils integrate several systems to meet the needs of children and families most effectively and efficiently.”
Pam Walker, Executive Director of ECHO Council

“Early Childhood Councils provide a central place to gather so that everyone involved, no matter how big or small, can participate in improving the lives of young children. They provide a focus that is greater than any one agency or program. They provide a structure to address issues more quickly and be proactive rather than reactive. Councils provide a structure across the whole state that is not uniform in nature but is consistent in ideals. Councils provide an opportunity for the youngest members of the community to be heard and their needs addressed.” Gretchen Davidson, Executive Director, ACECC

Appendix A: Sources for Data Tables

County Demographics at a Glance

	SOURCE
Total Population	American Community Survey (www.census.gov)
Proportion of population that is Hispanic or Latino	American Community Survey (www.census.gov)
Households with children under age 18	American Community Survey (www.census.gov)
Geographic area of Council in square miles	American Community Survey (www.census.gov)
2007 Young Child Population (under age 5)	American Community Survey (www.census.gov)
Young Children in Poverty	American Community Survey (www.census.gov)
Number of School Districts in Council area	Colorado Department of Education and Council Director
Number of Licensed Child Care Centers in Council area	Qualistar (www.qualistar.org)
Number of Licensed Child Care Homes in Council Area	Qualistar (www.qualistar.org)
Professionals with Credentials	Colorado Office of Professional Development

Council Characteristics at a Glance

	SOURCE
Year Council was Formed	Council materials
Definition of early childhood	Provided by Council Director/Staff
Current Council Structure	Provided by Council Director/Staff
Current Council Staff	Provided by Council Director/Staff
Funding sources for Council staff positions	Provided by Council Director/Staff

Appendix B: Expanded Timelines

Arapahoe County Early Childhood Council Timeline of Major Events

1997: Western Arapahoe County receives Consolidated Child Care Pilot funding, providing dedicated resources for collaboration that had previously been encouraged but not funded.

2001: Western Arapahoe Early Childhood Council Coordinator hired at 40 hrs per week as Independent Contractor.

2001: Council expands to include all of Arapahoe County. This was a significant development for gaining support from county officials who had emphasized the importance of serving the whole County. This is a difficult but ultimately positive tipping point in the history of the Council.

2003: Project BLOOM grant (Building Leveraged Opportunities and Ongoing Mechanisms for Children’s Mental Health--6 yrs of funding). State leaders applied for federal grant from SAMHSA. Arapahoe selected as 1 of 4 state sites. This significant investment makes mental health a sustainable part of ACECC’s work.

2003: ACECC forms the School Readiness Transdisciplinary Team with community-based professionals from Tri-County Health, Aurora Mental Health, and Community College of Aurora. This gives people shared work and strengthens partnerships.

2004: ACECC receives 501c3 status; Council Coordinator transitions from a Independent Contractor to a full time employee/ Executive Director, moving from home office into rented office space. This strengthens the visibility and permanence of ACECC, and allows them to procure funding, including private money, as their own entity.

2004-2005: Executive Director Gretchen Davidson campaigns for County Commissioner communicating mission and vision for early childhood to broader community. Davidson forms relationships with County leaders that benefit the Council to this day.

2005: Arapahoe County Human Services funds a portion of Mental Health Wrap Facilitator position for Project Bloom. This is the first county funding dedicated to a Council collaborative project.

2005 – 2006: Results Matter is adopted as the standard assessment tool for all programs in Arapahoe County.

2006: A Council partner (Early Childhood Connections for Arapahoe and Douglas) brings ABCD (Assuring Better Child Health and Development) Program from National Smart Start Conference to Colorado. They become the first community to implement the program, and now serve as fiscal agent and technical advisor for implementation across the state. This program provided a concrete connection between the early learning environment and the health domain, and put Councils “at the table” with regard to addressing developmental delays.

2006: ACECC creates video to explain the purpose of Early Childhood Councils which compels them to clarify who they are and why they are there. It becomes the beginning of an ongoing public relations and marketing campaign.

2007: ACECC recruits newly hired Director of Human Services to their Board of Directors which continues to strengthen the relationship with County Commissioners.

2008: ACECC hires full time Chief Financial Officer. This brings validity to the financial management of the organization, giving ACECC confidence to aggressively pursue additional funding.

2008: ACECC receives significant increase in funding for quality initiatives from the county (TANF reserves). The support of County officials has been a major tipping point, both in terms of the significant funding they began providing in 2008, and in their longer term recognition of the leadership and expertise of ACECC in influencing policies that affect children and families

2009: ACECC focuses on domain of family support through implementation of the Family Leadership Training Institute and the Nurturing Parent Program.

2009: ACECC pilots project funded by the Merage Foundation to assist with childcare business services.

2010: With four domains secured among the Council's efforts, ACECC begins outreach of programming to kids outside of the formal early childhood system; e.g., those in family, friend, or neighbor care or at home with their parents.

ECHO & Family Center Early Childhood Council Timeline of Major Events

1976: Fremont County volunteers to be a model for coordinating services for young children with disabilities initiated by State Interagency Coordinating Council formed to address gaps and duplication of services. Fremont County organizes a group of local consumers and providers of services for children birth to school age called the Project ECHO Interagency Council.

1977: Project ECHO begins serving children. Massive outreach campaign is launched, with June proclaimed by mayors as Developmental Screening Month.

1986: Inclusive Preschool Special Education is implemented in community childcare centers and preschool sites with parents choosing where their child attends. This marks the beginning of the Council's partnership with community providers.

1989: ECHO Council implements First Steps Parents as Teachers Home Visitation Program. This was the first of many programs developed by the Council.

1989: ECHO Council is chosen by ZERO TO THREE, /National Center for Clinical Infant Programs as one of 6 sites in the nation to study early childhood community collaboration using a case study approach. This is a major turning point as ECHO begins to think of themselves as a national model with key components such as comprehensive services across domains, high quality, research-based programming, and well educated staff. "While they studied us, we learned from them. Being associated with ZERO TO THREE shaped our future forever."

1989: Council implements Denver Child Health Passport, Partners in Health Care Program representing a new partnership with community health care providers.

1989: ECHO Council holds “Planning for the 1990’s” retreat, to develop the first formal strategic plan. Plan requires that each program implemented under the auspices of the Council have a “lead and responsible agency”. This is the beginning of the ECHO organizational structure to assure accountability and fiscal management using multiple fiscal agents. This is seen as an essential turning point as it broadens the fiscal support. Since then, board members of fiscal agencies have become involved on two occasions to assist the Council through financial crises.

1990: Canon City Schools asks ECHO Council to sponsor Colorado Preschool Program, later Fremont RE-2 Schools also asked ECHO to manage the CPP for them. These state-funded programs offer a measure of financial stability.

1993: Fremont County Family Center is established as one of 12 in Colorado under a Governor Romer initiative. This is the first time that the ECHO Council has a home for many of their programs.

1995: Fremont County is selected by the US Office of Special Education Programs as one of 9 sites in the nation for study by the Early Childhood Research Institute: Service Utilization a division of the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Rhode Island College. Fremont County is identified as the site with the greatest collaboration and the community where children received the most infant, toddler, and preschool special education services, underscoring the important link between collaboration and direct services for children.

1996: First Steps Early Head Start is implemented, with “2nd Wave” of federal funding from the Head Start Bureau in a national competitive process. Fremont County is one of the first 24 communities in the nation to receive an EHS grant. EHS continues to be an anchor for programs at the Family Center.

1997: Fremont County receives Consolidated Childcare Pilot grant and forms Pilot Action Team; Project ECHO and Family Center Councils merged to form ECHO and Family Center Early Childhood Council. This is a major turning point creating a new component of organizational structure for the Council charged with increasing access to high quality childcare for low income children. This body is known today as the Consolidated Early Childhood Education Action Team.

1999: ECHO is selected as one of first five communities in the nation for the Communities CAN Award as a National Community of Excellence sponsored by Georgetown University Child Development Center and the Federal Interagency Coordinating Council. This provided national recognition and an opportunity to learn from other national models.

2000: Fremont County identifies major challenges related to mental health based on concerns from home visitors, childcare and preschool teachers about increasing numbers of children with challenging behaviors, and reports from West Central Mental Health Center that referrals have doubled in just one year. Council establishes an Early Childhood Mental Health Action Team to address issues and develop formal early childhood mental health services in the County.

2001: Council establishes Crib to Kindergarten Early Childhood Mental Health Program which is seen as one of the most significant accomplishments of the Council. Three agencies have assumed some fiscal responsibility which helps the program's sustainability.

2001: ECHO Council sponsors first Legislative Symposium. Council becomes an *It's About Kids Community*, an initiative of the Colorado Children's Campaign. This is a turning point for ECHO as they learn how to interact with legislators, become visible and influence them. They started with 40 or 50 people attending; today there are over 100 attendees.

2003: ECHO Council is 1 of 4 counties in the state selected to implement Project BLOOM Grant (Building Leveraged Opportunities and Ongoing Mechanisms for Children's Mental Health--6 yrs of funding). State leaders applied for federal fed grant from Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, SAMHSA. This funding helped them to train new mental health specialists and fully develop their Crib to Kindergarten model.

2005 – 2006: Fremont begins measuring programmatic outcomes through Results Matter.

2006: ECHO with BLOOM funding sponsors statewide training in the Circle of Security Early Childhood Mental Health Model as part of Crib to Kindergarten Early Childhood Mental Health.

2007: ECHO Council, Fremont County Commissioners, Fremont Schools Facilities Corporation, and Canon City Schools partner to raise \$475,000 to remodel a portion of an old school for ECHO Council Offices and early childhood programs. Project Completed, March 2010. This is the first time ECHO Council has its own space.

Appendix C: Key Informant Interview Questions

1. What do you think has been the biggest success of the Council?
2. What has been the biggest challenge?
3. Identify major tipping point(s) in Council work.
4. What has changed in your County as a result of shifting from a program approach to a system approach?
5. What are some lessons learned that might benefit other communities doing this work?
6. What aspects of Council development in your County may / may not be applicable to a smaller or larger community?
7. Who is not “at the table” that you would like to see? What are the barriers to securing the partnership(s)?
8. Where would you like the Council to be in 5 years? In 10 years?

Appendix D: Paradigm Shift

Early Childhood Systems Paradigm Shift

<u>Program Approach</u>	<u>System Approach</u>
Single agency focus	Coordination, collaboration, and integration
Interagency competition/turf	Joint strategic decisions
Focus on a specific population	Builds supports for all young children and families
Impact immediate needs	Planned investment in early childhood
Starts and stops	Ongoing and sustainable
Leadership linked to position	Leadership as a process for engagement

12.2.2009 Wendy Watson