



Bound to Succeed:

An Environmental Scan of
Two-Generation Approaches to
Education in Colorado

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The Bell Policy Center



Photo courtesy of Clayton Early Learning

About the Bell

The Bell Policy Center is a Colorado nonprofit research and advocacy organization that produces ideas, action and analysis that Colorado's communities can use to lift up low- to moderate-income families. The Bell is a member of the Aspen Institute Ascend Network, a group of leading-edge experts and organizations working to influence two-generation policy and practice changes that increase economic security, educational success, social capital and health and well-being for children, parents and their families.

Report authors



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Executive Summary

Two-generation strategies are aimed at moving the entire family out of poverty and into economic stability. These strategies involve an intentional commitment to serving children and adults simultaneously, thus helping the entire family advance economically.

Our research focused on a specific aspect of the two-generation model — one that intentionally links adult education, job training, workforce development and postsecondary education for low-income parents with early childhood education for their young children.

Our goal is to create policies to ensure that these linked services are available for low-to-moderate income families throughout Colorado. Linking parents' and children's education programs is important because children's outcomes are closely tied to parents' educational level and income.

Yet most programs focus on children or adults exclusively, so low-income parents are often unable to access education programs and workforce training because the programs do not provide needed supports for them as parents.

We began the process of policy development by conducting an environmental scan to determine what is currently happening in Colorado. Our environmental scan

focused on identifying:

1. Examples of existing links among these systems
2. Barriers that inhibit developing strong links
3. Policies that promote more and better links
4. Practices and other actions that promote better links

Findings

We found that some good links currently exist between the education and workforce systems for adults and early childhood education systems in Colorado, including at family resource centers, the Colorado Community College System, the Nurse-Family Partnership, Colorado workforce centers, the Jefferson County Prosperity Project and Clayton Early Learning Head Start and Early Head Start Program.

However, for the most part, it is difficult for people in the systems serving adults and those in the early childhood education system to build relationships, and the funding doesn't support a linked model.

Additional and more flexible funding is needed to better serve

the needs of families, and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) implementation provides an opportunity to develop links among systems. Better links would also exist if services were more family-centered and designed to serve broad needs.

Recommendations

1. Convene a summit of representatives of these systems to develop better links among educational and workforce services for low-to-moderate-income adults and children.
2. Ensure adequate funding for family resource centers and the adult education system.
3. Include coordinated services to help low-to-moderate-income, low-skilled parents participate in workforce development programs as part of the refinement and implementation of Colorado's state WIOA plan.
4. Create a cabinet-level task force to address the child care needs of low-income parents of young children as the parents seek to advance their education.

Two-Generation Approaches

In recent years, a number of innovative strategies to help low- to moderate-income families escape poverty and get ahead economically have been developed using a two-generation approach. Two-generation approaches serve children and adults simultaneously, helping move the entire family out of poverty.

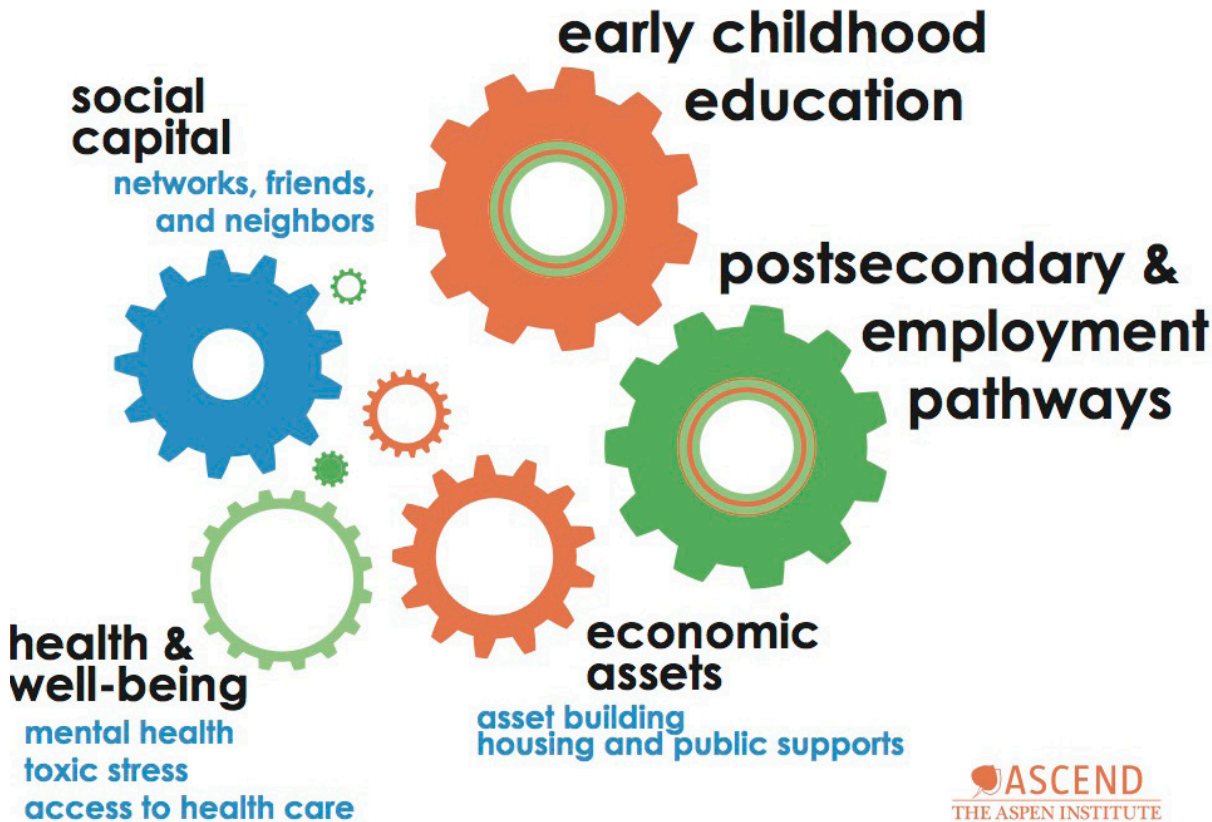
Our research focused on a specific type of two-generation approach — one that intentionally links adult education, job training, workforce development and postsecondary education for low-income parents with early childhood education for their children. This approach emphasizes long-term investments to

build human capital for both children and adults.

Research shows that children's outcomes vary based on their parents' educational attainment level and income, with parents' level of education as the best predictor of economic mobility for children.ⁱ Higher levels of parental education are generally associated with increased income and economic stability — both important for the well-being of children. A study using national data found that when young mothers with low levels of education completed additional schooling, their children performed better academically and the quality of their home environments increased.ⁱⁱ

According to the National Head Start Association, research shows “how interventions in both the quality and quantity of low-income children's early learning experiences and their parents' increases in education, employment, and income can contribute to strengthening children's outcomes — particularly when those interventions are integrated.”ⁱⁱⁱ

As important as it is to raise the educational levels of parents and children, the majority of programs serve each generation separately. Most workforce development, job training, adult education and postsecondary education programs focus on adults exclusively with limited attention to their children.



In fact, children are sometimes seen as an impediment to parental participation in training programs.

Over the past 20 years, the proportion of college students who are single parents increased from 7 to 13 percent. However, only a small proportion of single parents who start postsecondary education attain an associate's or bachelor's degree within six years. The low rates of completion can be explained, in part, by the fact that most postsecondary education programs are not specifically targeted to parents, few provide parents with supports and many are separate from programs for their children.^{iv}

On the other hand, researchers note that few early learning centers explicitly link parents to postsecondary education and career training, despite the fact that increased parental education and family income are associated with better outcomes for children.^v

Intentionally focusing on addressing the educational needs of parents and their children at the same time could raise the education level of low-income parents, thus improving their likelihood of obtaining better-paying jobs and improving the household environment for their kids. In recent years, several innovative and successful programs have been created that serve the educational needs of low-income parents and their children in an explicit two-generation strategy.

Creating policies that help low-income families in Colorado obtain the needed education to qualify for good jobs that pay family-supporting wages while providing their children with high quality early childhood education is one of the goals of our two-generation policy work. The first step in our process of developing and recommending policies to

One noted two-generation effort is the Community Action Project of Tulsa County, Oklahoma (CAP Tulsa). CAP Tulsa is a large, comprehensive antipoverty agency that focuses on early childhood education and economic security for families and serves as the Head Start and Early Head Start grantee for Tulsa County. It operates a specific two-generation program called CareerAdvance that combines early childhood education services with workforce training for parents to help them obtain workplace-recognized certificates and degrees in the health care sector. Early evidence shows that CareerAdvance is working to move families out of poverty.^{vi}

advance this goal was to develop a detailed understanding of what is currently happening in Colorado — identifying existing links between programs that serve the educational and workforce needs of low-income adults and their children and better understanding the factors that are both limiting and encouraging our efforts to move in this direction.

We began to gather this information by conducting an environmental scan. As King, et al suggest, “Policy makers interested in two-generation solutions should begin by conducting an environmental scan of policies, programs, and resources in the region. The challenges to developing and implementing two-generation strategies are not negligible, but there are opportunities to leverage existing resources and policy frameworks in every community.”^{vii}

In conducting this scan, we began by identifying key informants in early childhood education, adult education, workforce development and postsecondary education. We conducted structured interviews with 14 of these informants between July 2015 and February 2016. We reviewed

statutes, background documents and budget data related to the programs and organizations identified by the people we interviewed. We also attended a meeting of the Jefferson County Prosperity Project's Family Advisory Committee and interviewed parents on how best to serve low-income families' educational needs.

Our interviews focused on four major areas:

1. Are there examples of areas where educational and workforce services for low-income adults are currently linked with early childhood education for their children?
2. What are the barriers that inhibit developing strong links in this area?
3. Are there policies that could address these barriers and promote better links?
4. Are there practices and other actions that organizations can take to address barriers and promote better links?

This report offers findings in each area, grouped into major themes based on what informants shared.



Photo courtesy of Invest in Kids

Interview Findings: Existing Links

Based on our interviews with key informants, we identified the following areas where good links currently exist between education programs for parents and early childhood education for their children. Obviously, there could be other examples in Colorado.

Family resource centers

There are 24 statutorily recognized family resource centers in Colorado. By statute, they are directed to assess the needs of families, assist families in setting goals and help families develop a written plan to pursue their goals and move toward self-sufficiency. The centers are directed to coordinate services and either directly provide or refer the family to a service provider for: early childhood care and education,

parental education, adult education and family literacy programs, job skills training and self-sufficiency programs. The centers' family advocates generally help families enroll in programs and deal with agencies to ensure they are receiving services. The centers have good relationships with the early childhood councils and adult education providers and some experience working with local workforce investment boards and community colleges.

Jefferson County Prosperity Project

This is a specific program through the Jefferson County Human Services Department that links 50 families with children in Head Start to wrap-around services, including workforce development, adult education and postsecondary education services. The services are based on goals developed by the families and the needs they identified. The families take a leadership role in directing this program.

Nurse-Family Partnership

Visiting nurses currently operate in 61 out of Colorado's 64 counties and work with first-time, low-income mothers to help them develop parenting skills, create a positive vision and plan for themselves and their children, and identify workforce and education goals. The nurses help the mothers identify and enroll their children in high-quality child care. They help the mothers directly, or through referrals, with workforce advice, job training and educational programs. The nurse visitors can effectively link families to the early childhood education and workforce, adult education and postsecondary education systems.

Workforce centers

Some workforce centers provide adult basic education, workplace English education and high school equivalency training in house. They also work with county human services agencies to arrange child care assistance for clients, who can complete the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) application at the centers. The centers work closely with community colleges to help their clients obtain the necessary training and education to get jobs. Head Start and Early Head Start programs often refer parents to workforce centers for help with employment.

Community colleges

Almost all of Colorado's community colleges offer classes in early childhood education and are the primary source of training for early childhood educators. Some have on-campus child care centers open to the children of students, faculty, staff and the public. They also have strong links to the workforce system and provide a range of classes for people seeking to advance their education and obtain specific job skills.

Photo courtesy of Clayton Early Learning

Clayton Early Learning Head Start and Early Head Start

Educational services for children and parents are linked through Clayton's Head Start and Early Head Start programs. Parents serve as their children's first teachers, and through collaboration with staff, build individualized learning plans for their children. Clayton parents participate in diverse educational opportunities to garner needed skills, including literacy training, English as a second language (ESL) instruction and access to postsecondary education to extend their children's learning.



Interview Findings: Barriers to Links

Our initial interviews with key informants identified the following barriers to creating or extending links among the various systems.

1) Limited relationships exist among people in the education and workforce systems for adults and the early childhood education system.

Informants report that there is limited interaction among people working in the early childhood education and the adult education and workforce development systems. Many adult education providers do not have relationships with the early childhood education and child care providers, and structures are not in place for increasing communication. “There are very few forums or opportunities for early childhood leaders to engage with those in higher ed to consider opportunities for collaboration,” said Lisa Hill, executive director of Invest in Kids, a financial sponsor of the Nurse-Family Partnership.



A tutor helps a young mother prepare for a high school equivalency exam. Photo courtesy of CWEE

“There is a need for (adult education providers) to sit at the early childhood tables and develop relationships with child care centers.” —Laurie Harvey, president/CEO, Center for Work Education and Employment (CWEE)

2) The amount and nature of funding limits incentives for cooperation and coordination among systems.

Informants point out that the lack of funding makes it difficult for some groups to effectively link to other services. Others argue that the specific nature of some funding streams and program regulations limit the flexibility of organizations to meet the needs of families. They said adult education has stringent rules that prevent it from linking to other programs and

that a lack of funding limits parental involvement in the Colorado Preschool Program. Informants pointed to the need for child care for postsecondary student parents but said there is limited funding or resources. They described the adult education system as isolated and underfunded.

“We can be the glue that links the two systems together but we are not funded to do the networking functions.” –Mark Kling, executive director of the Family Resource Center Association

3) Lack of child care limits parent participation in education and training programs.

The need to care for their children while they participate in adult education, workforce training or postsecondary education classes is a barrier for many low-income parents. Even when a community college has a child care center on campus, the child care services might not be offered at night when the parent has classes. According to Arapahoe Community College faculty members, anecdotal evidence indicates that providing child care services attracts students to the college and helps them remain in school.

4) There is a need for data to show that a holistic approach to serving the entire family pays off.

To change how the current systems are organized and services are delivered, informants said there is a need to show that a more holistic approach is cost-effective. “There is a need for understanding the return on investment of serving the entire family,” said Shirley Penn, former president of the Colorado Adult Education Professional Association.

This is often difficult to do because the current systems that track data on the families involved either are hard to access or are not integrated in a way to produce the needed data. This is compounded by Colorado state government's well-documented problems with the computer systems used for various work support programs, making it hard to connect the data between different systems such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), CCCAP and workforce.

5) Complexity of the systems makes it difficult for families to get the services they need. Many of the programs designed to help low-income

families advance economically have complex and often contradictory requirements. They are often provided by different organizations spread across a number of locations. The disjointed nature of the systems makes it hard for families to access them. Lynn Johnson, executive director of the Jefferson County Human Services Department said we need to “focus on collaboration to help families as customers, similar to shopping at Nordstrom's, as opposed to making them jump through hoops.”

“Having customers go to six or seven locations for services is not helpful.” –Josh Evans, executive director of The Learning Source

6) Conflicting income limits and a potential steep drop in benefits limits families' ability to access services.

Families and informants report that as families begin to increase their income, the amount of support they receive declines. However, rather than declining in proportion to their increased income, many families lose all of the support from a program when their income exceeds a specific limit. The abrupt loss of supports, termed the “cliff effect,” was identified as a barrier by informants. In many cases, the value of the lost supports is greater than the increased income.

To add to the complexity, various work support programs have different eligibility limits, timeframes for services and application processes. It is hard to move families ahead economically and connect them with the services they need when eligibility for the services varies so dramatically. In addition, families say they are unable to move forward in their careers because they are concerned about losing work supports.

“The cliff effect is a barrier. There is not as much support if you're moving ahead, climbing up the mountain. The system is set to help fund crises.” –a Jefferson County Prosperity Project parent

Interview Findings: Policies to Promote Links

Informants identified changes in public policies that would encourage creating new links or expanding existing ones.

1) Provide additional and more flexible funding to better serve the needs of families.

A need exists to increase funding so that some organizations, such as the family resource centers and the adult education system, can better serve families. In other instances, there is a need for more flexible funding so organizations can serve the varying needs of families. Funding streams in adult education are a problem because they don't allow the flexible use to provide child care, said Josh Evans, executive director of The Learning Source.

2) Implement a state plan under WIOA that emphasizes links between adult education, workforce development and postsecondary education and early childhood education systems.

The recently enacted federal WIOA law requires that states develop plans for ensuring that workers receive the necessary job training and education services to enter and advance in the workforce. It also specifically directs the states to provide the necessary services such as child care and transportation that parents need to access these workforce development services.

The implementation of Colorado's state plan presents an opportunity to engage state and local government agencies, community organizations, employers, private businesses, educational institutions and all actors in the workforce development system to identify and better coordinate the services provided to workers. Because of the specific directive to help low-income parents receive services, it can be used to better focus the workforce development system on serving entire families. Under WIOA, we "need to clearly articulate who needs to be served and emphasize that career pathways start at the bottom in terms of skill levels and include those with limited educational skills," Evans said.

WIOA "implementation is an opportunity to have an impact and encourage systems to work together." –Shirley Penn, former president of the Colorado Adult Education Professional Association



A member of one of CWEE's education programs learns new skills. Photo courtesy of CWEE



Photo courtesy of Clayton Early Learning

Interview Findings: Practices and Actions to Promote Links

Informants identified ways to change how programs are designed, services are delivered and organizations operate to encourage more and better links.

1) Services should be family-centered and include help for families to access them.

A number of key informants, including families participating in the Jefferson County Prosperity Project, emphasized the importance of designing and providing services around what families want and need. Services need to be designed with a better, broader picture of families' lives and how this

affects their ability to access them. This might mean scheduling more community college classes at night, on weekends or at times and locations that better meet families' work schedules. Jefferson County recently started keeping county offices open some evenings so that families could square away paperwork without having to take time off from work.

“Asking the views of parents who are receiving benefits and providing an opportunity for them to participate in a leadership role in helping them work their way out of poverty is very beneficial.”

—a Jefferson County Prosperity Project parent

2) Culture of the organizations providing services needs to emphasize serving the broad needs of families.

Taking a more proactive approach to helping families — one that focuses more on preventing problems than dealing with crises, is flexible, involves families in problem-solving and better coordinates services among systems — would, in many cases, require a change in organizational culture. Staffers are busy providing their own agency's services, so it is hard for them to help families connect with services offered by others.

For example, college advisors are often busy focusing on class scheduling and academic preparation and have limited time or expertise to help students with child care. Yet lack of child care can be a major barrier preventing adult students with children from completing college. Jerry Migler, a former vice president with the Colorado Community College System, suggested using a more "intrusive advising" model that is proactive and collects more information to get at problems students are facing on the front end.

3) Better training of front-line staff would help more effectively link families to services.

“Cross training for staff working with adults and those working with children could help improve links. Training for front-line staff is needed, particularly for those working on adult programs.”

—Keri Batchelder, two-generation manager at the Colorado Department of Human Services

Most informants discussed the role that front-line staffers play in helping families deal with the complexity of current programs and systems. Many pointed to the need for navigators or coaches to help families deal with the demands and requirements of various programs. Many also emphasized the need to train those working in direct contact with families about the best ways to interact with the families, to ask the right questions, assess family needs and coordinate services among the systems and programs. Better trained front-line workers will result in stronger links among programs and more effective services for families.

4) Improve communications and relationships among people in the various systems.

One of the factors limiting links is the lack of knowledge among service providers in one system about the

services available in the other systems. For example, some of those in the adult education system expressed a lack of knowledge about providers in the early childhood system. Others described the role strong personal relationships play in people's willingness to collaborate.

Bringing people together from the various systems would be a good way to expand knowledge about different services and build relationships among those working in the different systems. Several observers suggested developing connections at a local level first, then expanding to other parts of the state.

“Bring program people around the table, workforce folks, counties and others and pick the issue apart at the local level.

... We have not spent enough time engaging everyone together.”

—Charlotte Brantley, president/CEO, Clayton Early Learning



Photo courtesy of Clayton Early Learning

Recommendations

The following recommendations offer a starting point to begin conversations around the best ways to intentionally link adult education, job training, workforce development and postsecondary education for low-income parents with early childhood education for their children.

1) Convene a summit of representatives from the adult education, workforce development, postsecondary education and early childhood education communities in Colorado to develop a plan to better link educational services for low-income adults and children.

A common theme from the key informant interviews was the need to develop a better understanding of and strengthen the relationships among the people working in these various systems in Colorado. Many expressed the desire to expand links but often did not know the people in other systems, the services available or how to link to them.

We propose to convene a meeting of representatives working in these areas so that people can get to know one another, learn about the services and activities each provides, develop personal relationships and start to discuss how to better link adult education, workforce development and postsecondary education services for low-income adults with early childhood education for their children. This could begin in the metro Denver area and expand to other parts of the state. The key informants in this scan would be a good starting point.

2) Ensure adequate funding for the family resource centers and adult education system.

Key informants identified the need for additional and flexible funding as a policy change that would promote more and better links. These two entities currently receive limited state funding. In fiscal year 2015-16, adult education received about \$1 million in state funds and the family resource centers received \$750,000. With more resources, these entities could serve more families and provide a better link between programs serving adults and the early childhood education system. Policy-makers should ensure these entities continue to receive state funding and increase it over time with the goal of doubling the number of families served by each.

3) Include coordinated services to help low-income, low-skilled adult parents participate in workforce development programs as part of Colorado's state WIOA Plan.

The new federal law explicitly directs states to provide the necessary services to ensure that low-income, low-skilled parents can access these workforce development services. Colorado developed a "combined plan" that provides enhanced coordination between human services providers and workforce training and postsecondary education systems. Colorado should use WIOA resources to provide incentives for partnerships between workforce development, adult education and postsecondary education

providers and child care providers that deliver high-quality early childhood education programming. Time spent in school or workforce development programs should be allowed to count toward TANF work requirements, and all counties should ensure that parents enrolled in school or workforce programs receive assistance through CCCAP.

4) The legislature should create a task force to address the child care needs of low-income parents of young children as the parents seek to advance their education. Legislation (HB16-1050) recommended by the Early Childhood Education and School Readiness Legislative Commission would have created a task force to identify the barriers low-income parents face in obtaining child care. Comprised of the heads of the state Departments of Labor, Human Services, Higher Education and Education, as well as county representatives and parents, it also would have reviewed and streamlined the processes for providing child care for parents while they obtain education or training.

This task force would have focused attention on ways of better serving the educational needs of low-income parents and their children. Although the bill failed to pass during the 2016 session, the legislature should consider and adopt the bill in the 2017 session.

Next steps

The following are next steps that the Bell will take to better link adult education, job training, workforce development and postsecondary education services for low-income Coloradans with early childhood education services for their children.

1) **Organize and convene a summit with representatives in the various communities.** We will reach out to the various key informants and others in this area to plan and hold a summit in 2017. This summit will provide an opportunity to thoroughly discuss what is currently

happening in Colorado, build relationships across organizations and systems, and begin the process of developing a strategy to better link the educational and workforce services for low-income adults with early childhood education for their children.

2) **Conduct additional interviews with key informants.**

We will reach out and conduct interviews with people in other areas of the workforce development, adult education, postsecondary education and early childhood education communities. A number of people have been suggested by the informants we have already interviewed. We will also expand our interviews to include people in other parts of the state.

3) **Advocate for the adoption of policy proposals during the 2017 legislative session.**

We will advocate for funding for the adult education system and the family resource centers as well as for passage of legislation similar to HB16-1050. In addition, we will advocate for expanding the number of slots in the Colorado Preschool Program that serves children from low-income and at-risk families and for improvements in the Cliff Effect Pilot Program as part of CCCAP. Both of these issues address policies that the key informants suggested could help advance better links in this area.



Proud CWEE graduates who received their high school equivalency. Photo courtesy of CWEE

Photo courtesy of Clayton Early Learning



Sources

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^{iv}Promoting Education: The Two-Generation Approach of the Community Action Project of Tulsa, OK, in An Anthology from the Ascend Fellowship, Aspen Institute, April 2015

^vIbid

^{vi}Ibid

^{vii}Promoting Two-Generation Strategies: A Getting Started Guide for State and Local Policy Makers, see 1.

Key informants

The following are the key informants that members of the Bell Policy Center study team interviewed during the course of conducting this environmental scan.

- Mark Kling, Family Resource Center Association
- Shirley Penn, Colorado Adult Education Professional Association
- Laurie Harvey, Center for Work Education and Employment (CWEE)
- Charlotte Brantley, Clayton Early Learning
- Bill Jaeger, Colorado Children's Campaign
- Jerry Migler, formerly of the Colorado Community College System
- Lynn Johnson and staff, Jefferson County Human Services Department
- Families who participate in the Jefferson County Human Services Department's Prosperity Project
- Lisa Hill, Invest in Kids
- Maegan Lokteff, Grand Beginnings
- Joseph Barela, Arapahoe Douglas Works Workforce Center
- Josh Evans, The Learning Source
- Keri Batchelder, Colorado Department of Human Services
- Kathy Sutherland and Kristen Habicht, Arapahoe Community College



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