PROMISES FOR CHILDREN
WELD COUNTY’S EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL
STRATEGIC PLAN
SUMMER 2018
Dear Friend,

We all have a role to play helping prepare Weld County’s children for the future.

Since 2000, United Way of Weld County through Promises for Children has facilitated, funded, and provided leadership to address early childhood challenges in Weld County.

In 2007, HB 1062 identified a statewide need to increase and sustain quality, accessibility, capacity, and affordability of early childhood services for all families. The legislation established Early Childhood Councils throughout Colorado with a common purpose to develop and implement comprehensive systems of early childhood services to ensure the school readiness of children in the areas of early care and education, family support, and health. UWWC’s Promises for Children became the host and manager for Weld County’s Early Childhood Council.

Promises for Children works to ensure that all children are valued, healthy and thriving by focusing on the whole child. Promises for Children does this by utilizing the Early Childhood Colorado Framework to:

1. Educate Weld County’s citizens on the importance of prenatal health care, early childhood development and support for young children through outreach efforts.
2. Strengthen the existing network of programs serving children prenatal to age 8, in an effort to better coordinate the delivery of services. Where appropriate, new programs are created and/or improvements are made to prevent service gaps or duplication within the system.
3. Support licensed and exempt child care providers to create high quality care environments.
4. Serve as Weld County’s Early Childhood Council, part of a state-wide network of councils and a place for collaboration on county-wide early childhood development efforts.

Collaborative partners include local businesses and other professionals, child care and health care providers, and parents all working together to address issues facing young children and families in our community. Organizations in collaboration are:

- Aims Community College
- Envision
- North Range Behavioral Health
- Weld County Government
- City of Greeley
- North Colorado Health Alliance
- University of Northern Colorado
- Weld County School Districts

If you are interested in learning more about Promises for Children, please contact Sheri Hannah-Ruh at 970-304-6173 or sheri@unitedway-weld.org. Promises for Children is offered through the generous funding of many individuals and organizations, including people like you!

Sincerely,

Sheri Hannah-Ruh
Director of Promises for Children

Jeannine Truswell
President & CEO
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Vision, Purpose, Core Principles, Domains of Activity, and Community-Wide Outcomes

Vision
Every child in Weld County is valued, healthy and thriving.

Purpose
A diverse Weld County community partnership that increases the awareness of the importance of early childhood development and facilitates accessible pathways of services leading to lifelong well-being for all children prenatal to eight years of age.

Core Principles
- Whole child and family centered
- Strengths based
- Culturally relevant and responsive
- Outcomes focused
- Informed by evidence-based and promising practices
- Cross-sector collaboration

Domains of Activity
- Family Support & Education
- Health & Wellbeing
- Learning & Development
- Community Awareness & Advocacy

Community-Wide Outcomes in Access, Quality, and Equity

Family Support & Education
ACCESS
- Family engagement and leadership opportunities exist within programs, schools and communities
- Services and supports promote the well-being and resiliency of parents and caregivers
- Family-friendly policies and practices exist in the workplace

QUALITY
- Family knowledge and capacity support children’s healthy development and learning
- Families advocate for high-quality comprehensive services and supports that lead to future success

EQUITY
- Education, employment, housing, financial and legal supports contribute to family economic security
- Families, including those with high needs, experience timely and coordinated services and supports
Learning & Development

ACCESS
- Education, coaching and ongoing training exists for caregivers, teachers and other professionals
- Learning experiences and environments are high quality, developmentally appropriate and affordable
- Promoting awareness of learning and development opportunities and services

QUALITY
- Formal and informal care environments and education practices reach the highest levels of quality
- Adults understand and support children’s learning and development, including social and emotional
- All settings provide effective transitions across and within programs, schools and systems

EQUITY
- All children are ready to learn and are achieving by third grade regardless of ability, race, place, income, language and culture
- Children, including those with high needs, receive timely, comprehensive and affordable academic services and transition support

Health & Wellbeing

ACCESS
- Comprehensive health coverage and services are consistently utilized by pregnant women and children
- Integrated and preventive maternal and child physical, behavioral and oral health services are available
- All settings promote mental health and wellbeing through early identification, consultation and treatment

QUALITY
- All health care providers, including mental health, deliver coordinated, family focused care
- Settings and practices promote strong relationships, social and emotional development, appropriate nutrition and offer opportunities to engage in physical activity

EQUITY
- Families have the ability to plan the number and timing of their children
- Promote environments that are safe, free of toxins, have affordable foods and offer opportunities to engage in physical activity
- Children with special health, behavioral or developmental needs receive individualized services and supports
Early Childhood in Weld County: An Overview

Of the 1.2 million children living in Colorado, 74,761 call Weld County home (as of 2016). Weld County lies within the relatively flat northeastern portion of Colorado; with a total area of 4,017 square miles, it is the third-largest county in Colorado by area and is larger than Rhode Island, Delaware, and the District of Columbia combined. Among the 64 counties in Colorado, Weld County ranks ninth in total population; a little over a third of the population lives in Greeley, the county seat. Weld County’s child population has the second fastest rate of growth in the state, a situation that presents both opportunities and challenges.

Poverty is one of the most important factors affecting a child’s life. 13.5% of children under 18 in Weld County live in poverty, and 50% of school aged youth qualify for free or reduced lunch. In east Greeley and Evans, the percent of children under 18 in poverty jumps to 34% – or one in three children. 43% of families who live in East Greeley with children under age five had income below the poverty line in 2014 – that’s almost one out of every two families with children in the most critical period of development. Much of the county’s poverty is related to a rapidly growing population, an ever-increasing cost of housing, and a job base that often does not pay a living wage.

Other influences (some of which are related to income) on a child’s life: 24% of births in Weld County are to single women, and 16% are to women without a high school diploma/GED. Over a quarter of pregnant women (26.5%) do not receive early prenatal care, and the child abuse and neglect rate is 7.3 per 1,000. 6.6% of women smoked during pregnancy, and 21% of Weld County children are overweight or obese.

Race and ethnicity play an important role in a child’s future as well. Weld County’s graduation rate is 81% for all students, but it drops to just 60% when looking solely at Hispanic students (29% of Weld County residents identify as Hispanic, a number that is increasing). Greeley is home to refugees from a multitude of countries as many families move from the nearby resettlement city of Denver to Greeley to work in agriculture. In 2016, 17.6% of Weld County students were English language learners, and in 2014, one in five families with a five year old child spoke another language at home, either in addition to, or instead of, English.

A lack of available child care slots is one of the most pressing challenges Weld County’s families are facing. In 2016, there were 14,249 children with both parents in the workforce, yet there were only 6,400 licensed child care slots – creating a critical child care desert. With the unemployment rate reaching historic lows, the need for child care is steadily increasing. When there isn’t child care available, parents are forced to leave the workforce or children don’t receive adequate care. Data from the 2016 Weld County Community Health Survey conducted by the Weld County Department of Public Health and Environment shows that 10.5% of households with children have had to quit, not take, or change jobs due to child care problems. Among parents age 18-34, that increases to 17%. Additionally, the cost of child care in Colorado is the third highest in the nation – infant care accounts for 19.5% of a median family income, while that percentage becomes 49.8% of a single mother’s median income. 5.2% of Weld
County residents reported needing but not obtaining child care financial assistance, likely due to it not being available. Those with less than a high school diploma, those at the lowest income levels, and those who identify as Hispanic were the populations in greatest need (all around 8%).

As of June 2018 in Weld County:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Licensed Child Care Providers</th>
<th>269</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Center Licenses</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Licenses</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool Licenses</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Age Centers</td>
<td>36</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colorado Shines Quality Rating*</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>127 providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>72 providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>8 providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>26 providers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*does not include school age centers

Examples of child care deserts within Weld County:

- In Greeley there are 9,733 children under the age of five, but only 2,966 licensed child care slots (30%).
- In Keenesburg/Hudson, there are 1,127 children under the age of five, and only 173 licensed child care slots (15%). Of those 173 slots, 75% don’t accept 0-2 year olds. 131 of those slots are licensed preschool programs accepting only 3-4 year olds for nine months of the year.
- In Ault, there are 457 children under the age of five, and 106 child care slots (23%). Those slots are available in one center (100 slots) and one home provider (six slots).
- In Prairie there are 27 children under the age of five, and 15 slots (56%) – these slots are in a licensed preschool program that only accepts 3-4 year olds for just nine months of the year.

Many of the above circumstances influence a child’s success in school and consequently in life. For the 2015-2016 Colorado standardized tests, just 38.8% of fourth grade students in Weld County met or exceeded expectations in English Language Arts – a whopping 61.2% (almost two thirds) are not reading and writing at the expected level by fourth grade. Equally dismal, just 26.3% of 2016 students met or exceeded math expectations, and 22.2% scored “strong” or “distinguished” in science. To ensure our communities have the leaders and professionals who will better our future, Weld County will need to rally together to help our children thrive today.
Weld County Challenges/Limitations/Opportunities

In 2017, a Promises for Children (PFC) strategic plan working group convened to discuss the challenges and opportunities unique to Weld County’s early childhood setting. Noted challenges include:

- large geographical size (4,000+ miles)
- # of school districts (12 in whole + 5 in part = 17)
- staff time to coordinate resources and efforts (for PFC to be the backbone)
- transportation to services (public transportation available only in Greeley/Evans)
- transitory population (some regularly change home address)
- funding
- resource deserts (child care, food, technology, etc.)
- child care affordability
- # of child care slots
- support for parents in the workplace (breast feeding support, paid leave, etc.)
- multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual population
- adequate nutrition (food procurement, preparation, etc.)

The working group felt that the below activities could begin to address the above needs:

- Needs assessment/environmental scan
- Overall education process; all of the above have need for education as a common aspect
- Are there any fatal flaws in any part of the 0-8 support system that is currently being offered?
History of Promises for Children

Promises for Children is a Weld County community collaborative that was formed in 2000 and is facilitated by United Way of Weld County. The concept of Promises for Children originated after the Colorado Children’s Campaign presented their annual “Kids Count” report to community members in Weld County; their findings demonstrated continuing decline in the wellbeing of Weld County’s children and the urgent need for action. At the same time, United Ways all over the world were changing their model from raising and distributing funds to bringing local communities together to tackle their greatest challenges. United Way of Weld County leaders recognized this opportunity to coordinate a focused collaborative effort to make real changes for young children, and Promises for Children was born. The original focus of these efforts was on children prenatal to three years old.

Years later, the state of Colorado piloted Early Childhood Councils in five communities (not including Weld County). Many individuals across Colorado advocated for this pilot to be expanded to include every county, and in 2007, Colorado House Bill 1062 authorized the creation of the Colorado Early Childhood Councils. The intent of the Councils as stated in the legislation was to “improve and sustain the availability, accessibility, capacity and quality of early childhood services for children and families throughout the state.” According to the legislation, these Councils were established “for the purpose of developing and ultimately implementing a comprehensive system of early childhood services to ensure the school readiness of children.”

Weld County’s commissioners, having witnessed the work Promises for Children had accomplished over the past seven years, endorsed it to serve as Weld County’s Early Childhood Council. Over time, the focus of the Council has expanded to include children prenatal to five years of age, and now includes children up to eight years of age. This change reflects current research showing the importance of the first eight years. The framework on which Promises for Children is built continues to be refined as knowledge is gained and community needs change. However, the original twenty promises with which Promises for Children began remain the same. We promise:

- To help improve the wellbeing of every child in Weld County.
- To educate our community about the importance of early childhood development between the ages of 0-8 years.
- To help parents become their child’s first and most important teacher.
- To help families raise happy, healthy children, regardless of family wealth.
- That every family will have the access to the necessary resources to prepare their children to enter school.
- That every mother will have access to information and resources for good prenatal and post-natal health services.
- To help parents learn positive parenting skills in our community.
- To help women become good mothers and role models.
- To help men become good fathers and role models.
- To help child care professionals provide the quality care our children deserve.
• To help create home environments that help children to reach their true potential.
• To help children have access to quality healthcare resources and affordable immunizations.
• To help parents understand and respond to the needs of their child.
• To help parents provide a predictable world for their child.
• To help all children obtain the school readiness skills they need to succeed in school.
• To provide parents with information that can help keep their child safe in all situations.
• To help provide information and resources to families about nutrition and healthy eating habits.
• To help educate every family about the effects of smoking and secondhand smoke on the health of their children.
• To educate parents about the importance of reading and singing to their child every day.
• To help parents understand the community resources that are available to them, and guide them through the process so they can receive essential services for their families.
Early Childhood Councils – History, Structure and Role

When tackling complex issues such as early childhood, no single organization, however innovative or powerful, can accomplish significant, wide-spread success alone. Large-scale social change comes from cross-sector coordination rather than from the isolated intervention of individual organizations.

Creating a foundation for a high-quality, accessible, and equitable early childhood system ensures long-term sustainability and support for the entire movement, rather than single organizations. This system of opportunities must exist in every community in order to give families with young children access to quality learning, family support, health, and mental health services. Without this foundation, services start and stop with funding cycles, agencies operate in silos, decisions are based on short-term needs, and redundancies are common. However, with a strong foundation, agencies and service providers work together, efficiencies are realized throughout the system, resources are coordinated and leveraged, decisions are strategic and long-term, and services are aligned for families and children.

Before 1997 there were no Early Childhood Councils in Colorado. Programs for young children and their families were separate and fragmented, sometimes inconsistently available and of varying quality. In 1997, the Colorado General Assembly established the Child Care Consolidated Pilot Program, which began to change the face of early childhood systems across the state. This program was ultimately expanded to 18 communities, and following successes of these communities, in 2007, HB 1062 identified a statewide need to increase and sustain quality, accessibility, capacity, and affordability of early childhood services for children and their families. The legislation established Early Childhood Councils and provided a common purpose for local Councils to develop and implement a comprehensive system of early childhood services to ensure the school readiness of children in the areas of early care and education, family support, mental health, and health.

Today across Colorado, 34 Early Childhood Councils serve as hubs in their local communities to improve access to high quality services and supports for young children and their families. These 34 Councils represent almost all of the counties in Colorado – 61 out of the 64. Because of this comprehensive coverage, councils are able to support early childhood efforts targeting a majority of the children and families in our state. The councils are a critical piece of early childhood services delivery. They focus on advancing programs, resources, and support around family support, health and wellbeing, and learning and development. They work to bring together local partners to improve the quality and availability of early childhood services for children and families in their communities. While not all councils offer direct services to children and families, they do work with partners in order to assure that services are available. Appendix H describes the direct services Promises for Children provides.

The work of Early Childhood Councils is guided by the Early Childhood Colorado Framework, which includes three domains of activity along with a variety of access, quality, and equity goals. The three domains are:
• Family Support & Education
• Health & Well-Being
• Learning & Development

In short, Early Childhood Councils improve systems of early childhood care and education and the coordination of services. They embrace the vision of a comprehensive, connected network of resources and services that promote positive outcomes for young children and their families.

At minimum Councils must:
• Apply for early childhood funding as detailed in HB 1062–26-6.5-104.
• Develop and execute a strategic plan that responds to local needs and conditions to increase quality, accessibility, capacity, and affordability of early childhood services for children and their families.
• Establish a local system of accountability to measure local progress based on the needs and goals set for program performance.
• Report annually the results of the accountability measurements defined in the strategic plan.
• Select a fiscal agent to disburse funds and serve as the employer of a council director.
• Conduct a comprehensive evaluation and report, based on the strategic plan.
• Actively inform and include small or under-represented early childhood service providers in Early Childhood Council activities and functions.

As identified in collective discussions throughout 2017, the core functions of councils include:
• Partnership and Engagement: Convening community partners to share information and resources, identify issues, and problem solve; while advancing robust public engagement to elevate early childhood issues.
• Capacity Building and Sustainability: Providing continuous community-wide assessment, strategic planning, data collection, and monitoring to build and sustain local capacity for improvement of early childhood systems.
• Advocacy and Policy Development: Advocating and educating the community, policymakers, and families on policies that promote the healthy development of young children.
• Professional Development and Leadership: Advancing the knowledge and skills of early childhood providers, educators, and families to support the healthy development of young children.
• Grant and Fiscal Management: Stewarding funds to improve local early childhood services and supports, and dispersing them to qualified providers and partners for effective service delivery implementation.

In summary, to fulfill their legislative intent, while also aligning with the Early Childhood Colorado Framework, Councils improve the quality of early learning environments to prepare young children to enter kindergarten; build the resources and skills of families; ensure that
families have access to social, physical, and mental health services; and deliver resources to increase the effectiveness of early childhood professionals.

The formation of Early Childhood Councils is a commitment to the development of a coordinated, intentional system of services for children. This investment is premised on the notion that infusing local communities with seed money for the creation of a coordinated system of services — across all four domains of early learning, health, mental health, and family support — will ultimately save money, reduce duplication, and leverage additional investments into the system. While there are many valuable programs that provide services directly to young children and their families in Colorado — examples include the Child Care Assistance Program, Child Health Plus, the Colorado Preschool Program, along with local organizations and programs — the Early Childhood Councils are the sole mechanism for addressing the underlying issues that create inefficiencies and barriers for families and children needing to access services. By providing coordinated, leveraged support to direct service organizations, Early Childhood Councils promote an effective system that ultimately results in improved opportunities for young children and their families.

The below further illustrates the intent and helpfulness of Early Childhood Councils. See Appendix B: Core Functions of the Early Childhood Councils for a further explanation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before Councils</th>
<th>With Councils</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decisions Made by a Few</td>
<td>Broad Stakeholder Engagement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ad Hoc Early Childhood Efforts</td>
<td>Formalized Local Structures</td>
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<td>Agency-Specific Planning</td>
<td>Collaborative Strategic Plans</td>
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<td>Investments Made in Silos</td>
<td>Coordination/Integration of Resources</td>
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<td>Limited Local and Philanthropic Funding</td>
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<td>Poorly Defined Goals and Direction</td>
<td>Effective Local Early Childhood Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chasing Programmatic Dollars</td>
<td>Capacity to Develop Sustainable Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited Public Awareness</td>
<td>Coordinated Voice for Early Childhood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inconsistent Early Childhood Systems Statewide</td>
<td>Consistent Statewide Expectations for Local Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited Alignment of Services Across Domains</td>
<td>Cross-Domain Alignment of Early Childhood Services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Guiding Change

As we work to improve the early childhood landscape in Weld County, considering how people deal with change is an important factor. Adoption of a new idea, behavior, or product does not happen simultaneously in a social system; rather it is a process whereby some people are more apt to adopt the innovation than others. The Diffusion of Innovation Theory, developed by E.M. Rogers in 1962, explains how, over time, an idea or product gains momentum and spreads through a population or social system. Researchers have found that people who adopt an innovation early have different characteristics than people who adopt an innovation later. When promoting an innovation to a target population, it is important to understand the characteristics of the target population that will help or hinder adoption of the innovation.

- **Innovators** - These are people who want to be the first to try the innovation. They are venturesome and interested in new ideas. These people are very willing to take risks, and are often the first to develop new ideas. Very little, if anything, needs to be done to appeal to this population.

- **Early Adopters** - These are people who represent opinion leaders. They enjoy leadership roles, and embrace change opportunities. They are already aware of the need to change and so are very comfortable adopting new ideas. Strategies to appeal to this population include how-to manuals and information sheets on implementation. They do not need information to convince them to change.

- **Early Majority** - These people are rarely leaders, but they do adopt new ideas before the average person. That said, they typically need to see evidence that the innovation works before they are willing to adopt it. Strategies to appeal to this population include success stories and evidence of the innovation's effectiveness.

- **Late Majority** - These people are skeptical of change, and will only adopt an innovation after it has been tried by the majority. Strategies to appeal to this population include information on how many other people have tried the innovation and have adopted it successfully.

- **Laggards** - These people are bound by tradition and very conservative. They are very skeptical of change and are the hardest group to bring on board. Strategies to appeal to this population include statistics, fear appeals, and pressure from people in the other adopter groups.
Common Early Childhood Strategies

Protective factors are conditions in families and communities that increase the health and wellbeing of children and families. These attributes serve as buffers, helping parents to find resources, supports, or coping strategies that allow them to parent effectively, even under stress. The early years represent a very sensitive period in brain development, laying the foundation for a number of critical skills and abilities including vision, hearing, emotional control, language, and learning. In order for young children to develop these skills and abilities, they require consistent, stimulating, and nurturing early environments and, in particular, positive interactions with parents and other caregivers. If children do not experience optimal development during this critical period, there can be life-long negative consequences for both physical and mental health and wellbeing throughout childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

Prevention and intervention strategies strengthen the capacity of parents and societies to care for children’s health and wellbeing. Funding programs and services which create a healthy environment and positive experiences in infancy and the early years of childhood is far less costly than trying to address problems later. Prevention and early intervention strategies have also been shown to be more effective than remediation.

Primary prevention is defined as programs and services that provide families with the support they need to build protective factors and prevent the development of risk factors and vulnerabilities. By supporting parents and caregivers, these programs and services help to ensure that children have stable and healthy living environments in which to grow and develop.

Example: Programs that help new and expecting parents prepare for challenges of child rearing; programs that educate parents about child care and child development; child care opportunities for those who work outside the home or need respite; programs that teach children how to protect themselves from abuse.

Early intervention is defined as involvement with families when vulnerabilities are first identified in order to strengthen protective factors and reduce the impact of risk factors, and reduce the need for more intrusive and intensive interventions. Families served in these programs usually have one or more identified risk factors, such as poverty, parental substance abuse, young parental age, parental mental health issues such as depression, parental or child disabilities, or exposure to family violence.

Example: The Abecedarian Project, in which children born between 1972 and 1977 were randomly assigned as infants to either the early educational intervention group or the control group. Children in the experimental group received full-time, high-quality educational intervention in a childcare setting from infancy through age five. Researchers monitored children’s progress over time with follow-up studies conducted at ages 12, 15, 21, 30, and 35. The findings continue to demonstrate the positive, long-term effects of high-quality early care.
and education, particularly with regard to the power of early intervention to surmount some of the disadvantages of poverty.
Cost of Not Investing in Early Childhood

Academic and social skills acquired by age eight provide the foundation for lifelong learning and success. This is the most opportune time to influence learning paths and ensure the very best outcomes for all children. A five-year study of more than 1,850 children and their mothers found that children whose learning environments were of consistently low quality were much more likely to have language and literacy delays before kindergarten, while supportive home learning experiences could help close the school readiness gap. By the time children from low-income families enter kindergarten, they are typically 12-14 months below national norms in language and pre-reading skills. Preschoolers whose parents read to them, tell stories, or sing songs tend to develop larger vocabularies, become better readers, and perform better in school, while children who lack this stimulation during early childhood tend to arrive at school with measurably weaker language, cognitive, and memory skills.

Reading at grade level by the end of third grade is critically important. The National Research Council asserts that “academic success, as defined by high school graduation, can be predicted with reasonable accuracy by knowing someone’s reading skill at the end of third grade. A person who is not at least a moderately skilled reader by that time is unlikely to graduate from high school.” Up until the end of third grade, most children are learning to read. Beginning in fourth grade, however, they are reading to learn, using their skills to gain more information in subjects such as math and science, to solve problems, to think critically about what they are learning, and to act upon and share that knowledge in the world around them. Sociologist Donald Hernandez found that children who do not read proficiently by the end of third grade are four times more likely to leave school without a diploma than proficient readers. Black and Hispanic children who are not reading proficiently in third grade are twice as likely as similar white children not to graduate from high school (about 25 versus 13 percent).

Earning a high school diploma is perhaps the most important determinant of a person’s future in the United States. The average dropout can expect to earn an annual income of $20,241, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. That’s a full $10,386 less than the typical high school graduate, and $36,424 less than someone with a bachelor’s degree. Among those between the ages of 18 and 24, dropouts were more than twice as likely as college graduates to live in poverty according to the Department of Education. Among dropouts between the ages of 16 and 24, incarceration rates were a whopping 63 times higher than among college graduates. When compared to the typical high school graduate — a dropout will end up costing taxpayers an average of $292,000 over a lifetime due to the price tag associated with incarceration and other factors such as how much less they pay in taxes. High school dropouts also are more likely than those who graduate to be arrested or have a child while still a teenager, both of which incur additional financial and social costs. The current pool of qualified high school graduates is neither large enough nor skilled enough to supply our nation’s workforce, higher education, leadership, and national security needs.
The Plan

Methodology
PFC, Weld County’s Early Childhood Council, is one of many councils statewide that coordinate early childhood service delivery. We work to improve the system and the coordination of services for children in Weld County using the Colorado Early Childhood Framework to guide our work. This framework focuses on three domains: family support and education, health and well-being, and early learning. PFC takes a holistic approach to a child by supporting all three domains – some directly and others by working with community partners. Our work is guided by community needs assessments and is data-driven.

Descriptions of Goals
Long-term indicators of success include:

- Local resources for health, development, mental health, education, and family support are easily accessible for Weld County families.
- Weld County community partners actively participate to form a safety net of services that ensures all children and their families receive the help they need.
- Early childhood professionals receive training opportunities in best practices to increase their knowledge, skills, and the quality of care provided.
- Weld County children enter school ready to learn and continue to succeed as they progress, as demonstrated by the critical milestones of reading proficiently by fourth grade and graduating on time.

As we work toward these long-range goals, short term goals for the 2017-2018 year included:

Access:
- Increase quality in formal and informal care environments to promote school readiness for all.
- Increase the percentage of child care programs with access to slots for CCCAP subsidies in a high quality program (level 3-5).
- Increase Colorado Shines Quality Rating and Improvement System Engagement to 60%. Engagement is defined as level 2 or higher.

Capacity:
- Build a seamless system amongst parents, families, child care providers, and service providers to deliver early childhood services in the areas of early care and education, family support, mental health, and health.
- Promote the Colorado Shines Quality Rating and Improvement System and Early Learning and Development Guidelines at least once a month.

Affordability:
- Increase the number and percentage of children receiving child care subsidy being served in a high quality program.

Accessibility:
- Increase coordination of resources to provide access to information about young children’s overall wellness and development for parents.
• Work with community partners to increase awareness of nutrition, physical activity, and mental health services available in the county.
• Link public engagement/awareness efforts about early childhood issues, priorities, and challenges, and share/implement with stakeholders.

Methods for Accomplishing Work
Family Support and Education
• Home Visitation Programs: prevention programs that offer family-oriented services to pregnant mothers and families with young children; structured visits are made to the family’s home
  o Example: Bright by Three, Parents as Teachers; Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters
• Parenting Resources: educational tools designed to help parents and caregivers navigate the journey of raising a child
  o Example: parenting classes such as Best Start for Babies and Toddlers
• Early Intervention: case management services for families with children who have a developmental delay to enhance the capacity of the family to support their child’s development and learning
  o Example: Envision

Learning and Development
• Head Start: a federally-funded program that supports the comprehensive development of children from birth to age five, in centers, child care partner locations, and in their own homes
  o Example: Head Start, Early Head Start, Migrant Head Start
• Preschool: a school for young children, primarily between the ages of three and five
  o Example: Colorado Preschool Program
• Licensed Child Care: either a child care center or a licensed family child care home that has met the licensing standards defining the minimum acceptable health, safety, and program standards
  o Example: Colorado Shines and Child Care Resource and Referral
• FFN Child Care: unlicensed (also known as exempt) child care provided by a family member, a friend, or a neighbor, usually in a home
  o Example: your neighbor taking care of your children in her home, Weld County’s FFN Association

Health and Well-Being
• Prenatal Care: preventive healthcare with the goal of providing regular check-ups that allow doctors or midwives to treat and prevent potential health problems throughout the course of the pregnancy and to promote healthy lifestyles that benefit both mother and child
  o Example: FIRST STEPS at North Colorado Health Alliance
• Healthcare Visits: preventative and treatment healthcare including primary care, specialty care, dentistry, ophthalmology, and mental health support
  ○ Example: a pediatrician providing regular checkups for a newborn
• Healthy Lifestyles Programs: programs designed to teach about and encourage healthy eating and regular physical activity
  ○ Example: before- and after-school walking and running programs in local schools, 5210 obesity prevention program, 9 Ways to Grow Healthy Colorado Kids
• Early Childhood Mental Health Programs: programs that help early childhood professionals and parents build their skills so that they are equipped to support children with challenging behaviors and to facilitate healthy social and emotional development
  ○ Example: North Range Behavior Health offers early childhood mental health specialists to assist children and families with their social-emotional needs.

Community Awareness & Advocacy
• Shared Messaging: set messaging for stakeholders in a specific field to use in order to speak from a collective voice, engage more audiences and mobilize action
  ○ Example: Early Childhood Colorado Partnership’s shared message bank/United Way’s shared messaging, United Way of Weld County’s Roadmap4Kids
• Social Messaging: intentionally utilizing social media to get the word out to the general public about a specific topic
  ○ Example: United Way of Weld County’s social media campaign for five early childhood programs in Weld County
• Advocacy: working alongside other organizations to educate the general public, businesses, and parents about the importance of early childhood interventions and advocacy
  ○ Example: collaborating with Colorado Children’s Campaign to advocate for change in practices impacting early childhood, Annual Kids COUNT! Presentation; annual speaker on specific early childhood issues (ie. Dr. Sarah Watamura, Dr. Bruce Perry)
Evaluation and Sustainability

As Promises for Children makes the intentional shift toward a collective impact framework, a shared measurement system is key to progress. Agreement on a common agenda is illusory without agreement on the ways success will be measured and reported. Collecting data and measuring results consistently on a short list of indicators at the community level and across all participating organizations not only ensures that all efforts remain aligned, it also enables the participants to hold each other accountable and learn from each other’s successes and failures.

In 2013 the Weld County Commissioners and the Weld County Department of Public Health and Environment purchased the technology for what has become the Thriving Weld Dashboard. The dashboard (www.thrivingweld.com) is a publicly viewable performance management tool used by dozens of Weld County agency programs to show the results of health and human services programming. The dashboard makes agency and county-wide progress visible to anyone interested.

There are six dials on the dashboard (Healthy Eating, Active Living, Healthy Mind & Spirit, Education, Livelihood, and Access to Care) corresponding with six strategy maps, which are the plans for how the community will achieve a shared goal. Additionally, each agency is able to measure their own program success via a scorecard. Through it they can report any and all data that they wish. These programs are then linked to boxes on the strategy maps, detailing where they fit into the larger community-wide picture.

Additionally, a collaboration survey will be conducted annually beginning in 2018 to measure how well the organizations that make up the Weld County Early Childhood Council are working together, and to seek out areas for improvement. These measures will be developed by September 2018.

Year after year, the United Way of Weld County board of directors continues to vote to dedicate staff and financial resources toward improving early childhood outcomes. Funding from government sources, private foundations, and individual donors will continue to be sought to allow this important work to sustain and grow over time.
Conclusion

Promises for Children is dedicated to creating a community in which every child is valued, healthy and thriving. As a diverse partnership, we increase the awareness of the importance of early childhood development, and facilitate accessible pathways of services leading to lifelong wellbeing for all children prenatal to eight years of age.

Our future doctors, politicians, teachers, and parents are born each day, and it is our responsibility and privilege to help them grow. We can do this by strengthening parents’ capabilities, providing engaging and safe schools, and building strong community resources to help when a family is in need. The first eight years are critical, and as our county’s population grows, there has never been a more important time.

It takes a village.
A Call to Action: Your Role in Weld County’s Future

Join Us in Strengthening Weld County’s Early Childhood System

Donate
Together, we are building and supporting Weld County’s early childhood system. Our collective effort is critical – because when families thrive and children have a strong start, our communities across the region are strengthened. Please consider a donation to United Way of Weld County’s Promises for Children and join us in our strategies to support Weld County’s children.

Policy Priorities
Together, Colorado’s 34 Early Childhood Councils form a statewide network with deep knowledge of local perspectives. Leaders can rely on the expertise of councils to ensure policies focus on helping young children enter school ready to learn and achieve their full potential. Annually, councils develop policy priorities to ensure there is a collective voice on behalf of all Colorado’s young children and their families.

The Policy Priorities of Promises for Children:
• Support policy and funding strategies that actualize and enhance the legislative intent of HB07-1062 (the legislation that created councils) to promote Early Childhood Councils as key facilitators of local system building and implementation.
• Support building capacity and access to quality comprehensive services that are guided by documented best practices and support young children, families, and school readiness.
• Support local flexibility in decision making, including the use of a mixed delivery system, to best respond to local child and family needs.
• Promote efforts to identify and address regulatory barriers to quality Pre-K, child care, and comprehensive services for young children and families.

Promises for Children encourages community members to join conversations with their local elected officials. Contact information for county-wide and state-wide offices can be found at:
www.weldgov.com/departments
leg.colorado.gov/find-my-legislator

Family Friendly Business Practices
Beginning in the earliest years, children learn resilience, teamwork, and creativity – skills that become highly valued once they grow up and enter the workforce. Kids learn these skills through positive early learning experiences with their parents and caregivers.

Today, 63% of Colorado’s children birth through the age of four have all available parents in the workforce. Many families struggle to access high quality, affordable child care programs and are not provided with supportive family policies at work. Employers can attract and retain a
workforce that is more present, prepared, and productive when they offer family-friendly workplace policies.

When businesses support parents and caregivers they help to strengthen families and promote positive parenting so young children can achieve their full potential. Family-friendly policies that support child wellbeing and family stability contribute to a healthy, thriving, and productive society for Weld County.

Business leaders can support young children and families in several ways.

- Adopt family-friendly workplace policies:
  - Paid leave for parents when they bring home a new child.
  - Flexible hours and telecommuting so parents can balance work and life commitments.
  - Breastfeeding support by providing time and a clean, private space for mothers.
  - On-site, high quality child care so parents have reliable and safe care for their children.

- Consider the Colorado Child Care Contribution Tax Credit (CCTC).
  - This public, private partnership can provide a tax credit up to 50% of the total contribution to a qualified child care organization and lowers state and federal taxes for businesses.
  - CCTC contributes to expanding quality child care opportunities for Colorado’s children and increasing access and affordability.

Join Us
Please join us at our next Early Childhood Council (everyone is welcome!) and consider becoming a member. Contact Sheri Hannah-Ruh (970-304-6173, sheri@unitedway-weld.org) to find out when the next meeting is, or to sign up for our monthly email updates.
Planning Group Membership

- Jenny Acevedo (Envision, Creative Support for People with Developmental Disabilities)
- Vicki Barron (Blooming Littles Learning Center)
- Angelica Bordonada (Sunrise Community Health)
- Sandy Bright (ABC Child Development Center)
- Heide Brown (Ft. Lupton School District)
- Nina Duran (United Way of Weld County Board of Directors)
- Sarah Eggert (Family Connects)
- Alexandra Farrell (Adventure Child Care Center)
- Lissette Frederick (Parent Representative)
- Suzanne Gallegos (United Way of Weld County)
- Caroline Gelatt (United Way of Weld County)
- Sheri L. Hannah-Ruh (United Way of Weld County)
- John Kruse (Weld County Department of Human Services)
- Andrea Larson (Weld RE-4 Windsor-Severance School District)
- Julie Lindauer (Weld County School District RE-1)
- Nancy Milliken (High Plains Library District)
- Katie Mott (Weld RE-3J School District)
- Kathy O’Neil (Aims Community College and University of Northern Colorado)
- April Perez (Weld County School District RE-8)
- Casey Pierce (Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains)
- Janis Pottorff (Family Connects)
- Juanita Puga (Family Connects)
- Amelia Ritchart (United Way of Weld County)
- Elena Rosenfeld (High Plains Library District)
- Mike Schwan (Weld County Department of Public Health and Environment)
- Lyle SmithGraybeal (United Way of Weld County)
- Dwight Steele (Community Representative)
- Mary L Walton (Envision, Creative Support for People with Developmental Disabilities)
Factoids

1. Three quarters of students who are poor readers in third grade will remain poor readers in high school.
2. Students with relatively low literacy achievement tend to have more behavioral and social problems in subsequent grades and higher rates of retention in grade.
3. By age 3, children from wealthier families typically have heard 30 million more words than children from low-income families.
4. A follow up study of the Abecedarian Project found that by age 30, participants were four times more likely to obtain a college degree than nonparticipants.
5. For children from low-income families, preschool attendance is one of the strongest factors in school readiness; attending a high-quality early childhood program also predicts higher levels of achievement at age 11.
6. Up to half of the printed fourth-grade curriculum is incomprehensive to students who read below that grade level.
7. Education is generational: students whose mothers have less than a high school diploma or its equivalent are more likely to be retained in grade than children whose mothers have a bachelor’s or graduate degree (20% versus 3%).
8. 73% of Weld County kindergarteners were enrolled in a full-day program in 2016.
9. In 2014, 17% of Weld County families with a five year old child spoke Spanish at home.
10. Each change of school costs a child 3-6 months of learning.
11. Just 22% of students get 60+ minutes of physical activity per day.
12. Just 11% of children ages 1-14 and 29% of high school students eat 2+ servings of fruits/vegetables per day.
13. 25% of children 1-14 consume 1+ sugar sweetened beverage per day, and 72% of children 1-14 eat fast food 1+ time per week.
14. 14% of Weld County families do not read to their children 3 or more times per week.
15. Four in ten Colorado high school graduates (6 in 10 School District 6 graduates) who went on to attend a public, in-state college or university required remediation in at least one subject.
16. 49% of Weld County residents living in a library service area are not registered borrowers.
17. 59.8% of Weld County children under 6 have all parents in the work force.
18. 678 homeless students were served by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Program during the 2015-2016 school year.
19. 4,006 or 9.3% of Weld County students were enrolled in special education programs in 2016.
20. 2,173 children in Weld County lived in a food desert in 2010 (defined as a low-income census tract where a substantial number or share of residents has low access to a supermarket or large grocery store.)
Sources
Kid Count Data Center https://datacenter.kidscount.org/

US Census Data / American Fact Finder https://factfinder.census.gov

Early Childhood Leadership Commission http://www.earlychildhoodcolorado.org/


2016 Weld County Community Health Survey conducted by the Weld County Department of Public Health & Environment

Boston University School of Public Health http://sphweb.bumc.edu/otlt/MPH-Modules/SB/BehavioralChangeTheories/BehavioralChangeTheories4.html

Upstate Colorado Economic Development http://upstatecolorado.org

Colorado Department of Education www.cde.state.co.us

Colorado Department of Human Services https://www.colorado.gov/cdhs


Annie E. Casey Foundation


PBS https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/by-the-numbers-dropping-out-of-high-school/

Thriving Weld Dashboard www.thivingweld.com

The Carolina Abecedarian Project http://abc.fpg.unc.edu/

The Impact of Poverty on Educational Outcomes for Children
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2528798/
