



## GRANTMAKING FOR COLORADO'S YOUNGEST CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

[www.buellfoundation.org](http://www.buellfoundation.org)



The Buell Foundation is dedicated to early childhood and improving the lives of young children and their families throughout Colorado. We have made significant contributions to organizations and initiatives that work to bolster outcomes for children ages birth to five, particularly those from underserved and under-resourced communities across the state.

## Reasons for Optimism

### Last Six Years

- Full-Day Kindergarten (fall 2019)
- Paid Family and Medical Leave (FAMLI)
- Universal Preschool Program (Prop EE and II)
- Family Affordability Tax Credit
- Caregiver Tax Credit
- Career Advance Colorado
- Employer-Sponsored Child Care
- DOLA – Child Care Facility Development Toolkit
- Local Ballot Measure Success



## THE BENEFITS OF LOCAL FUNDING

### SUFFICIENCY

Local investment can close the gaps left by insufficient federal and state investments and help ensure that low-to-middle income families get the support they need to thrive within their local economic context.



### TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY

Local programs, which tend to be smaller in scale, can more easily track and account for their spending.



### INNOVATION & LEARNING



It is often easier to try new approaches at a smaller scale. Local public investment can be viewed as something of a pilot program that allows communities to tackle challenges and learn from the experience. That has certainly been the case in Colorado where municipal and county-level investments in Aspen, Denver, Summit, and San Miguel counties have preceded and informed state policy on preschool. These communities are trying new approaches to address ongoing challenges, particularly around infant and toddler care and engagement with informal care providers.

### FLEXIBILITY & RESPONSIVENESS



Local leaders understand their community's needs best and can therefore design programs and direct funding where it is needed most. Local funding sources can also be designed to be more nimble and responsive, allowing local leaders to shift dollars among priorities more quickly and easily.

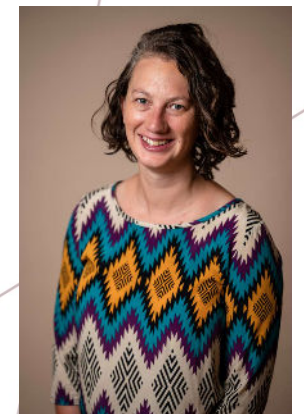


## Lodging Taxes

Communities are using lodging taxes to support early childhood education in myriad ways ([Chalkbeat article](#))

- [Estes Park](#) is utilizing lodging taxes to purchase a building for child care, give out provider grants (operational support with requirements for higher pay, etc.), incentivize/support infant and toddler care and more.
- [Eagle County](#) is utilizing lodging taxes to provide salary supplements (\$6,000 per year), pay for a nurse health consultant, level facilities costs and more.
- [Chaffee County](#) is utilizing lodging taxes to support child care infrastructure and their ECE workforce.
- San Juan County just gave approval for more than \$40k for operational support of Silverton Family Learning Center.
- Clear Creek County and Georgetown are utilizing lodging tax dollars to reduce costs for families, and they aim to increase summer care hours.
- Ridgway voters approved a lodging tax increase, with 50% of the net lodging tax revenues used for workforce support, which includes child care and education, affordable housing, and programs facilitating homeownership.
- La Plata and Grand counties and the city of Montrose all passed lodging taxes in November of 2024 with the expectation that funds would support early childhood education. The city of Durango, Regional Housing Alliance, La Plata Economic Development Alliance and the local early childhood council released their [child care investment strategy plan](#), which lays out a path where lodging tax funds would be used to encourage further investment.

# Leadership in La Plata County







Developed by the **La Plata Economic Development Alliance**, the **Early Childhood Council of La Plata County**, the **Regional Housing Alliance of La Plata County**, and the **City of Durango** in partnership with local consultants (Cass Walker Harvey of CWH Consulting, and Cyo Nystrom).

The plan incorporates extensive market research and input from the business and childcare communities.

## Voters overwhelmingly approve La Plata County lodgers tax reallocation



**More than 69% of electorate said 'yes' to spending revenue on workforce housing, child care**

By Reuben M. Schafir Herald Staff Writer

Tuesday, Nov 5, 2024 8:47 PM **Updated Tuesday, Nov. 5, 2024 10:28 PM**



### Lessons Learned:

- Importance of diverse participation and advocacy
- Power of storytelling
- Influential advocates
- Community-driven action
- External support

2+2

# LA PLATA COUNTY EARLY CHILDCARE STRATEGIC INVESTMENT PLAN

The business impact is immediate and measurable. 60% of employers have lost employees directly to childcare issues, while 54% face ongoing hiring challenges linked to childcare accessibility. More concerning, 26% of employers reported losing five or more employees in the past two years due to childcare gaps. **Only 6% of employers report adequate childcare access for their workforce**, leading some businesses to consider relocation due to workforce instability. These statistics highlight the critical need for systemic childcare solutions to ensure business stability and economic growth in La Plata County.

*‘We track exit reasons, and childcare is one of the top two reasons people leave.’*

*–Participating Employer*

## BUSINESS IMPACT OF CHILDCARE GAP in La Plata County



# LA PLATA COUNTY EARLY CHILDCARE STRATEGIC INVESTMENT PLAN



## THE CRISIS: Market Analysis & Economic Impact

Due to childcare shortfalls, La Plata County loses up to \$34 million annually in unrealized economic potential, representing our share of Colorado's staggering \$2.2 billion annual loss. These deficits have immediate, measurable impacts on business operations, talent retention, and growth potential across all sectors, including healthcare, education, and small businesses.



**Half of Colorado parents report** making sacrifices that affect their employment, including reducing work hours, taking unpaid leave, or entirely leaving their jobs due to lack of affordable childcare options.<sup>2</sup>



The Healthier Colorado 2023 Voter Opinion Survey revealed that **one-third of respondents limited their work hours** because of the high costs of childcare.<sup>3</sup>



**Colorado would realize over \$700 million in lost wages** if the estimated 10,200 Colorado parents could secure childcare and re-enter the workforce. If this occurred, it would generate over \$3.7 billion in GDP and create 29,000 new jobs.<sup>4</sup>



To replace an employee costs companies up to 2x an employee's salary<sup>5</sup>, and productivity problems cause **Colorado employers to lose \$780 million annually** due to childcare challenges their workforce faces.<sup>6</sup>

Since 2019, La Plata County has experienced **an 11% decrease in licensed childcare slots**, losing 147 slots over five years. If this trend continues, the county's **licensed childcare capacity will decline by approximately 23%, falling below 1,000 slots by 2030**. This worsening shortfall will further strain families, exacerbate workforce instability, and significantly hinder economic growth.



# LA PLATA COUNTY EARLY CHILDCARE STRATEGIC INVESTMENT PLAN

## Current Market Status

AGE GROUP	CURRENT LICENSED CAPACITY	NEED	GAP
Infants (0-18 months)	80	656	576
Toddlers (18-36 months)	244	629	385
Preschool (36-60 months)	822	850	28
<b>Total Licensed Care</b>	<b>1,146</b>	<b>2,137</b>	<b>991</b>
Additional FFN Care	250	-	-

*Note: FFN Care refers to Family, Friends, and Neighbor Network care options, including informal arrangements with nannies, babysitters, relatives, and unlicensed providers. While these options supplement licensed care, they do not fully bridge the childcare gap.*

# LA PLATA COUNTY EARLY CHILDCARE STRATEGIC INVESTMENT PLAN



## La Plata County Educator Wage Analysis

Understanding the wage structure is key to addressing workforce stability:

ROLE	WAGE RANGE
Assistant Teachers	\$17.00 - \$19.47/hr
Lead Teachers	\$19.50 - \$26.51/hr
Infant Teachers	\$17.62 - \$22.69/hr
Toddler Teachers	\$16.98 - \$21.00/hr
Assistant Directors	\$18.11 - \$20.00/hr
Directors	\$31.03/hr or approx. \$59,381/year

## EARLY CHILDCARE WORKFORCE STATISTICS in La Plata County



**260**

employed as Early  
Childcare Educators

**\$40,560**

median annual income  
early childcare employee

**15.1%**

live below  
poverty line

# LA PLATA COUNTY EARLY CHILDCARE STRATEGIC INVESTMENT PLAN



## **Business community insights**

Surveys and interviews with 34 employers and 16 leading business leaders provided critical insights into the impact of childcare shortages on workforce stability.



## **Family perspectives**

Surveys and focus groups with over 150 families, including diverse and bilingual households, emphasized the urgent need for affordable and culturally responsive childcare options.



## **Childcare provider expertise**

Focus groups with 80% of licensed providers and engagements with over 20 Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FNN) providers highlighted operational challenges and workforce needs.



## **Public-sector & Nonprofit participation**

Collaborations, interviews, and focus groups with city officials, public agencies, and key nonprofits ensured our recommendations were comprehensive and actionable.

# LA PLATA COUNTY EARLY CHILDCARE STRATEGIC INVESTMENT PLAN



## THE SOLUTION: The Strategic Investment Framework

A \$20M investment over five years will reimagine the childcare sector in La Plata County, doubling the number of childcare slots available for children aged 0-3.



### Childcare Investment Fund (\$10M)

Stabilizes the workforce by raising educator wages, improving retention and recruitment of qualified childcare educators. Catalyzes 420 new childcare slots over three years.



### Capital & Infrastructure Fund (\$10M)

Expands physical capacity by providing loans and grants for new facilities and upgrades. Creates sustainable infrastructure to meet growing childcare demand.



### Childcare Champions Initiative

Offers perks, discounts, and recognition to early childhood educators. Builds support and retention by enhancing educator morale and appreciation.



# LA PLATA COUNTY EARLY CHILDCARE STRATEGIC INVESTMENT PLAN



## Childcare Investment Fund - \$10M

- Stabilizes the workforce through wages, tuition assistance, and benefits
- Immediate impact on retention and recruitment

Year	Investment	Funding Source	Outcomes
2026	<p><b>\$2.2M total investment</b></p> <p>\$1.2M to increase wages for 260 early childcare educators</p> <p>\$800,000 to catalyze new childcare providers.</p> <p>Priority projects for year one:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bring existing facilities to capacity</li> <li>• Expansion of existing facilities</li> <li>• Creation of bilingual program</li> <li>• Creation of 3 new in-home/family providers</li> <li>• Creation of Bayfield center</li> <li>• Support to alternative providers</li> </ul> <p>\$200,000 to complete strategic projects</p>	<p><b>Public Sector:</b> \$800,000</p> <p><b>Private Sector:</b> \$1M</p> <p><b>Philanthropy:</b> \$400,000</p>	<p>Additional approx. 260 childcare slots created</p> <p>Increased wages by an average of \$4000/year per educator - ensuring all educators are making at least \$20/hour.</p>

# LA PLATA COUNTY EARLY CHILDCARE STRATEGIC INVESTMENT PLAN



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
**ALLIANCE**

Funding Source	Details
<b>Public Dollars</b>	Possible Sources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• La Plata County Lodgers Tax</li> <li>• Municipal Lodgers Tax</li> <li>• Special Tax Districts</li> <li>• Mill Levy</li> <li>• Sales / Property Taxes</li> <li>• Tax exempt revenue bonds or Capital bonds</li> </ul>
<b>Employer Donations</b>	Three year commitment
<b>Gold Level</b>	8 businesses contributing \$50k+ each (\$25,000+ back in tax credits <sup>13</sup> ) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Priority access to childcare spots at designated partner providers after year 2</li> <li>• Childcare contribution state and federal tax credits (50%)</li> <li>• Strategic partner recognition</li> <li>• Business network benefits</li> <li>• Economic impact tracking</li> </ul>
<b>Silver Level</b>	8+ businesses contributing \$30k-45k each (15,000+ back in tax credits) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Childcare contribution state and federal tax credits (50%)</li> <li>• Strategic partner recognition</li> <li>• Business network benefits</li> </ul>
<b>Bronze Level</b>	10+ businesses contributing \$5k-\$10k each (\$2,500+ back in tax credits) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Childcare contribution state and federal tax credits (50%)</li> <li>• Community partner recognition</li> </ul>
<b>Philanthropy</b>	Contributions from philanthropic organizations

# LA PLATA COUNTY EARLY CHILDCARE STRATEGIC INVESTMENT PLAN



## EXPECTED OUTCOMES & ECONOMIC IMPACT

We project significant growth in La Plata County's childcare capacity through strategic investment and coordinated action.

### Outcomes Include:



Grow childcare capacity to 73% by 2029, including 15 new licensed centers or homes.



Increase wages for all childcare workforce to at least a \$20-\$24/hour, and ensure all childcare educators have access to health benefits.



Stabilize the childcare workforce, reducing the turnover rate to 25-30% and ensuring all facilities are fully staffed.



Establish at least one bilingual Spanish option for families.



Establish at least one licensed center for 0-3 in both Bayfield and Ignacio.



Add at least \$21M in additional earnings annually to La Plata's economy.

# LA PLATA COUNTY EARLY CHILDCARE STRATEGIC INVESTMENT PLAN



## IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Our four-phase implementation plan ensures measurable progress toward economic impact goals.

### Phase 1: Market Foundation

January-August 2025

The first phase focuses on building the foundation for long-term childcare improvements by addressing immediate needs and laying the groundwork for implementation.

- Formation of the Childcare Coalition to coordinate cross-sector efforts and oversee progress.
- Completion of the geo-mapping project to identify expansion opportunities across Durango, Bayfield, Ignacio, and unincorporated areas.
- Conducting a childcare planning audit to identify regulatory barriers and opportunities for improvement.
- Development of strategic plans for childcare centers operating below capacity to optimize existing resources.
- Creation of fund guidelines, governance structures, and policies for both investment funds.
- Launch of the capital campaign to achieve the \$20 million fundraising goal.



**LA PLATA COUNTY  
EARLY CHILDCARE  
STRATEGIC  
INVESTMENT PLAN**

## Creating a Strategic Investment Plan

- Is this a need for your community? Would it be helpful for funding/advocacy?
- Interest in a template or cohort model?

# Questions & Answers

# LET'S WORK TOGETHER

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