



DENVER'S EARLY
CHILDHOOD COUNCIL

Community Report

2024-2025 FISCAL YEAR



OUR MISSION

To elevate the early childhood field through innovative and inclusive leadership, services, and solutions.

OUR VISION

A community where the diverse needs of all young children and their families are supported.





Message From the CEO



This year marks an important moment for Denver's Early Childhood Council.

Dear Friends of DECC,

As I step into the role of CEO, I am joining an organization with a long history of impact, deep community relationships, and a steadfast commitment to children, families, and the early childhood workforce. In these first months, I have had the privilege of listening closely to our partners, meeting with providers across Denver, and connecting with educators and community leaders who show up every day for young children.

What I have seen is clear. Denver's early childhood ecosystem is strong, but it is also under extraordinary strain. Programs are navigating unprecedented financial pressure, workforce shortages persist, and statewide policy shifts require adaptation in real time. Yet through all of this, the resilience of this community is remarkable. Providers continue opening their doors each morning. Educators continue delivering the kind of responsive, relationship-centered care that shapes a child's entire life trajectory.

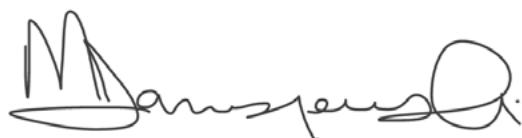
DECC's role, now more than ever, is to bring clarity, coordination, and advocacy to this moment. Our team's accomplishments this past year reflect that commitment. Whether expanding multilingual professional development, strengthening the business backbone of child care programs, elevating Family, Friend, and Neighbor caregivers, or driving critical state-level conversations on the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) and quality improvement, DECC continues to anchor the early childhood landscape with expertise, integrity, and a systems-level lens.

As CEO, my vision is to build on this foundation while charting a path forward that is strategic, financially resilient, and deeply responsive to community need. That means lifting up the entire ecosystem, not only through services and supports, but through advocacy, data, and partnerships that help Denver's early childhood system thrive long-term. It means centering equity, honoring the expertise of our educators and caregivers, and ensuring that every child has the strong start they deserve.

I am deeply grateful to our Board of Directors for their steady leadership and partnership, and to our staff whose talent and dedication make this work possible every day. I also want to thank our providers, funders, families, and community partners for the trust you place in us. Your collaboration strengthens everything we do.

Together, we are building a more coordinated, equitable, and sustainable early childhood system for Denver's youngest learners and the adults who support their growth.

Sincerely,



Melissa Janiszewski
Chief Executive Officer
Denver's Early Childhood Council



DENVER CCAP COLLABORATIVE

As the hosting organization for the Denver CCAP Collaborative, we participated in critical discussions on the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) freeze, hosted presentations from the state CCCAP team, and examined local budgeting and financial impacts on providers and families. Our collective work helped inform local and state-level strategies for improving program stability and equity. This work is ongoing, as CCCAP remains frozen for any new enrollment for an indeterminate amount of time.



FAMILY, FRIEND, AND NEIGHBOR (FFN)

We launched the FFN Rising Care Program, a new initiative designed to connect caregivers with resources and support to enhance the quality of care in informal home-based settings.



PROFESSIONAL AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Our professional development efforts expanded this year, including the expansion of language offerings in our training opportunities to better serve diverse educators. We co-hosted the first annual Career and Resource Fair with the Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County, connecting early childhood students and job seekers with employers, training programs, and community supports to promote workforce growth and retention.



SYSTEMS BUILDING AND ADVOCACY

Throughout the year, we continued to strengthen our ongoing practice as a systems-building and advocacy organization, bringing together partners, providers, and policy makers to address the evolving needs of Colorado's early childhood sector. Our work focused on collaboration, policy engagement, workforce development, and community support to create a more equitable, sustainable early childhood system.



STATEWIDE AND LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

We continued to advocate for policies that strengthen the early childhood workforce and improve families' access to care, including facilitating Policy Pathways at the Rocky Mountain Early Childhood Conference, leading discussions on CCCAP freeze impacts, provider financial challenges, and broader systems issues affecting early childhood education programs across the state. We maintained on-going participation in licensing, waivers, and health department discussions and on the CCCAP rule-re-write committee.



COMMUNITY SUPPORT

We supported families and child care program directors and administrators through immigration safety and legal support webinars, which reached 370 individual participants.



PROVIDER REPRESENTATION AND LEADERSHIP

Through advocacy in the Equity & Advocacy Professional Learning Community (PLC) and drafting formal correspondence with the Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC), we elevated provider voices on key issues such as equity in quality improvement systems, workforce recruitment and retention, and the true costs of delivering high-quality care. These are ongoing conversations that are shaping a more responsive and fair early childhood system moving forward.



COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

We deepened partnerships across local and statewide networks to expand resources, share expertise, and align efforts that benefit children, families, and educators. Together, these partnerships advanced initiatives ranging from health and business supports to family engagement and early learning quality.



OUR PROGRAM

Highlights in FY 24-25

“Your leadership, knowledge, and expertise truly inspired our team. As we wrapped up the day with intention setting and reflection, it was wonderful to hear how your insights resonated with everyone, both in the large group and the smaller discussions. We’ve added our note-taking page to the staff break area as a reminder of the great work we accomplished together. I’m truly grateful for your partnership and excited to see how the work we started will continue to grow within our community. Our newest teacher was giddy and said to me - ‘It’s so inspiring to hear from professionals in the field who’ve been doing this work. I feel like I can really learn here.’ Thank you!”

- Custom Group Training Participant

Quality Initiatives



“The Council nurtures a culture of continuous improvement within early childhood education settings that enables educators to refine their skills, implement evidence-based practices, create a more stimulating and responsive learning environment for young children, and strengthen family-teacher partnerships. As one director stated, “working with the coaches and navigators develops a continual mindset of quality improvement.”

- Program Director

DECC partners with leaders of licensed child care programs to elevate the quality of care for Denver's youngest children. Our team of Quality Navigators and Coaches provides expert guidance and technical assistance to programs ranging from large centers to family child care homes, helping them navigate the complexities of Colorado's early childhood quality rating system (Colorado Shines) and create the conditions for high-quality outcomes in classrooms. A higher Colorado Shines rating allows for greater access to grants, funding, and resources for programs.

QUALITY NAVIGATION

IMPACT IN FY 24-25

- ✓ Total licensed programs in Denver: 333
- ✓ Programs that rated: 34
- ✓ Programs that rated at a Level 3: 20%
- ✓ Programs that rated at a Level 4: 50%
- ✓ Programs that rated at a Level 5: 20%
- ✓ Programs that rated at Level 3 or higher: 91%
- ✓ % of programs that maintained or improved their rating: 91%

The Quality Initiatives team helped child care programs access **\$436,838** for early learning materials and professional development, **\$114,752** for program expansion and capital improvements, and **\$28,876** for infant and toddler-focused improvements.

CLASSROOM COACHING

4,500

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS
RECEIVED COACHING

600

EARLY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS
BENEFITED FROM COACHING

6,974

COACHING HOURS
WERE DELIVERED

93%

COACHING RECIPIENTS WHO EARNED A CDA
(CHILD DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATE) CREDENTIAL.

We implemented LENA Grow in **8 classrooms** in **2 programs**. LENA Grow is an evidence-based professional development program that focuses on high quality teacher-child interactions. LENA Grow also uses devices to measure verbal interactions in early childhood classrooms, leading to improved language skills and kindergarten readiness.

LITTLE HANDS LEARNING CENTER – A REMARKABLE LEAP!

Little Hands Learning Center's advancement from a Colorado Shines Level 2 to a Level 4 rating reflects a strong, organization-wide commitment to quality improvement, staff development, and child-centered practices. Their progress, with guidance from our Quality Initiatives team, was driven by targeted professional development, enhanced collaboration among teachers, thoughtful revisions to schedules and classroom routines, as well as strategic administrative investments such as upgraded storage, improved outdoor play structures, and other facility enhancements.

As a result, children and families are enjoying a more enriching, responsive, and safe early learning environment that supports school readiness and social-emotional growth. The program continues to build toward their long-term goals of sustaining excellence, deepening family engagement, and pursuing Level 5 quality.

DENVER PRESCHOOL PROGRAM PARTNERSHIP

Through our partnership with Denver Preschool Program (DPP), we invest directly in the people who shape children's futures. Together, we administer quality improvement grants that fund expert coaching, college coursework, professional trainings, conferences, and essential classroom materials, empowering teaching staff and program directors to deliver the highest quality early learning experiences to children.

IMPACT IN FY 24-25

247

1,821

4,000-5,000

DPP PROGRAMS IN
DENVER

TEACHERS & DIRECTORS
SUPPORTED BY DPP

3 & 4 YEAR-OLDS WHO BENEFIT
FROM DPP EACH YEAR

Teachers, directors, and programs have the opportunity to earn DPP Achievement Awards through completing DPP featured training and coaching administered by DECC. These awards provide financial incentives, support staff development, and aim to strengthen the early childhood workforce.

- 90% of DPP teachers and program directors earned Achievement Awards
- 97% of DPP programs earned Achievement Awards.

ADVANCING ORAL HEALTH THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

We also partnered with DPP as part of the Healthy Universal Preschool Collaborative, a two-year initiative funded by Delta Dental of Colorado Foundation, to integrate oral health and developmental screenings into Universal Preschool sites. Together, we're helping preschool programs in Denver meet new Healthy Development Quality Standards coming in 2026. 17 centers have joined the screening program in Denver, with more underway in the new year.



“We are most proud of the collective growth and resilience demonstrated by our team throughout this process. Seeing our staff embrace new strategies, collaborate more effectively, and support one another to achieve meaningful improvements has been incredibly rewarding. The positive impact on both our classroom environment and the children’s learning experiences stands out as a testament to our commitment and hard work.”

- Program owners Martha Aguilera and Norma Payares

BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SERVICES



Early childhood programs operate in an increasingly complex environment, one shaped by evolving regulations, fluctuating funding streams, shifting workforce demands, and the ongoing pressures of running a small business or nonprofit. Program directors and administrators across Denver and beyond are turning to DECC for support that strengthens their operational stability, expands capacity, and ensures long-term sustainability.

Our Business and Community Development team brings deep expertise in the administrative, regulatory, and financial realities that ECE leaders navigate every day. From leadership coaching and budgeting to facility development and compliance, the team provides practical, hands-on guidance that directly strengthens Denver's early childhood infrastructure.

IMPACT IN FY 24-25

15

PROGRAMS WERE SUPPORTED IN
OPENING, EXPANDING, OR STABILIZING

10

SITE DEVELOPMENT WALK-
THROUGHS WERE CONDUCTED
THAT RESULTED IN NEW CAPACITY

80

LEADERSHIP AND FINANCIAL COACHING
ENGAGEMENTS RESULTED IN AN IMPROVED
OUTCOME SUCH AS A NEW BUDGET OR
EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK REVISION

30

PROGRAMS COMPLETED
COLORADO LICENSING-APPROVED
TRANSPORTATION RULES TRAINING

Beyond direct services, our team delivered leadership and administrative training to other early childhood councils across the state and supported statewide recruitment and retention strategies advancing a stronger, more coordinated ECE ecosystem.

“Directors rarely receive training for the business portions of the work, and there are many of them. I am so grateful for the support that Denver’s Early Childhood Council, Dora Esparza, and her team offer. I couldn’t do this without them!” - Program Director

“After taking this class, my director and I are much more confident about transporting our kiddos while they’re in our care. We know exactly what we need to have in the vehicle and what is recommended to keep in the vehicle. Great information.”
- Transportation Rules Training Participant

Career Services

Our career services model extends far beyond traditional recruitment and retention efforts. DECC's Early Childhood Career Coach provides individualized, relationship-based guidance that helps educators and emerging professionals build meaningful, sustainable careers in early childhood education.

A core focus of this work is supporting individuals in meeting the Early Childhood Teacher (ECT) qualification. Through tailored coaching, participants receive assistance with credentialing, enrolling in higher education coursework, navigating employment pathways, and exploring entry into the early childhood profession. This approach ensures that both new and experienced educators gain clear, structured pathways to advance within the field.

412

IMPACT IN FY 24-25

164

INDIVIDUALS ENTERING ECE JOBS, ADVANCING ROLES, OR PURSUING HIGHER EDUCATION RECEIVED CAREER COACHING

STUDENTS AND CAREER SEEKERS PARTICIPATED IN THE FIRST ANNUAL ECE CAREER AND RESOURCE FAIR (IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ECPAC)

317

INDIVIDUALS WERE SUPPORTED IN EARNING PDIS CREDENTIALS

33

INDIVIDUALS WERE SUPPORTED IN APPLYING FOR HIGHER EDUCATION COURSEWORK

26

INDIVIDUALS WERE SUPPORTED IN ECE EMPLOYMENT SEARCHES

This work strengthens the educator pipeline by connecting people to qualifications, coursework, job opportunities, and long-term professional development. It also directly supports program directors who rely on qualified educators to maintain quality and meet family needs.

“Ché is an amazing asset to the community. Her support of teachers allows us to meet the early childhood education needs of the families in our community. She was an integral part of supporting several of the new teachers we hired for our brand-new center to ensure they received their credentials and had access to professional development pathways. This allows us to better support the families we serve. We are so thankful to have Ché as a resource.” — ECE Program Director



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & TRAINING

DECC provides high-quality, relevant professional development opportunities for early childhood professionals across Denver. Training is a core component of our mission, and we continue to advance language equity by offering key sessions in the first languages spoken by our community. This approach ensures that educators and caregivers can learn, grow, and apply new skills without linguistic barriers.

We offered a wide range of trainings for teachers including social-emotional learning, math and STEAM, physical movement, and strategies to strengthen child-teacher communication. Administrators received training in high-leverage topics such as teacher retention, performance management, financial oversight, and aligning structural quality with Colorado Shines rating expectations.

IMPACT IN FY 24-25

688 TOTAL EDUCATORS TRAINED

505 TOTAL TRAINING HOURS DELIVERED

251 TOTAL SESSIONS OFFERED

SESSIONS BY LANGUAGE

157
ENGLISH

40
SPANISH

29
ARABIC

25
DARI

96% OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS REPORTED INCREASED SKILLS, CONFIDENCE, OR IMMEDIATE APPLICATION OF LEARNING (35% RESPONSE RATE)

“Gracias por ofrecer estos entrenamientos; nos ayudan a prepararnos mejor para nuestro trabajo y a comprender más a los niños en sus distintas etapas de desarrollo.”

Translation: Thank you for offering these trainings; they help us better prepare for our work and understand children more deeply in their different stages of development.
—Training participant

FAMILY, FRIEND, AND NEIGHBOR CARE (FFN)

Simple Routines, BIG Science



DENVER MUSEUM OF

NATURE SCIENCE



Family, Friend, and Neighbor caregivers are the foundation of early care for many families, highly present across communities yet often overlooked as a vital part of the early childhood ecosystem. DECC is committed to elevating FFN caregivers as essential partners in children's learning and development.

This year, we advanced two innovative FFN strategies:

- **The FFN Rising Care Program**, providing training, peer connections, and hands-on learning experiences.
- **A partnership with Empowering Communities Globally (ECG)**, offering culturally responsive coaching and community-building opportunities.

The program delivered six online training sessions focused on caregiving skills and child safety, supported monthly virtual peer groups, and hosted seasonal Play & Learn Days where caregivers and children engaged in enriching activities together.

IMPACT IN FY 24-25



The FFN Rising program represents a significant shift. strengthening the skills, confidence, and connectedness of caregivers who play a critical role in children's earliest learning experiences. Demand continues to grow, with 16 caregivers already on the waiting list for the next cohort.

PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS:

"Since participating in the program, I have been able to become more aware and reflective about how to strengthen my community."

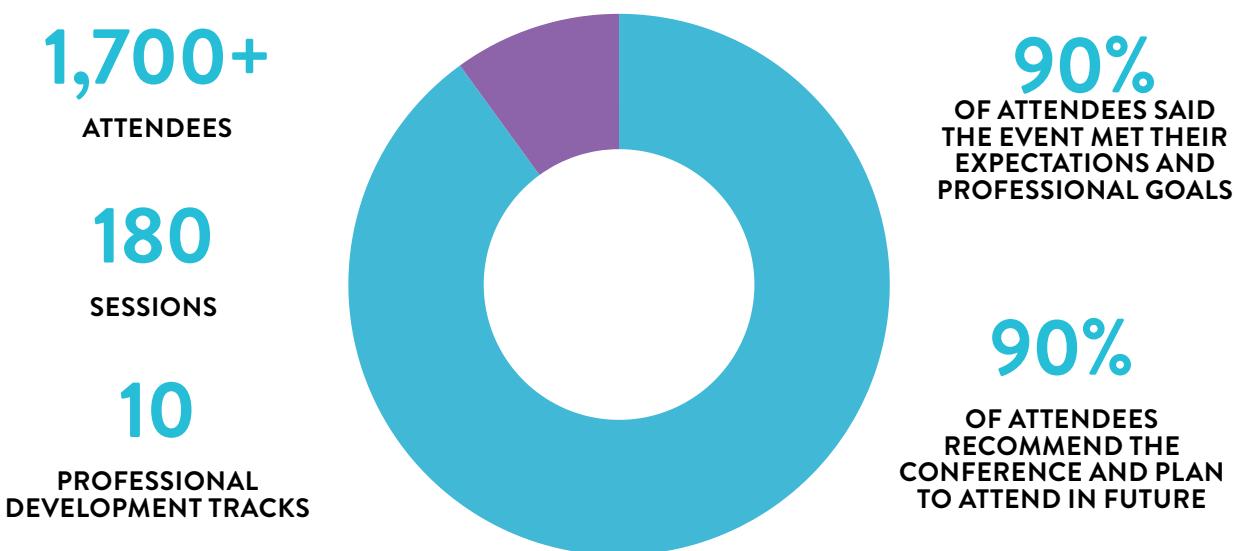
"The resources and materials provided by this program were very helpful, as I didn't have to pay for them myself and it alleviated a financial burden. The program also helped me learn and apply new strategies to support the learning and engagement of the children under my care."

"I really enjoyed the program because it helped me realize that I play an important role for my family, friends, and neighbors by caring for their children when they need it, and that learning is never enough, as each day and each topic brings something new to my life. Thank you for your services, both in materials and in knowledge."

ROCKY MOUNTAIN EARLY CHILDHOOD CONFERENCE

The Rocky Mountain Early Childhood Conference (RMECC) remains one of the region's most influential convenings for early childhood educators, leaders, and advocates. Each year, the conference brings together thousands of professionals committed to strengthening the quality of early learning. In 2025, RMECC once again delivered a dynamic, high-impact experience that equipped attendees with new skills, renewed inspiration, and practical strategies to elevate their work with children and families.

RMECC 2025 BY THE NUMBERS



"I come back to my center with excitement and tools that are ready to use day one. I enjoy being with so many teachers in the same location!"

- 2025 RMECC Participant



“It is invigorating to be in a space with others on the same mission, and is a great reminder to me as to why I do this work.” - 2025 RMECC Participant

DENVER'S EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL FY 24-25

Financial Snapshot

\$4,126,257

TOTAL REVENUE

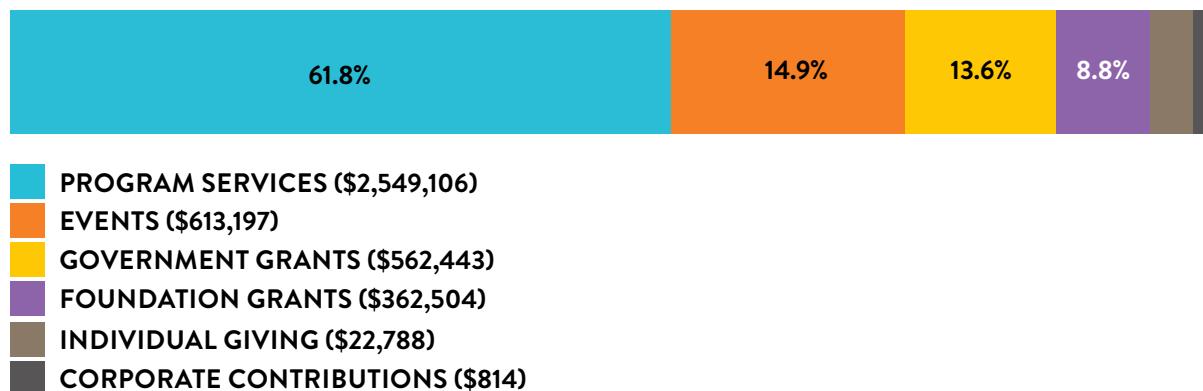
\$3,711,879

TOTAL EXPENSE

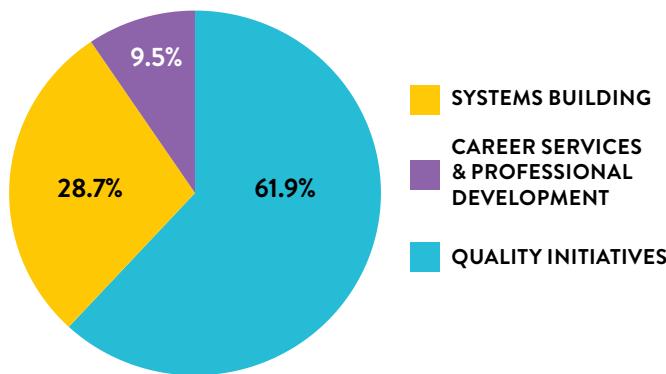
\$414,378

NET REVENUE

FUNDING COMPOSITION (REVENUE MIX)



ALLOCATION ACROSS PROGRAM IMPACT



DECC is a \$4.1M organization, with more than 75% of our funding coming from government grants and program services, 15% from events like RMECC, and nearly 9% from philanthropic foundation partners. Individual giving, while a small portion of our revenue, is one of the only flexible funding sources we have, allowing us to innovate, respond quickly, and fill gaps grants cannot cover.

EVERY DOLLAR INVESTED IN DECC DIRECTLY SUPPORTS OUR CORE MISSION:

- **62% strengthens quality** initiatives that improve early learning environments and expand access to high-quality care.
- **29% fuels career pathways and professional development**, supporting the early childhood workforce through training, coaching, and advancement supports.
- **10% builds systems-level solutions**, data infrastructure, coordination, and partnerships that drive policy and long-term change.

LOOKING AHEAD

As DECC looks toward the coming year, our focus is on building the next era of early childhood support in Denver. The work ahead calls for intentional planning, stronger infrastructure, and deeper alignment across the field. With new leadership and a renewed sense of purpose, we are positioning the organization to meet emerging needs with clarity, accountability, and long-term impact.

We will begin by updating our five-year strategic plan, establishing a unified roadmap for financial resilience, workforce development, quality improvement, data and evaluation, and expanded services for Family, Friend, and Neighbor caregivers and early childhood entrepreneurs.

A strengthened operational and financial backbone is central to this work. We are refining internal systems, deepening grant oversight, expanding financial controls, and improving forecasting tools to support responsible growth and stability.

Our FFN Rising Care Program will continue to expand, offering additional cohorts, culturally responsive trainings, and stronger pathways into licensure, employment, and formal ECE roles. We will also broaden opportunities for educators and job seekers, including expanded credentialing support, multilingual professional development, and a larger Career and Resource Fair in partnership with Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County.

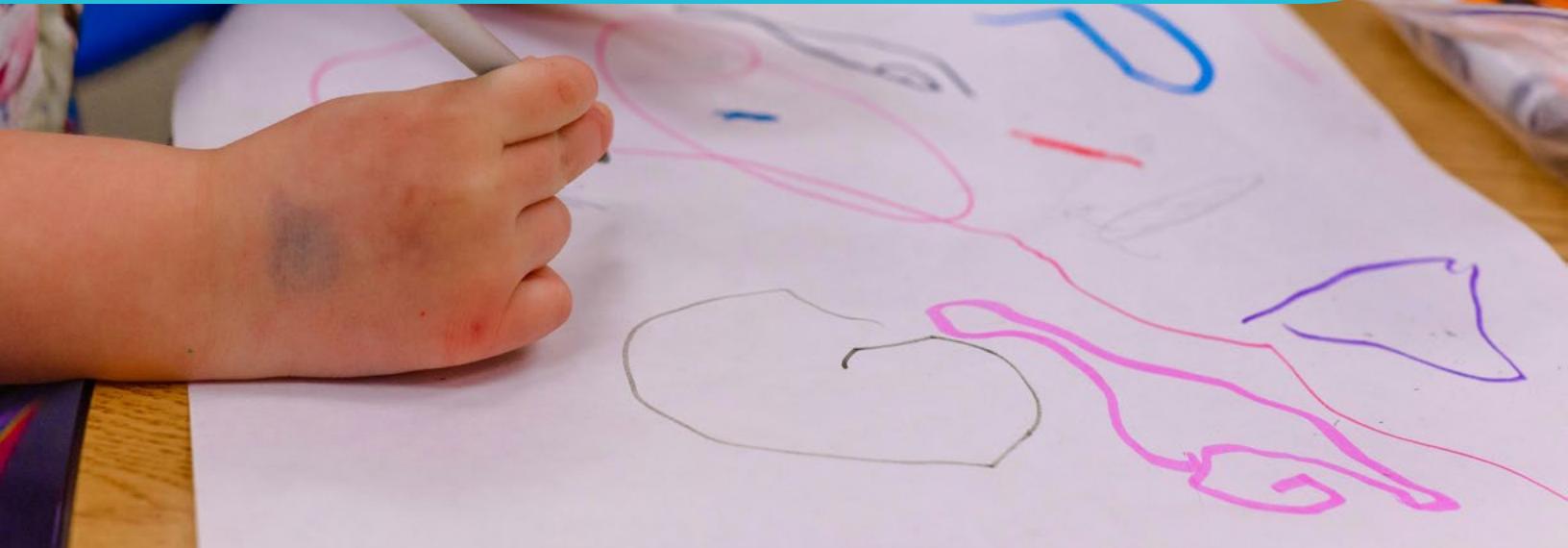
DECC will deepen its policy leadership by elevating provider experiences and shaping statewide conversations at RMECC 2026 and throughout the year. Our focus includes equity, workforce stability, and developing sustainable funding structures.

In 2026, we will also launch a refreshed brand and new website that reflect the organization's evolution and improve access to resources for families, providers, and partners. Strengthening partnerships across sectors - including councils, school districts, higher education, philanthropy, and local and state agencies - will remain a central driver of our progress.

OUR COMMITMENT MOVING FORWARD

The year ahead will require adaptability and shared leadership. DECC remains committed to listening to the field, strengthening coordination across partners, and advocating for a more equitable and sustainable early childhood system. Together, we will build a future where every child in Denver has access to strong early learning environments, every educator is supported in their profession, and every family experiences a system grounded in connection and designed for their success.

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