**Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County**

**Colorado Project LAUNCH -- Communications Plan**

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# Introduction

*Note that in this document “Colorado Project LAUNCH” refers to a collaboration between the Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County (ECPAC), the Colorado Department of Human Services, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, JFK Partners, and is intended to be inclusive of the LAUNCH Together initiative through Early Milestones Colorado.*

# The communications tools created for the Colorado Project LAUNCH initiative include (a) a comprehensive messaging platform that includes a variety of messages and personas for a range of audiences and (b) a targeted communications campaign plan to reach select key audiences. When reviewing these documents and considering the messages and strategy, it is important to bear in mind that we are pursuing this two-pronged approach.

# The messaging platform and audience personas form a foundation of general and targeted messages that equip Colorado Project LAUNCH to communicate with a variety of audiences -- including parents/caregivers; child care, health care, home visitors and other early childhood professionals; and policymakers and business leaders -- about social-emotional development, early childhood mental health and the Colorado Project LAUNCH initiative.

# This communications plan outlines a more targeted campaign to reach a primary audience of child care providers and home visitors, as well as a secondary audience of parents/caregivers (through the media purchase). The objective of the communications campaign is to provide these audiences with information about social-emotional development and early childhood mental health; prevention and health promotion practices; and local resources for support.

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# How We Got Here

# In order to lay a foundation for the development of this communications plan, SE2 reviewed key documents, facilitated group conversations, and held one-on-one interviews with key stakeholder groups of the Colorado Project LAUNCH initiative. The discovery process helped us build a foundation for defining audiences, drafting messages and determining the strategies and tactics recommended in this communications plan.

SE2 **facilitated in-person discussions and interviews** with the following groups and individuals:

* Zero to Three technical assistance provider, Jamie Colvard
* FrameWorks Institute and GroundFloor Media
* State early childhood leaders, including staff and leadership from the Colorado Dept. of Human Services’ Office of Early Childhood, the Colorado Dept. of Public Health and Environment, JFK Partners and Spark Policy Center
* Colorado Project LAUNCH program partners and communications committee
* Parents in Adams County
* Latifah Hasan, Boston Public Health Commission

SE2 also **reviewed a wide variety of materials**, including but not limited to:

* Colorado Project LAUNCH strategic plan and drafts of communications plan
* Colorado’s Early Childhood Mental Health Strategic Plan
* Issue briefs, reports and working papers on social emotional development and infant and early childhood mental health from Harvard University, JFK Partners and Zero to Three
* Infant and Toddler Messaging Guide from Zero to Three
* FrameWorks Institute Communications Toolkit and the Shared Message Bank
* Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation brochures (for providers and parents)
* Environmental scan of early childhood communications campaigns by Elementive Marketing
* Early Childhood Communication Efforts in Colorado from the Early Childhood Leadership Commission
* Communication planning workbook from SAMHSA
* Communications materials developed by other Project LAUNCH grantees across the country

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# What We Heard and Observed

What is working:

* Colorado Project LAUNCH has a **strong network of supporters**, program partners and advocates who want the initiative to succeed and endure – and to be replicated in other Colorado communities.
* There is a **robust community of early childhood professionals, organizations and institutions across Colorado, creating many opportunities for Colorado Project LAUNCH to align,** collaborate and complement related efforts with messaging and materials related to social-emotional development and mental health.
* Colorado Project LAUNCH’s focus on the promotion of positive social-emotional development and the prevention of mental health issues, provides an **opportunity to reduce the stigma surrounding this topic by normalizing the conversations and giving parents and providers easily accessible lines of support** (for screening, assessment, intervention, etc.).
* The most **promising communications opportunities for Colorado Project LAUNCH can directly support the initiative’s strategic goals** of building provider capacity to support social-emotional development, sustainability (both in terms of financial and in terms of meaningful contributions to the early childhood system), and laying a foundation for program replication.

Opportunities for improvement:

* Colorado Project LAUNCH **needs clear, compelling messages to communicate about its own work and impact, as well as to raise awareness** about the importance of social-emotional development and mental health in early childhood.
* In a space with many early childhood initiatives, organizations and communications efforts, Colorado Project LAUNCH must **ensure its communications strategy is tightly focused with clear goals and can align with existing and future initiatives.** Otherwise our efforts could get lost in the shuffle.
* **Stigma related to mental health is a barrier** **that all our audiences face**, to some degree. Therefore, the messages and strategy should address the challenge of trying to improve the quality of understanding and dialogue surrounding these issues *and* make it easy, safe and flexible for parents and providers to reach out for help if they have concerns.
* **The providers who interact with parents and caregivers about social-emotional development and mental health need training and support** in order to have effective conversations about these sometimes difficult topics.

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# Strategic Keys

Based on the above findings, here’s how Colorado Project LAUNCH should approach its communications efforts:

* Colorado Project LAUNCH must design its communications efforts so that **messages and materials can be easily integrated with other early childhood communications efforts** around the state, with particular focus on replication within the four LAUNCH Together communities. Efforts should complement, not duplicate, initiatives that exist or are under development.
* To infuse the early childhood system with greater awareness of social-emotional development and mental health and help to reduce stigma, strategies should include **building the skills of those who are the most trusted messengers and advisors to parents** – providers of early care and learning, educators, home visitors and health care providers.
* Colorado Project LAUNCH’s **communications need to support and advance the collaborations that are key to the program implementation as well as raise wider public awareness** of social-emotional development and the importance of health promotion and prevention.
* All people, particularly those from low-income or diverse backgrounds, value face-to-face communication and outreach, so Colorado Project LAUNCH should **emphasize personal connections and ongoing relationship maintenance in the strategy to train and build capacity** amongearly care and learning providers, educators, home visitors, health care providers, and others.
* Providers and parents can at times feel overwhelmed by the amount of information they receive on early childhood topics. **In order to break through the clutter, Colorado Project LAUNCH materials must solve a problem, address a “pain point” or be otherwise highly relevant to our audience.** For some, this is knowing how to prevent challenging behaviors in the classroom or at home by focusing on positive social-emotional development for children.
* Materials and messages must **increase understanding of how mental health and social-emotional development are interconnected** with physical health and a critical foundation for health and achievement throughout life.
* Materials must provide a **clear call to action** **so that parents and providers know where to go** for more information about childhood mental health and social-emotional development as well as resources to help them if they have questions or concerns.



# Communications Objectives

With the above strategic keys in mind, we recommend the following objectives for Colorado Project LAUNCH communications efforts.

* **Increase engagement with Colorado Project LAUNCH program partners, stakeholders and supporters.** Colorado Project LAUNCH must ensure that its work and significant contributions to the early childhood system in Adams County, the LAUNCH Together communities, and across the state are understood and appreciated.
* **Build and cultivate relationships with new stakeholders and prospective partners** to expand awareness among key influencers about the impact of Colorado Project LAUNCH. Strong, mutually beneficial collaborations are the foundation of the program model, and deepening and expanding collaborations will help the initiative move the needle on social-emotional development and mental health awareness.
* **Broaden awareness of the importance of promoting positive social-emotional development in early childhood and reduce the reluctance to ask for help.** By training and supporting the people who interact with young children and families the most, and offering them information that is useful and meets their needs, Colorado Project LAUNCH has an opportunity to make an enduring impact on Colorado’s early childhood landscape.
* **Amplify and enhance the distribution of our messages and materials by aligning with existing and future communications initiatives related to early childhood.** Colorado Project LAUNCH can become the go-to resource for information on social-emotional development and mental health by proactively seeking out opportunities to integrate its messages and materials in the communications channels and campaigns of other, related initiatives across the state.

# C:\Users\brandon\Desktop\Megaphone.pngCampaign Strategies

The above objectives will be achieved by applying the following strategies through a comprehensive communications campaign:

* **Strategy 1: Establish consistent communications channels and create a “feedback loop”** with Colorado Project LAUNCH program partners, stakeholders and other key supporters of social-emotional development and mental health in early childhood:
	+ Inform them about Colorado Project LAUNCH and the work to educate key audiences in Adams County, the LAUNCH Together communities, and across the state about the importance of social-emotional development and mental health. Provide **periodic updates** on both the program and the communications campaign and share key outcomes/lessons learned.
	+ Develop **template materials** that can be adapted and used by Colorado Project LAUNCH partners and other related initiatives in Adams County and across the state.
	+ Be available to **respond to questions or input** from Project LAUNCH partners and others about the work and the communications campaign; share the outcomes of those questions/input as they are addressed.
	+ Develop a **post-campaign summary** that can be disseminated by Project LAUNCH program partners and others, enabling them to share and/or replicate the effort in their own communities.
	+ **Incorporate messages and materials** into existing ECPAC training offerings forproviders; engage provider partners to **identify opportunities to present** and share information about social-emotional development with expanded networks of early childhood professionals.
* **Strategy 2: Target** **key audiences in Adams County who are trusted advisors to parents**. Provide them with information, training and support to have more effective conversations with parents about social-emotional development and mental health. Include **information they can hand out to parents** about ways to support positive social-emotional development at home as well as **resources for support** if they have questions or concerns about their child.
* **Strategy 3: Conduct a digital media campaign aimed at parents and caregivers in Adams County** to raise awareness of the importance of social-emotional development; how to support healthy development at home; and where to turn with questions or concerns.
* **Strategy 4: Connect and integrate with other early childhood communications initiatives across the state** in order to amplify the reach of Colorado Project LAUNCH messages and enhance existing and future early childhood communications efforts with improved messaging around social-emotional development and mental health.



**Key Audiences for the Campaign**
Through the communications campaign, the following audiences will be provided information, resources and training to educate and support parents and other caregivers of children in Adams County:

* Colorado Project LAUNCH program partners, stakeholders
* Early child care and learning providers
* Informal early care providers (including FFN) in home-based child care settings
* Home visitors
* Elementary educators (pre-K – grade 3) including teachers
* Health care providers or professionals working with families of young children

Target audiences are located in and/or serve families in Adams County.



**Key Messages for the Campaign**

This section is an excerpt from the full messaging platform and includes only the messages most relevant to the communications campaign: (a) general messages about social-emotional development and (b) targeted messages for providers and parents/caregivers.

***General Messages about Social-emotional Development and Mental Health in Early Childhood***

* The early years of a child’s life — beginning before birth to age eight — are critically important for learning and development as the early years are among the most sensitive periods for brain development.
	+ The relationships and experiences a child has in the first years of life – positive or negative – have a profound and lasting effect on how the brain develops.
	+ All aspects of a young child’s development – cognitive, physical, social and emotional – are interconnected, and healthy development in each of these areas lays a foundation for long-lasting well-being as a child grows.
* Healthy social-emotional development and mental health in early childhood lay a foundation for overall health, well-being and success in school and throughout one’s life.
* Just as we all have physical health, we all have mental health – and that includes very young children, even babies.
	+ In the same way that we nurture children’s physical health -- through nutrition, exercise, hygiene, sleep and medical care -- we must also nurture their mental health with positive experiences and loving, stable relationships, and intentional, direct support that helps develop critical social-emotional skills.
* In addition to being a time of great opportunity, early childhood is also a time of great vulnerability. Children’s development and mental health can be negatively impacted by the influences around them, including poverty, abuse or neglect, community or family violence, poor quality child care, or parental substance abuse.

***Targeted Messages for Child Care Providers and Home Visitors***

* As providers we play an essential role in encouraging the healthy social-emotional development of the children in our care.
* It is important for providers to help parents understand that their child’s mental health is a critical part of their overall health and well-being – and to reduce the stigma associated with talking about mental health concerns.
* As providers, parents trust us to provide compassionate care for their children. Part of this role is to ensure parents who have concerns about their child’s development receive referrals to screening, evaluation and appropriate treatment.
* Many parents prefer to get information in person from someone they trust, such as their child’s doctor, teacher or child care provider, followed by information in writing.
* It is important for providers to recognize that many parents get much of their parenting advice from their own parents or other family members. Therefore, providers should seek opportunities to spread messages about positive mental health and social-emotional development to other caregivers in the child’s life including grandparents.
* During infancy and the toddler years, mental health problems may present as difficulty managing or expressing emotions or the lack of secure attachments with caregivers. During the preschool years, mental health problems may result in challenging behaviors, including class disruption or withdrawal.
* Instead of viewing challenging behaviors simply as a disruption, providers should be aware that these behaviors often are the result of social and emotional factors and represent a teaching opportunity (for both the parent and the child), which can be effectively addressed within the home and through external support programs that are available in our community.

***Targeted Messages for Parents and Caregivers***

* A child’s mental health is every bit as important as their physical health.
	+ Just as a child’s body grows and changes early in life, so too does their brain and the social-emotional aspects of their development.
	+ A child’s positive mental health and social-emotional development can be supported with loving, stable relationships, positive experiences, and intentional, direct support that helps develop critical social-emotional skills.
* It’s important to remember that all children develop differently and at their own pace.
	+ Parenting is hard work and children don’t come with instruction manuals. It is normal to have concerns about your child’s social-emotional development and mental health and it’s important to ask your child’s doctor or child care provider if you have concerns or need help.
	+ For children struggling with emotional or behavioral issues, effective intervention is available that helps children grow up healthy and achieve success in school and in life. If you have concerns, ask your child’s doctor, teacher or child care provider about getting more information or a referral to have your child assessed.
* Parents are a child’s first and best teacher, yet all parents need support from friends, family and the community in order to raise happy, healthy kids.
	+ There are programs and services available in the community to help you build a positive relationship with your child, overcome adversity and help your child develop their potential.

**Campaign Action Plan**

We envision a multifaceted, tactical approach that complements the communications strategies and reaches Colorado Project LAUNCH’s target audiences.

*Please note that pursuing all the tactics proposed in this plan would exceed the budget for the current project. However, we wanted to provide a comprehensive action plan to ensure Colorado Project LAUNCH has a clear view of how best to achieve its communications objectives. Not all of these tactics need to be undertaken simultaneously, and we can prioritize our approach and also plan along an extended timeline in order to maximize resources. We look forward to discussing and prioritizing these tactics with the Colorado Project LAUNCH coalition in person so that we can identify the best short-term and longer range tactics to pursue, given resources and capacity.*

***Strategy 1***

***Establish consistent communications channels and create a “feedback loop” with Colorado Project LAUNCH program partners, stakeholders and other key supporters of social-emotional development and mental health in early childhood.***

***Tactics:***

* **Develop key messages** *(underway)*
	+ Messages should emphasize both the importance of early childhood social-emotional development and mental health, as well as the approach and impact of the Project LAUNCH initiative, while speaking directly to key audiences.
	+ Utilizing input from partners, lessons learned and the accomplishments of the Colorado Project LAUNCH initiative, continually review, revise and draft new messages to ensure the messaging platform retains its relevance over time.
* **Train staff, key partners and stakeholders to use the messages and provide ongoing coaching**
	+ Host a training with staff and partners on messaging and how messages support the communications campaign strategy.
	+ Record the message training and distribute as needed.
	+ Following training, disseminate the messages to key stakeholders.
	+ Regularly check-in with stakeholders to ensure messages are being used, that they are useful and that messages are being used correctly.
* **Incorporate messages and materials into existing training programs and outreach efforts**
	+ Ensure Colorado Project LAUNCH messages about social-emotional development and mental health, as well as the calls to action for providers and parents, are incorporated into the training and support programs that ECPAC provides on a regular basis to child care professionals, parents and caregivers in Adams County.
* **Establish and maintain regular communication with Colorado Project LAUNCH partners and child care providers in Adams County via e-news and social media**
	+ Distribute monthly e-newsletter for Project LAUNCH partners and child care providers that includes focus on the work and accomplishments of Project LAUNCH, as well as information that helps providers support healthy social-emotional development. This could be a single e-publication or two (one focused on Project LAUNCH and another targeted to providers), depending on content relevance and team capacity.
	+ Continue to build a distribution list of partners and child care providers to communicate with via the preferred email service provider (Constant Contact).
	+ Repurpose e-newsletter content for blog posts, social media content, and distribution to partners and stakeholders for further dissemination through their communications channels.
	+ Particularly if the content for the Colorado Project LAUNCH and provider newsletters are combined, create a template for a quarterly or semi-annual Project LAUNCH program update to recap the initiative’s key outcomes for program partners, funders, local policymakers, etc.
	+ Utilize the ECPAC Facebook and Twitter channels, including boosted posts and sponsored tweets, to reinforce messages, educate about Colorado Project LAUNCH, engage stakeholders and reach new audiences.
* **Develop a presentation or “road show” to educate provider groups on the importance of social-emotional development and early childhood mental health**
	+ Identify and pursue opportunities for ECPAC staff and Colorado Project LAUNCH partners to speak/present at a variety of events to reach provider groups and early childhood professionals.
	+ Create a PowerPoint training / presentation that can be given by ECPAC staff and Project LAUNCH partners to educate new audiences about the importance of social-emotional development, the critical role that providers and caregivers play, and how to access community resources for support.
* **Develop template materials from the provider toolkit for easy customization**
	+ For the rack cards, brochures, posters, digital assets and other materials that are developed from the provider toolkit, customizable template versions (including local call to action, logo and contact information) will be developed for use by partners and others working on similar initiatives.
	+ There are different ways to approach a template system, which vary considerably in cost and functionality.
* The simplest way to create templates is to incorporate into the design a space for local information. Then the designed materials with a blank fillable space can be distributed as PDFs for easy customization. The rest of the content of the materials can also be easily edited and updated as native design files will be provided along with the PDFs.
* Alternatively, template materials could be available within an online library, with a user-friendly interface for easy customization, and quickly downloadable for local printing and distribution. The template system could live on the ECPAC website, the landing page developed for the media campaign, or elsewhere online depending on the client’s preference. This option is significantly more expensive.
	+ SE2 recommends developing English- and Spanish-language versions of template materials.

***Strategy 2***

***Target key audiences in Adams County who are trusted advisors to parents. Provide them with information, training and support to have more effective conversations with parents about social-emotional development and mental health. Include information they can hand out to parents about ways to support positive social-emotional development at home as well as resources for support if they have questions or concerns about their child.***

***Tactics:***

* **Develop a two-part toolkit for providers, educators and home visitors that includes:**
	+ A brochure or booklet with (a) information about the importance of social-emotional development and mental health for young children; (b) providers’ key role in supporting parents of young children around social-emotional development and early childhood mental health; and (c) tips for having effective conversations with parents.
	+ Parent-facing materials that providers can hand out to the families they work with. Information includes how parents can support social-emotional development at home and what to do if they have concerns (call to action).
		- Parent-facing materials could include three versions -- one for caregivers of children aged 0-3, aged 3-5 and aged 5-8. Within each material, the content can be more narrowly targeted (i.e., 0-12 months, 12-24 months, etc.).
	+ A strong call-to-action for both providers and parents.
	+ English- and Spanish-language versions.
* **Develop outreach plan to ensure broad penetration of toolkit resources in Adams County**
	+ Working from a list of licensed and known child care and home visitation programs in Adams County, create a prioritized outreach list of programs that Colorado Project LAUNCH will reach out to for in-person contact related to the provider toolkit.
		- Priority programs can be identified based on program size, characteristics of families served, existing relationship with ECPAC, etc.
		- Train multiple trainers and create and stick to a timeline in order to conduct outreach in a coordinated “push” that supports the media campaign and reaches a broad provider audience.
		- Secondary and tertiary lists of providers can be developed for outreach by phone and email.
	+ Create a plan to distribute toolkit resources to key health care providers in Adams County, including those in clinics where Care Navigators are placed, as well as other high-priority health care settings ( i.e., federally qualified health centers). Conduct in-person outreach to Care Navigators, medical directors and others as necessary within the targeted health care settings to ensure toolkit resources are incorporated and appropriately distributed.
	+ Ensure a system of appropriate follow up and ongoing communication (including e-news if appropriate) with each provider to build relationships, answer questions, provide additional training and materials.
* **Create talking points and training to help providers discuss social-emotional development and mental health with diverse parents and caregivers**
	+ Ensure providers are able to effectively use the toolkit materials by providing talking points and training to help them have meaningful, stigma-reducing conversations with families about how to support social-emotional development at home, how to manage challenging behaviors, and what to do if they have concerns.
	+ Record the trainings for wider distribution.

***Strategy 3***

***Conduct a digital media campaign aimed at parents and caregivers in Adams County in order to raise awareness of the importance of social-emotional development in early childhood; how to support healthy development at home; and where to turn with questions or concerns.***

***Tactics:***

* **Purchase targeted media to reach priority parent populations**
	+ Work with SE2’s digital and media team to plan an all-digital or possibly a digital/outdoor hybrid media campaign to target parents and caregivers of young children in Adams County, particularly those with risk factors, including low income, low level of educational attainment, and Spanish-speaking.
	+ Reach key audiences seeking information through a paid search campaign targeting direct and supplemental keywords.
* **Develop designed assets for the campaign**
	+ Ensure the media campaign is supported with compelling ads that effectively convey Colorado Project LAUNCH’s key messages and drive people to take action.
	+ Provide to partners digital assets (social media/website graphics, email newsletter copy, etc.) that they can share/post across their owned media channels to raise awareness and drive action.
* **Create a landing page for media campaign**
	+ In order to measure the success of the media and toolkit distribution campaign, we recommend creating a unique landing page for the campaign either on ECPAC’s website or elsewhere online. This is critical to both enhance and evaluate the effectiveness of our call-to-action for both providers (via the toolkit materials and outreach) and parents (via the media campaign).
	+ The landing page could be organized into two sections – providers and parents – and include the information that supports our calls to action:
		- Parents - activities to support positive social-emotional development, information on local parenting classes, and support services to access if they have questions or concerns.
		- Providers - information about social-emotional development; how to support it in the classroom and within families; information about classes, training and workshops; and the template tool to download promotional materials with one’s own logo and information.

***Strategy 4***

***Connect and integrate with other early childhood communications initiatives across the state in order to amplify the reach of Colorado Project LAUNCH messages and enhance existing and future early childhood communications efforts with improved messaging around social-emotional development and mental health.***

***Tactics:***

* **Integrate with communications channels of program partners and providers**
	+ Seek opportunities to include articles, social media content, blog posts, or messages on the communications channels (e-news, website, Facebook, newsletter, etc.) of program partners and child care providers.
* **Create a list of priority early childhood communications initiatives**
	+ Drawing on the team’s own knowledge, this project’s discovery findings, as well as the environmental scan of early childhood communications initiatives and the current ECLC communications work, develop a list of priority early childhood communications initiatives to align with.
	+ Develop talking points and conduct personal outreach to each potential partner organization to propose the integration of Colorado Project LAUNCH messages and materials into their existing communications channels.
	+ Due to limited staff capacity and the work required to provide each partner with content that meets the specs of their communications channels, we recommend focusing initially on only the highest-yield initiatives, including those that reach large numbers of parents and caregivers or those that are effective in serving priority populations.
* **Seek alignment opportunities with greatest “bang for the buck”**
	+ Because of the large number of parents and caregivers reached, the flexibility of the technology, and the similar target population, we recommend seeking a partnership with Bright by Three to develop a text message campaign for its Bright by Text program focused on social-emotional development and mental health for caregivers of children aged 0-3.
	+ The Early Childhood Leadership Commission’s Early Childhood Communications Collaborative recently released a report related to early childhood communications efforts across the state. We recommend meeting with the primary author(s) of this report to gather their input and recommendations on the most effective communications initiatives to align with.
	+ With its focus on shared messages around mental health and toxic stress, screening, and provider outreach, the Early Childhood Colorado Partnership and the infant and early childhood mental health resource hub are potentially important communications partners.
	+ The ELDG optimization project-to increase engagement and awareness of EC learning and development will pick up in January. Could align with social-emotional work based on the guidelines