

2022 Spring Tour Overview



NEW MEXICO

Early Childhood
Education & Care Department





2022 Spring Tour Summary

Establishing the New Mexico Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) as a new state-level cabinet level department is an exciting and challenging opportunity to transform the lives of families and young children throughout the state. I am thrilled to lead this effort for many reasons, primarily to bring to life Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham's bold vision to ensure quality early childhood services for all New Mexican children. The ECECD supports this goal by bringing together all the different early childhood programs in New Mexico and uniting them into a single agency that is cohesive and aligned, focusing on the needs of families and their young children. This new structure has helped increase access to critical programs like child care, home visiting, early intervention and PreK.

While New Mexico public and private sector leaders and community leaders worked hard to maintain and expand access to quality services, among various recent challenges, I was eager to get out around the state to hear from the diverse voices in many communities. We laid out an ambitious three-month tour schedule that would take us 4,000 miles, visiting 25 New Mexico communities, where we conducted 17 community listening sessions and dozens of site visits to child care, PreK, early intervention, and home visiting programs. Meeting so many people across the state was a joyful and enlightening experience for me and the rest of the team. As Secretary, I am energized about what I heard during our visits and enthused about sharing it in this report.

I want to thank the many early childhood professionals, public school officials, state and community leaders, other stakeholders, and families and children who welcomed us so warmly

wherever we went. It was such an honor to get to know all of you in person, learn more about your communities, families and children, and better understand your unique needs and challenges. New Mexico truly is a diverse and beautiful place with so much potential, and we learned a tremendous amount from our time with you. We are taking back with us a wealth of knowledge that will inform our work as we strive to build a world class early childhood system that helps all New Mexico children and families thrive.

I want to thank the many early childhood professionals, public school officials, state and community leaders, other stakeholders, and families and children who welcomed us so warmly wherever we went.

This report compiles and reports what we heard from people on our tour, especially the themes and issues that were raised repeatedly during our travels. These issues are among the most relevant priorities in ECECD's strategic plan: school readiness, family and community engagement, government-to-government, and early childhood ecosystem alignment. In addition to documenting what we learned and heard, we also describe the state's current and future work that addresses the needs and issues raised on our tour.

These last few months on the road were a wonderful and fruitful journey, and we are excited to incorporate what we learned into our planning, strategies, and actions for New Mexico children and families.

Sincerely,

Secretary Elizabeth Groginsky

School Readiness

School Readiness, the degree to which a child arrives at Kindergarten prepared with the social-emotional, cognitive, and academic skills needed to thrive, is a key indicator for early education and care success. Many factors affect a child's school readiness, including a well-compensated, credentialed, and diverse early childhood workforce; access to adequate supply of early care and education; access to health care; food security; and the quality of programs and services available locally.

Early Childhood Workforce

- On our tour across the state, we consistently heard from child care providers, home visitors, and early intervention specialists that **staffing shortages** remain the primary challenge facing the early childhood sector. Comparatively low wages and few benefits mean that providers often lose employees to higher paying industries. As a result, many child care centers report that they are operating below licensed capacity because they cannot adequately staff classrooms.
- **Lack of affordable housing** was raised as another major contributor to the early childhood workforce shortage. This is especially true in high cost-of-living areas, communities where tourism drives high-second home ownership or short term rentals, and areas where the booming oil industry has led to short supply and inflated prices.
- Early childhood professionals across the state consistently mentioned they had a **high level of satisfaction** with the ECECD scholarship program. During nearly every provider visit on the tour, multiple staff reported enrollment in the scholarship to pursue an Associate's or Bachelor's degree. However, many child care professionals also identified multiple barriers to pursuing credentials, including language barriers in core prerequisite courses and lack of time and energy to study while working full time.

Access

- One frequently cited barrier to child care access is lack of non-traditional hour care (early mornings, nights, and weekends). This need was mentioned in communities whose economies are heavily dependent on tourism and hospitality, such as Ruidoso, where families are typically required to work hours outside the Monday-Friday 9am-5pm work week. Another major gap in most areas is care for school-age children, namely before and after school and during summer months, with

some communities reporting no school-age care availability at all.

- Families and providers **offered overwhelmingly positive feedback on Governor Lujan Grisham's decision to expand child care eligibility** and eliminate associated copayments. Parents described access to free child care as "life changing," and providers report that removal of copays has improved their financial stability and strengthened relationships with the families they serve.
- Providers expressed a need to **increase the base reimbursement rate** for home visiting services to accommodate for rising travel costs, increased number of visits beyond the 90-minute standard visit and increased frequency of home visits for at-risk families, who require more frequent contacts.
- **Administrative challenges** such as tracking enrollment, billing, and maintenance were consistently raised by all providers.

Quality

- **PreK teachers reported concerns** about a "push down" of K-12 methods and standards, which they believe is taking away from play-based learning that is developmentally appropriate for young children.
- During site visits on the tour, ECECD staff observed a general need for **higher quality learning environments** (age-appropriate furniture, materials, books, toys, etc.). Facilities not designed for early childhood education are frequently used for it, leading to a setting that is uncondusive to supporting a learning environment that promotes school readiness.



Picture Locations: 1. San Jose Day Care in Carlsbad, NM 2. Mighty Movers in Roswell, NM 3. Pequeñas Ilusiones, LLC in Albuquerque, NM 4. Zia Therapy in Alamogordo, NM 5. Clayton Public Schools

Success Story: **Cross-sector collaboration preserves and expands child care in Silver City**

In the summer of 2021, the operators of Grant County's only extended-hours child care center for infants, toddlers, and PreK-aged children decided to close the center, leaving more than 60 children without care. This critical loss of child care capacity would have left dozens of families without child care, forcing them to possibly choose to either quit their jobs to stay home to care for their children. However, a collaboration between ECECD, Grant County, private industry, and a local child care provider preserved, expanded and improved this care for the community.

Grant County acquired the building and worked with Misty Pugmire, the director of the El Grito Inc., an early care and education program in Silver City, to remodel and expand operations using a mix of federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds provided by ECECD and Grant County funding. ECECD distributed more than \$157 million dollars in ARPA stabilization grants to over 1,000 child care providers across the state, including a \$197,000 grant to help Pugmire reopen El Grito del Bosque Child Development Center to the community. The county provided \$162,000 in local funds to help fund the program for the first year, along with \$100,000 in ARPA funds for renovations. Freeport-

McMoRan, the largest employer in Grant County, provided additional funds to install new playground equipment for the facility.

During the tour, Secretary Elizabeth Groginsky and members of the ECECD leadership team attended the grand re-opening of the modernized facility in Silver City, along with city and county leaders and community members, to celebrate the preservation of this critical child care resource. This state-local-private partnership can serve as a model for how collaborative funding and creative partnerships can address child care shortages in New Mexico. To help facilitate these kinds of collaborative efforts moving forward, ECECD has invested more than \$7 million to support 15 established and emerging local early childhood coalitions representing 12 counties across the state.



Secretary Groginsky and Chris Ponce, Grant County Commissioner cutting the re-opening ribbon.

[Click here to view the grand opening ceremony video](#)

Family and Community Engagement

To create a system of programs and services that is responsive to the needs of children and families, ECECD must foster effective, transparent, and trust-based engagement with New Mexico's diverse families and communities. As ECECD continues to build capacity and invest in local early childhood systems, local stakeholders and families need a voice in decision making process and a leadership role in program and service design.

- **Child care supply shortages** throughout the state underscore the importance of coordination among state government, local governments, local stakeholders, and private industry. Identifying creative and community-specific solutions to child care deserts, will require close alignment of resources.
- Communities with **local early childhood coalitions** that create outlets for engagement among families, providers, and local leaders strongly correlate with higher quality early childhood programs and services, more options tailored to families' needs, and greater input in decision making at every level. Department leaders recognized this once again on the tour.
- During the tour, several child care providers reported that families who qualified for free child care assistance were reluctant to apply, citing **stigma often associated with enrollment in public assistance programs** or a misplaced association between child care assistance and the Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD) protective services program.
- A recurring problem expressed by families, school districts, and community leaders on the tour was a **lack of awareness or understanding of ECECD and its programs**, especially among. This concern amplifies the need for the state to ensure families are engaged in their children's care and early education.

Government to Government

A key priority for ECECD is deepening and expanding government-to-government relationships and agreement with all Tribes, Pueblos, and Nations with a focus on consultation, culture, language, data sharing, and facility improvements to improve outcomes for Native American families and young children.

- ECECD met with several **Pueblos, Tribes, and Nations** throughout the tour to better understand the unique early childhood needs of each community throughout New Mexico. With the intrinsic importance of linguistic and cultural aspects to early childhood education among Native American communities, the state will focus on supporting the Tribes in efforts to “grow their own” early childhood workforce. This will help address the needs of Tribal children in a culturally appropriate manner.
- In conversations with Tribal leadership on the tour, ECECD identified the need to **leverage and maximize** state, federal and Tribal dollars in a coordinated manner to increase access to early childhood education and care opportunities.
- Feedback from Tribal leaders indicated need for increased access to New Mexico PreK, home visiting, expanding child care services, and establishing a local Families FIRST program, a perinatal case management program staffed by nurses. **Tribal leaders also expressed a need for early intervention services** that are culturally relevant and appropriate.
- To support young children and their families in the context of enhanced government-to-government coordination and collaboration, Tribal Leaders granted permission for ECECD to work with key individuals in their early childhood programs moving forward.

Placeholder: New Side Story

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Picture Locations: 1. A Gold Star Academy in Farmington, NM
2. Summer Food Program service at Santa Teresa, NM Elementary
3. Mescalero Apache G2G Consultation
4. Mighty Movers in Roswell, NM



Early Childhood Eco-System Alignment

Alignment between various programs and services... is key to success as ECECD builds the early childhood system in New Mexico. will foster coordination and collaboration within and among the early childhood, health, and child welfare sectors to create a holistic, family centered, culturally responsive, and integrated early childhood ecosystem that supports families, reduces child abuse and neglect, and improves school readiness.

- Early intervention (EI) and home visiting providers frequently noted a frustration with a **lack of coordination between the health sector and local early childhood service providers**. EI providers in many communities reported that local health care providers are often misinformed about early intervention and home visiting services, do not understand how the programs work, and fail to refer families to the free services that would benefit children. Families in rural communities often expressed a profound dissatisfaction with the availability and/or quality of prenatal and neonatal health care. Behavioral health services are also lacking in many areas of the state, including infant mental health services and treatment of substance use disorder, especially in the prenatal period.
- In communities where PreK is available in Head Start, community-based settings, and school-based settings, parents have many options from which to choose. However, people in several communities shared concerns about **oversaturation and lack of coordination** between programs spread across multiple settings.
- One of the most common issues raised in the communities ECECD visited is early intervention services funded through the Family Infant Toddler (FIT) program ending on a child's third birthday. **This age limit on FIT services** creates a gap or disruption for many families who need continuing special education services, but struggle to access them through the public school system due to logistical burdens.
- Public school partners on the tour expressed a need to serve typically developing three-year-olds to ensure inclusive settings in their three-year old special education classrooms. Additionally, in many communities there are no other options outside of the public school for families seeking **Early PreK for their three-year old child**.
- Multiple school-based PreK programs cited **burdensome administrative and paperwork** requirements as a significant barrier, diverting hours away from classroom instruction. These barriers include the monthly walk-through checklist, which is challenging, especially if providers have more than one PreK location.
- Many child care providers on the tour expressed dissatisfaction with FOCUS (New Mexico's tiered quality rating system) requirements, finding them to be inequitable and burdensome. Some of the most frequently reported challenges included meeting educational and training requirements. **There is also a common misconception that it takes several years to reach five-star status** when it can be done within four to six months. This widespread misconception can significantly lower providers' revenues if they miss out on receiving child care assistance reimbursements at the 5-star rate level.

Next Steps

School readiness

Access

- ECECD has opened a \$10 million supply-building grant that funds the expansion of child care and the creation of a minimum of 800 new child care slots.
- Beginning in 2023, ECECD will conduct a supply and demand study of infant and toddler child care to better understand which communities need the most support and investment.
- ECECD will identify funding sources to sustain the 2022 expansion of child care assistance to families at 400% of the Federal Poverty Level and redesign the copay system to simplify the system and reduce the financial burden for families.

Workforce

- ECECD will leverage state and Tribal funding to provide access to culturally supportive early education and care. In response to Governor Lujan Grisham's policy of increasing all teacher salaries, ECECD will allocate additional funds to its PreK Parity Program to ensure wages for community-based PreK teachers with comparable credentials are aligned with their school-based counterparts.
- ECECD will initiate an early childhood workforce recruitment campaign to highlight career opportunities in field, promote the impact that early childhood professionals have on their communities, and encourage New Mexicans to join the early childhood profession.
- After Governor Lujan Grisham's free college initiative passed in early 2022, ECECD is using a portion of its early childhood scholarship funding to support stipends up to \$2,000 per semester for early childhood professionals seeking a degree in the field. The stipends can be used to support living expenses, aiding early childhood professionals in the completion of their Associate's or Bachelor's degree.

- ECECD is creating more opportunities for Tribes, Pueblos, and Nations to grow their own culturally responsive early educators, which will better support the culture and language of each unique community.
- To address the need for more bilingual and indigenous early childhood professionals, ECECD created a one-time incentive payment for certified bilingual professionals in the early childhood workforce.
- A key objective in ECECD's strategic plan for the next five years is to fully implement an equitable career and compensation system. This will help professionalize the early childhood workforce by outlining clear career trajectories, accelerated and supported pathways to credentials and degrees, and competitive compensation.

Quality

- In response to provider feedback on the tour, ECECD is in the process of redesigning and streamlining the FOCUS quality rating system so that it incorporates outcome-based measures of quality and supports diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- ECECD is exploring ways to invest in high-quality early learning environments across New Mexico, including a possible grant for purchasing furniture, books, toys, supplies, and other classroom-enhancing materials.
- ECECD is focused on improving the quality of child care and PreK through personalized supports, professional development, and intentional, relationship-based technical assistance.

Early Childhood System Alignment

- Based on the feedback from PreK administrators, principals, superintendents, and teachers on the tour, ECECD generated a plan to reduce or minimize redundant paperwork and other labor-intensive processes. The plan will specifically: allow PreK providers to use their own lesson planning forms; reduce required training hours by nearly 50%; reduce data entry responsibilities to entry into one database platform instead of three; eliminate monthly administrator walk through checklists; and provide additional flexibility to the practice based coaching model.
- To promote better coordination between the early childhood and health systems, ECECD is creating a statewide coalition comprised of representatives from the health field – pediatricians, caseworkers, doulas, family practitioners, managed care organizations, and others – to work towards improved alignment and better outcomes for children.
- ECECD will integrate early childhood programs and services into the Health and Human Services 2020 data system to improve constituents’ experiences, and better link pediatricians and hospitals with ECECD services.
- ECECD is piloting a Medicaid claiming system to bill Medicaid for home visitation services through New Mexico’s three managed care organizations.
- One of the primary objectives for ECECD in the next five years is integrating trauma informed, responsive principles and practices into all early childhood programs and services. The Department also intends to center the needs of families in all agency processes, practices, and projects.
- ECECD will work with FIT providers, PED and Home Visitors to improve the transition process and better support families moving from Part C to Part B and from preschool to kindergarten, especially those children with disabilities and/or in need of special education services.

Workforce Supports



Scholarship Participants

468

Summer 2021 Semester

791

Fall 2021 Semester

827

Spring 2022

558

Summer 2022 - July 30, 2022

388



Wage Supplement Participants

as of June 2022

129



Bilingual Incentive Recipients

July-June 2022

67



PreK Pay Parity

July-June 2022



Picture Locations:

- Sunland Park, NM Listening Session
- Zia Pueblo Home Visiting in Truth or Consequences, NM
- Tresco-Day One Listening Session
- Roswell, NM Listening Session
- Holloman Air Force Base in Alamogordo, NM

Family and Community Engagement

- ECECD supports 15 local early childhood coalitions throughout New Mexico with federal relief funding to help foster and enhance family engagement and leadership, improve coordination between state and local partners, and maximize and leverage all available funding to support early childhood programs and services.
- ECECD's Moments Together public education campaign will continue to help raise awareness about programs, services, and supports that are available to families. In summer 2022, the Moments Together campaign began a new fun and accessible web TV series focused on parenting skills and early childhood programs and services.
- ECECD initiated a powerful new online child care search tool to help families find programs that fit their needs in August 2022.

Government to Government

- ECECD has conducted nine government to government consultations and provided departmental orientations for tribal leaders to begin developing working relationships and highlight the agency's mission, vision, budget and priorities.
- Although most Tribes operate their own Child Care Development Fund programs as federal to local, ECECD has a role in supporting Tribes in understanding how we can best leverage and coordinate state, federal, and Tribal funding to support families needing child care assistance.
- ECECD is developing Intergovernmental Agreements (IGAs) to advance Tribal priorities identified through consultation. The department will also hire a Tribal Grants Coordinator to help identify and secure additional funding for helping Tribes, Pueblos, and Nations grow their own early childhood workforce and expand culturally and linguistically diverse early childhood programs.



Picture Locations: 1. Alamogordo, NM Listening Session 2. Little Castle Learning Center in Artesia, NM 3. Christine Duncan Heritage Academy in Albuquerque, NM 4. Community Action Agency of Southern New Mexico in Anthony, NM 5. Ashley's Garden in Las Cruces, NM 6. Tresco, Inc (FIT and Home Visiting Provider) in Las Cruces, NM 7. Mosquero, NM Listening Session 8. Cradles and Crayons in Anthony, NM



NEW MEXICO

Early Childhood Education & Care Department

Learn more about ECECD at nmececd.org

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Cover picture L-R:

San Juan College Child & Family
Development Center in Farmington, NM.
Nick Salazar Early Childhood Education
Center Preschool at Luna Community
College in Las Vegas, NM.
Palmas Palmitas Child Care Home in
Sunland Park, NM.
Cradles and Crayons in Anthony, NM.

