

Floreecer

Progress and Accountability
Report **2023**



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Florecer

Spanish for **Flourish**

Synonyms: grow · thrive · prosper · do well · develop · bloom

1. (of a person, animal, or other living organism) grow or develop in a healthy or vigorous way, especially as the result of a particularly favorable environment.

Our Commitment

Our commitment to New Mexicans is to create a cohesive, equitable, and responsive prenatal to five early childhood system that supports families, strengthens communities, and enhances child health, development, education, and wellbeing.

Vision:

All New Mexican families and young children are thriving.

Mission:

Optimize the health, development, education, and well-being of babies, toddlers, and preschoolers through a family driven, equitable, community-based system of high quality prenatal and early childhood programs and services.



Introduction

Creating a strategic plan is a tall order for any organization, but even more so for an agency like the Early Childhood Education Department (ECECD) that aims to transform the state's early childhood programs and services into a world class prenatal-to-five system. After nearly six months of meeting, envisioning, planning, drafting, and editing, we released the department's five-year strategic plan 2022-2027, which we named *Florecer*, the Spanish word for "Flourish" in acknowledgement of our vision that all families and young children in New Mexico are thriving and flourishing.

It was never our intention to let our five-year strategic plan sit on a shelf; the six overarching goals and respective objectives are our North Star, guiding our major decisions. **We are also committed to transparency and accountability over the life of the plan, updating the document and creating a yearly progress and accountability report.**

In this report we highlight our most significant accomplishments in year one, according to the six goals. ECECD has made significant progress in a relatively short time, expanding Child Care Assistance to an additional 8,000 children and waiving copays for over 16,000 families, making child care free for most New Mexico families. We administered the largest expansion of New Mexico PreK in state history, increasing access for three-year-olds and achieving universal access for four-year-olds. ECECD raised wages for early childhood professionals and improved

access to tuition-free early childhood degree programs. And those are only the highlights from Goal One of our strategic plan.

New Mexico is now regarded as a national leader in early childhood education and care, with other states looking to us as the blueprint for building their own early childhood systems. While we are proud that New Mexico is leading the nation, our real accomplishment is the impact that the implementation of *Florecer* has on families, children and communities across our great state – some of whom we feature in this report. We know that when we support families and young children with comprehensive, equitable, and high-quality early childhood programs and services, it provides a solid foundation for a lifetime of healthy growth and development.

Because of the visionary leadership of Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, the investments and commitment of the State Legislature, and the support of the general public, we are transforming lives and bringing lasting, generational change to New Mexico. **We are well on our way to a future where every family has what they need to flourish, and we will not rest until we see that vision become a reality.**



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elizabeth Groginsky".

Elizabeth Groginsky
ECECD Cabinet Secretary



Strategic Plan Impact *by the Numbers*



Growth in PreK

- Funded NM PreK Slots, FY23: **14,440**
- Funded NM PreK Slots, FY24: **17,533**



TOTAL:
3,093, a 21% increase



Growth in Infant Toddler Child Care

- Infants and toddlers served, June 2022: **5,741**
- Infants and toddlers served, June 2023: **7,282**



TOTAL:
1,541, a 27% increase



Growth in Child Care Assistance

- Children served, June 2022: **21,715**
- Children served, June 2023: **28,154**



TOTAL:
6,439, a 30% increase



Growth in Home Visiting

- Funded Home Visiting slots, FY23: **5,022**
- Funded Home Visiting slots, FY24: **5,334**



TOTAL:
312, a 6% increase



Goal 1: School Readiness

Advanced Workforce Development and Compensation

Over the last year, ECECD has implemented an array of initiatives to increase compensation and credentials for the early childhood workforce:

- ECECD significantly increased rates for three crucial programs: Child Care Assistance Program, Family Infant Toddler (FIT) program, and New Mexico PreK.
 - From Sept. 2022 through Sept. 2023, the Competitive Pay for Professionals grant increased wages for child care staff by \$3 an hour for 7,438 child care professionals.
 - These wage increases will be sustained through the increased child care assistance rates, which support a wage floor of \$15 an hour for entry-level workers and \$20 an hour for lead teachers in licensed two and three star FOCUS facilities. The rates at higher levels of quality assume a higher entry-level and lead teacher hourly wage.
- ECECD continued to expand its PreK Parity Program in 2023, ensuring 165 qualifying PreK teachers working in community-based settings are earning at least \$50,000/year.
- From January to June 2023, ECECD's wage supplement program increased wages for 949 qualifying early childhood professionals – a collective total of \$875,000.

- In the spring and summer semesters of 2023, 1,356 people enrolled in early childhood degree programs were awarded scholarships totaling over \$1.2 million.
- ECECD scholarships are now layered with the New Mexico Opportunity Scholarship, providing comprehensive support to students seeking their degree in early childhood education. ECECD also offers stipends to assist qualifying students in completing their early childhood degrees.

Expanded New Mexico PreK

The historic investment of nearly \$100 million increased the reach of New Mexico PreK by over 3,000 slots, added 46 new PreK programs, expanded PreK to Tribal communities, extended hours and days of service, and improved rates. Instructional hours increased from 900 to 1,030 annually, and PreK providers had a new extended plus option for 1,380 hours a year to support full-day, full-year care, resulting in 7,223 children and their families enrolling in extended plus.

Ramped Up Trauma-Responsive Practice

The Home Visiting program created an online trauma-informed training and hosted statewide in-person trainings for the Home Visiting workforce, training 290 out of 303 home visitors. Home visitors and Family Infant Toddler staff also received training on best practices for supporting families with a history of substance use, which often has its roots in trauma.



Pictured: New Mexico PreK students and educators attending ECECD's Early Childhood Day at the Roundhouse 2023.

Goal 1: Stories



“The expanded child care assistance program allows me to work full time to provide for my children. I can go to work with peace of mind knowing that my children are safe and receiving quality care and education from trusted professionals. I would have never been able to afford that kind of care without the waived child care assistance copays.” - **Vicki Sampler, a single mother of four in Curry County, NM**

“It has been a long-term dream of mine to go to nursing school and become a RN. Until we enrolled in the child care assistance program, there wasn’t a way for me to afford school because of the cost of child care and the time commitment nursing school requires. *Because of the child care assistance program, I am now working towards my dream job.* It’s helping my dream come true, all while providing the best quality of care for my children.”
- **Lauren Frazier, Albuquerque, NM**

“ECECD allows me the opportunity to have my young children interact with other kids and get high quality education through PreK. I also receive child care assistance. *ECECD is a real asset to the community, from child care, to PreK, and even after school care.* I am so grateful to have all these resources available to me.”
- **Nikki Mares, Las Vegas, NM**

“Increased wages for our staff have given them the security they needed to quit second jobs, spend more quality time with their own families, pursue early education degrees and credentials,

and commit to early education as a viable long-term career.” - **Ashleigh Tackitt, center director at Future Generations Early Learning Center in Clovis, NM**

“The expansion of the PreK grant funding has supported our families, children, and our staff. The extended class time has allowed families the ability to work or attend school during our seven-hour session. Children are enjoying the extra time learning and being with friends. *All our NM PreK Team returned this year with larger salaries, pay parity, and a full-time position in our program.*”- **Barbara DeDera M.A., NM PreK Administrator for Alpha School for Young Children, Inc. in Las Cruces, NM**

“The increased funding from ECECD has increased our ability to recruit and retain qualified teaching staff. All our staff takes classes at Northern New Mexico College and are enthusiastic about the career possibilities afforded to them through our center.” - **Catherine Martinez Berryhill, PhD, Director, Family Learning Center, Espanola, NM**

“Thanks to the stipend, I will soon be receiving my AA degree in Early Childhood at the end of the year. I plan to keep going to school and work towards my BA to strengthen my knowledge in Early Childhood Education so I can better serve the children and families that I work with.” - **Rebecca Sandoval, Early Childhood Student, Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute**

Goal 2: Family and Community Engagement

Supported Local Early Childhood System Building Coalitions

Fifteen coalitions across 12 counties increased local awareness of and engagement with ECECD programs and services, conducted community needs assessments, and created strategic plans for local and state early childhood work. The coalitions are central to ECECD's state-to-local governance strategy, providing invaluable feedback on local community needs, assets, and gaps that will drive future early childhood investments and policy decisions.

Launched The Early Show with Alax

ECECD launched *The Early Show with Alax*, an on-line show featuring a muppet-like extraterrestrial character, Alax. Alax hosts a bilingual English/Spanish talk show on his spaceship where he invites a diverse set of New Mexico families and early childhood experts to teach him about caring for young children. Conceived, written, and filmed by New Mexicans, *The Early Show with Alax* has covered home visiting, safe sleep, child nutrition, child development, language development, and the power of play. In its first season, *The Early Show with Alax* garnered 23,000 subscribers on YouTube, 5.6 million episode views across platforms, and more than 380,000 media impressions.

Recruited New Families to Home Visiting Through Baby Showers

ECECD's Home Visiting program held five community baby showers across the state, with all publicly and privately funded home visiting programs participating, resulting in 370+ new families enrolling in home visiting.



Pictured: Hobbs, NM
Baby Shower.

Goal 2: Stories

“We got to know our home visitor a few weeks before our first son was born in fall 2020. We're transplants to Santa Fe, so we don't have family here to help support us, and we have loved having someone to help us learn the ropes and keep an eye on how we're all doing. *Our home visitor helped support us through our son's severe colic, kept tabs on his milestones*, and most recently helped us plan and prepare for the transition to child care and the arrival of baby brother in October. We've gained a lot of confidence in our parenting thanks to our home visitor.” – **Kristi McBride, Santa Fe, NM**

“We had our first child in January of 2023, and we saw *the Early Show with Alax episode about one of New Mexico's incredible home visiting programs for first time parents*. We had heard about the home visiting program

in the hospital, but it wasn't until we saw the interview with Alax that we truly considered it. We've been participating in the home visiting program ever since and we love it.”

– **Kat Wright, Albuquerque, NM**

“The Community Partnership for Children (CPC) has joined forces with ECECD weaving together a tapestry of resources and services to empower families and early childhood education providers. *This collaboration has strengthened the voices of parents, guardians, and community leaders as they advocate for access to quality early childhood programs* and inform the expansion and improvement of early childhood programs in Grant County.” – **Kalah Carrasco, Coalition Coordinator for the Grant County Community Partnership for Children, one of the 15 local early childhood coalitions funded by ECECD**

Goal 3: Government-to-Government



Pictured: The Statewide Tribal Advisory Committee (TAC) at their June 2023 convening in Mescalero, NM

Early Childhood Tribal Advisory Coalition Set Goals

Twenty-five representatives from 15 of New Mexico's Pueblos, Tribes, and Nations came together as the Early Childhood Tribal Advisory Coalition. The Coalition met regularly, with Tribal communities taking turns hosting meetings, adopted major goals; created an actionable work plan; and provided policy recommendations to ECECD on Tribal programming needs and feedback on ECECD initiatives. The Coalition's goals focus on:

- community, family, and Tribal engagement;
- professional development, systems change and capacity building;
- collaborative planning and investment; and
- coalition development, meeting process, statewide visibility, and reporting.

New Resources for Tribal Communities

ECECD put in place multi-year intergovernmental agreements (IGAs) with the Mescalero Apache Tribe, Sandia Pueblo, and Isleta Pueblo to assist with Early Intervention services. As part of ECECD's PreK expansion, ECECD awarded grants to the Mescalero Apache Tribe, To'Hajillee Navajo Chapter, Nambe Pueblo, Navajo Nation, and Tesuque Pueblo, expanding access for more than 500 Native American PreK students.

Comprehensive Background Check Collaboration Established

Through ongoing collaboration, ECECD established Memorandums of Understanding with Zuni Pueblo and San Felipe Pueblo to conduct Comprehensive Background Checks for their child care staff.

Goal 3: Stories

"Through the IGA with ECECD and within its defined scope of work, the program continues to *provide services to the community and strengthen the cultural bridge* upon which the Mescalero Apache's Tribal identity and language are upheld." - Rosario Dick, Mescalero Apache Tribe Early Childhood Education Director

"Navajo Head Start is excited to begin the extension of service hours this summer with the help of ECECD. *Twenty-six Navajo Nation-New Mexico Head Start sites will benefit from the PreK funding and extended hours*, which will have a major impact on the young children in our communities. The Navajo Head Start and ECECD partnership will deliver high quality early childhood education and improve access for families and children in New Mexico." - Roy Tracey, Delegated Assistant Superintendent for Navajo Head Start.

"*The Tribal Advisory Council has been an amazing way to connect with the Tribal Communities throughout New Mexico* to brainstorm and help resolve common issues that we see in our Early Childhood Communities. - Anne Duran, Sandia Pueblo Coalition member

Goal 4: Early Childhood Ecosystem Alignment

Developed the Thriving Families Prenatal to Three Prevention Plan

Under the leadership of Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham’s Children’s Cabinet, New Mexico developed the Thriving Families Prenatal to Three (PN-3) Prevention Plan to reduce abuse and neglect. The Plan strengthens coordination and collaboration between the health, child welfare, and early childhood systems and is designed to supplement and align with the Children, Youth, and Families Department’s (CYFD) Title IV-E Prevention Plan for birth to twenty-one.

Collaborated on the Improvement of the Comprehensive Addiction Recovery Act (CARA) Program

ECECD collaborated with CYFD, Department of Health, and Human Services Department to improve the CARA program. ECECD’s role was identified as assuring high-quality, trauma-responsive early childhood services are available for families in the CARA program. This past year, Family Infant and Toddler (FIT) and Home Visiting providers were trained on the CARA approach and best practices to support



families with a history of substance use. ECECD conducted outreach to health care providers, pediatric residents, community health workers, and hospital personnel to educate them about home visiting, how to refer to early childhood programs, and the CARA approach to substance use.

Goal 4: Story

“Early intervention has been very helpful and supports my understanding of the risks that impacts the development of my child. They help me with what I need to look out for when they come for home visits. I want my baby to be healthy.” – **Quote from a family with a CARA Plan of Care**

Goal 5: Organizational Excellence

Appointed the Early Childhood Education and Care Advisory Council

In January 2023, ECECD established the Early Childhood Education and Care Advisory Council (ECECAC) to advise, inform, and make recommendations on how ECECD can create a more cohesive, equitable, and effective early childhood education and care system. The Council met in communities across New Mexico, with an initial focus on seeking input from local early childhood system building coalitions. The Council developed four subcommittees to help advance its work: Public-Private Partnerships; Program Quality and Accountability; Early Childhood Professionals; and Data, Infrastructure, and Analysis—and recruited community members (families, providers, advocates) to the subcommittees.

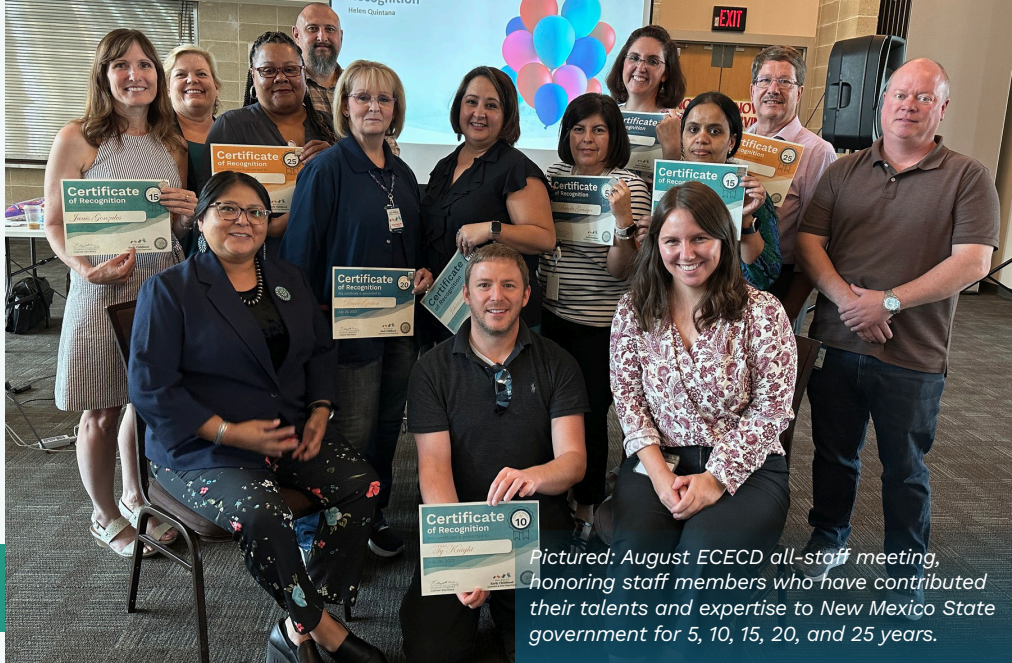


Pictured: (L) Cotillion Sneddy, Assistant Secretary for Native American Early Education and Care and, (R) Sandy Trujillo-Medina, Director Early Care Education and Nutrition, (TOP L) Shana Runck, Acting Head Start State Collaboration Director and Deputy Director of ECEN, at the Nov. 2023 ECECD all-staff meeting.

Strong Organizational Culture

The 2023 ECECD staff survey showed that:

- **76%** reported being inspired by ECECD’s mission
- **86%** believe ECECD is moving in the right direction
- **75%** believe their supervisors care about employee well-being
- **86%** find their work meaningful



Pictured: August ECECD all-staff meeting, honoring staff members who have contributed their talents and expertise to New Mexico State government for 5, 10, 15, 20, and 25 years.

Goal 5: Stories

“I am grateful for ECECD’s programs because they provide more information than I even expected. *I’m learning a lot about my kids and about me as a mom. I can’t wait to tell my friends and family about ECECD’s programs.* I know I will use them more and more.” – **Victoria Romero, Pojoaque, NM**

Quotes from the ECECD 2023 staff survey

- “I enjoy coming to work every day because of the positive, inclusive environment we have created.”
- “I feel so valued here - my supervisor(s) go out of their way to make sure we are all recognized for our work.”
- “My co-workers are amazing. They have been a great resource and support system to me as I learn my role with the department.”
- “I absolutely love that we align our employee evals with *Florecer* - it really supports me in helping my team to connect their work to the bigger picture of our departmental work.”

Goal 6: Actionable Data

Developed New Child Care Assistance Cost Tools

Dedicated a webpage to cost modeling for the child care assistance program, including Excel cost model tools in English and Spanish to assist child care centers and family child care home providers in identifying costs and revenues essential to providing quality child care. ECECD introduced the tool through community webinars and office hours, providing guidance on how to use the tool to improve business practices, increase quality, and expand their businesses for a healthier bottom line.

Contributed to the Health and Human Services (HHS) 2020 Project

ECECD contributed to the development of the HHS 2020 Project through work on the Data Warehouse, input in the selection of the data services vendor, and identification of ECECD needs from the referral system.

Goal 6: Stories

“The model is helpful in capturing a snapshot of profits and loss. I look forward to using the tool in the future to get an *even better understanding of costs and in my program.*”

“The cost model tool will be *extremely helpful in getting my business off the ground* and will support my budgeting process.”

- **Providers attending cost model meetings in Albuquerque and Las Cruces**



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Progress and

Accountability Report **2023**

nmececd.org

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NEW MEXICO

Early Childhood

Education & Care Department