Cradle to Career Initiative

Issue Papers to Explore Program Strategies in:
- Early Childhood Education
- Out of School Time
- Secondary Education
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Introduction

Aspen Community Foundation’s (ACF) service area spans the Roaring Fork and Colorado River valleys from Aspen to Parachute. This area encompasses Pitkin, Garfield and a small portion of Eagle counties, and includes four school districts. The map below depicts ACF’s service area:

As the data below and in the next section demonstrate, children living in this area have highly diverse backgrounds and experiences—experiences that lead some children on to post-secondary education and success and others to dropping out of school.

- ACF’s geographic reach includes Aspen High School, with a graduation rate of 95.1%, and two schools—Bridges High School and Yampah High School—where only one in three Latino students who starts ninth grade ends up graduating from high school.

- The service area boast a high quality early childhood system, yet one that is used by fewer than one in three preschool-aged children.

- Areas of great wealth are surrounded by areas with high rates of poverty—in Garfield County, two out of five school-aged children qualify for free- and reduced-price lunch programs.

These statistics are just a few of many that demonstrate that there are children in our community who lack access to proven approaches that help children succeed in life.

Believing that all children should have opportunity, and that ACF can indeed Be the Difference, ACF has developed a vision and framework for a stronger community that is based on three powerful and connected focus areas that together will form a “Cradle to Career” initiative:
• Early Childhood
• Out of School Time
• Secondary Education

To support the launch of this initiative, ACF engaged JVA Consulting to research and produce issue papers in each of the three areas. The papers identify the best practices and promising approaches (research-based practices with proven efficacy and effectiveness) related to each area, map what is currently being done in ACF’s service area, and identify areas of need and opportunity.

ACF Cradle to Career work is important to its community. While the community has abundant resources in some areas, e.g., early childhood education, distribution is uneven. In other areas, access may mean increasing physical availability of services. In yet others, access may mean supplementing or enhancing existing programs so that they offer the type of research-based services that are demonstrated to produce impact. ACF is in a unique position to coordinate, expand and replicate these services within its region so that all children in ACF’s region are ready for school, succeed in school and go on to post-secondary education.
A Snapshot of Children in Aspen to Parachute

Perhaps nowhere in the United States is wealth disparity more evident than in ACF’s service area, encompassing 150 square miles of ranchland and mountain slopes on the western slope of the Rocky Mountains. With Aspen housing prices averaging $1.8 million, the low-wage workers who serve food, make beds and otherwise support tourism endure long commutes into adjacent bedroom communities like Carbondale and Rifle.

Belying pictures of rural poverty, the greater Roaring Fork Valley is home to picturesque mountain towns—marked by small businesses, public art and cattle drives that stop traffic. On the blind side however are unattended children and youth congregating in trailer parks and rooms in dilapidated homes, discretely out of the way of tourists, waiting for parents who work double and triple shifts. Of these parents, over 40% commute over an hour.1 The long-time economic mainstays of farming and ranching are dying; coal mining, once a primary job source, ended when the mine closed in the 1980s, and workers who transitioned into jobs in construction have been disappointed to see that with the last recession, these jobs have vanished and left many families struggling with the new economic reality.

In the greater Roaring Fork Valley, there are 7,702 households with individuals under 18 years of age. The median household income in Garfield County is $62,716; for Pitkin County, it is $69,352. Among the families living in ACF’s region, 12% of children under 18 live in poverty in Garfield County and 11% of those children are ages 5–17. While there is less poverty in Pitkin County, it is still present. Six percent of children ages 5–17 live in poverty in Pitkin County. Local food banks, such as LIFT-UP have felt this growing poverty in the number of people requesting food—33% more in 2010 than in 2009. Charity care has more than doubled at local hospitals, as well. Only 77% of children ages one to 14 in Garfield County have some form of health insurance, compared to 91.9% in the state.2

The figure below shows the change in the under 20 population from 2000–2010 for both Garfield and Pitkin counties.

Under 20 Population for Garfield and Pitkin Counties 2000 and 2010

![Graph showing population change for Garfield and Pitkin counties](image)

As shown above, from 2000 to 2010 the under 20 population grew 27.3% in Garfield County and 19.7% in Pitkin County.

The figure below shows the change in the proportion of the population that identifies as Latino/Hispanic from 2000–2010.
As shown above, from 2000 to 2010 proportion of the population that is Latino/Hispanic grew 11.6% points in Garfield County and 2.6% points in Pitkin County.

The figure below shows the regional graduation rate.

As shown above, the graduation rate for Latino/Hispanic children is substantially lower than the overall rate. Thus, as these figures demonstrate, there are more children in the region, the region increasingly identifies as Latino/Hispanic and Latino/Hispanic children in the region are at an increased risk of not graduating.
The Cradle to Career Initiative

Goal
To provide opportunities for ACCESS to safe and enriching programming for children ages 0–18 from Aspen to Parachute

Objectives
INCREASE capacity in existing programs EXPAND programs to other schools and communities COORDINATE services to increase efficiencies

Strategies
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
Preschools, Home Care Providers, Literacy Programs
- Reach underserved populations
- Create additional slots and expand tuition assistance
- Strengthen existing programs by promoting a network of providers

OUT OF SCHOOL TIME
Afterschool, Summer, Intersession
- Strengthen existing programs by building organizational capacity
- Expand programming based on the interests and needs of students and parents
  - Link programming to school engagement and achievement

SECONDARY EDUCATION
Academic Mentoring, College Counseling, Life Skills
- Expand model for academic mentoring to other school districts
- Develop college counseling programs in all high schools
- Connect life skill learning opportunities to students

Funding
The Cradle to Career Initiative is a focused project that goes beyond the scope of the Aspen Community Foundation’s general grantmaking. The Cradle to Career Initiative will identify the funding needs for reaching the goal of “access” through issue papers, strategy sessions with board members, key donors and community members, formal communication tools, and creative and targeted asks.

Prepared by JVA Consulting for Aspen Community Foundation, July 2011
Early Childhood Education

This paper examines early childhood programs, defined as programs that serve children ages zero to five.

It includes information on school- and center-based early childhood programs, home care providers, literacy programs and other support services.

Why It Matters

Children who attend high-quality preschools experience significant positive outcomes well into adulthood. The University of Minnesota tracked 900 children for 25 years who attended early childhood programs in Chicago’s Child-Parent Centers, which offer comprehensive services for low-income children through second or third grade. The researchers found that these students, compared to the control group, had a 28% lower incarceration rate, were 28% less likely as adults to use drugs and alcohol, had a 20% increase in socioeconomic status and were 9% (average of males and females) more likely to finish high school (males were 22% more likely to finish high school).

The study—released in June 2011—also revealed that the average cost per child for 18 months of preschool in 2011 is $9,000, an investment that leads to at least $90,000 in benefits per child in terms of increased earnings, tax revenue, less criminal behavior, reduced mental health costs and other measures.³ This study confirms what earlier longitudinal research about the value of early childhood education has found: High-quality early childhood education profoundly improves the lives of children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, rural areas such as those served by ACF have received less research attention than urban areas, and therefore less is known about childcare issues in these less populated communities.⁴ What is known is that parents in rural areas have less access to formal center-based childcare and public transportation, and parents in rural areas must often commute long distances to work.⁵ Whether by choice or necessity, rural children are more likely

Prepared by JVA Consulting for Aspen Community Foundation, July 2011
than nonrural children to have no participation in formal early learning programs as they are more likely to be taken care of by relatives or family friends in home daycares or by their own parents.\(^6\)

While the value of high-quality learning experiences for young children is undisputed, **affording it is often beyond the reach of families**. Childcare costs can consume 35% or more of a low-income family’s budget.\(^7\) And, while childcare subsidies and Head Start programs are intended to lower or even eliminate the cost of childcare for low-income families, a number of barriers exist that keep families from benefiting from subsidies.\(^8\) These barriers include insufficient funding, state-determined income limits for assistance eligibility and agency practices (e.g., priority for families receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families [TANF] payments). In addition, childcare centers often limit the number of slots available to families using subsidies.

**Other barriers to rural families’ access** to high-quality formal child care also include **work schedules** that are not traditional or **long commutes** that require child care arrangements that can accommodate early morning drop-offs and late pick-ups.\(^9\) These employment factors require flexibility in childcare arrangements that typically cannot be met by licensed childcare providers and can often only be found in informal arrangements with family and friends.\(^10\) In addition, for many families, **limited access to vehicles or public transportation** pose barriers to taking their child to a high-quality early childhood education programs. Some parents’ preference to arrange care by family and friends may also reflect families’ **cultural norms** around caregiving.\(^11\) However, despite the practical and personal value to rural mothers using informal providers, informal caregivers typically lack special training in child development best practices and are not subject to safety and quality regulations as are licensed providers.\(^12\) The informal nature of relying on friends and family as caregivers can also mean inconsistent environments for children, as the arrangements often change.\(^13\)

**In Our Community**

**The Data**
There are 5,248 children age five and under in Garfield, Pitkin and west Eagle counties. Of those, an estimated 1,500 receive care by licensed early childhood education providers. In Garfield County, 42% of children qualify for free- or reduced-price lunch; 12% live in poverty; 25% of families receive Women, Infants and Children (WIC) (a federal program that provides foods, health care referrals and nutrition to low-income women with infants); and 2% of families receive TANF. Pitkin County, while wealthier overall, still has a significant number of children at risk of missing developmental milestones due to their family’s socioeconomic status. In Pitkin County, 6% of children qualify for free- or reduced-price lunch; 6% live in poverty, and 6% of families receive WIC.

**Current Programming and Investments**
A wide variety of types of childcare providers exist in ACF’s region: 15% are nonprofit; 18% are school-based; 4% are church-based; 57% are family home care; and 5% are for-profit providers.
(n=115). For all age groups—infants, toddlers and preschoolers—the region has sufficient licensed capacity with 2,209 licensed slots. Similar to other regions, the availability of care increases as children age. In ACF’s region, among all providers, 48% are licensed to serve infants, 64% toddlers and 96% preschoolers. There are 5,248 children under age five in the region, which suggests that nearly half of young children are cared for by their parents or in unlicensed care arrangements, most likely with family members or friends. The following table contains data that ACF staff gathered in its needs assessment of the region’s early childhood education availability.

**TABLE 1: CURRENT NUMBER OF PROVIDERS AND CAPACITY BY CITY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Licensed Infant (ages 0–2)</th>
<th>Licensed Toddler (ages 2–3)</th>
<th>Licensed Preschools (ages 3–5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td># Providers</td>
<td>% Full</td>
<td># Providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspen</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basalt</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carbondale</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Jebel</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glenwood Springs</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>52%*</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marble</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Castle</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parachute</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redstone</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rifle</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silt</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snowmass</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snowmass Village**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woody Creek</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data is too limited to say with certainty.

**While the data for Snowmass Village is incomplete, it appears that there may not be enough capacity to meet the needs of parents in this town.

**Early childhood education providers in the region**

The map below shows where the early childhood education/childcare providers are located. The blue locations indicate the family-based providers; red are for-profit providers; green are nonprofit providers; purple are church-based providers; and yellow are school-based providers.
Gaps and opportunities
As clearly depicted in the map above, the vast majority of providers in ACF’s region are family-based providers. In addition, the providers that are available in ACF’s region are primarily located along the I-70 corridor. Redstone, Marble, Snowmass, Snowmass Village and Woody Creek appear to be particularly underresourced areas within ACF’s region. Based on the location of and proximity among providers, ACF has an opportunity to invest its resources, especially for professional development of family-based providers in a fairly targeted geographic area. However, ACF may also want to explore the opportunity to help support providers in locations outside of the I-70 corridor, who likely have very limited access to professional development. ACF may wish to consider partnering with the Rural Resort Region Early Childhood Council (RRRECC) to conduct these trainings. RRRECC is trained to conduct a three-hour assessment using the Family Child Care Environment Scale, which could help ACF support improved quality care among family-based providers. RRRECC can also provide coaching to those providers to help them address the unique needs of their particular facility.

What Works
Access to early childhood education requires that parents know how to find care, can afford it, and have transportation to early childhood education sites. A study of low-income families found that 20% of the mothers reported that they did not know how to find childcare. While community-based organizations, such as Kids First and RRRECC, have lists of area providers and their Qualistar rating, JVA is not aware of any agency that recommends specific providers to families based on the family’s unique needs. This is a service that ACF may wish to consider funding.

The following subsections describe specific strategies that have been described in the literature as ways to promote access to early childhood education by removing the most common barriers to access.
Tuition Assistance/Subsidies

Given the relatively high cost of center-based childcare, it is not surprising that mothers in rural areas rarely use it. A recent study compared the median family incomes with the average costs of care for licensed childcare or providers in rural counties to determine a family’s ability to pay for that type of care. The average median monthly income for families with at least one infant or toddler was $1,153.84, or $13,846 per year. Paying for full-time, center-based care for an infant (at an average of $5,144 per year) would consume 37% of the family income. Childcare costs are also relative to expenditures for other basic needs. **According to data gathered about average monthly expenses for the families, the cost of full-time care for an infant would exceed costs for housing and utilities.** These costs may be perceived as fixed, whereas options for informal care offer flexibility in paying for care.

Subsidizing care has some potential as a strategy to promote access and continued enrollment of low-income children in high-quality early childhood education. Reducing the financial burden of childcare for families can be addressed through grants provided to providers to offset tuition costs for low-income families, as well as government programs e.g., Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) and Colorado Childcare Assistance Program (CCAP). An example of how private dollars make a difference in promoting access is the First 5 Contra Costa’s Preschool Makes a Difference scholarship program. The program received a $6.2 million five-year grant from the Thomas J. Long Foundation, which will provide scholarships for 150 children, as well as support programming that includes professional development for staff and Raising a Reader, a program that distributes children’s books to families through pediatricians’ offices.

However, government subsidies may be of limited use in promoting access. In a study of 323 low-income women living in rural counties in 11 states, less than one-third (29%) of the mothers reported receiving childcare subsidies in the form of cash payments to providers or using subsidized childcare facilities. This is higher than the national average, where one in seven eligible families receive childcare subsidies. Comparing the families who used subsidies and those who did not, there were no significant differences by marital or partner status, or hours per week worked. Subsidy use has been linked to increased maternal employment.

There was a significant difference in subsidy use by the type of care used for children: **those whose parents received childcare subsidies were more likely to be in licensed centers.** Nearly half of the children (45.5%) were living at the 2000 poverty level and nearly all (91.6%) lived below 200% of the poverty level, the amount set for eligibility for many federal assistance programs. This suggests that subsidies may be part of the solution to increasing low-income families’ access to preschool options, particularly if a significant number of parents in ACF’s region are unemployed or working low-wage jobs.

However, because state policies affect the administration of federal childcare subsidies, and income eligibility is determined by the counties, ACF would need to actively lobby for legislation to have an impact on increasing families’ use of subsidies, such as changing rate ceilings and reimbursement rates. The table below documents the eligibility limits in ACF’s region for CCAP, as reported by staff of county departments of human services:

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ACF would also need to develop strategies around promoting the use of private subsidies because mothers in rural areas appear more likely to pay for unlicensed care provided by friends or family than for licensed, center-based care. ²⁰ By and large, when families provide childcare, there may have been an assumption either by the mother or by her relatives that some type of child care was available for her child(ren), either as the primary arrangement, or as backup in case of emergencies. Yet, this care often comes with expected payment—either by the provider, by the mother, or both. Mothers sometimes paid with cash, but more often payments were in services or other resource exchange. While this arrangement may be less financially costly to the mother than formal care, such an arrangement very likely places strain within the family and, as personal resources decrease, family members become less available to offer help and support. ²¹

Additional barriers that prevent families that qualify for government subsidies from seeking them include a lengthy paperwork process that often involves traveling to a regulatory agency and income verification. ²² Eliminating these barriers by reducing the time it takes for families to complete the initial paperwork, as well as the paperwork to recertify their eligibility for subsidies, would be necessary to promote the use of subsidies. ²³ Once a family is approved for a subsidy, they must also recertify, which is a time-consuming and lengthy process. This may help explain why subsidies last only three to seven months. ²⁴

**Adding Capacity**

Expanding the capacity of early childhood education would only be successful if the care provided could accommodate low-wage families’ work schedules, which often include early mornings, evenings and weekends. Innovative strategies for adding capacity to early childhood centers in rural areas include before and afterschool programs, such as partnerships with assisted living facilities, schools, community organizations and religious institutions ²⁵ and coordinated countywide efforts. ²⁶ Parents’ child care options may also be supported by increasing incentives and assistance to family child care providers and relative providers in rural communities and by offering training and incentives to rural parents interested in establishing their own home-based child care business. ²⁷

While it is true that the rural mothers in the study cited frequently chose nonregulated child care settings, when available, regulated, publicly-provided learning environments for children...
were consistently used. This suggests that if public and private dollars were used to provide an expanded system of early education and care environments, rural families would benefit.

**Improving Quality of Care Available Through Informal Networks**

When an informal care network is available, research clearly indicates that rural parents prefer to use it. However, ACF could allocate resources to ensure that the care provided through those arrangements is high quality. An example of how this has been done in a rural area is the Southern Maryland Child Care Resource Center, which offers a home visitation program for informal childcare providers. Providers who receive state childcare subsidies are offered one-to-one consultation and educational kits appropriate to the age of the children in their care. In New York, Cornell Cooperative Extension distributes “Children in My Care: A Series for Family, Friends and Neighbors Who Care for Kids,” a newsletter series offering information pertinent to all quality child care settings, yet sensitive to the unique nature of friend and relative caregivers.

**Improving Quality of Family Home Care**

Family home care providers are typically isolated from one another and linking them would: increase provider training and education about early childhood development; increase access to care by better understanding each provider’s availability; and create networks of support among these providers. Family home care providers have less education and training on average than providers in licensed care. As such, they need to be targeted for increased education and training. Encouraging family home care providers to participate in specialized early childhood education coursework is particularly important to quality. At minimum, researchers recommend that these providers receive training in health and safety issues, curriculum and educational instruction, appropriate discipline and child abuse prevention, as well as training to promote child growth and development. The Early Childhood Professional Development Network, funded through the Head Start Bureau, has demonstrated that provider training could successfully be administered via satellite to geographically remote areas.

Flexibility is necessary when providing training in rural and remote regions. In focus groups with key stakeholders in five rural communities, flexibility, in terms of content, delivery mode and location was found to be essential to successful training enterprises. In these communities, successful training programs, around a variety of topics, were provided online through distance learning programs, with face-to-face presentations, and through a mix of these modes.

In addition to better tailoring training opportunities to the realities of rural communities (i.e., thin markets, geographic isolation, and challenges accessing skilled trainers), childcare providers could be incentivized to provide higher quality childcare. Stipends could be provided to providers who upgrade their skills, such as those provided through the Childcare Retention Incentive (CRI) in California. In geographically isolated parts of Nevada County, California, caregivers have access to career planning services, cash stipends, and childcare, health, or other benefits, and vans that bring onsite child development training to family childcare homes and interns to childcare centers.

Prepared by JVA Consulting for Aspen Community Foundation, July 2011
Maryland is an example of a state that has proactively attempted to coordinate care. In its five-year action plan, one of its goals is to coordinate the delivery of quality childcare, early intervention, Early Head Start/Head Start, preschool, home visiting, family support services and family literacy through local coordination and expansion efforts to serve more families. It identified five strategies to achieve this goal. Two of the strategies that it attempted are relevant to ACF. First, it would increase the participation of early childhood providers in local planning efforts. Secondly, it would strengthen the capacity of early childhood providers to provide culturally competent outreach and accommodations for families in their native language and culture and recognize their diverse learning strategies.  

**Using Early Education Mobiles**

Programs of this type have not been thoroughly evaluated, but there is some evidence that this strategy has been successfully used before. Contact Children’s Mobile, developed in 1987, brings early learning opportunities to children in remote areas of Australia. Families are visited once a month and connected to playgroups to link isolated families/children (birth to age 12), preschool sessions, afterschool sessions, as well as assistance, information and referrals to families. The program also sponsors a morning parent segment on local radio and publishes information in local newspapers. Evaluations of this program found that parents believed Contact Children’s Mobile increased their child’s cognitive and social stimulation, particularly in the arts and reading.  

**Initiating Parent Cohort Groups**

There are many examples of parent cohort groups that have formed to meet parents’ needs, as well as the needs of their children. Purposes of these groups include: providing social support, advocating for improvements to their child’s education, as well as meeting practical concerns such as carpooling. Parent groups typically form to address a concern shared among many parents in the community, i.e., they develop in a grassroots way. Parents themselves create the group’s vision and set its agenda. The groups that are most effective have a clearly defined purpose that includes a list of specific activities that will occur with dates, times and locations; a formal leadership structure to ensure that the group is on track to achieving its purpose, goals and objectives; and subcommittees to work on discrete tasks. Recruiting members is most effective when parents are directly asked to join. Early childhood providers may be a referral source of parents who would benefit from joining the group. Because ACF’s region is so large, careful attention should be paid to where group meetings are held so they are accessible to everyone. Meeting through electronic means may also be useful, e.g., conference calls or video conference calls. If meetings are held in-person, childcare must be provided. The timing of meeting will also be critical, particularly if the aim is to include parents who work nontraditional hours.  

There are many examples of early childhood providers reaching out to parents to help them learn ways to support their child’s education in the home, e.g., Head Start, parent education programs and home visitation programs. While many of these programs include group meetings, e.g., Parents as Teachers, often the work of teaching parents how to promote their
child’s literacy is conducted one-on-one. If ACF and its partners decide to form a parent group, it must engage them from the start when designing the program. Programs that draw on parents’ strengths and empower them to do more for their children are more likely to recruit and retain parents. If parents also identify transportation barriers as one of the key limitations to their ability to ensure that their child has access to high-quality childcare, parents may choose to form a group to share transportation duties on a rotating basis.

**Supporting Home Learning Through Home Visitation Programs**

There is ample research that supports the efficacy of several home visitation programs, e.g., Nurse Family Partnership, Parents as Teachers and Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY). All of these programs differ slightly in their curricula, but share a common goal of giving parents the tools they need to support their young child’s development at home. In ACF’s region, the Family Visitor Programs enrolls approximately 400 families each year in its Home Visitor Program. Visitors provide parents with home visits; prenatally and up to 12 months post partum (longer for high-risk parents, such as teen moms). Visitors use established home visitation curricula, including Partners for a Healthy Baby developed by Florida State University and other curricula appropriate for both English and Spanish speaking parents.

Education and mentoring include:

- **Ages & Stages Developmental Follow Along** — parents receive education about ways to stimulate their child’s mental and physical development. This includes using materials from The Creative Curriculum’s age appropriate *Learning Games* and other materials that encourage parents to talk and play with their child.

- **“Read to Me!” Pre-Literacy Education** — each month, the visitor gives the child a new book and models developmentally appropriate reading techniques for parents.

Family Visitor Programs also partners with Colorado Bright Beginnings to coordinate services and provide visits for families residing in Garfield, Pitkin and Eagle County.

**Promoting Access Among Immigrant Families**

While ACF’s Cradle to Career Initiative focuses on all children in the region without regard to specific subpopulations, research indicates that some strategies are particularly effective in promoting access among immigrant families. While this is a relatively unstudied population, studies using data from the 2000 Census and the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K) with a focus exclusively on preschool-age children confirmed that **immigrant parents use family/friend care much more frequently than licensed care when parental care is not available**. This is despite the fact that immigrant children are overrepresented in the poverty population and are typically eligible for subsidized care and early-learning programs through federal programs like Early Head Start, Head Start, or programs administered at the state level such as state-funded preschool programs or subsidized child care provided through CCAP, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) block grant. Most immigrant children under age six are U.S. citizens and are therefore eligible for these programs if their families meet other requirements such as...
low income and, in some cases, a demonstrated need for care because the parents work or meet other criteria. Even if a child is eligible, an undocumented parent may not be able to demonstrate that he or she qualifies for the subsidized program. If parents are working outside of the formal labor market and have no verification of employment, they will not be able to access available slots. In addition, the available subsidized programs do not cover all children who are eligible, and immigrant families may be less likely to obtain access if they are not able to navigate the system. The limited supply of programs in communities where immigrants are concentrated often cannot meet their needs for bilingual or culturally competent staff, flexible hours, or subsidized spaces. Also, a study of immigrants in New York City found that some immigrant families do not want to use any form of subsidized care because of the stigma associated with its use. Believing they must be self-sufficient, families are afraid that accessing subsidized care will label them as burdens on the government as well as jeopardize their immigration status and their status within their co-ethnic immigrant community.

Studies of immigrant families note that many are simply unaware of the existence or availability of the ECE programs that their children could attend. Furthermore, the research has shown that the predominant method of sharing information about childcare and early-learning programs within immigrant communities is word of mouth, not formal information provision. City agencies and child-care providers may not be effectively using direct, language-appropriate outreach or media to educate immigrant families about the options available to them. Yet, even if such outreach were available, immigrant families, because they rely predominantly on their co-ethnic immigrant peers to inform them of ECE options, may lack the necessary social resources and capital to understand and navigate the broad childcare market at their disposal.

Enrollment processes in both public and private ECE programs involve complex paperwork and often, long waiting lists. Immigrant parents may need to rely on community agencies to facilitate the process or to translate written or oral communications. Forms for subsidized programs can be even more complicated and time consuming because parents have to demonstrate their eligibility for the subsidy, documenting income level and, for some subsidies, employment status. In a study in New York City, for example, immigrant parents who were interviewed remarked that they would prefer to pay for unsubsidized center-based care or informal care by a trusted family member or friend because there would be fewer hassles and immediate enrollment.

Another reason that immigrant parents may not choose licensed early childhood education is related to cultural competency. If providers are not culturally sensitive or responsive, do not know the language of an immigrant family that has difficulty speaking English, or are unsupportive of immigrant families, the parents may not feel welcome or respond to requests for involvement. Research notes that being culturally responsive is critical in supporting parent participation, in allowing parents to communicate with the teachers to understand what is happening and to support their child’s learning at home, and in developing trust in the program. Immigrant parents may also prefer that their children enroll in programs that are familiar or supportive of the native language or culture. Although an understanding of best practices has yet to fully emerge, programs can be culturally responsive in many ways, from
hiring teachers and staff who speak the languages of the parents or who are from the same country, to creating formal roles for parents and others to act as cultural liaisons, to honoring and respecting cultural and religious practices that may differ from those of mainstream American society.²

**Ensuring Summer Learning For At-Risk Children**

Summer learning loss has been well-documented. The Wallace Foundation has been a driving force in support of the National Summer Learning Association, which helps schools and community organizations deliver quality summer learning programs to children and youth, particularly, those living in poverty.

Several strategies could improve the quality of investments in summer care, particularly for ACF’s prioritized target population of CPP children. First, policies should prioritize full-year care and early learning opportunities for disadvantaged children.⁵¹ Integrating childcare and pre-kindergarten programs has the potential to provide opportunities in the face of cuts to state childcare programs. While state policies do encourage programs to offer full-day, full-year opportunities, they do not require, coordinate, or fund such activities.⁵⁴ Most state programs are part-day, part-year programs intended to benefit a limited number of four-year-olds based on family income. For example, funding is available to pay for early childhood education through CPP during the school year, but is not sufficient to support those children’s education during the summer months. Policymakers should consider strategies to generate greater awareness among summer program providers about the uses of CCDF and TANF.⁵⁵ Incentives for summer day camps to become licensed and widen their recruitment efforts to include children from disadvantaged and diverse backgrounds should be included in the legislation. Policies should explicitly discuss the need for continued learning and enrichment over the summer months; they should prioritize funding for organizations that collaborate effectively to increase the opportunities available to children and youth.⁵⁶ For example, a partnership among the public school, community-based organizations and the public library could result in a well-rounded experience that incorporates a wide variety of learning experiences, while maximizing and combining funding streams, such as those that fund library summer reading programs.

New Mexico is an example of a state that has a high level of readiness to address the need for expanded summer learning opportunities based on the recent growth in summer-related education funding and a broader, integrated services initiative that is underway at the state level. First, New Mexico’s Kindergarten Plus policy, which began in 2003 as a three-year pilot program to provide summer programming before and after the kindergarten year, recently expanded statewide. Results from the three-year pilot demonstrated a number of positive outcomes including: improved student performance on the DIBELS (Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills) assessment; decreased number of students classified with delayed skills in prekindergarten; strengthened social maturity; and greater parental involvement.⁵⁷ It is

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particularly noteworthy that New Mexico is the only state identified by the National Summer Learning Association that successfully integrates its approach to preschool policy with a strategy to expand summer learning opportunities for young people in high-poverty schools. In addition, the program successfully leverages federal Reading First funding from the U.S. Department of Education, making it one of few states to access the funding for this purpose. The program has strong support from both the state legislature and the governor.

For decades, private philanthropy has funded relatively small-scale programs run by nonprofits and other entities designed to expand summer learning opportunities for low-income youth. In most major U.S. cities, it is not difficult to find a small number of comprehensive, high-quality summer programs that use philanthropic support to provide disadvantaged youth with a mixture of academic enrichment and recreation during the summer months. Such programs often partner with public schools, but generally exist outside the formal structures and funding streams of large urban districts and other public agencies, which constrains efforts to bring comprehensive programs to scale.

A recommendation from the National Summer Learning Association is that foundations target funding on a time-limited basis to convert programs from operating on a nine-month schedule to a 12-month schedule. This recommendation is fully aligned with ACF’s interest in supporting education for children receiving services through CPP over the summer. In addition to providing seed funding for this effort, foundations should provide resources to enable programs to identify, maximize and integrate available local, state, and federal resources to sustain efforts. 58

Removing Transportation Barriers

Increasing access to early childhood education may be challenging as formal childcare in rural areas is clustered around larger towns. 59 Limited transportation is a characteristic of rural settings, 60 families who live outside of these centralized areas are often unable to access such settings. This challenge calls for innovative planning among key stakeholders, including social service providers, employers and policymakers, to develop effective transportation services. The Rides Program is a nonprofit program meeting transportation needs in Spencer, Iowa. 61 The program received funding for public transportation and door-to-door service from the federal Non-Urbanized Area Formula Transit Grants for both capital and operating costs. Another model, such as Wheels-to-Work in Alabama, Georgia and Indiana, among other states, leases refurbished cars to low-income individuals. 62 Such a model would be particularly valuable for those moving from welfare to work who often work nontraditional hours when public transportation is not operating, when child care providers are located far from a work site, or in areas that are too sparsely populated to make public transportation systems viable. Providing transportation may alleviate transportation as a barrier to undocumented parents who are unable to obtain a driver’s license.

Opportunities for Aspen Community Foundation

The following describes a menu of opportunities that ACF and/or its partners could implement to improve access to high-quality early childhood options throughout the region.

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• **Continue to promote a comprehensive early childhood system** throughout the region that offers a wide variety of service delivery methods including home-based, center-based and parent-provided arrangements.

• **Leverage ACF’s influence and resources to encourage center-based providers to accommodate parents with nontraditional work schedules** so they have the opportunity to choose that type of arrangement, if they desire it. ACF and other donors could help centers extend their hours of operation by paying a portion of staff salaries for extra hours or providing general operating support to keep centers open more days, e.g., on the weekends. In the event that more families are able to use center-based care, the capacity of those centers may need to be expanded. However, the data suggest that there is sufficient capacity currently to serve additional families.

• **Conduct a public awareness campaign** through a variety of media as well as through community networks to inform parents about the importance of quality early childhood education, the resources/programs that are available to help pay for it and how they can find high-quality providers that implement best practices. This campaign should be designed with key stakeholders throughout the region, including parents. These meetings should also be used to help ACF better understand how to best fill the gaps in available services and family supports. The campaign should include the following steps: establish a steering committee, develop a campaign brand, develop messaging, develop timeframes and establish partnerships with TV, radio and print advertising.

• **Leverage ACF’s investments and resources to support professional development for home-based care providers.** ACF could partner with the RRRECC to coordinate mentoring opportunities with home-based providers and promote available training among these providers.

• **Address affordability by investing in licensed center-based providers who can offer low-income families scholarships to enroll their child(ren).** Because subsidies are tied to state policies, ACF could lead or partner with other organizations to lobby for increased funding of early childhood education, including revisions of eligibility criteria to qualify for the Child Care Assistance Program. Also, because providers must be licensed to accept families who use subsidies, ACF may wish to explore investing in providers who are in the process of becoming licensed.
Out of School Time

This paper examines best practices in out of school time, defined as the hours of 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. on school days, summer months and school breaks when school is not in session (intersession).

Why It Matters

Youth who participate in high-quality out of school time programs have the opportunity to experience significant outcomes related to their academic, social/emotional and often, physical development.

While there is tremendous variation among out of school activities, which Ebie defines as “ungraded activities offered beyond the regular school day,” sports/athletics and academic enrichment programming are some of the most common out of school time activities. This broad definition includes any type of supervised and structured activities offered outside of the school day. However, out of school activities exclude activities youth do at home even when overseen by a parent other adult.

Research demonstrates that those who do participate in out of school activities benefit in many ways. For example, youth who participate in out of school activities experience academic success including higher grades and standardized test scores than youth who do not participate in out of school activities. Additionally, as compared to students who do not participate in out of school activities, participants report higher life satisfaction, have lower rates of depression and greater social competence. On the other hand, Lagacé-Séguin & Case point out that youth who do not participate in out of school activities face higher rates of criminal activity and arrests as compared to those who do participate in such activities.

Not all out of school activities have the same potential to deliver positive benefits. In other words, it is not only important that youth participate in out of school activities, but that the activity in question is designed in such a way that it maximizes potential benefits. Various research articles outline characteristics necessary for creating a high quality out of school program. Likewise, research demonstrates that certain program characteristics may be best
suited for a specific age group; therefore, best practices for out of school activities for six- to 13-year-olds were considered for this project.

**In Our Community**

**The Data**
There are over 10,000 children between the ages of five and 14 in the Aspen to Parachute area. Currently, little is known about how many are involved in some sort of out of school time program.

**Current Programming and Investments**
ACF’s region currently offers some out of school time programs for youth. While incorporating some effective practices, current programs could be improved by extending their length of operations. For example, Access Roaring Fork is an innovative program with some characteristics that meet the standards described in research. Access’ current programming includes academic classes and enrichment classes that are taught in coordination with academic courses. Classes run three days a week with fall, winter and spring sessions, totaling 25 weeks of programming. Despite Access’ programming, many communities in the region have minimal out of school time programming.

The map below indicates where out of school activities are currently offered. The blue dots represent summer school offerings and the purple dots represent afterschool programs.

**What Works**
Research about what constitutes best practices in out of school time activities has garnered significant attention from researchers. The research identifies specific characteristics of out of school activities that support the likelihood that the youth involved in the program will experience the positive benefits associated with high-quality out of school experiences. A common theme across this research is that programs must emphasize fostering relationships with caring adults and creating positive peer associations, and offering engaging and empowering curriculum. Additionally, the logistical aspects of programs such as how often they are offered and how they are marketed to the public are also important factors to consider when creating high-quality programs.

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Effective Program Content

The importance of relationships
One example of a characteristic that contributes to the quality of an out of school program is its ability to foster positive peer-to-adult relationships. Research conducted by DeFord suggests ways in which adults should approach fostering relationships with youth. She suggests that adult leaders should be responsible for balancing care and control by establishing routines, implementing coaching techniques, praising students for positive actions, conveying rules and expectations, emphasizing the importance of community over individuals and avoiding favoritism. Furthermore, DeFord warns that adults should avoid “tactics of control, punishment, denial and exclusion.” Additionally, the mentor-protégé relationship is a specific example of a positive peer-to-adult relationship that can be implemented in out of school time and has been extensively researched by such institutes as the Harvard Family Research Project, which examines out of school time. Mentoring is beneficial when relationships are built following guidelines supported by research. Lerner, Brittian & Fay suggest that mentors should work with protégés by supporting their interests, involving them in decision making, helping them learn from mistakes, connecting them to people to whom they otherwise might not have access, speaking out when they are making bad or unhealthy choices and encouraging them to join community service efforts.

Empowering youth
Curriculum that has the ability to empower youth is another important characteristic of out of school programs. Musson & Gibbons explain that out of school programs have the opportunity to help youth develop, but this is accomplished when adults empower youth rather than acting as babysitters by simply entertaining children or by over-structuring recreational activities. They further outline steps practitioners can take to implement empowering curricula into programs so that youth can learn to challenge themselves, gain a sense of independence and direct their own lives. The researchers designed a three-part model for incorporating empowerment into programs and suggest that the model is appropriate for programs targeting youth in the seven to 17 years of age range. The three-phase map teaches youth how to direct their own programs. In the first phase, youth are exposed to challenging activities during which the instructor directs the youth. In the second stage, the youth and the instructor have a shared influence in the activity design—the instructor supervises the youth as the youth contribute to the design and running of the activity using the skills they developed in the first phase. In the last stage, youth self-direct programming by proposing what they want to do and how they want to do it while the instructor is present for guidance. This type of empowering curriculum can be implemented into various types of activities including performing arts, sports, community service and practical skills. An example of a program that follows these guidelines is one in which youth are first taught by an instructor how to operate a video camera and edit the material. Next, the youth and the instructor determine that a lip-syncing contest would be a good way to practice how to utilize the skills they were just taught while the instructor supervises the youth as they use the technology. Lastly, the youth determine they want to put their new skills to use by creating a music video.
A variety of activities
The Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) in New York City, which offers publicly funded out of school programs, found that high quality programs exposed youth to new experiences, gave youth an opportunity to socially interact with peers and communicated with parents to meet the needs of youth. These high quality programs covered a variety of activities—from academic skills enhancement to sports—demonstrating that high quality programs are not limited to specific activities.

Program Design and Logistics
Program characteristics are not the only important factors to consider when implementing an out of school program. Research on best practices for out of school time also stresses the importance of considering certain logistical factors when executing programs such as dosage, collaboration and marketing.

Dosage
The amount of time in which students spend in quality out of school time programs has an effect on the overall benefits reaped from participating in such programs. The Policy Studies Associates found that students who participated in a high-quality afterschool program for two years saw stronger benefits than for those who attended for one year. Therefore, youth should have access to out of school time programs for at least two years. Likewise, youth who demonstrated the most benefits attended programs at least two to three times per week. Therefore, these programs need to be made available to youth several days per week. Finally, the Policy Studies Associates acknowledge that students are more likely to attend consistently and for longer periods of time when programs are engaging with positive adult and peer relationships.

ACF’s interest in supporting summer programs such as camps, which typically last up to one week, and school-based summer learning programs, would facilitate students’ expanded learning time. Because summer presents several more hours during the day where youth could potentially be left unsupervised due to the lack of a traditional school day, daylong summer camps and summer school are good options for youth who could otherwise face the negative consequences of being unsupervised and without structured activities. Therefore, daylong summer programs are good options for out of school time because of high dosage opportunities.

Collaboration
Collaboration is another important aspect of out of school programs. The Policy Studies Associates work suggests that collaboration can be used to meet the needs of youth on a community-wide basis rather than leaving gaps in certain service areas such as programs that only target certain age ranges, races or interest areas. This type of collaboration effort ensures that all youth in the community have a safety net. Collaboration also allows out of school program directors to work with schools in order to target students who teachers think will most benefit from the programs. Additionally, collaboration with schools also allows out of school directors to create beneficial programs for youth by offering activities that build on the school-
day curriculum. Finally, collaboration in the community allows directors to recruit knowledgeable individuals to lead activities; for example, an expert in painting could instruct youth in an art-based afterschool program.

**Marketing and recruitment**

Marketing efforts are another important factor to consider when creating out of school time programs because parents and youth may not otherwise be aware of opportunities and their benefits. A study conducted on the Head Start program found that the organization was able to reach new populations by advertising through local media in the language of those they were trying to recruit, hosting open houses, going door-to-door to recruit families and contacting agencies, churches and other groups serving minorities. While Head Start serves younger children in a preschool setting rather than youth in out of school settings, this research is relevant because it demonstrates how to recruit people who are unaware of a program opportunity as well as minority populations.

**Specific Program Areas of Interest to ACF**

**School-based out of school time care**

This refers to both out of school programs that take place on school campuses and those that have an academic focus. Research in these areas demonstrates these are both good options for out of school time and outlines ways to best implement them. The Institute of Educational Sciences claims that academically focused out of school time can “supplement the school day and provide targeted assistance to students in need.” Additionally, such programs can help to close the gap between high performing students and low performing students. To best implement an academically focused out of school program, IES suggests aligning the program with the school day, using one-on-one tutoring or breaking students into small groups, connecting instruction to student interests and allowing for hands-on learning activities. Supporting students with homework is another example of an academically focused out of school activity. Additionally, Filardo et al suggests that utilizing public school facilities for out of school programs is a good way to provide services to youth in convenient locations.

Those school-based programs that do receive public funding, often from sources like the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, face major challenges in expanding their services and sustaining investments beyond short-term grant cycles. Rather than being the preferred time for services, public funding often includes summer as an “allowable use,” with the bulk of funding directed toward school day or afterschool programs. As a result, few innovative programs that take place during the summer and rely primarily on either private or public grant funding have been able to scale their operations dramatically or serve large numbers of young people consistently.

In addition to supporting program-level innovation, funders and policymakers have invested in intermediary organizations at both the state and city level resulting in new infrastructure for out of school time programming. City and state intermediary organizations have leveraged public and private investments in afterschool programming over the past decade. They have also

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created much stronger systems for data collection, interagency collaboration and public engagement around the issue. Despite this progress, city and state funding and infrastructure are often not enough to result in adequate opportunities during the summer months. In general, current funding models are inadequate to meet the demand and need for year-round, comprehensive out of school time programming. ACF may choose to use its resources to invest in citywide summer programming. ACF is in a position to engage mayors in leading citywide planning for summer programming.

**Coordinating programs through a uniform website or operating entity**

A joint website advertising these programs seems to have the same benefits of utilizing collaboration in the community. Parents and youth would be more likely to be aware of a program if there was one location to go in order to research options. Likewise, a joint website is an example of a marketing effort, which research suggests is an important aspect of out of school programs. Because researchers advise out of school time practitioners to utilize collaboration in an effort to ensure all youth needs are met, the joint website should be capable of being navigated based on needs of youth and their families, such as target age, program location, available activities, transportation options, and days and times of operation. Research on the topic of one operating entity is scarce; however, one director in charge of several programs can ensure that programs collaborate in order to meet the needs of the community. Additionally, an operating entity well versed in the best practices for out of school time could also provide training sessions to adult program leaders so that they can learn how to create empowering curricula and positive peer-to-adult relationships.

**Summer camps**

Summer camps are a good program option for extending students’ learning time. The summer camp model that ACF is interested in supporting takes place Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. As was previously mentioned, youth benefit from having adult supervision rather than being left unsupervised; therefore, youth who are in the care of adults for this timeframe—traditionally during the workday for many parents—will not face the risks of being left alone. Additionally, an Internet search for summer camps yielded many results showing similar programs throughout the country. One such example is a summer camp offered at the University of California, Los Angeles. 83 This program offers a variety of types of activities throughout the day for youth of all ages including story time, art, music, board games, pool time, tag, picnics and sports. In addition to giving students supervision while parents may be at work, summer camps can also benefit youth by offering aspects of the best-practices research outlined previously.

In response to a lack of summer activity options for children in western Garfield County, ACF has established a month-long summer camp for children ages six to 10 in the Rifle area. Housed at Wamsley Elementary School, the camp provides structured learning time, recreational activities, Folkloric dance and food for 100 children, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. throughout the month of July. The camp is staffed by teachers and teaching assistants who use hands-on projects to reinforce literacy and math skills. Bus service is also provided.
Programming for diverse audiences

Programs that are inclusive of various cultures can both aid in recruiting participation of those whose cultures are recognized, as well as increase tolerance among all participants. A study conducted on Head Start programs demonstrated ways in which a multicultural curriculum can be implemented into various activities. While Head Start serves preschool-aged students, the suggested activities could be made developmentally appropriate for youth ages six to 13. Head Start’s multicultural curriculum includes: cooking and eating foods from different countries, planning potlucks with food from different cultures, learning about and celebrating different cultural holidays such as Chinese New Year, having access to books about different racial and ethnic groups, singing songs in different languages, learning traditional dances from different countries, playing music from around the world, attending ethnic dance performances and other presentations and going on field trips to ethnic-specific museums and shops. The report on Head Start also suggests that staff “reflect the ethnicity of their community and speak the languages of the children they serve.” Likewise, programs should “reflect the everyday experiences of the inhabitants of the local community.”

Examples of Best Practice Programs From Around the Country

In addition to research demonstrating ways in which ACF program areas can be utilized, research also outlines out of school programs that have been deemed successful and could be a model for ACF partners or implemented into existing programs. It is important to remember that the research defines methods for implementing high quality out of school programs. The following are examples of programs that meet the standards for best practices for out of school time:

• According to the Harvard Family Research Project, the Hispanic After School Program serves Spanish-speaking elementary school children in a rural community. Activities include: “Spanish Puerto Rican arts, crafts and singing; discussion of ethnicity and ethnicity-related problems, morals, values, sex roles and skin color; and role modeling by male and female Latino professionals.”

• The 4-H Latino Outreach program in Oregon offers a wide variety of programs throughout the state, all of which focus on reinforcing cultural identity while fitting the daily lives and environments of the youth participants and involving youth in active learning. Examples of cultural activities include folkloric dance groups, the creation of family bands, and art and drama clubs. Another activity present in some of the programs is teaching youth the use of technology including web development, family computer workshops, digital photography and video and podcast production. Some youth also have the opportunity to partake in environmental science activities such as stream restoration and forestry-related science skill development. Additionally, some programs offer tutoring and homework support, community gardening and soccer.

• According to the Harvard Family Research Project, the After-School Peer Tutoring program provides one-on-one tutorials in language arts, science, mathematics and social studies from trained volunteers who are college students.
• The Boys & Girls Club of America Triple Play program strives to teach youth the importance of a healthy lifestyle by teaching youth a “Healthy Habits” curriculum that demonstrates eating smart, keeping fit and forming positive relationships. Youth also participate in sports, fitness and recreation programs.\(^\text{91}\)

• GirlSports Basics is an out of school time program that teaches young females sports skills while enhancing positive attitudes about sports and physical fitness.\(^\text{92}\)

• The Youth Opportunity Advisory Board (YOAB) located in Boulder, Colorado, is a leadership program with minimal dosage throughout the year. However, the program allows youth to plan and implement relevant events for other youth and is an example of how a portion of a city’s sales tax can be used for a specific program.\(^\text{93}\)

• Research by Musson & Gibbons\(^\text{94}\) gives additional examples about how empowering curriculum can be implemented into actual activities. For example, an outdoor adventure program may include teaching about maps and compasses, outdoor clothing, shelter building and safety survival leading to youth planning a three-day backpacking trip. Another program with an arts focus may teach youth the use of several artistic media leading the club to eventually plan and implement an art exhibit of the youth’s work.

• A case study of one successful afterschool program that serves 300 students and includes program staff who either teach at the school or hold other positions at the school, includes programming that is balanced among recreational, academic and enrichment activities including sports programs, music lessons, and reading and math tutoring.\(^\text{95}\)

Opportunities for Aspen Community Foundation

ACF can take steps to implement best practices into regional out of school programs. Specific recommendations that would strengthen the network of out of school time programs include:

• **Assess available programs in the area to see what gaps need to be filled.** This can be done by ensuring that programs are available for each age group within the six to 13 age span, determining how often programs are offered to verify that youth have options throughout the year, tracking location of programs so that youth throughout the community can practically participate in programs, and ensuring that some out of school programs in the area have practitioners who can speak the language of minority youth. If gaps exist, ACF should consider changing the ages certain programs target, increasing dosage of programs, relocating or adding programs in areas lacking options and recruiting practitioners who speak the native languages of youth in the community. These steps will increase the likelihood that youth are not missing out on the benefits of out of school programs due to a lack of access.
• **Facilitate development of a website offered in multiple languages**—those spoken in the community—that can be navigated based on activities offered in programs, ages targeted and location of the program.

• **Collaborate with school districts** to determine if school space can be utilized for programs, thus making it easier for students to attend programs, teachers to see what curriculum would best align with the school day and which students would benefit most from attending programs. Locating a program within the school would also help community members recruit mentors, tutors and those who have an area of expertise in subjects being taught in the program.

• **Sponsor training for out of school time practitioners** teaching them how to best create positive peer-to-adult relationships and empowering curriculum. ACF could also offer training sessions to volunteer mentors so that they understand how to best work with protégés. These practical steps, which are aligned with research on best practices for out of school time, will allow ACF to make improvements to out of school programs throughout its region.
Secondary Education

This final paper focuses on academic mentoring, college counseling and programs that develop life skills geared toward preparing students for post-secondary education.

Why It Matters

Although earlier interventions are essential for child development when considering “Cradle to Career” approaches, it is within secondary education (i.e., high school) settings that some of the earliest development efforts come to bear on successful student outcomes. This time is not only essential for social, emotional and cognitive/academic learning, but is also a time of conflicting motivations and influences. Recent literature suggests that beyond consistent lifelong influences, such as family income and parents’ educational history, outcomes realized during this time are strong predictors of success later in life. This realization has consequently led to a greater focus on secondary education by both practitioners and researchers alike.

In a recent analysis of “what works” in positive youth development, researchers argue that social, emotional and academic learning (SEL) approaches are useful for understanding the complexity of student development. The authors suggest that viewing student development through an SEL lens helps create comprehensive programs that fully address students’ needs. Furthermore, the underlying principles of SEL can help organizations, such as ACF, better coordinate the community’s implementation of academic, prevention and youth development activities (among others), while creating a standardized way of communicating about programming that considers school, family and community factors.

In addition to providing a conceptual framework for viewing high school-age student development, research and evaluation evidence supports an SEL framework as an effective starting point for realistically tackling issues common to the development of secondary-aged youth. When an SEL framework is used, research shows an increase in students’ positive behavior, e.g., increased interpersonal skills, quality of peer and adult relationships, self-control, commitment to schooling and academic achievement. Negative behaviors that have been reduced using SEL approaches include drug and alcohol use, school misbehavior, truancy, high-risk sexual behavior and smoking.

Student-relevant facilitators are equally important to SEL development in secondary students. These facilitators include those significant others, such as counselors and mentors, who have the potential to have a profound impact on positive student outcomes. These individuals are responsible for helping students successfully navigate the final legs of the cradle to career continuum. Both mentors and counselors provide the needed guidance to students in the face of...
of competing influences and decisions. The life skills they have the potential to develop can often set students up for success in post-secondary settings.

**In Our Community**

**The Data**

While many of the 11 high schools within ACF’s service area (54.5%, or six high schools) are outperforming the state’s 72.4% graduation rate, nearly one-half (45.4%, or five high schools) are either slightly or significantly underperforming compared to the rest of the state in terms of percentage of students graduating.

When breaking-down graduation rates by race/ethnicity, some ACF-area high schools are only graduating one-third of their Latino students (Bridges and Yampah High Schools).

Dropout rates in the ACF area paint a slightly different picture of secondary education in the region. While many of the high schools with the lowest graduation rates also saw the highest dropout rates, some high schools with above average graduation rates also saw some of the higher dropout rates (e.g., Grand Valley High School). Overall, the dropout rate in the ACF area is more than twice the dropout rates seen across the state (7.5% and 3.1%, for the ACF region and the state, respectively).

The bottom line: In Aspen to Parachute, many young people are not graduating.

**Current Programming and Investments**

Several programs exist in the ACF region to address graduation rates, dropout rates and other factors related to secondary education. One of these includes the Pre-Collegiate Program, which was started by and continues to be supported by ACF. This program motivates and prepares academically qualified and under-represented students to graduate from high school and become the first generation in their families to attend college. The program includes three main components: Mentor Program, Saturday Academies and Summer Academic Camp. Additional efforts present in the region include college/career counseling programs, in which a high school has a counselor solely dedicated to providing students with the information they need to successfully navigate college, and ultimately a career, after high school. Other, less formalized efforts include the provision of life-skills coaching, which are a part of mentoring and counseling efforts in the region.

The map below indicates where the high schools are in ACF’s region.
Gaps and opportunities
Currently, there is very little systemization of these programs across all high schools in the region. For example, just under one-half of all high schools have the Pre-Collegiate Program (or something similar) available to them, with even less having access to a dedicated college/career counselor (only Aspen High School has such a counselor). Considering the combined reach of these programs in the community, there are still five high schools that are not receiving either program. Presently, no high schools in the region have both a Pre-Collegiate program and a designated college counselor. This is lack of uniformity is problematic when considering the strength of coordinated approaches.

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<tr>
<th>TABLE 2. PROGRAM AVAILABILITY BY HIGH SCHOOL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated College/Career Counselor</td>
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<tr>
<td>PreCollegiate Program (or similar)</td>
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<td>Note. Schools in bold don’t have either program</td>
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What Works in Secondary Education Programs

Academic Mentoring
Several best practices emerge from the literature on mentoring program components and systematization of mentoring programs.

Having a quality mentoring relationship is a consistent predictor of student success. As students enter high school, there are many conflicting influences that pull students toward positive and negative behaviors. Non-related (i.e., non-family), “very important others,” can help guide students when negative influences are at their worst. In addition, being involved in a mentoring relationship has shown to lead to positive growth on SEL dimensions. For example,
students in a positive mentoring relationship have been shown to have lower levels of depression, more positive attitudes toward career attainment, a lessening of problem behaviors, lessened drug and alcohol use, lessening of risky sexual behavior, increased school connectedness, increased sense of school membership, community connectedness and improved attitudes toward self, adults and the future.\textsuperscript{102} What’s more, these positive results are not limited to at-risk youth. Recent research demonstrates even those students “on-track” when it comes the SEL dimensions and success in high school demonstrate higher rates of positive outcomes as well.\textsuperscript{103}

Although the positive impact of very important others cannot be refuted, more than simply providing a mentor is required for positive student outcomes to occur. Research and practice literature suggests that characteristics of the mentors and of the program can help develop a strong mentoring program or improve a mentoring program.

**Mentor characteristics**

- **Mentors should demonstrate a genuine interest in the student as a person.** In practice, mentors would make statements such as “the student is fun to be around,” when listing reasons for continued involvement with the student.

- **Mentors should provide a combination of adult-like qualities (e.g., providing advice, serving as a role model) and “peer-like” relationships (e.g., nonjudgmental, non-punitive, fun).** By providing this balance of adult and peer, the very important others fill a special niche in the student’s life that is not filled by other adults or peers.

- **Mentors should attempt to make the relationship with their mentee as natural and normal as possible.** Although the assignment to a mentee may be unavoidable for many programs across the U.S., and for the ACF-region programs more specifically, mentor-mentee relationships that form naturally tend to show better outcomes.

- **Mentors should always be aware of their attitude and behavior when engaging their mentee.** Although more prevalent with at-risk youth, a mentor’s negative mood has been shown to relate to mentee misconduct.

- **Problem mentee behavior should not be sanctioned by the mentor.** Demonstrating the power of mentor relationships, research and practice demonstrates that a mentor’s disapproval of mentee misconduct has the same impact as disapproval by parents and friends.

**Characteristics of successful programs**

Recent efforts have also been made to identify recent programmatic characteristics that are common across the most impactful mentoring programs. Researchers recently\textsuperscript{104} conducted a review of over 50 evaluations of the effects of mentoring programs on youth. This review included evaluation of some of the most prominent mentoring programs from across the U.S. Beyond the common characteristics of guiding students to successful outcomes, mentoring program should also reflect the following:

- **Mentoring programs should include, or at least consider, formal evaluation throughout the development process.** Formative and summative evaluation can help
organizations learn more about how their particular program operates within a given community and what goals are being reached.

- **A single-factor approach to mentor programming should be avoided.** Comprehensive mentoring programs that focus on several dimensions of student development demonstrate higher rates of success than those that take a single-component approach.

- **Programs should include continuous training and support for mentors.** Although mentors may be seasoned and confident in their approach, certain situations may arise that call for mentors to learn new skills.

- **Structured activities for mentor and youth should be offered.** Although mentors may enjoy planning activities for their mentees, offering some set activities allows the mentor to spend less time planning events and more time focusing on the development of the mentor-mentee bond.

- **There should be set expectations for frequency of mentor-mentee contact.** Youth involved in mentoring programs already have preconceived notions of adults. Many times, this attitude is negative and has grown out of inconsistencies and the general lack of dependability in other aspects of their life. Mentoring programs should be a constant in the youth’s life.

- **Mentoring programs should reference published guidelines for effective practice.** Organizations such as the National Mentoring Working Group have published standards covering mentoring program operations. These include standards on recruitment, screening, training, matching, monitoring and support, and closure.

To become and/or remain effective, there are many issues for mentoring programs to consider. It is important for mentoring programs to move beyond the simple “screen and assign” approach to facilitating mentoring relationships. Recent evidence suggests that there is a long way to go. In fact, only 23% of mentoring programs offer any ongoing training after relationships have begun. Programs should provide support throughout the lifecycle of the mentor-mentee relationship.

**College Counseling**

Somewhat similar to the role provided by mentors, high school counselors play a role in guiding high school students to a path of success. However, the role of the counselor is much more formal than that of the mentor, and more often occurs within a structured system (e.g., high school) where many of the operational guidelines are defined and non-malleable. To make things even more difficult for counselors in the high school setting, high school-age students have already begun to solidify their attitude and beliefs when it comes to future life decisions (e.g., whether or not to attend college). Furthering complicating matters is the general lack of resources and the number of students counselors are expected to reach using these limited resources.

Students who receive quality counseling in high school show increased odds of enrolling in a four-year college. High school counseling also increases the chances that students will feel they have received enough information regarding “next steps” once they graduate high school.
This information provided by counselors can be more fact-based (e.g., college costs, the type of college they can apply to), or more operationally based (e.g., how to apply for financial aid and what the college admittance process looks like). Further elevating the importance of counseling programs, counselors are often seen as reliable sources of information within the formal education setting.

*Focusing more specifically on college counseling in high school, The Center for Higher Education Policy and Analysis reported that college counseling received in high school is one of the major preconditions for college access.* A report from The Education Research Institute (TERI) further summarized research and practitioner evidence from the field and suggested that effective counselors should focus on the following college advising tasks:

- **Structuring information and activities that promote and support students’ college aspirations and a general understanding of college.** Research suggests that high school students have misinformation when it comes to attending college. For example, students often overestimate tuition at colleges. In a recent federal study, only 18% of high school students and 30% of parents had information on college costs.
- **Helping parents understand their role in creating a culture of college attainment away from school.** Using evidence from a system-wide counseling approach to providing college information, evaluation demonstrated that frequent interactions (at least once a month) with families produced significant gains in parent knowledge of factors related to college.
- **Performing more traditional roles, such as ensuring the correct academic actions are being taken by the student as they relate to the college admission process.** In the face of educating parents and addressing misinformation, counselors should not lose focus on ensuring that academic expectations are in place at the beginning of high-school, or sooner if possible. College preparation courses are not uncommon among effective college counseling programs.
- **Influencing students’ decision-making processes to help them make the decision to attend college.** Although counselors remain influential throughout the cradle to career process, the peak of influence, as it relates to making the choice to apply to college, comes in the student’s junior year of high school. Additionally, a counselor’s continuous support throughout the entire admission process has shown to be an important factor for college attainment. This is especially true for students with a lower socioeconomic status.
- **Counselors should also attempt to impact the school culture to include college attainment activities in its mission.** Although research and practice does not point to one specific positive outcome related to having a strong college attainment culture, there is evidence to support that having this culture in place increases positive student outcomes overall.

Although one of the main goals for counselor programs is to expose students to opportunities after high school, and the evidence of its importance abounds, counseling remains a low priority...
for many schools. In fact, only 71% of states have even implemented a statewide comprehensive counseling program. Of those states that have implemented a counseling program, the average ratio of student-to-counselors is 467:1 (Colorado currently stands at 470:1). This average is almost twice the national recommended ratio of 250:1. There are other statistics pointing to the negative state of college counseling in the U.S.¹⁰⁷:

- **Only 35% of public secondary schools require counselors to participate in professional development**
- **Public secondary school counselors spent only 22.8% of their time on college admission counseling**
- **57% of high school counselors spend 0%–19% of their time on college counseling**
- **When factoring in national ratios and other variables, the average school counselor spends only 38 minutes with each student for college counseling**
- **When asked about the goals of their counseling programs, only 26% emphasize college preparation. However, this number is higher for smaller schools.**

High schools in ACF’s region may not be that different from these national statistics. Resources for counseling are most likely stretched just as thin, and student-to-counselor ratios most likely remain above the recommended guidelines. However, there are exemplary counseling services in place for students. For example, Aspen High School has a designated college counselor (established with initial support from ACF), which is quite rare compared to current trends across the state and nation. ACF should determine what components of the Aspen High School counseling program work for the population that ACF serves. Focusing on what works will allow ACF to guide other organizations that want to support this particular effort in the cradle to career process. Moving forward, there are several guidelines that may serve as useful starting points for discussions around college counseling in high school and increasing counselors’ roles in college attainment among ACF-area youth:

- **Counselors should receive pre-training and ongoing professional development in relation to college attainment process**
- **Counselors should be given support to focus on college preparatory responsibilities**
- **Counselors should be given the training they need to build trust with students and families**
- **Counselors should be encouraged to increase their overall knowledge in regards to college admission and finances**
- **Counselors should be supported in their efforts to alter their high school’s college attainment culture**

ACF may consider options around providing professional development activities for area counselors. Providing such activities (e.g., workshops, guest lectures, training sessions) and/or materials (e.g., training-guides focused on specific areas of need, such as college financing), ACF could quickly become a valued resource for counselors in the area while addressing some of the most pressing issues facing counselors (i.e., lack of resources).
Life Skills
Life-skills coaching is also a major consideration when preparing secondary students for success after high school. Effective life-skills coaching programs have been implemented within both mentoring and counseling programs and typically involve a combination of the SEL factors previously discussed.

Effective life-skills coaching programs have been shown to lead to a reduction of secondary students’ alcohol, tobacco and other drug use, higher positive mental health and lower rates of distress. A related approach to life-skills coaching, competence building, has shown to buffer the impact of negative life events and increase the adaptive ability of youth. Successful programs have historically included a focus on the following factors: self-esteem, resisting advertising pressure, managing anxiety, communicating effectively, developing personal relationships, asserting one’s rights, decision making, self-efficacy and competence building. Some life-skills training programs have broken specific skill sets into three categories. These include the following:

- **Personal self-management skills.** These are skills specifically related to ability to define goals, generate alternative solutions and consider consequences. Training in this dimension can also include relaxation training and training to inhibit impulsive reactions. Students should learn how to set realistic goals, evaluate and record their progress, and learn how to handle stress and failure along the way.

- **Social skills.** These skills are related to those involving getting along with others. Training in this dimension may focus on helping youth overcome shyness, give and receive compliments, initiate social interactions and be verbally and nonverbally assertive.

- **Drug related information and skills.** Some programs include drug resistance information in their training due to the propensity of illegal substance use within high school settings. Training on this dimension can include providing the correct drug use information to youth, social resistance skills and health-related information about alcohol, tobacco and drug use.

An additional advantage of life-skills coaching programs, beyond the fact they can be easily incorporated into existing programming, is cost. Programs, such as the Life Skills Training (LST) program, which has been heavily vetted and is widely used, costs relatively little to implement. Recent published research suggests that LST programming can be instituted for $5–$10 per student. Considering the costs, and the fact that life skills can be easily added to existing efforts, makes life-skills coaching an attractive option to add to programming available in ACF’s region.

The Role of Scholarships and Vocational Programs
There are other areas in which ACF hopes to gain a further understanding of secondary education that don’t necessarily fit within the areas previously discussed. However, these areas can impact student motivations and options for finding success within the secondary and even post-secondary settings. Scholarships and vocational programs have their place in the secondary
education setting and should be mentioned here as another area in which ACF could impact youth.

**Scholarships**

Many have wondered if the presence of external rewards, such as scholarships, increase student engagement and achievement. Results from research and practice provide mixed results. Having scholarships in place often increases achievement for those who have fewer barriers and are already on-track for success (e.g., upper-middle class students whose parents went to college). However, when it comes to lower-income or minority students the results aren’t as clear-cut. In a recent analysis of both merit-based and universal scholarship programs, researchers \(^{113}\) found that merit aid impacts those who were most likely to attend college anyway. **Universal programs, which reach a more diverse student base, and for which most students can qualify, provide benefits to both those who are already achieving, as well as those limited by low-income or minority status.** Research from the field suggests that universal programs double the percentage of all high school graduates who enroll in higher quality colleges. The same researchers go on to demonstrate that a larger, broad-based scholarship program can halt enrollment decline in certain types of districts. Researchers end their summary of scholarship programs from across the country with a series of recommendations. These include the following:

- **All scholarship programs should have a simple application process.** The complications around the application and financial aid process are some of the most heavily cited barriers to college enrollment. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that best practice in regards to scholarships and diverse populations is to keep the procedures and information simple.

- **Merit-based scholarships have their place, but universal scholarships should be considered.** Although merit-based programs do increase achievement, they do not reach secondary students who need the most help. Considering this, there should be a concurrent focus on scholarship programs for those not eligible for merit-based programs in the region. More universally-based programs have been documented to reach those most in need, and can be instituted within certain limitations to keep costs down (e.g., only for state colleges).

- **Lower grades should not be a disqualifier.** Many colleges offer open-admission policies that will allow those with lower grades to attend. However, addressing perceptions of cost and providing academic support increases the number of those who go on to earn a four-year college degree.

**Vocational programs**

There has been great debate on whether support for vocational programs should continue and whether this support should be shouldered by high schools. \(^{114}\) Some argue that vocational education should be placed within post-secondary education, whereas others suggest that there are positive community benefits to secondary-based programs. ACF has expressed interest in

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learning more about where these programs fit. Research to support secondary-based vocational programs suggests the following:

- **Students who end up within a technical vocational track have better achievement when they stay on that track.** 115 Research comparing secondary achievement of both those on a traditional academic track with those on a vocational track has shown that vocational track students are not likely to go on and achieve more if they had chosen differently.

- **Vocational programming can be an effective transition strategy for students.** 116 Whether it’s to prepare student for college by providing necessary program skills, basic college credits, or increasing the functionality of the community through workforce development, vocational programs can have a positive impact.

- **Transfer programs can be beneficial.** Traditional vocational programs are beginning to work with more and more two-year vocational institutions to increase achievement. Research suggests that there is growth in the number of vocational students who end up in four-year colleges after attending a two-year vocationally-oriented school. Often these two-year programs involve two-year colleges.

- **Local support is important.** Successful vocational programs often have support from business and community partners.

**Opportunities for Aspen Community Foundation**

When considering options for access, ACF provides numerous opportunities for involvement within the cradle to career approach. Although secondary education settings may prove to be the most challenging in terms of changing the path of youth, it is also a time of exciting opportunity for those wishing to impact youth. Mentoring, or very important others, college counseling and providing life-skills coaching, are just a few of the options for positively impacting youth. When managing any efforts aimed at secondary youth, it is of utmost importance to consider the student’s surrounding environment, social network and other important factors. Positive student impacts may be minimized if care is not taken in the approach.

Beyond carefully considering the approach, it is important to become involved early. Late adolescence and early adulthood ushers in a time when attitudes become solidified and important life decisions are made. Research and practitioners agree that focusing on high school-aged youth early in their first year, or sooner, if possible is ideal. Social, emotional and academic competencies can all be influenced during this time, especially when it comes to efforts focused on the three options for access discussed in the current section.

More specific recommendations that ACF could undertake quickly to address secondary education in their service area include the following:
• **Infuse evaluation into programs.** As recommended throughout the literature and practiced across the U.S., some of the most efficient youth programs conduct regular evaluation. This can be in the form of summative evaluation (providing a picture of current efforts), or formative evaluation (uncovering new ways to build programs in the future). Evaluation goes beyond providing programmatic information to address issues of program sustainability, as well.

• **Provide resources to support current efforts.** Whether this is in the form of training sessions or providing simple best-practice literature, any additional support given by ACF may ultimately lead to positive youth outcomes.

• **Offer support and information to those not receiving it.** Due to many factors, families are not provided the information they need to successfully guide their child while away from the school settings. Information such as college admission requirements, financial aid and information regarding current support in the region would be a welcome addition to ACF’s service region.

• **Coordinate current services.** Research suggests that those working with secondary youth in concert can have a larger impact on positive outcomes. Although it may not be realistic to influence other organizations, simply offering a common forum for communication may weaken some of the barriers that are often seen between community-based groups.

• **Call on the community.** In any community there are people who are unaware of the current state of various issues impacting cradle to career development. This lack of information may be due to easily solved problems, such as simple lack of awareness when it comes to the issues. However, there are often more complicated reasons for lack of community involvement. These include such things as social and economic disparity, and the sense of disconnectedness this creates. Efforts should focus on making the connections between secondary youth development and positive community outcomes (e.g., a highly educated workforce).

**Conclusion**

The ACF service area houses children of all ages with mounting needs so that they can grow up to become productive, self-sufficient adults. There are a variety of evidence-based approaches that ACF can implement to strengthen programs that do exist, fund areas where there are gaps, and use its leverage and resources to coordinate efforts. The cradle to career initiative provides a framework for strategic investment that will allow children of all ages from Aspen to Parachute ready for school, succeed in school and go on to post-secondary education.
Endnotes


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49 The National Association for the Education of Young Children, the premier organization that accredits child-care and early-learning programs, has an initiative to define culturally competent practices.


