Measuring & Learning

This report offers an overview of the four goals of the Aspen to Parachute Cradle to Career Initiative. Each goal has several specific, measurable indicators that are used to evaluate progress toward the mission of the Initiative. Cradle to Career partners worked collaboratively to determine the goals and indicators and to create a region-wide Action Plan for Youth Success.

GOAL 1: READY FOR KINDERGARTEN
- Mothers with risk factors receiving home visits
- Participation in preschool
- Children assessed ready for kindergarten

GOAL 2: DEVELOP SOCIAL & LIFE ASSETS FOR SUCCESS & HAPPINESS
- Hope
- Engagement in school

GOAL 3: SUCCEED ACADEMICALLY
- 3rd grade reading
- 8th grade math

GOAL 4: GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL READY FOR COLLEGE & CAREER
- High school graduation
- ACT/SAT scores
- Postsecondary plans

In addition to the Cradle to Career goals and indicators, data are collected on demographics, socio-economics, social determinants, etc. This information is combined to tell a more complete story of our region and its issues and is part of a larger system of learning and evaluation for the Cradle to Career Initiative.
The vision is to increase youth success from Aspen to Parachute by ensuring that children in the region are ready for kindergarten and that they graduate from high school ready for college and career.

The Aspen to Parachute Cradle to Career Initiative was launched in 2012 to address the persistent issues facing our youth. Profound achievement gaps existed between our low-income students and their more affluent peers. Children were entering kindergarten unprepared to learn, elementary and middle school students were struggling in school, and high school students were unprepared for college and career. We knew that improving youth outcomes – from birth through career readiness – would not only help them succeed now and in the future but would also substantially benefit our region’s quality of life and economy.

Collective Impact
About 100 community leaders from nonprofits, schools, governments, civic groups, and philanthropy are part of the Cradle to Career Initiative network. In the early stages, these partners created a regional Action Plan for Youth Success and implemented more than a dozen collaborative action projects between Parachute and Aspen. Now, Cradle to Career partners are focusing on advancing the goals of the Initiative by analyzing accumulated data to inform decisions and priorities, identifying levers for policy change, and strengthening systems that serve youth and families.

The power of collective impact comes from enabling ‘collective seeing, learning, and doing’ rather than following a linear plan.

As an organization committed to serving the Aspen to Parachute region since 1980, Aspen Community Foundation provides backbone support for the Cradle to Career Initiative.

Our Community

Children in our region have highly diverse backgrounds and experiences.

The Aspen to Parachute region spans an 80-mile corridor of ranchland and mountain slopes along the Roaring Fork and Colorado rivers in northwestern Colorado. This area covers three counties and includes four school districts.

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**Garfield County**
- Median Income: $69,161
- Self-Sufficiency Standard: $75,239
- Unemployment: 3.1%
- Poverty: 11%
- Children in Poverty: 13%

**Pitkin County**
- Median Income: $79,556
- Self-Sufficiency Standard: $95,667
- Unemployment: 2.3%
- Poverty: 8%
- Children in Poverty: 7%

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**Regional Population**

88,830

- White: 71%
- Hispanic/Latino: 23%
- Other Race/Ethnicity: 6%

23% Language other than English spoken at home
14% Foreign born
Who are our children?

20,000 children, aged 0-18, live from Aspen to Parachute

FREE OR REDUCED PRICE LUNCH (FRL)

- Region: 43%
- Parachute and Battlement Mesa: 59%
- Rifle, Silt, and New Castle: 49%
- Glenwood Springs, Carbondale, and Basalt: 46%
- Aspen: 5%

48% of students are a race or ethnicity other than White

240 students are homeless meaning they lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence

74% of children have both parents working

24% of students are English Language Learners (ELL)

345 students are immigrants meaning they arrived in the country in the last three years
GOAL 1: Ready for Kindergarten

90% of brain development occurs between birth and five years old and provides the foundation for sound social, emotional, and cognitive development.

Positive experiences and enriching environments allow children to develop the foundational capacities for learning like executive function and self-regulation. Children who experience ongoing stress and adversity such as neglect, domestic violence, or substance abuse in the home, often demonstrate limited vocabularies, disruptive behaviors, and other challenges that inhibit their ability to learn and thrive.

Positive development for children begins with the family and also involves other adults who play important roles in their lives. Programs that support parents, such as evidence-based home visitation, and high-quality preschool with skilled teachers are two of the strategies that can improve kindergarten readiness especially for children from low-income households.

Number of Mothers with Multiple Risk Factors Receiving Intensive Home Visits

Children raised in households that are stable economically are far more likely to have better health, higher school achievement levels, and more long-term job prospects.

### Participation in Preschool

These data are based on parental reports when children are registered for kindergarten.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014-15</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-16</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016-17</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017-18</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Teaching Strategies Gold (TS Gold)

Teaching Strategies Gold is an ongoing, observation-based assessment tool designed to assess the developmental progress of children from birth through age 8 in six primary domains: physical, social-emotional, cognitive, literacy, language, and mathematics.

In 2017, school districts across Colorado began using TS Gold for kindergartners, creating, for the first time, a way to collectively assess kindergarten readiness. While further analysis is necessary, early data indicate that children from low-income households are showing slower developmental progress than their more affluent peers.

- **35%** of FRL eligible Colorado kindergartners meet all 6 domains
- **56%** of non FRL eligible Colorado kindergartners meet all 6 domains

### SUMMARY

In the Ready for Kindergarten goal area, very few systems for collecting regional data on the indicators existed prior to the Cradle to Career Initiative. Thus, some of the early efforts of the Initiative were to identify and implement ways to collect and analyze regional information. Now, with these data systems in place, the work of Cradle to Career is transitioning from supporting program design and expansion, to analyzing regional data over time to inform action.

- The home visitation data is focused on families enrolled in the Healthy Families America program; preschool participation data is collected through parent surveys. Other organizations have also implemented home visits to low-income and isolated families but a universal data-collection system to compare outcomes to these multiple approaches does not yet exist.

- Mobile preschool programs such as Aspen Community Foundation’s Preschool on Wheels and Valley Settlement’s El Busesito along with the expansion of bricks and mortar preschools have increased the number of children who attend preschool.

- All four of our region’s school districts and a third of preschool programs are now utilizing TS Gold with children between the ages of 3 and 6 years. The information gathered before and at the start of kindergarten will inform preschool and kindergarten curriculum and practices that set the foundations for life-long learning.
GOAL 2: Develop Social and Life Assets for Success and Happiness

Social-emotional skills enable youth to adapt to change, persist through challenges, innovate, problem solve, and advocate for themselves and others when needed. Developing these skills begins at birth and continues through adulthood. Youth who develop and nurture these characteristics are more likely to engage in their community, develop healthy self-esteem, and experience success.

Hope

The Gallup Student Poll is a survey that measures the engagement and hope of students in 5th-12th grades. The Hope Index shows the ideas and energy students have for the future. Hope has also been linked to student success in school.

- 43% Strongly Hopeful
- 37% Stuck
- 20% Discouraged

In the Gallup Student Survey, 43% of our region’s 5th-12th graders report being strongly hopeful. 37% are stuck. 20% are discouraged.
Engagement in School

Gallup’s Engagement Index indicates students’ involvement in and enthusiasm for school. Engaged students are excited about what’s happening at their school and what they’re learning. Nationally, engagement levels are strong in 5th grade and show a consistent decrease before bottoming out in 11th grade.

When young people have the opportunity to make contributions that are valued by others, they gain self-confidence and come to see themselves as capable and able to affect change in their own lives and the larger world.


Summary

Our region’s low Hope score and the persistent gap between our White and Latino youth are troubling. Family stressors like financial struggles, health issues and uncertainty around the political climate impact children, increase anxiety and, in some cases, lead to risky behavior. Cradle to Career partners are focusing on prevention strategies and helping youth who are engaged in risky behaviors and/or who are involved with the juvenile justice system get back on a successful track.
GOAL 3:  
Succeed Academically

Education is a universally recognized strategy to improve life-long outcomes. Students who succeed academically can manage the demands of higher levels of education and therefore have the opportunity to design their future.

Third grade reading and eighth grade math scores are strong predictors of high school success. Children who are not proficient in reading by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school. Proficiency in eighth grade math is an indicator of both high school success and postsecondary readiness.

It is a given that today’s level of student learning will directly impact our future economic and civic well-being.

— Terry K. Peterson,  
Expanding Minds and Opportunities (2013)
Colorado Measures of Academic Success

The new Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS) is the result of a multi-year process by the State of Colorado to develop relevant and rigorous standards and aligned assessments to evaluate and improve student learning.

Since 2015, the CMAS has been used to assess the proficiency of students across the state in the areas of science, social studies, English language arts, and math. CMAS scores are meant to help parents, teachers, and school administrators gain a greater understanding of how well their schools are helping children reach educational benchmarks.

SUMMARY

Across the region, reading and math scores plummeted with the adoption of the CMAS testing instrument in 2015. The assessment is more complex and rigorous than previous ones and schools are still adapting curriculum and teaching methods. That said, proficiency scores continue to be alarmingly low for free and reduced lunch students and students of color.
GOAL 4: Graduate High School Ready for College and Career

Most jobs in today’s economy require postsecondary education and training. To be competitive in the workforce and to be economically independent, young people need something beyond high school – college degree, career-tech certification, or trade or vocational training.

Developing a postsecondary plan can be challenging. There has been a lack of understanding, guidance, and support both at home and at school to help students explore career options and develop a roadmap.

The Cradle to Career Initiative has addressed the substantial gaps in college and career advising programs in the region so that now all students have the support needed to prepare for and matriculate into a postsecondary degree or certificate program. All nine of our region’s high schools have college and career counseling programs and two have additional programs directed at connecting students to career exploration opportunities such as internships, job shadowing and work-study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High School Graduation Rates</th>
<th>Graduation Gaps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2012</strong></td>
<td><strong>2017</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STATE</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REGION</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2017</strong></td>
<td><strong>2017</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHITE</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRL</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We need educators, community organizations, employers, and volunteers to work together in new and more productive ways that spark student interest in learning.

– Terry K. Peterson, Expanding Minds and Opportunities (2013)

Postsecondary Planning

ACT scores provide an indicator of college readiness and often correlate with a student’s probability of earning a college degree.

2016 ACT Scores

19.2 Region Range for ACT Scores 23.8

In 2017, Colorado adopted the SAT as its universal college-readiness assessment. Cradle to Career partners are in the process of updating this indicator.

SUMMARY

Graduation rates have increased for all students across the region and we’ve seen an increase in the number of students attending two- or four-year colleges as well as a strong number of students with a plan that can lead to financial independence.
Moving the Needle Toward Youth Success Across Our Region

The formative work of the Aspen to Parachute Cradle to Career Initiative was guided by questions of how to increase the number of children who are ready for kindergarten, meet academic benchmarks, have social and life skills, and are college and career ready. Research into these questions informed the creation of a regional collaborative Action Plan for Youth Success with strategies that addressed quality, access, capacity, best practices, and program design; all intended to impact the Initiative’s goals and indicators.

As this report shows, some indicators have increased, some have not changed, and some have decreased. In some cases, the increases have not been significant. This analysis has prompted new thinking and new questions: What are other root causes and conditions that prevent children from thriving?

Research shows that children who have reliable relationships with adults, enriching environments, predictable interactions, and adequate nutrition will develop strong brain structures that enable them to focus, engage, and learn. When faced with adversity, these children are better equipped to adapt, manage, and regulate.

Unfortunately, some children instead experience intense chronic family stress caused by such things as financial insecurity, untreated adult mental illness, substance abuse, lack of medical care, long commutes, isolation, and overcrowded or chaotic homes. Their brain structures are built for survival and fight/flight/freeze, making it very difficult to focus, store information, regulate emotions, and learn. These early issues show up across the age continuum and remain into adulthood.

Local data indicate that 20-25% of our region’s children are in environments that create this type of stress.
The primary strategies for closing the achievement gap – feeding a hungry child, removing them from abusive households, providing quality early education, afterschool programs, mentoring – are all important activities. But for children in chronic stress situations, these strategies often aren’t enough.

The organizations and individuals working on the Aspen to Parachute Cradle to Career Initiative continue to dive into research on how to address the chronic stress on families and other effective strategies for improving outcomes for children. This includes looking at data and research, strengthening networks, building community investment in family outcomes, and identifying opportunities for policy change.

Together, we are building a region of thriving children, supported and supportive families, and healthy communities.
We are grateful for the innovative and collaborative work that the Aspen to Parachute Cradle to Career Initiative is doing to build youth success and then to measure the results. We commend the Aspen Community Foundation for its leadership and applaud the region’s citizens for supporting their youth in this visionary way.

- John Hickenlooper, Governor of Colorado

Using the strategy of collective impact, the organizations and individuals working on the Aspen to Parachute Cradle to Career Initiative continue to explore effective approaches for improving outcomes for children by using data and research, strengthening networks, building community investments in youth success, and identifying opportunities for policy change. Together these partners are building a region of thriving children, supported and supportive families, and healthy communities.

Aspen Community Foundation (ACF) was founded in 1980 to build philanthropy, support nonprofit organizations, and bring people together to solve community issues. In the more than 35 years since its founding, ACF has convened local organizations and leading stakeholders to identify regional needs and implement effective solutions through its relationships, institutional knowledge and grantmaking. The Aspen to Parachute Cradle to Career Initiative originated in ACF’s recognition of the persistent achievement gaps between low-income and more affluent youth in our region.

For more information and to learn how to become involved in the Cradle to Career Initiative, contact Tamara Tormohlen, Executive Director, tamara@aspencommunityfoundation.org

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