



Partnerships Deliver on Quality Early Learning in Wisconsin & Colorado

By: Maricela Palomares, director, community partnerships at Clayton Early Learning; Paula Smith, vice president, Early Learning Services at Clayton Early Learning; Lydia Reaves, director of childcare partnerships at Next Door and Myranda Syrjanen, vice president of programs at Next Door

Supporting Young Children & Families

Throughout this crisis, our Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships have brought the strength, courage, and resilience of families and child care providers to the forefront, offering hope for a path forward despite increasingly challenging circumstances. Partnerships funds help our partners deliver remote services to infants, toddlers, and their families while they prepare to re-open. Re-opening will make it possible to continue a comprehensive, multi-generational approach to meet the educational, health, and nutritional needs of children during a time when these supports are hard to come by for families.

Tischa Brown, director of education — Early Childhood at JO’S Early Learning Academy, a small, for-profit child care center in Milwaukee, WI, recently opened her center’s parking lot for a supply “drive through” so that families from her own center, as well as those enrolled in other centers, could secure food, diapers, formula, masks, and educational materials during the pandemic.

JO’S Early Learning Academy is a child care partner of [Next Door](#), an early education organization operating two-generation programs, including Educare Milwaukee, to improve school readiness for children from birth to age 5 in Milwaukee’s central city and support their parents through adult education and family engagement opportunities.

Next Door partners with [nine local child care providers](#) through its Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships grant ([Partnerships](#)). All but one of these partners closed in mid-March at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic; the remaining site stayed open to provide care in a limited capacity for children of essential workers.

Next Door has continued to provide critical resources for Early Head Start (EHS) families served by each of its partners and has continued to pay child care partners for EHS slots, regardless of closures. Brown is grateful for this ongoing financial support, which makes it possible to continue to pay staff, rather than furloughing them. Hosting supply pick-ups in a location close to many of the EHS families served across Next Door’s partners is just one of the ways Brown demonstrates commitment to this vital partnership.

“These pick-ups, when so many things are uncertain, have given parents one less thing to worry about,” said Brown. “Through our partnership with Next Door, JO’S has been able to meet the needs of our families far beyond what we could have done by ourselves. Smaller providers do not have the resources to coordinate such comprehensive services for their children and families.”

Easing Devastating Economic Impacts

Equitable relationships, tangible resources, and coaching and professional learning supports, which are foundational to all [successful Partnerships](#), have proved to be even more significant in confronting the immense challenges resulting from the COVID-19 crisis. Through its Partnerships, [Clayton Early Learning](#), home of [Educare Denver](#), works with four child care partners located across urban neighborhoods in Denver, the community of San Luis Valley in rural south-central Colorado, and Summit County located in the mountains of Colorado. Like Next Door, Clayton has continued payment for EHS slots since partners closed in mid-March. Both of our organizations have intensified support for child care programs, staff, and families through our Partnerships, recognizing the enormous toll this situation has taken on children and those who care for them.

The child care picture nationally is grim, but [the exact picture varies from state to state, and even by community](#). As a result of the health care pandemic and during a Safer at Home emergency order, Wisconsin child care providers received child care subsidy payments, regardless of child attendance. During this time, parents have maintained eligibility under amended child care assistance rules. Child care programs that remained open to provide care have done so under guidance from the state regarding enrollment, capacity, and health and safety practices. As of May 18, the [Wisconsin Legislation approved a plan](#) for distributing \$51 million dollars of federal child care funding via the bi-partisan Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic (CARES) Act, including payments for child care for children of essential workers, incentive pay for child care teachers, and support for temporarily closed providers so they can re-open.

In Colorado, where the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program is administered at the county level, providers have received child care subsidy payments as determined by county level policies regarding absences and enrollment. Consequently, Clayton's partners have varying levels of financial support. Under the creation of the Colorado Emergency Child Care Collaborative, essential workers were eligible for 100% tuition coverage through May 24, though child care has not been limited to children of essential workers. While Colorado's \$42.5 million in federal child care funding from the CARES Act is targeted to support emergency child care, flexibility for subsidy payments to providers, and potential hazard pay for child care workers, no formal plan to date exists for distribution of these funds.

Partnerships Create Conditions for Success

Heading into June as our states ease coronavirus restrictions, many of our child care partners are re-opening to meet the needs of employers and parents returning to work. However, as the circumstances in which they will re-open continue to evolve, we must address health and safety concerns while not losing sight of the goals of high-quality early care and education - helping children, especially those in underserved communities, develop the skills they need to succeed in school and in life.

Early Head Start creates opportunities for child care providers to support the comprehensive needs of young children and their families that result in positive and meaningful educational, social, emotional, and health outcomes. Early Head Start funding and extra staff capacity make it possible for our child care partners to offer health, including mental health, and parent engagement supports to families that they could not afford to deliver with revenues from parent fees and public child care subsidies alone.

Without the resources, public policies, and funding supports to respond to the trauma our families are experiencing as the result of increases in unemployment, social isolation, food insecurity, and health concerns, the opportunity gap for children who have been traditionally underserved will continue to widen.