


2022 Spring Tour Report



NEW MEXICO

Early Childhood
Education & Care Department





Secretary Elizabeth Groginsky touring San Jose Day Care in Carlsbad, NM.

2022 Spring Tour Summary

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

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

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

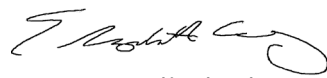
wherever we went. It was such an honor to get to know all of you in person, learn more about your communities, families and children, and better understand your unique needs and challenges. New Mexico truly is a diverse and beautiful place with so much potential, and we learned a tremendous amount from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

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

This report compiles and reports what we heard from people on our tour, especially the themes and issues that were raised repeatedly during our travels. These issues align with ECECD's five year strategic plan: **1)** school readiness, **2)** family and community engagement, **3)** government-to-government, and **4)** early childhood ecosystem alignment. In addition to documenting what we learned and heard, we also describe the state's current and future work that addresses the needs and issues raised on our tour.

The Spring Tour 2022 a wonderful and fruitful journey, and we are excited to incorporate what we learned into our planning, strategies, and actions for New Mexico.

Sincerely,



Secretary Elizabeth Groginsky

School Readiness

All children entering kindergarten with the social-emotional, cognitive, and academic skills needed to thrive is a key goal for ECECD. Many factors impact a child's school readiness, including a well-compensated, credentialed, and diverse early childhood workforce; access to adequate supply of high quality early care and education, and access to health care and food security.

Early Childhood Workforce

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

Access

- One frequently cited barrier to child care access is lack of non-traditional hour care (early mornings, nights, and weekends). This need was mentioned in communities whose economies are heavily dependent on tourism and hospitality, such as Ruidoso, where families are typically required to work hours outside the Monday-Friday 9 a.m.-5 p.m. work week. Another major gap in most areas is care for school-age children, namely before and after school and during summer months, with some communities reporting no school-age care availability at all.

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

Quality

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



Picture Locations: 1. Mighty Movers in Roswell, NM 2. Clayton Public Schools 3. Zia Therapy in Alamogordo, NM.

Family and Community Engagement

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

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



El Grito Director Misty Pugmire (left), Grant County Commissioner Chris Ponce (middle), Secretary Groginsky (right) cutting the El Grito re-opening ribbon.

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

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

Grant County acquired the building and worked with Misty Pugmire, the director of the El Grito Inc., an early care and education program in Silver City, to remodel and expand operations using a mix of federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds provided by ECECD and Grant County funding. ECECD distributed more than \$157 million dollars in ARPA stabilization grants to over 1,000 child care providers across the state, including a \$197,000 grant to help Pugmire reopen El Grito del Bosque Child Development Center to the community. The county provided \$162,000 in local funds to help fund the program for the first year, along with \$100,000 in ARPA funds for renovations. Freeport-McMoRan, the largest employer in Grant County, provided additional funds to install new playground equipment for the facility. This state-local-private partnership can serve as a model for how collaborative funding and creative partnerships can address child care shortages in New Mexico.



Government to Government

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

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

1



2



Picture Locations:
1. Zia Pueblo
2. Mescalero Apache
G2G Consultation



Pictured: Sunland Park, NM Listening Session

Next Steps

School Readiness

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

- Early intervention (EI) and home visiting providers frequently noted a frustration with a **lack of coordination between the health sector and local early childhood service providers**. EI providers in many communities reported that local health care providers are often misinformed about early intervention and home visiting services, do not understand how the programs work, and fail to refer families to the free services that would benefit children
- Families in rural communities expressed a profound dissatisfaction with the availability and/or quality of prenatal and neonatal health care. Behavioral health services are also lacking in many areas of the state, including infant mental health services and treatment of substance use disorder, especially in the prenatal period.
- In communities where PreK is available in Head Start, community-based settings, and school-based settings, parents have many options from which to choose. However, people in several communities shared concerns about **oversaturation and lack of coordination** between programs spread across multiple settings.
- One of the most common issues raised in the communities ECECD visited is early intervention services funded through the Family Infant Toddler (FIT) program ending on a child's third birthday. **This age limit on FIT services** creates a gap or disruption for many families who need continuing special education services, but struggle to access them through the public school system due to logistical burdens.
- Public school partners on the tour expressed a need to serve typically developing three-year-olds to ensure inclusive settings in their three-year-old special education classrooms. Additionally, in many communities there are no other options outside of the public school for families seeking **Early PreK for their three-year old child**.
- Multiple school-based PreK programs cited **burdensome administrative and paperwork requirements** as a significant barrier, diverting hours away from classroom instruction. These barriers include the monthly walk-through checklist, which is challenging, especially if providers have more than one PreK location⁴.
- Many child care providers on the tour expressed dissatisfaction with FOCUS (New Mexico's tiered quality rating system) requirements, finding them to be inequitable and burdensome. Some of the most frequently reported challenges included meeting educational and training requirements. **There is also a common misconception that it takes several years to reach 5-Star status** when it can be done within four to six months. This widespread misconception can significantly lower providers' revenues if they miss out on receiving child care assistance reimbursements at the 5-Star rate level.



Next Steps

Family and Community Engagement

- ECECD supports 15 local early childhood coalitions throughout New Mexico with federal relief funding to help foster and enhance family engagement and leadership, improve coordination between state and local partners, and maximize and leverage all available funding to support early childhood programs and services.
- ECECD's Moments Together public education campaign will continue to help raise awareness about programs, services, and supports that are available to families. In early 2023, the Moments Together campaign will launch a fun and accessible web TV series focused on parenting skills and early childhood programs and services.
- In November 2022, ECECD created a powerful new online child care search tool to help families find programs that fit their needs.

Next Steps

Government to Government

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



Picture Locations:

1. Summer Food Program service in Santa Teresa, NM
2. A Gold Star Academy in Farmington, NM
3. Holloman Air Force Base in Alamogordo, NM
4. Roswell, NM Listening Session
5. Tresco-Day One Home Visiting in Truth or Consequences, NM

Next Steps

Early Childhood System Alignment

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



Picture Locations:

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

Clovis

- We enjoyed lunch with the EMERSH leadership team and met the staff. Concerns were raised about the financial viability of the Centennial Home Visiting, and we discussed opportunities to strengthen the program. ECECD was encouraged to see their focus on infants and toddlers through early intervention, home visiting, and infant mental health. EMERSH hosted a community meeting that brought child care, home visiting, and early intervention programs together for a lively discussion.

Deming

- ECECD had the opportunity to meet Superintendent Vicki Chavez and her team and tour the classrooms at My Little School. Superintendent Chavez and her staff shared that they needed more child care, especially infant and toddler care, to attract and retain educators in their employ.

Truth or Consequences

- Some families expressed concerns about the lack of quality prenatal and pediatric care in the community. Families must drive more than an hour to Las Cruces for basic care, which can be a significant obstacle for families without access to reliable transportation.
- Families were happy with Home Visiting and Early Intervention services, which not only provide care and support, also a source of community for families with young children.

Silver City

- Community stakeholders reported no availability of after school and summer care, limiting parents' ability to work traditional hours in year-round jobs.
- Grant County has a strong early childhood coalition that models successful coordination between state/local government, early childhood stakeholders, and private industry.

Farmington

- Child care providers were very appreciative of the child care stabilization grants provided through ECECD. Providers reported using the funds to make critical infrastructure repairs, improve outside play areas, and providing retention incentives to staff. At one listening session, Bradley Horton from Child Care Castle, a center his grandparents started, shared that the stabilization funds helped keep their doors open and allowed them to make long overdue upgrades to the facility.

Ruidoso

- Ruidoso's tourism-based/service economy

increases need for non-traditional hours and after-school care – both of which are in extreme short supply locally.

- Very high numbers of short-term rentals, low housing stock, and high prices make affordable housing very difficult to access, limiting options for early childhood workforce.
- ECECD met Superintendent Dr. B and his PreK leadership team for breakfast and learned about the intentional work Ruidoso Public Schools PreK is doing for their students and community.

Cloudcroft

- Visited the only child care center in Cloudcroft, learned about the great partnership they have with the school district to serve children with special needs.

Alamogordo

- Stakeholders report that quality and frequency of communication from the state has significantly improved since early childhood programs and services were reorganized under ECECD.

Roswell

- Stakeholders expressed strong concerns about the “3-year-old gap” in services, when children no longer qualify for FIT early intervention services and may struggle to continue receiving services through the public school system until they enter Kindergarten.

Artesia

- Because of the booming oil/gas industry, local providers have difficulty hiring workforce in a relatively low paying industry, and - due to relatively high family incomes driven by the oil/gas industry - fewer families qualify even under expanded eligibility for child care assistance.

Carlsbad

- School district reports great difficulty hiring special education staff, even with some of the highest salaries.
- School administrators report that training requirements are excessive/not compatible with PreK teachers schedules/workloads.

Grants

- Visited Small Wonders Child Care Center, which occupies a beautiful new custom-built facility near the NMSU Grants campus. The center reported that the new higher child care assistance reimbursement rates have been extremely helpful in maintaining solvency, especially because the center has kept private-pay infant and toddler care rates extremely low to insure families can afford tuition.



Pictured: Jardín de los Niños in Las Cruces, NM

Las Cruces

- Witnessed a great deal of Child Care Stabilization Grant funding at work! Cradles and Crayons presented their effective use of stabilization grant funding with the expansion of a new playground area and remodeled restroom, and Gym Magic Kids added a kitchenette in their toddler classroom.
- We learned about the Glass Family Research Institute for Early Childhood Studies work across multiple disciplines.

Anthony

- Visited Community Action Agency of Southern New Mexico (CAASN), an organization committed to helping low-income individuals build a better future for themselves. We had the pleasure of meeting Cinthia Saenz, a former recipient of home visiting services who now works as a Home Visitor and Parent Educator for CAASN. Cinthia received an ECECD scholarship to support her educational goals. She is a single mother and DACA recipient who is excited to be giving back to her community in such an impactful way.
- CAASN has implemented programs to help fathers understand the importance of breastfeeding and what they can do to support their breastfeeding partners, and has employed an Indigenous doula and lactation specialist to support the health of newborn babies.

Sunland Park

- Had an inspiring visit with Martha Munoz, director of Palmas Palmitas, a 5-star NM PreK family child care program, who shared how she partners with other child care providers in the area to support one another with best practices and business strategies.
- Visited with teachers and students in the Gadsden Independent School District's Summery Jumpstart program, where all the students were deeply engaged in learning and play. ECECD appreciated spending time with Superintendent Dempsey and learning more about our state's "largest rural school district."
- Witnessed a remarkable degree of local collaboration. Ngage, Head Start team and the Kids Can Boom Box Program of Doña Ana County were connecting with one another to enhance services and provide culturally relevant activities for children. Area child care centers were being creative and were exploring the possibility of sharing wait lists to increase access for children.



Picture Locations:

1. Guadalupe Montessori School in Silver City, NM
2. Cloudcroft, NM Little Paws Learning Center (PreK, CC)
3. Santa Teresa, NM Elementary School (Summer Food Program)

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Thank You

ECECD would like to express its gratitude to the dozens of early childhood programs, school districts, and community leaders who hosted us during our tour.

Home Visiting/Early Intervention/Infant Mental Health

- First Born of Northern NM - Las Vegas, NM (HV)
- ENMRSH - Clovis, NM (HV, EI, IMH)
- TOTS (Tresco Inc.) - Truth or Consequences, NM (HV, EI)
- Amplified Therapy Early Intervention - Silver City, NM (EI)
- Gila Regional Medical Center - Beginning Years program - Silver City, NM (HV)
- Community Partnership for Children - Silver City, NM (Resource and Referral)
- Growing in Beauty - Farmington, NM (EI/HV)
- NW New Mexico First Born - Farmington, NM (HV)
- Region IX - Ruidoso, NM (EHS, HV)
- Zia Therapy - Alamogordo, NM (EI, FIT, CC)
- Los Pacitos - Roswell, NM (EI, FIT)
- Blue Star Therapy - Artesia, NM (EI, FIT)
- Dungarvin - Gallup, NM (EI, FIT)
- Community Action Agency of Southern NM - Las Cruces, NM (HV, CACFP, MIECHV)
- Tresco Inc - Las Cruces, NM (HV, FIT)
- Jardin de los Niños - Las Cruces, NM (EI, IMH, PreK)

Child Care/Community-Based PreK/Head Start

- Luna Community College - Las Vegas, NM (CC)
- Eastern New Mexico University - Portales, NM (CC)
- Millie Weed - Clovis, NM (Licensed Family Group CC Home Provider)
- Apple Tree - Truth or Consequences, NM (CC, PreK)
- Help NM Family Resource Center - Deming, NM (Early HS, PreK)
- Western New Mexico University - Silver City, NM (CC)
- Guadalupe Montessori - Silver City, NM (PreK)
- Lil Ones Day Care - Silver City, NM (CC)
- El Grito del Bosque - Silver City, NM (CC)
- CATE Center - Farmington, NM (PreK)
- Presbyterian Medical Services - Farmington, NM (HS, EHS)
- A Gold Star Academy - Farmington, NM (CC, PreK)
- San Juan College - Farmington, NM (CC)
- Nageezi Chapter House - Nageezi, Navajo Nation (PreK)
- Little Paws Learning Center - Cloudcroft, NM (CC, PreK)
- Holloman Airforce Base - Alamogordo, NM (CC)
- Mighty Movers - Roswell, NM (CC, PreK)

- Little Castle Learning Center - Artesia, NM (CC, PreK)
- San José Day Care - Carlsbad, NM (CC, PreK)
- Small Wonders Child Care Center - Grants, NM (CC)
- Martha Muñoz - Las Cruces, NM (CC, PreK)
- Cradles to Crayons - Sunland Park, NM (CC, PreK)
- Ashley's Garden - Las Cruces, NM (PreK, Aftercare)

School Districts/School Based PreK

- Raton Public Schools
- Clayton Municipal Schools
- Mosquero Schools
- Portales High School
- Truth or Consequences Elementary Schools
- My Little School Deming Public Schools
- Silver Consolidated Schools
- Ruidoso Public Schools
- Alamogordo Public Schools
- Roswell Public Schools
- Carlsbad Public Schools
- Gallup McKinley County Schools
- Santa Teresa Public Schools

Tribal Consultations

- Pueblo of Zia
- Mescalero Apache Tribe
- Pueblo of Acoma
- Navajo Nation
- Pueblo of Zuni

Program Abbreviations

- **CACFP** - Child and Adult Care Food Program
- **CC** - Child Care
- **EHS** - Early Head Start
- **EI** - Early Intervention
- **FIT** - Family Infant Toddler
- **GRADS** - Graduation Reality And Dual-role Skills
- **HS** - Head Start
- **HV** - Home Visiting
- **IMH** - Infant Mental Health
- **MIECHV** - Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program
- **PreK** - Prekindergarten

(in-school program for expectant and parenting teens)



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Learn more about ECECD at nmececd.org

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Cover picture L-R:

Pequeñas Ilusiones, LLC in Albuquerque, NM

Palmas Palmitas Child Care Home in Sunland Park, NM.

Cradles and Crayons in Anthony, NM.

