

2022

**Community Assessment:
Montrose/Olathe Early Childhood Centers**



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MONTROSE/OLATHE EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTERS

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT REPORT OCTOBER 2022

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Early Childhood Centers (ECC) is part of and coincides with the service area of Montrose County RE-1J School District (MCSD) in the state of Colorado. ECC serves those residing in/near the city of Montrose and town of Olathe.

Montrose County is located in the southwestern quadrant of the state and has a population of more than 42,500 residents. The county is considered rural, with residents traveling 60 miles north to Western Colorado's largest city (Grand Junction) for medical and other services.

The local housing market regularly experiences lower-than-state average median sale prices, yet housing costs are rising and continue to be an issue for many families, with wait times as long as two years to rent affordable family units. The Colorado Center on Law & Policy reports that Montrose County families need income more than two times the federal poverty level to make ends meet.

Access to affordable healthcare is an area of significant concern for Montrose County residents. Since passage of the Affordable Care Act, Medicaid enrollment has significantly increased, with 58.3% of the county's children enrolled in Medicaid and 10.1% in Colorado's publicly-funded CHP+. However, the proportion of uninsured children in Montrose County (8.6%) still is higher than in Colorado overall (5.7%), and the community is a federally-designated health professional shortage area so, even with insurance, accessing care can be difficult.

Despite these struggles, there are hopeful economic indicators as well:

- The unemployment rate in the county, at 3.1%, is down from 5.6% in 2021, and is lower than the statewide rate of 3.4%, the lowest rate since February 2020 (Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, August 2022).
- An estimated 73.9% of homes in the county are owner-occupied; the majority of residents (86.3%) live and work in Montrose County (American Community Survey, 2016-2020).
- Montrose County families are taking advantage of financial supports, with 80% of the eligible population enrolled in WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children) and 59% of the eligible population in SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) (Colorado Center on Law and Policy, 2022).
- The forthcoming (school year 2023-24) rollout of the Universal Preschool Program (UPK) is anticipated to have a positive impact on Montrose County families. The Colorado Department of Childhood estimates that UPK will save impacted families an average \$4,300 per year on childcare (Colorado Department of Childhood, 2022).

In response to community realities and needs, MCSD Early Childhood Centers is making a positive impact through its Head Start, Colorado Preschool Program, Children with Disabilities, Early Childhood At-Risk Enhancement (ECARE), and tuition programs, currently involving a total 335 children, 114 of these through Head Start.

Along with providing educational opportunity, ECC supports family access to dental exams, immunizations, nutrition and various other programs/supports, making a profound difference in the

lives of low-to-moderate income families, as seen in the following figures from school year 2021 - 2022:

- 94% of Head Start children have had dental care within the last 12 months, compared to 81% of children statewide (Kids Count Data Center, 2022).
- 93% of ECC children were current on their vaccinations, just slightly lower than the state average of 94.7% (Colorado Department of Health and Environment, 2021).

An additional indicator of ECC success lies in the involvement of families, and particularly fathers, father figures, and male role models: During the 2021-2022 school year, parents, guardians, and family members contributed 12,159 volunteer hours, with 8% of volunteers being male.

Like early childhood organizations throughout the state, maintaining a workforce continues to be a struggle. An Early Milestone's 2017 survey of Colorado's center directors reported 17% annual turnover rate in program leadership positions, a 16% turnover rate in lead teacher positions, a 22% turnover rate among assistant teachers, and a 40% turnover rate for floaters. ECC saw turnover of five staff positions (9% turnover rate) during the most recent school year, compared to a turnover of less than two percent in 2020-21. This most recent loss of staff resulted directly from COVID-19 vaccination requirements for Head Start employees.

The following goals have been set for, and continue to be pursued by the MCSD Early Childhood Centers for the period 2019-2024:

1. Strengthen active supervision systems.
2. Provide professional development for ECC staff members; provide educational opportunities for parents to promote development of kindergarten readiness skills in children.
3. Improve the Centers' communication systems.
4. Acquire quality and sustainable facilities.

Through active participation in the community assessment and planning processes, ECC administrators, staff, teachers, and Policy Council (including parent participants) all are committed to these goals, and to providing social supports and exceptional early childhood education, including Head Start, for qualifying families and the Montrose County community at large.

II. INTRODUCTION

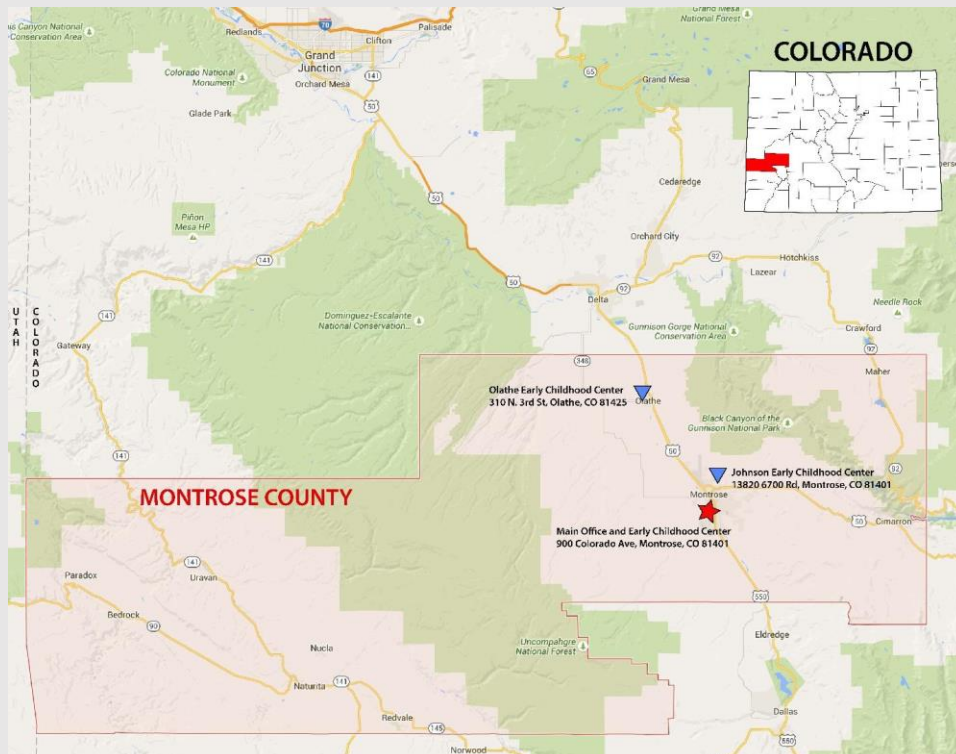
Montrose County School District RE-1J Early Childhood Centers (ECC) administers Head Start programming for preschool-age children and their families in the communities of Montrose and Olathe, Colorado; the service area coincides with Montrose County School District RE-1J (MCSD) boundaries. The towns of Nucla and Naturita also are in Montrose County (90 miles from the city of Montrose) and impact countywide statistics but are part of the West End School District RE-2, currently unserved by ECC/Head Start programs.

In 1993, three MCSD programs focused on addressing challenges to early childhood learning: Head Start, Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) and MCSD's Children with Disabilities (special needs program). These programs were integrated to form Early Childhood Centers, now providing preschool services through five distinct programs:

- Head Start, locally initiated in 1991
- CPP
- Children With Disabilities
- Early Childhood At-Risk Enhancement (ECARE)
- Paid tuition, inviting children of School District employees and community families not otherwise eligible to attend preschool at an ECC site.

MCSD serves as the Local Education Agency (LEA) for children with disabilities, qualifying these children for an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and services at all three ECC sites:

- In the city of Montrose – 900 Colorado Avenue, Unit 4
- Three miles east of the Montrose city center on the Johnson Elementary School campus – 13820 6700 Road
- Eleven miles north of Montrose in the town of Olathe on the Olathe Elementary School campus – 320 N. 3rd Street.



The main office of ECC/Head Start is located in Montrose on the same campus as the school district office building, Unit 4, which houses administrative services and the following program support staff:

- Director & Colorado Preschool Program Coordinator
- Program Operations Coordinator
- Family and Community Engagement Coordinator
- Mental Health Consultant
- Education Coordinator
- Coordinator Assistant – Health & Safety
- Family Advocates (3)
- Administrative Assistant to the Director
- Secretary
- Data Technician

ECC employs a total 54 staff; of these, 16 are preschool teachers, 16 are classroom paraprofessionals and three are Family Advocates, all having direct involvement with enrolled children and their families.

During the 2021-2022 school year, parents, guardians, family members, and community members contributed 12,159 volunteer hours to our program. Volunteer hours are counted if they participate in the following number of ways:

- Back to Preschool Orientation
- Budget/Grant Committee
- Classroom Volunteer x as often as they are able
- Colorado Preschool Program District Advisory Council (CPP-DAC)
- Discovery Wonderland Carnival
- End of the Year BBQ
- End of the Year Drive-in Movie Night
- Health Advisory Committee
- Home Visits x 2
- Interview Committee
- Meet & Greet
- Parent-Driven Activities Committee (PDAC)
- Parent/Teacher Conferences (PTC) x 2
- Policy Council (PC)

Additionally, of the aforementioned hours, 5,004 were contributed by Head Start parents, guardians, and family members, 7,155 were contributed by community members (including the other four programs within ECC), and 8% of all volunteers were male.

ECC's Head Start Policy Council for the 2021-2022 school year comprised twelve parent representatives and four community members. The Policy Council meets monthly and assists in the development of program goals and objectives, and additionally acts as liaison to parents, staff, and the community at large on matters of specific concern.

Colorado childcare licenses held for all ECC sites allow for provision of services for children 2-1/2 years to six years of age:

- If a child turns three or four years old on or before August 1 of a given year, s/he may enroll through ECC’s Head Start, Colorado Preschool Program, ECARE, or tuition programming. Children who are five years old, on or before August 1, are eligible for kindergarten and may not be served through Head Start, Colorado Preschool Program, or Early Childhood At-Risk Enhancement funding.
 - For a three- or four-year-old child to be Head Start eligible, his/her family must be living at or below the federal poverty level or receiving Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF) or Social Security Income (SSI) for a disability; or the child must be living with a foster family or be homeless.
 - For a three-year-old to be Colorado Preschool Program eligible, s/he must have at least three of ten risk factors outlined by State statute, while a four-year-old must have a minimum one of the ten risk factors.

Each child's parent(s) or guardian(s) is/are interviewed to collect information determining risk and eligibility. Eligibility criteria assigns and accumulates points for placement. A child with the highest number of accumulated points will be placed in a program first, while the child with the second highest points will be placed in a program second, and so on, ensuring that children and families with the most needs are served.

An enrollee under the Children with Disabilities program is eligible for Part B services (preschool) at the age of two years and nine months and may be provided an additional year of preschool services beyond his/her fifth birthday, providing that policy requirements are met; one child met the criteria to extend participation this past school year.

During the 2021-2022 school year, ECC served the following numbers of children:

Program	Registered/Placed (served minimum one day)	Funded Preschool Opportunities
Head Start	114 children	102 children
Colorado Preschool Program	99	130
Children With Disabilities	57	52*
Early Childhood At-Risk Enhancement	50	60
Tuition Pay	15	14
TOTALS	335 children	358 children

* +/-, as needed

As illustrated in the above table, the number of children served by ECC during the 2021-2022 school year did not equal the total number of preschool opportunities funded by state and federal organizations. Enrollment numbers increased over the prior year, but the impacts of COVID-19 still linger, and parents continue to be cautious about their child(ren)’s potential exposure.

Transportation services are not provided for ECC/Head Start children; enrolled children must be dropped off and picked up by parents or care providers at the preschool site. Some ECC children attend school for 3-1/2 hours, so parents must pick up or deliver their child in the middle of the day, often posing hardship for working parents who typically enlist family members or find childcare options that will deliver and/or pick up children.

III. METHODOLOGY: COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT PROCESS

This assessment endeavors to depict the community served by ECC, and to examine key factors impacting the overall population and child well-being:

- Community geography and economics, including employment, income, and housing
- Community demographics, including ethnic composition and languages, and children with disabilities
- Childcare and preschool programming
- Education
- Health and nutrition
- Social services, including child welfare
- Community resources

As applicable and available, county and/or school district-level data is provided and then compared with state averages. Then, specific information is provided regarding the families benefiting through ECC/Head Start during the 2021-2022 school year.

Prevalently cited as part of these annual assessments are periodic reports from Colorado Children Campaign: “Kids Count! in Colorado” provides widely accepted information on overall childhood well-being. Also, important data sources are 2020 U.S. Census statistics and American Community Survey projections 2016-2020. Various State of Colorado agencies provide data on demographics, education, employment, and housing, while the regional Early Childhood Council – Bright Futures – sources information specific to local childcare and preschool facilities. A complete list of information sources is included in the appendix to this report.

ECC annually conducts parent surveys, with feedback helping to inform the ECC Policy Council and staff regarding satisfaction with and direction of program services. The instrument used for this survey is reviewed each year by the CPP District Advisory Council and updated as needed.

The process of community assessment began in 2002, as required by the Administration for Children and Families, with discussions at Policy Council, ECC staff meetings, and other community gatherings. Reviewing the first draft and working with a document to final approval, the first Community Needs Assessment process and report were completed in September 2002. Since then, and on an annual basis, the assessment process is repeated and improved, with staff gathering much of the internal data concerning services, families and Head Start children as part of the organization’s evaluative process. Other community, regional, state, and national information is collected and compiled by an independent contractor, Third Sector Innovations, Inc. of Grand Junction, Colorado.

Information gathered through this assessment process reveals the ongoing and emerging challenges faced by children and families living in the ECC/Head Start service area, as well as the strengths of ECC in addressing these challenges through provision of quality early childhood services.

IV. DATA AND FINDINGS

Service Area - Geography

Montrose County is 2,241 square miles, located in the west central portion of the Colorado, a region referred to as Colorado’s Western Slope. The community is 269 miles southwest of the Denver metro area beyond the Continental Divide, and nearly 100 miles east of the Colorado-Utah state line. Many residents live in unincorporated areas of the county (45%). The City of Montrose is home to 47% of the county’s residents; Olathe (5%), Naturita (2%) and Nucla (1%) are town centers providing residence for the remainder of the county’s population (U.S. Census, 2020).

The area is considered mountain desert, experiencing four distinct seasons and a temperate climate.

Service Area – Population, Racial/Ethnic Composition and Languages

The state of Colorado is home to 5,773,714 people (U.S. Census, 2020), the majority of whom live in the eastern portion of the state, referred to as Colorado’s Front Range. From 2010 to 2020, Colorado’s population increased by 724,643 people, or 14.3%.

Montrose County is one of 64 counties in Colorado and is ranked 16th in the state for total population. From 2010 to 2020, the population in Montrose County grew from 40,266 to 42,679, or 6% (U.S. Census, 2020). The population of Montrose County is expected to grow by 24,278 people, or 57%, from 2020 to 2050 (Colorado State Demography Office, 2022).

There currently are an estimated 2,470 children, ages five years and younger, in Montrose County; approximately 1,275 of these children are preschool aged (Colorado State Demography Office, 2022).

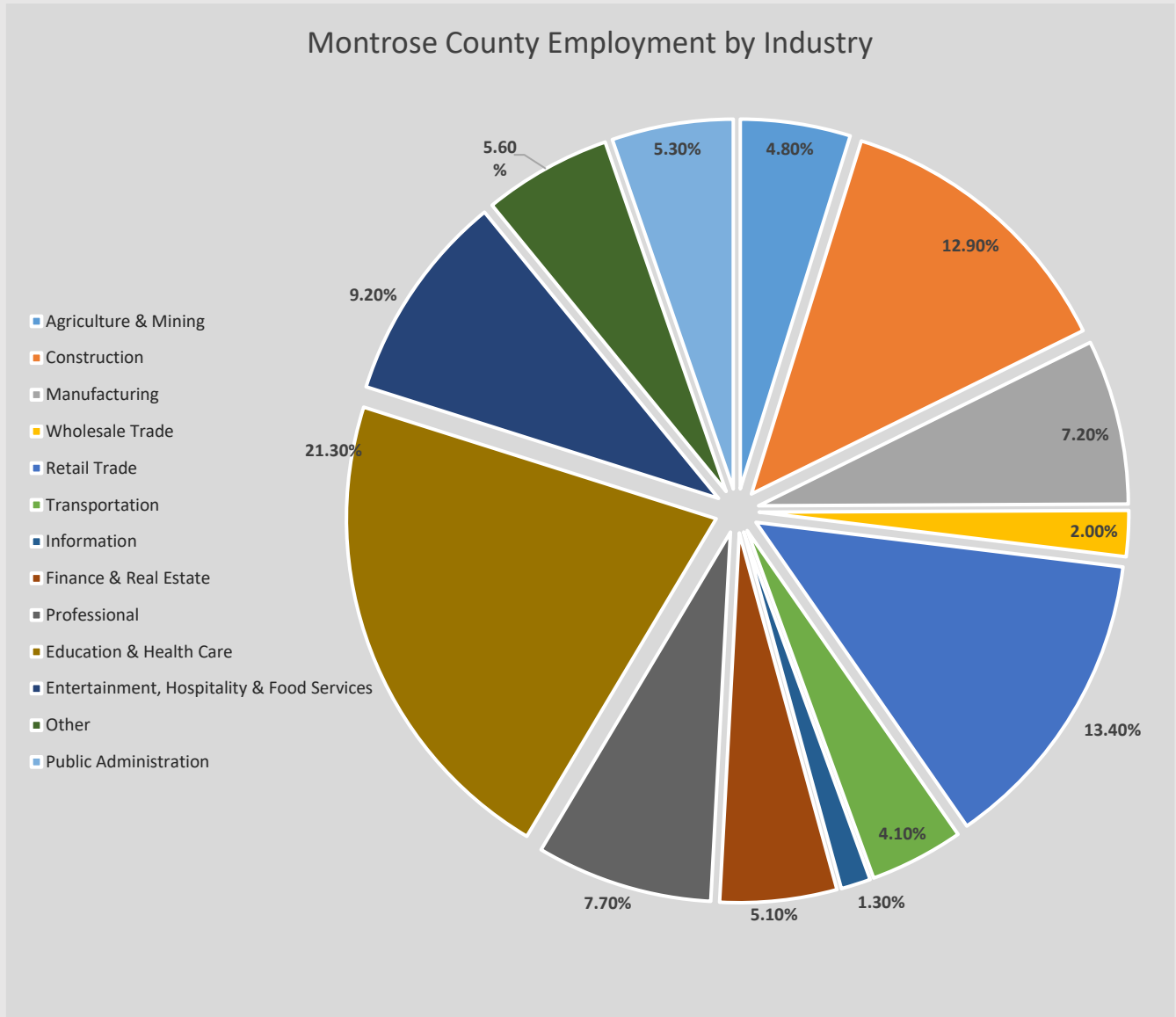
The U.S. Census American Community Survey 2016-2020 reports that, among Montrose County residents aged five years or older, 17.5% speak a language other than English in the home (nearly exclusively Spanish), a figure aligned with the statewide number of 16.4%. The same survey reports the following ethnic/racial population breakdowns for Montrose County and Colorado; due to Census data reporting methods, totals do not equal 100%:

Population ⇒ ⇒ Geography ⇓ ⇓	White*	Black or African American*	American Indian and Alaska Native*	Asian/ Pacific Islander*	Some Other Race	Two or More Races	Hispanic/ Latino Origin
Colorado	70.7%	4.1%	1.3%	3.6%	8.0%	12.3%	21.4%
Montrose County	78.2%	0.42%	1.4%	0.88%	9.1%	10.0%	20.5%

*Not Hispanic or Latino

Service Area - Economy, Employment, and Income

The area’s economy finds 60.2% of the workforce employed in the private sector, 13.1% employed by government, 10.3% employed by private not-for-profit, and 16.4% self-employed (American Community Survey, 2016-2020). The private, non-farm sector is made up of those working in the following trades:



(American Community Survey 2016-2020)

The American Community Survey reports 69.4% of households in Montrose County are family households (two or more people related by birth, marriage, or adoption); among these, 22.8% earn less than \$35,000 annually, with 33.6% earning less than \$50,000 each year.

The average hourly wage in the county still is notably lower – at \$22.03 per hour – than the \$36.38 per hour state average (Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, 2022):

Geographic Area	Unemployment Rate (July 2022)*	Average Hourly Wage (1st Quarter 2022)*	Per Capita Annual Income (2020)**	Median Household Income (2020)**
Colorado	3.3%	\$36.38	\$39,545	\$75,231
Montrose County	3.1%	\$22.03	\$30,017	\$54,611

*Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, 2022

** American Community Survey 2016-2020

Service Area - Housing

Housing in Montrose County includes both owned and leased single- and multi-family homes, as well as small and large acreage farms. Estimated occupied housing units (i.e., no unoccupied dwellings included) total 17,482 (American Community Survey, 2016-2020).

An estimated 44.1% of renters and 30% of homeowners in the community spend more than 30% of income on housing (American Community Survey 2016-2020). From a 2011, recession-low \$139,495 average single-family house sale price, the 2021 median sale price is nearly triple at \$413,000 (Colorado Association of Realtors, 2022). The median monthly rent rate in the County is \$980 (American Community Survey 2016-2020).

The availability of affordable dwellings throughout much of the service area is limited. With the capacity to serve only 182 clients through its voucher system (14 additional vouchers for veterans), Montrose County Housing Authority continues to see long wait periods for eligible families to receive assistance. The Authority briefly opened its waitlist in 2020, but then closed it when the wait time reached two years. Even with voucher assistance, high rental rates currently present a significant difficulty as families try to secure affordable rentals (Montrose County Housing Authority, 2022).

Service Area - Social and Human Services, Child Welfare

Many Montrose County families are taking advantage of available financial supports, but there is room for improvement. The Colorado Center on Law and Policy’s Human Services Gap map shows that 80% of the eligible population is enrolled in WIC, but only 59% of the eligible population is enrolled in SNAP (2022 Kids Count!).

Colorado reports that 26% of Montrose County children are born to single mothers, and that 2.5% of Montrose County families receive TANF assistance payments, with 49.7% receiving WIC vouchers.

Montrose County has higher rates of child abuse and neglect, and out-of-home placements, than state averages (Kids Count!, 2022), as well as a higher rate of students experiencing homelessness:

Geographic Area	Rates for Out-of-Home Placement (per 1,000 children)	Rates of Child Abuse and Neglect (per 1,000 children)	Number of Students served by McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Program*
Colorado	6.9	9.0	15,374 (1.7%)
Montrose County	12.0	17.6	143 (2.4%)

*Colorado Department of Education, 2022

In 2021, the Dolphin House Child Advocacy Center (Montrose) provided services for 292 primary victims and 327 secondary victims of child abuse (children 0–17 years old), and currently continues to provide follow-up support for 90 families.

In an attempt to counter child abuse, Hilltop Family Resource Center provides a variety of programs for Montrose County families. Hilltop programming includes the High-Fidelity Wraparound program (“family choice and voice to create a family vision while identifying natural support systems”), Parents as Teachers (for children 0-5 years old and their parents), and Family Navigation and Intensive Family Development (educational and support services for parents with open cases for reunification with a child/children in foster care).

A significant community gap exists in meeting the mental health services needs of children. It is particularly difficult to find and secure an appointment with a mental health professional both trained to work with children and accepting Medicaid or sliding fee scale payment. While providing a very different form of treatment, both Dream Catchers and Pegasus Equine Therapy endeavor to address behavioral challenges presented by the community’s at-risk youth/teens and Children with Disabilities participants.

Montrose County School District RE-1J and many local human service providers have long been educated in and committed to the tenets of “Bridges Out of Poverty.” This client-focused, strengths-based approach to service provision is prominent in the work of Montrose’s social services providers, promoting understanding and largely defining the experiences of families frequently interacting with local agencies.

Early Childhood Centers/Head Start proactively provides referrals to other resources/services available in the community. During the 2021-2022 school year, the following referrals were documented:

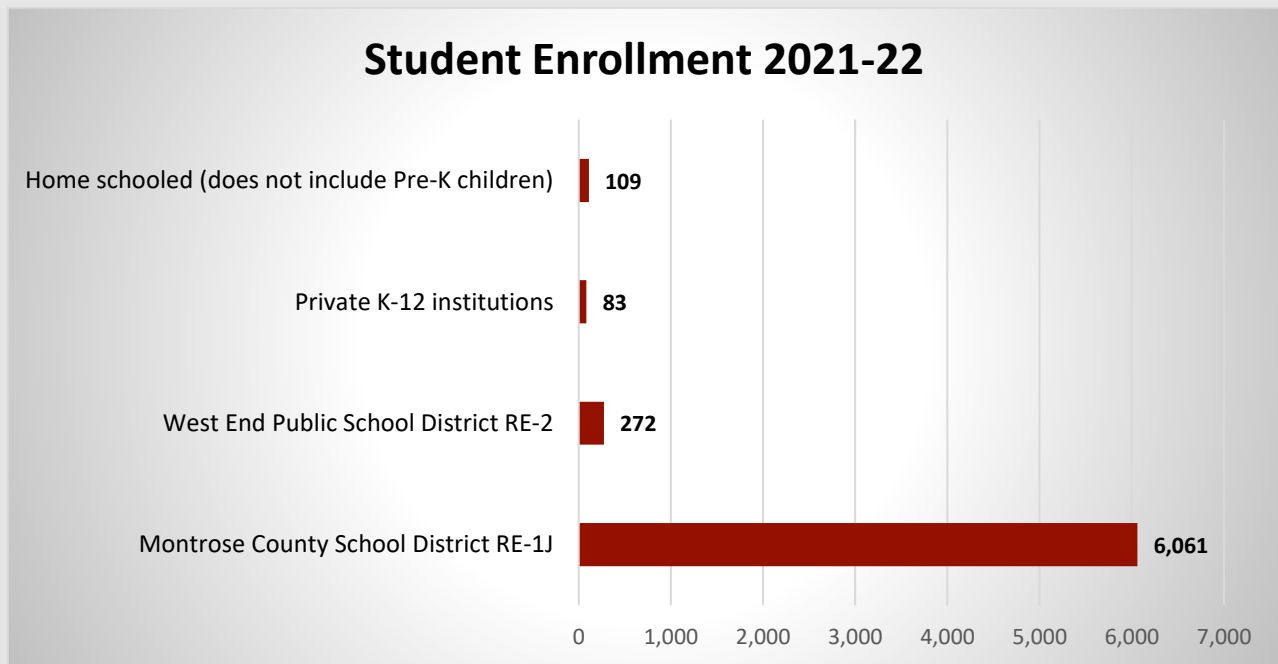
- Kids Aid (backpack food program) – 46
- Cobble Creek Angel Tree Community (Christmas presents/gift cards) – 35
- Parenting education – 22
- Mental health services – 14
- Tom Goodrich Warm Hearts Memorial Project (coats) – 14
- Child mental health – 8
- Emergency/crisis intervention – 6

Service Area - Educational Institutions and ECC Service Delivery Sites

Numerous entities provide educational opportunity in Montrose County: Colorado Mesa University-Montrose (CMU-Montrose) provides degreed higher education, with total enrollment in 2021-22 of 221 undergraduates, including 43 high school students, a decrease from 2020-21 (attributed to the ongoing impacts of COVID-19). CMU anticipates a bounce back in enrollment for the Fall 2022 semester, predicting near pre-COVID participation.

Conveniently located in neighboring Delta County, Technical College of the Rockies offers certification programs. 2021-2022 enrollment included 32 Montrose/Olathe high school students, an additional 78 full- and part-time post-secondary Montrose County residents, as well as 97 community/supplemental education enrollees.

Following are the enrollment figures for Montrose County Pre-K-12th grade students for the 2021-2022 school year:



MCSD reports only 31% of students in grades 3, 5, and 7 are meeting or exceeding expectations in English/Language Arts, compared to 42.9% in Colorado (Kids Count!, 2022).

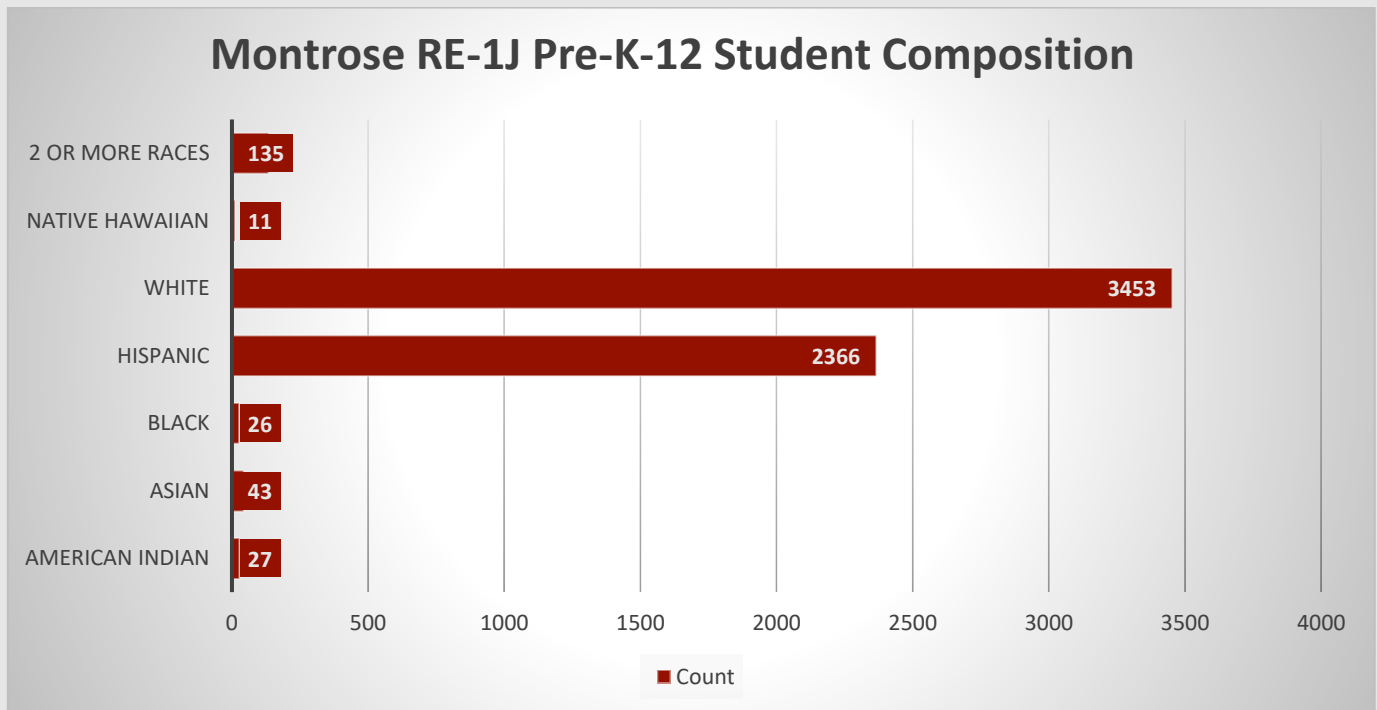
Specific to early childhood education, the community historically has experienced shortages of licensed facilities. The following chart outlines the number of preschool facilities in the ECC/Head Start service area. (Bright Futures, Fall 2022):

Geographic Area	Total # Licensed Facilities	# ECC/ Head Start Facilities	# Facilities Accepting CPP Children	Total # Slots (full- and half-day)	Current # of Open Slots
Montrose County	28* (including private homes)	3	3	788	37
Montrose	25	2	2	704	34
Olathe	3	1	1	84	3

*Includes two preschool programs in the towns of Naturita and Paradox, locations unserved by ECC

Families in the Service Area - Ethnic Composition and Languages

Colorado Department of Education enrollment figures (pre-K through 12th grade) for the 2021-2022 school year show the following ethnic make-up of students enrolled in Montrose County School District RE-1J schools:



Of the 6,061 students enrolled in pre-K through 12th grade during the 2021-22 school year, 43% (2,608) students were race/ethnic minorities. The predominant language spoken by MCSD RE-1J Early Childhood Centers’ students is English (54%), while 8.3% of students’ first language is Spanish.

Families in the Service Area - Residency/Mobility

The majority of local individuals and families consider Montrose County their long-term residence. 86.3% of residents live and work in Montrose County and 73.8% of households are owner-occupied (American Community Survey, 2016-2020).

Families in the Service Area - Childcare Needs

A 2017 study conducted by DU's Butler Institute for Families revealed that families in Colorado with an infant or toddler in center-based care pay 44% more for a year of care than they would pay for a year of in-state, public college tuition (*Bearing the Cost of Early Care and Education in Colorado: An Economic Analysis, 2017*). Current public funding for early care and education subsidies, such as the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP), CPP, and Head Start do not fully meet the demand for services (*Bearing the Cost of Early Care and Education in Colorado: An Economic Analysis, 2017*).

Montrose County families share in this struggle, with 29% of family households with two children considered child care cost-burdened (County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, 2022). The current average cost for full-time childcare is \$40.50 per day for a child younger than two years, \$38.95 per day for a toddler or preschooler (Bright Futures, 2022). With average rent at \$1,292/month, a single-parent, female-led family with two children can easily spend 90% of family income to meet just housing and childcare expenses.

To ensure more Colorado families have access to quality childcare, the Colorado Department of Human Services, Division of Child Care oversees the state and federally funded CCCAP, which is administered by individual county departments of Social or Human Services. Counties set program eligibility requirements within the federal mandate (to serve families with incomes at or below 165% of federal poverty guidelines) and reimburse participating local childcare providers according to County-defined, pre-determined rates. Participating families must meet income-qualifying guidelines, are responsible for a portion of childcare costs, and are required to be working, searching for employment, training, or enrolled in Colorado Works (Colorado's TANF program). As noted above, the need for public funding far exceeds capacity.

In response to the need for out-of-home childcare, the State of Colorado requires specific education and certification standards for childcare facility staff. Educational expenses typically are the responsibility of the staff person and are not necessarily rewarded with greater compensation, adding to the challenge of attracting and retaining qualified childcare staff. In recent years, center and home-based care closures – due to a lack of qualified staff – have further depleted needed childcare slots, leaving families little choice but to leave their children in the care of friends or family in unlicensed homes. National studies indicate that as many as 60% of children in working families receive care from friends/family (*Bearing the Cost of Early Care and Education in Colorado: An Economic Analysis, 2017*).

Families in the Service Area - Preschool Needs

Preschool is widely acknowledged as a critical contributor to early childhood education, laying the foundation for a child's future educational success. In 1988, the Colorado General Assembly created CPP to serve the young children in Colorado most vulnerable to starting elementary school

unprepared. Funded through the Colorado Public School Finance Formula and administered under the Office of Teaching and Learning, Colorado Department of Education, CPP provides for preschool programming for those being raised in a low-income family or by parents having completed lower educational levels, involved with foster care or involvement with violence/neglect in the home, and/or showing delays in language and social development.

176 of Colorado's 179 school districts participated in CPP in school year 2020-2021, with Colorado Department of Education estimating fewer than one-half of funded spaces were utilized for full day services, leaving 10,724 spaces unused by eligible 3- and 4-year-olds (CPP Legislative Report 2022). MCSD's Early Childhood Centers is the only CPP provider in the Montrose-Olathe community.

The Universal Preschool Program (UPK) ushers in the next era of early childhood education in Colorado. In 2022, legislation was passed to guarantee a minimum ten hours of high-quality, voluntary preschool for every Colorado child in the year prior to entering kindergarten, helping the "working poor" who did not qualify for financial support in the past. Children who qualify for other funding sources like CPP, CCCAP and Head Start can "stack" these resources on UPK hours to meet family needs. This is a significant step in making high-quality early education affordable for all families; UPK is expected to save impacted families an average of \$4,300 per year (CO Department of Early Childhood, 2022).

UPK goes into effect for the 2023-24 school year, and Montrose ECC is prepared to accommodate the anticipated uptick in enrollment. Bright Futures, the region's Early Childhood Council is slated to act as the Local Coordinating Organization (LCO) for coordinating the UPK delivery system in Montrose County.

Early Childhood Centers provided preschool services for 45% of MCSD enrolled kindergartners in the 2021-2022 school year. An ECC-conducted survey of 383 parents of incoming kindergartners indicated 80% of kindergartners had some childcare or preschool experience. Of the 20% responding that their child(ren) had no childcare or preschool experience, top reasons given for lack of this experience included stay-at-home parent (37%), did not specify (24%), and other (12%).

Families in the Service Area - Children with Disabilities

Child Find, available for children birth to 21 years and using the Denver II screening tool, identifies Montrose County children presenting potential developmental concerns, and helps to prepare them for the coming school year. The local Child Find Coordinator provides screenings for individual families/children throughout the year, as needed. From June 1, 2021, to May 31, 2022, Child Find completed 176 screenings and 80 evaluations in the ECC/Head Start service region; of those evaluated, only four did not qualify for services. Across the past two school years, the total number of parents requesting screenings and the number of evaluations completed have been lower than in previous years, assumed due to health concerns and restrictions related to COVID-19.

Children identified as qualified through Child Find benefit from an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) and are provided services through Part C funding. Community Options is the local agency

responsible for providing therapeutic services for these children from birth to just younger than three years. Shortly before a child turns three, s/he is reassessed to determine if the identified developmental delay will significantly impact educational development; if yes, the child receives an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and will benefit from ECC’s preschool programming and other services in an integrated classroom with children funded through Head Start, CPP, ECARE, and tuition programming.

Families in the Service Area - Health and Nutrition

Montrose County is a federally-designated Health Professional Shortage Area for primary care providers, mental health providers, and dentists (Health Resources and Services Administration, 2022), with significant provider shortages creating unmet demand for services.

While Colorado has made significant gains to ensure the health care of its youngest residents, Montrose County has experienced inconsistent trends regarding health insurance coverage for and enrollment of its children:

Kids Count! In Colorado Report	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Montrose County Uninsured Children	8.5%	8.3%	6.2%	6.2%*	8.6%	8.6%
Montrose County Children Eligible yet not Enrolled in Medicaid or CHP+	5.4%	8.5%	1.5%	10.1%	13.0%	13.0**

*Data repeated from 2019/not updated in 2020 Kids Count! report.

** Data repeated from 2021/not updated in 2022 Kids Count! report.

Income-eligible families with children younger than 18 years may qualify for Child Health Plan Plus (CHP+) or Medicaid. CHP+ allows children to receive necessary health care services, including well child check-ups, immunizations, and mental health services for a reduced fee. Prescriptions, eyeglasses, hearing aids and dental services also are provided under CHP+.

The River Valley Family Health Center, a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC), serves low-income, under/uninsured individuals and families, as well as migrant workers. The Clinic accepts Medicaid/Medicare and CHP+ and has a sliding fee scale for payment by uninsured patients. The Clinic offers medical, dental, and behavioral health services and medications at a discounted price via bilingual staff (Spanish) and 28 full-time and part-time providers (primary and behavioral health, dentists/hygienists, pharmacists). Currently, River Valley serves 9,628 patients (unduplicated count) from three facilities located in Olathe (10 examination rooms), Montrose (20 exam rooms) and Delta (10 exam rooms).

PIC Place (Partners in Integrated Care) serves patients living at or below 250% of federal income guidelines, including all Medicaid and CHP+ clients, as well as those experiencing difficulty accessing health care services in the community. Those without insurance can qualify for PIC Place’s sliding fee schedule for discounted services (sometimes up to 100%) based on ability to pay. PIC Place provides fully integrated primary (family practice) health, preventive and restorative dental,

optometric and behavioral health services for unserved/underserved residents of Montrose and Delta counties via 12 full- and part-time providers (primary and behavioral health, dentists) and 19 exam rooms. PIC serves an estimated 6,000 unduplicated patients each year.

Early Periodic Screening and Diagnostic Testing is provided by Montrose County Health Department to identify children with unmet medical needs. These children may be eligible for TANF and/or Medicaid benefits. Regardless, families who do not qualify for Medicaid, CHP+ or health insurance through employment often seek primary health care at local hospital emergency rooms, Urgent Care, River Valley Family Health Center and/or PIC Place.

In Montrose County, an estimated 1,971 households received benefits through SNAP (American Community Survey, 2016-2020), and 49.7% of children live in homes receiving WIC vouchers (Kids Count!, 2022). This not only indicates the nutritional challenges of Montrose County residents, but contributes to the ever-growing concern of childhood obesity, most particularly impacting those of low-income who rely on less expensive/nutritional foods (i.e., other than lean meats, fresh fruit, and vegetables). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that youth (ages 2-19 years) living at or below 350% of the federal poverty level are 3.5 times more likely to be obese than their more affluent peers; 2022 County Health Rankings and Roadmaps data reveals that 12% of Montrose County residents are food insecure, eight percent have limited access to health foods, and 26% of Montrose County adults are obese.

Montrose County Child and Family Services works to address nutritional needs by providing a "prescription" to receive fresh fruits and vegetables from the local Farmers' Market, where SNAP also provides recipes for preparation of fresh foods.

Families in the Service Area – Adult Graduation Rates, Education Level

Among Montrose County adults 25 years and older:

- 11.1% have less than a high school education
- 32.3% graduated high school
- 25.3% have some college/no degree
- 6.8% have an associate degree
- 24.5% hold a bachelor's degree or higher (American Community Survey, 2016-2020).

During the most recently reported school year, K-12 dropouts in MCSD RE-1J increased to 2.8%, up from 2.2% in the previous year (2019-2020). While the graduation rate improved from 77.3% in 2019-2020, it remains lower than the state average. Colorado Department of Education’s 2022 data provides further details:

Geographic Area	Total PK-12 Enrollment 2021-22	% PK-12 Students Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch 2021-22	Graduation Rate 2021	Dropout Rate 2021
Colorado	886,517	37.2%	81.7%	1.8%
MCSD RE-1J	6,061	50.6%	78.4%	2.8%
Montrose High	1,396	42.0%	83.7%	4.4%
Olathe High	272	48.2%	86.8%	3.2%
Peak Virtual Academy	254	23.2%	95.5%	0.0%
Vista Charter School	156	59.6%	41.5%	3.3%

Community Resources

The following programs are a comprehensive list of community agencies currently working in collaboration with Early Childhood Centers/Head Start:

PRE-K THROUGH 12TH GRADES, HIGHER AND CONTINUING EDUCATION RESOURCES

Colorado Mesa University
Colorado West Christian School
Community Options
Goal High School
Holy Guardian Angel School
Maslow Academy
Montrose Christian Church Preschool
Montrose County School District RE-1J
Pope John Paul II
Sonshine Patch Preschool
Technical College of the Rockies

EMPLOYMENT TRAINING AND PLACEMENT RESOURCES

Colorado Workforce Center
Community Staffing
Elwood Staffing
State of Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

PRIMARY/BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CARE, HUMAN SERVICES, AND FAMILY SERVICES RESOURCES

Cedar Point Health
Cobble Creek Community
CSU Cooperative Extension/4-H
Dolphin House Child Advocacy Center
Dream Catcher Therapy Center
Farm Workers' Health Services
Hilltop Community Services Montrose (including the Family Resource Center)
The Center for Mental Health
Montrose County Department of Human Services
Montrose County Department of Public Health
Montrose Recreation District
Montrose Regional Health
My Pediatric Dentist
Northside Community Health Clinic
Over the Rainbow Behavioral Consulting
Peak Professionals
Pegasus Equine Therapy
PIC Place
River Valley Family Health Center
Shepherd's Hands

Smiles 4 Kids
Solutions Wellness Center
The Center for Mental Health
Trek Bicycle Montrose
Tri-County Health Network
Urgent Care
Volunteers of America
Western Colorado Migrant and Rural Coalition

DISABILITIES RESOURCES

Community Options
Child Find
Dream Catcher Therapy Center
Montrose Regional Health Rehabilitative Services
Montrose School District RE-1J Special Education
Pegasus Equine Therapy

LOW-INCOME HOUSING AND SHELTER RESOURCES

Cottonwood Apartments
Habitat for Humanity
Haven House
House of Promise
Montrose Housing Authority
Pavilion Gardens Apartments
Sunshine Peak Apartments

CHILD CARE PROVIDER AND REFERRAL RESOURCES

(located in the city of Montrose, unless otherwise noted)
Babbette's Kiddy Kampus
Bright Futures Child Care Resource and Referral, Telluride
Bright Beginnings Child Care
Creative Hands
First Presbyterian Church
Learning Cottage
Little Harvard
Little Sprouts
Living Word Lutheran Preschool
Migrant and seasonal Head Start, Olathe
Montrose Christian Church
Montrose County Department of Health and Human Services
Precious Child Care & Learning Center
Regional Early Childhood Council
Sonshine Patch
Smart Start

CLOTHING, FOOD AND NUTRITIONAL SERVICES RESOURCES

Canyon Chiropractic
Colorado State University Cooperative Extension
Delta-Montrose Electric Association (DMEA)
Farmers' Market
Food SHARE America
Habitat for Humanity ReStore
Heirlooms for Hospice Store
Kids Aid
Mexican American Development Association (MADA)
Montrose County Department of Health and Human Services
Montrose County School District RE-1J
Sharing Ministries Food Bank
Shepherd's Hands
The Salvation Army
Tom Goodrich Warm Hearts Memorial Project

TRANSPORTATION RESOURCES

All Points Transit

Among other community organizations working in partnership with the ECC/Head Start programs are Walmart, Office Depot, Montrose United Methodist Church, local grocery stores, local banks and local fire, and police and ambulance services.

V. DATA REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

Eligible Head Start Children and Families – Racial/Ethnic Composition and Languages

Percentages and actual enrollment numbers by ethnicity for the 2021-2022 school year are as follows for Early Childhood Centers, including Head Start enrollees (total 335 reporting):

	White	Hispanic	Native American	Black	Asian	Pacific Islander	Other
Enrollment	308	198	9	9	2	0	16
% of Enrollment	92%	59%	3%	3%	1%	0%	5%

*Numbers total more than 100% (enrollees can mark more than one box for ethnicity)

The dominant language of children in the Montrose Early Childhood Center program is English, spoken as the only language by 54% of the children enrolled during the 2021-2022 school year. The second most common language is Spanish, spoken as the only language by 8% of children. An additional 35% are bilingual, with the remaining 3% of children using sign language, other spoken languages, or not reporting. These percentages are in alignment with overall MCS D RE-1J enrollment figures.

Eligible Head Start Children and Families – Economics, Employment, Income and Housing

Montrose County continues to have higher rates of poverty than statewide averages:

Geographic Area	Children (0-18 years) Living in Poverty* 2020	School Children (5-18 years) Living in Poverty* 2020
Colorado	10.6%	9.8%
Montrose County	15.1%	14.0%

*Income below 100% of federal poverty guidelines

It is conservatively estimated that one-third of preschool-aged children in Montrose County are eligible for Head Start services based on economic factors alone. Beyond economic considerations, Head Start allows for categorical eligibility based on homelessness and/or living in foster care. And, as noted above, other funding sources have differing eligibility criteria.

The economic landscape of all ECC families served in the 2021-2022 school year is:

- 37% of children were living in families at or below 100% of federal poverty level
- 49% of children were living in families with income over the federal poverty level

- 17% of children were living in families not required to provide proof of income as a result of meeting other eligibility criteria.

Ninety-two (92) children automatically qualified for Head Start programming due to family homelessness, receipt of public assistance, or foster care placement, and 22 children qualified with an IEP.

The employment situation among Head Start families is often concerning. With average hourly wages in Montrose County equating to \$45,812 in annual income (Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, 2022) and the self-sufficiency standard for Montrose County at \$61,794 (two adults, one preschooler and one school-aged child, per Colorado Center on Law & Policy, 2018), many Head Start families struggle to make ends meet.

In the 2021-2022 school year, 37% of Head Start families reported being single-parent households and 63% two-parent households. Additionally, families reported the following employment status:

- 87% had at least one parent employed at the time of child enrollment, dropping to 81% employed at the end of the school year.
- 12% had at least one parent enrolled in training or school at the time of child enrollment.

111 Head Start parent respondents to ECC's 2021-2022 survey self-report the following educational attainment:

- 19% non-graduates
- 41.5% with high school diplomas/GEDs
- 32.5% with associates degrees and/or some college or advanced training
- 7% with bachelor's and/or master's degrees.

Eligible Head Start Children and Families – Child Welfare

ECC staff members, including those employed via Head Start funding, are required to report suspected child abuse/neglect, with seven cases reported during the 2021-2022 school year.

Eligible Head Start Children and Families – Health and Nutrition

At ECC in 2021-2022, 102 (94%) of 114 Head Start children were enrolled in Medicaid or CHP+; seven had private health insurance, five were without insurance.

As an important indicator of childhood well-being, immunizations are taken very seriously at ECC/Head Start. Among ECC children enrolled during the 2021-2022 school year, 93% were up to date on all immunizations.

Within 45 days of a child's start date, ECC/Head Start works with the parent(s)/guardian(s) to complete a child nutrition assessment. Twice a year, the ECC Health Technician measures the students' heights and weights. Of the Head Start children enrolled at ECC during the 2021-2022 school year, 7% qualify as overweight, and 9% obese.

The ECC/Head Start program implements Healthy School practices by incorporating:

- 30 minutes of daily physical activity
- Nutritious snacks
- Education on healthy eating
- Commitment that all Head Start-enrolled children are up-to-date on immunizations, physicals, and annual dental exams (100 Head Start children received a professional dental examination during the 2021-2022 school year, and none had signed waivers from participation).

MCSO RE-1J data collected during the September 2022 registration process identified the following risk factors among 288 total (102 Head Start) children entering preschool:

Risk Factor	All ECC Programs (288)		Funded Head Start Enrollees (102)	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Qualifies for Free/Reduced Meals	195	68%	94	92%
Homeless	40	14%	24	24%
In Family Experiencing Domestic Violence	78	27%	31	30%
In Family Experiencing Substance Abuse	79	27%	31	30%
Child of Teen Parent	8	3%	6	6%
Parent Not Having Completed High School/Equivalent	124	43%	45	44%
In Family Experiencing Frequent Moves	69	24%	29	28%
Potential Developmental/Social Delay	29	10%	8	8%
Speech/Language Delay/Concerns	153	53%	54	53%
In Family Impacted by Natural Disaster	137	48%	52	51%
In Family Experiencing Military Deployment	0	0%	0	0%
Family or Child Experiencing Mental Health Concerns	93	32%	36	35%
Family Member with Learning Disability	92	32%	37	36%
In Family Experiencing Family Crisis	129	45%	54	53%

Eligible Head Start Children and Families – Childcare and Preschool

In any given year, Early Childhood Centers has served more than 40% of all children enrolling in MCSO kindergarten through one of its five programs. One of the Centers’ core goals – and something it does quite successfully – is to ease the transition into kindergarten.

The Montrose and Olathe communities continue to need quality early learning and care opportunities for preschool-age children. ECC’s increase in online applications, phone inquiries and spring registration appointments suggest that families who were thinking about relocation have decided to stay in Montrose County. Coupled with an increase in new families moving to the county, ECC had 25 children on its waiting list by the end of the 2021-2022 school year.

The following figures illustrate the significant potential for Head Start in the ECC service area, with an estimated 312 children eligible but not enrolled:

Estimated # of children, ages 3-5 years, in service area*	Estimated # of Head Start-eligible children in service area**	# of children enrolled in Head Start 2021-2022
1,275	414	102

*Colorado State Demography Office, 2022
 **Based solely on economic factors' eligibility

Eligible Head Start Children and Families – Children with Disabilities

During the 2021-2022 school year, 22 Head Start enrollees had IEPs (a decrease of four from the prior year), as did 57 enrollees through the Children with Disabilities program (a 10% increase from the prior year) and 34 enrollees in other programs, for a total 91 children being served with IEPs.

Children with IEPs automatically qualify for preschool placement. For other children displaying significant delay in one or more areas of development, eligibility is determined based on a special needs placement assessment. Assessments are conducted in the child’s native language and involve the child’s parents, Early Childhood Special Education Assessment Team, and Child Find Team including:

- Speech language pathologist
- Occupational therapist
- Child Find Coordinator (master’s-level Special Education)
- School psychologist
- Language interpreter, as needed

When a developmental delay is identified, the family/child is referred to and/or receives supports and services based on the age of the child:

- A child 0-3 years of age with significant delays is referred to Community Options for the development of an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). Case management, early intervention work and needed therapies all are coordinated through this regional, state-mandated provider of services for individuals with developmental disabilities.
- For qualifying children ages 3-5 years, an IEP is created, including attention to specific therapy needs. Speech, motor, and educational services are provided at ECC/Head Start, where these children automatically qualify for Children with Disabilities placement.

All ECC classrooms are fully inclusive, which means children with IEPs for development delays participate in all classroom activities with their same-age peers without developmental delay. Accommodation for children with IEPs (e.g., support staff and/or equipment) ensure full participation in classroom activities. Proactive outreach is continuously conducted to inform families in the community of ECC’s commitment to serving children with special needs.

Eligible Head Start Children and Families – Early Childhood Centers

In response to the many and various needs of the community's children and families, and in support of the MCSD RE-1J mission statement, ECC delivers high-quality, comprehensive, developmentally appropriate services for young children and their families. Early Childhood Centers has been providing Head Start programming for families and children since Fall 1991, developing a strong infrastructure both within the agency and with community partners, allowing for sustained programming and the ability to continue responding to the needs of the community by offering quality early childhood education.

Collaborative staff teams at ECC participate in the ongoing monitoring of and planning for Head Start programs. An annual self-assessment ensures that Head Start requirements are known and implemented by ECC program staff, and to meet Head Start Performance Standards for monitoring quality of services provided. The parents, staff and community volunteers who are members of the Program Self-Assessment Committee collect data to identify areas working well and those in need of improvement. Team members take pride in their participation, and ECC improves as a result of this school-community self-monitoring process.

The ECC Mission

In partnership with our families and communities, the children of the Montrose County School District RE-1J Early Childhood Centers will acquire a positive foundation for lifelong learning.

Recruitment Strategies, Recruiting New Students

ECC staff, Policy Council, and Colorado Preschool Program District Advisory Council continuously work to engage new methods for recruitment and retention of students. A recruitment policy is in place and is followed by all staff; methods for recruitment include:

- Child Find screenings are held throughout the year. All families attending these events are provided with information on Head Start and are encouraged to enroll when eligible. The Child Plus online application is available to complete in both English and Spanish.
- Posters, flyers, and other written materials are distributed at local grocery stores, community service agencies, post offices, libraries, medical facilities, public schools, private/public preschools, and businesses.
- Public service announcements are submitted to local newspapers, local cable access channels, radio stations, and other regionally distributed media publications.
- Facebook, Twitter, and other social media outlets disseminate program information and updates, and the MCSD web site provides information on ECC programming.
- Annual re-enrollment of returning children, and discussions regarding younger siblings, are held on an ongoing basis; word-of-mouth promotion is active and encouraged.

Head Start Performance Standards require that no more than 30 calendar days elapse for a vacancy to be filled from any existing waitlist. The policy further provides for 10% of total enrollment to be comprised of those served through the Children with Disabilities program. During the 2021-2022 school year, the 91 children diagnosed with an identified disability – or 27% of 335 enrollees – far exceeded the required minimal enrollment of this population.

ECC maintains a waitlist of eligible or potentially-eligible children. At the time of registration, if a child is determined not to be eligible for any of the five ECC programs, the family is instructed to inform ECC of any changes in their situation that could indicate eligibility. Of 25 children on the ECC waiting list at the end of the school year (May 2022), none qualified for any ECC program.

Currently, there are ECC classrooms at two MCSD schools: Johnson and Olathe Elementary schools. It is convenient for parents to have their older children and preschool-aged children receive educational instruction at the same campus; this convenience, as well as use by MCSD teachers enrolling their own children, typically results in full enrollment at both sites.

Community Programs and Resources Available

Early Childhood Centers has always worked diligently with other local/regional resources to expand, enhance, and supplement the education provided through its programs. Collaboration occurs with numerous agencies to meet specific objectives for staff, parents, and children.

Families and siblings of Head Start children, depending on circumstance, may be eligible for services or enrolled in programs through other early childhood service provider agencies, including Kids Thrive – a national early childhood development initiative for children ages 0-3 years – and/or subsidized childcare available via Montrose Department of Human Services.

Despite the sometimes overwhelming needs presented by the community, and particularly by ECC/Head Start families, the overall outlook in Montrose County remains positive, and community agencies work well together to find solutions to unmet needs. Early Childhood Centers continues to reach as many Head Start-eligible children as possible, while implementing programming to provide quality early childhood education for enrollees and additional resources/supports for their families.

COVID-19 Impact, Adjustments, and Response

During the COVID-19 pandemic, total child care enrollment dropped statewide in Colorado by 53.2%; enrollment dropped an average 38.9% among providers serving children four years of age and younger (Early Milestones Colorado, 2021). Families bore the brunt of this burden: 64.3% report having altered child care arrangements due to the pandemic, and 49.2% of parents saw household income decrease (Early Milestones, 2021).

Kids Count! 2022, *A Pause in Progress: The Impact of the Pandemic on Colorado's Kids*, reports that nearly two years later, Colorado children and families are still feeling the impacts of COVID-19:

- Child care closures impact working households and remain a concern: As of early 2022, 25% of Colorado households with children reported that disruptions in child care caused them to cut work hours or use paid leave to care for children
- More than half report a loss of household income since the pandemic began
- Roughly one-third of these households report difficulty paying for basic household expenses, such as food and medical care.

In collaboration with federal and state funders, ECC worked diligently to continue service delivery throughout the pandemic, and now – in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic – continues to

support Montrose County families. ECC fully complied with the MCSD RE-1J Return To Learn Plan; mitigation practices have included:

- Additional cleaning/sanitizing of high touch surfaces several times per day; disinfecting of toys minimum once per day and as otherwise needed.
- Daily student and staff health checks prior to entering school facilities, including symptom screening and temperature checks.
- Face masks required for all staff, students, and volunteers except during eating and napping; masks made available for both staff and students via MCSD RE-1J and donations.
- Full vaccination required of all staff, except those exempt by waiver (religious or health reasons). Exempted staff participated in weekly/serial testing.

In collaboration with Montrose County Public Health Department, MCSD RE-1J provided access to no-cost COVID-19 testing for students and staff at an offsite, easy-to-use, drive-thru location.

Additional funding was made available for the 2021-2022 school year by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service to provide free breakfast and lunch for all children in the School District on scheduled school days.

The mental health of students and their families, as well as staff and their families continue to be a priority for Early Childhood Centers. Students and families who need mental health resources can treatment/services through funding procured for the preschool program. In addition to Head Start's priority of staff wellness, Montrose County School District provide staff members with a benefits' opportunity that promotes staff health and wellness. During the 2021-2022 school year, staff were invited to choose up to three opportunities from a list of activities that included four rounds of golf, a one-year State Parks pass, a one-year National Parks pass, a 10-punch pass at Ouray Hot Springs and/or a 20-punch Montrose Recreation Center pass.

Conclusions Based on Data Analysis

Since initiating the community assessment process, Montrose County has experienced significant population growth and low wages. These factors strain community infrastructure as agencies scramble to keep up with the increased demands prompted by hardship and population growth. Housing, healthcare, education, and social/human services all have been impacted by changing demographics and the economy. Recovery from the pandemic along with rising inflation, only exacerbate this landscape.

Despite unemployment rates currently lower than state averages, employment remains a concern in Montrose County. Average annual wages are consistently lower than statewide averages. This impacts not only individuals and families, but also the service providers tasked with meeting the needs of families. Further, Montrose County's isolated and rural location, combined with an unpredictable economy, makes it difficult to attract qualified professionals in health care, childcare, and preschool teaching.

ECC/Head Start identifies the following trends, concerns, and gaps as most noteworthy:

- Population growth in Montrose County has been substantial over the last decade, and this is projected to continue. This presents greater problems for lower-income families, many of whom are Head Start eligible.
- Wages continue to be lower, overall, than in Colorado's more populated counties, especially on the Front Range. Lower wages result in families' inability to exist on one or even two parents working full-time jobs, especially as childcare costs increase.
- Inflation, combined with steeply rising housing prices and high cost of rent, presents difficulties as families seek to secure affordable housing, particularly lower-income families.
- A far greater number of children are living in Montrose County than currently can be served by area resources. Enrollment continues to grow at Montrose ECC, and now is back to pre-COVID levels. There continues to be a lack of childcare centers, preschool environments, and other child development services, particularly for the more sparsely populated outlying communities of the county where resource/service providers must partner with one another to create viable, sustainable service delivery systems.
- Adequate facilities must be available to accommodate the growing number of children enrolled in programs, particularly those with disabilities. Montrose RE-1J recognizes this need and has identified a new facility for Montrose ECC as a priority in its budgeting, with a funds-generating campaign plan currently underway.
- Appropriate programs must be in place for children whose families are above income guidelines – i.e., those whose families are a part of the “working poor” and unable to afford quality programming, yet who have incomes substantial enough that they do not meet current eligibility guidelines. It is hopeful that the introduction of UPK in 2023-24 will favorably impact the affordability of early childhood education for this population.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS AND PRIORITIES

Early Childhood Centers is committed to ongoing assessment of philosophical and programmatic approaches, self-assessment and community assessment, child outcomes, parent involvement data and parent surveys, Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) and staff member feedback, all of which drive both long-term (five year) and short-term (specific components/programs) goals. Additionally, a formal strategic planning process occurred in 2018, involving numerous individuals representing the MCSD Board of Education and District leadership, ECC Policy Council, preschool education staff and leadership, and the community.

Based on the results of the assessment process and updated data contained herein, as well as the needs of the community served by MCSD, Early Childhood Centers intends to continue forth with the following priorities for the five-year period 2019-2024:

1. Strengthen active supervision systems.
2. Provide professional development for ECC staff members; provide educational opportunities for parents to promote development of kindergarten readiness skills in children.
3. Improve the Centers' communication systems.
4. Acquire quality and sustainable facilities.

The following provides the plan of action for each of the goals outlined above:

Goal I: TO STRENGTHEN ACTIVE SUPERVISION SYSTEMS FOR THE MCSD RE-1J EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTERS

Objective 1: *To monitor the completion of the 2022-2023 Active Supervision Committee Action Plan*

Objective 2: *To assess the secondary monitoring data of the current system for usefulness, effectiveness, and ability to drive ECC program planning and improvement.*

Goal II: ADDRESS TRAINING NEEDS BY PROVIDING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO MCSD RE-1J EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTERS STAFF MEMBERS AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES TO PARENTS THAT PROMOTE THE DEVELOPMENT OF KINDERGARTEN READINESS SKILLS IN CHILDREN

Objective 1: *ECC education staff members will receive professional development in the Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment and Creative Curriculum implementation to improve overall scores in all seven domains of Teaching Strategies GOLD for all 4-year-old students by May 2023.*

Objective 2: *To provide ChildPlus professional development opportunities to the ECC support staff for the purpose of reliable data collection during the 2022-2023 school year.*

Objective 3: To provide preschool families with opportunities to gain knowledge and understanding in Pyramid Model strategies and the Prevent, Teach Reinforce for Young Children (PTRYC) process for Level 2 and Level 3 Multi-Tiered Systems of Support.

Objective 4: To develop a calendar that offers ECC parents' current and new educational opportunities during the 2023-2024 school year.

Objective 5: To provided Practice Based Coaching for CLASS to MCSD RE-1J Early Childhood Centers education staff and improve scores in the Instructional Support domain.

Objective 6: To provide professional development opportunities to increase the use of Google Drive for all ECC staff members.

GOAL III: IMPROVE THE COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS OF MCSD RE-1J EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTERS

Objective 1: To ensure that the ECC year 5 of 5 strategic plan has alignment with the MCSD RE-1J strategic plan and is communicated with ECC staff, parents, and stakeholders during the 2022-2023 school year.

Objective 2: To improve the MCSD RE-1J onboarding training for new staff members by completing tasks identified in the ECC Year 4 of 5 strategic plan by the end of the 2022-2023 school year.

Objective 3: To develop an ECC Emergency Safety Training Implementation Plan for the 2023-2024 school year.

Objective 4: To develop and implement a plan to communicate the new ECC policies and procedures handbook to all ECC stakeholders.

GOAL IV: TO ACQUIRE QUALITY AND SUSTAINABLE FACILITIES

Objective 1: To work with MCSD RE-1J and the Board of Education to develop a Facilities Committee that will make recommendations to the design and construction of a new MCSD RE-1J ECC Montrose facility.

Objective 2: To implement a capital campaign project to raise \$10 million by July 2023 to begin construction of a new MCSD ECC Montrose facility.

VII. APPENDIX

Community Assessment: Sources of Data

Information has been obtained via scanning web sites and telephone interviews from/with the following:

Affordable Housing; Web site at <https://affordablehousingonline.com/>

Bright Futures; 620 Mountain Village Blvd, Telluride, CO 81435; (970) 369-1312; Web site at <http://www.brightfuturesforchildren.org>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Web site at <https://www.cdc.gov.html>

Colorado Association of REALTORS; *Local Market Update for July 2022- Montrose County*; Web site at <https://coloradorealtors.com/market-trends/regional-and-statewide-statistics/>

Colorado Center on Law & Policy, *The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Colorado 2018*; 789 Sherman Street #300, Denver, CO 80203; (303) 573-5669; Web site at <https://cclponline.org/resources-publications/publications/self-sufficiency-standard/>

Colorado Center on Law & Policy, *Human Services Gap Map 2022*; 789 Sherman Street #300, Denver, CO 80203; (303) 573-5669; Web site at: <https://gapmap.org>

Colorado Children's Campaign; *Kids Count in Colorado!*, 2000-2022 reports; 1120 Lincoln Street, Suite 125, Denver, CO 80203; Web site at <http://www.coloradokids.org>

Colorado Mesa University, Montrose Campus; 234 S. Cascade, Montrose, CO 81402; (970) 249-7009; Web site at <http://www.coloradomesa.edu>

City Data; Web site at <http://www.city-data.com>

County Health Rankings and Roadmaps; Web site at <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/app/colorado/2022/measure/factors/171/data>

Data USA; Web site at <https://datausa.io/>

Dolphin House Child Advocacy Center; 236 S. 1st St. #311, Montrose, CO 81401; (970) 240-8655; Web site at www.montrose-child-advocacy.org

Early Childhood Centers Montrose-Olathe, Head Start; P.O. Box 10,000, Montrose, CO 81402; (970) 249-5858; Web site at <http://ecc.mcsd.org>

Early Milestones Colorado. (2021). *Measuring the Impact of COVID-19 on Colorado's Early Care and Learning Sector*. Suzanne Delap, Ph.D.; Meg Franko, Ph.D.; Katherine Nicolaou, M.A.T.;

Gerardo Silva-Padrón, B.A.; and Courtney Thornton, B.A. Web site at:

<https://earlymilestones.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/COVID-Wave-1-Report-Web.pdf>

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Montrose County School District RE-1J; P.O. Box 10,000, Montrose, CO 81402; Web site at <http://www.mcsd.org>

Montrose Economic Development Corporation; 100 Tessitore Court, Suite A, Montrose, CO 81401; (970) 270-0211; Web site at <http://www.montroseedc.org>

River Valley Family Health Center; 308 Main Street, Olathe, CO 81425; (970) 323-6141; Web site at <http://www.rivervalleyfhc.com>

State of Colorado, Demography Office; Web site at <https://demography.dola.colorado.gov/>

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Technical College of the Rockies; 1765 Hwy 50, Delta, CO 81416; (970) 874-7671; Web site at <https://www.tcr.edu/>

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The Center for Mental Health, Montrose Clinic; 605 East Miami Road, Montrose, CO 81401; (970) 252-3200; Website at <https://www.centermh.org/>

The PIC Place; 87 Merchant Drive, Montrose, CO 81401; (970) 252-8896; Web site at <https://www.pic.place/>

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