

2023

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



Prepared by  
Third Sector Innovations, Inc.

October 2023

# **MONTROSE/OLATHE EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTERS**

## **COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT REPORT OCTOBER 2023**

900 Colorado Avenue, Unit 4  
P.O. Box 10,000, 81402  
Montrose, Colorado 81401  
Telephone 970/249-5858  
Fax 970/249-7537

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Executive Summary	3
II.	Introduction	5
III.	Methodology: Community Assessment Process	9
IV.	Data and Findings	
	Service Area	10
	Families in the Service Area	15
	Community Resources	20
V.	Data Review and Analysis	23
	Conclusions Based on Data Analysis	28
VI.	Recommendations and Priorities	30
VII.	Appendix	
	Community Assessment: Sources of Data	31

## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

Montrose County is in the southwestern quadrant of the state and has a population of 42,679 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 have steadily risen since 2018 and continue to be an issue for many families, with wait times beginning at six months or more to rent affordable family units. The Colorado Center on Law & Policy reports that Montrose County families need income more than two and a half times the federal poverty level to make ends meet.

Access to affordable healthcare remains a significant concern for Montrose County residents. Medicaid enrollment remains high, with 63.5% of the county's children enrolled in Medicaid and 8.6% in Colorado's publicly-funded CHP+. Yet, the proportion of uninsured children in Montrose County (7.2%) still is higher than in Colorado overall (4.7%), and the community is a federally-designated health professional shortage area; even with insurance, accessing care can be difficult.

Despite these struggles, there are hopeful indicators as well:

- The unemployment rate in the county remains relatively stable, at 3.5%, up only slightly from 3.1% in 2022, and the same as the statewide percentage (Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, August 2023).
- An estimated 75.2% of homes in the county are owner-occupied (compared to 66.4% statewide); the majority of residents (86%) live and work in Montrose County (American Community Survey, 2017-2021).
- Montrose County families are taking advantage of available financial supports, with 80% of the eligible population enrolled in WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children) and 59% of those eligible Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP (Colorado Center on Law and Policy, 2023).
- The July 2023 initiation of the Universal Preschool Program (UPK) is anticipated to have a positive impact on Montrose County families. UPK is provided via a mixed delivery system, offering a variety of provider types and settings (stand-alone preschools, child care centers, public schools, faith-based providers, family child care homes.) The Colorado Department of Early Childhood reports that Pre-K enrollment is up 40% statewide for the 2023-24 school year (Colorado Department of Childhood, 2023).

In response to community realities and needs, MCSD Early Childhood Centers is making a positive impact through its Head Start, UPK Colorado, Children with Disabilities, Colorado Preschool Program (CPP), Early Childhood At-Risk Enhancement (ECARE), and tuition programs, currently involving a total 281 children, 110 of these through Head Start.

ECC further supports families by providing 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 2022-2023:

- 74% of Head Start children have had dental care within the last 12 months, compared to 82% of children statewide (Kids Count Data Center, 2023).
- 99.6% of ECC children were current on vaccinations, higher than the state average of 92.3% (Colorado Department of Health and Environment, 2023).

An additional indicator of ECC success lies in the involvement of families, and particularly fathers, father figures, and male role models: During the 2022-2023 school year, parents, guardians, and family members contributed 10,862 volunteer hours to ECC-related activities, with 15% of volunteers being male, up from 8% in 2021-22.

Like early childhood organizations throughout the state, maintaining a workforce continues to be a struggle. Early Milestones Colorado, a nonprofit early childhood research organization, 2017 survey of Colorado's center directors reported a 17% annual turnover rate in program leadership positions, 16% turnover in lead teacher positions, 22% turnover among assistant teachers, and 40% turnover for "floaters." ECC saw turnover of nine staff positions (16%) during the most recent school year, an improvement over the prior year's 12 vacating/replaced staff. Reasons for leaving include a new job, moving, retiring, returning to school, and death. In the most recently conducted staff survey, 76% reported they feel supported at work.

The following goals have been set for, and will be pursued by Early Childhood Centers in 2024:

1. ECC will provide a high-quality, research-based instructional experience that is relevant and engaging for all students to develop kindergarten readiness.
2. ECC aims to create a culture that prioritizes respect and value and is continuously monitored to ensure that staff, students, and families experience an enjoyable, safe, and inclusive environment.
3. ECC aims to create well-structured and sustainable support systems for staff, students, and families and maintain safe and engaging facilities to enrich the ECC community.

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 (unserved by ECC/Head Start programs).

In 1993, three MCSD RE-1J programs were available to provide early childhood learning opportunities: 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 (ended in June 2023 and replaced by Universal Preschool Colorado (UPK))
- 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, Colorado on the Montrose County School District RE-1J administrative campus, Unit 4, housing the following staff:

- Early Childhood Centers Director
- Program Coordinators: Program Operations, Family and Community Engagement, Education
- Coordinator Assistant – Health & Safety
- Mental Health Consultant
- Family Advocates (5)
- Administrative Assistant to the Director
- Secretary
- Data Technician

ECC employed a cumulative total of 58 staff during the 2022-23 school year, including 16 preschool teachers, 19 classroom paraprofessionals, and four Family Advocates including the family and community engagement coordinators, who all have direct involvement with enrolled children and their families.

During the 2022-2023 school year, parents, guardians, family members, and community members contributed 10,862 volunteer hours to ECC programs; 15% of volunteers were male. Of those, 3,138 volunteer hours were contributed by Head Start parents, guardians, and family members. Volunteer hours are tallied for participation in the following:

- Back-to-preschool orientation
- Budget/grant committee
- Classroom volunteerism
- 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
- Interview committee
- Literacy night
- Meet & greet
- Parent-Driven Activities Committee
- Parent/teacher conferences
- Policy Council

ECC's Head Start Policy Council for the 2022-2023 school year comprised seven parent representatives and two 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 the 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 in and participate through ECC’s Head Start, UPK Colorado, ECARE, or tuition programming. Those five years old, on or before August 1, are eligible for kindergarten and thus may not be served through Head Start or ECARE.
  - 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 UPK Colorado eligible, s/he must have at least one qualifying factor outlined by State statute (outlined below). All four-year-olds are eligible for at least 15 hours per week of preschool through UPK.

Each child's parent(s) or guardian(s) is/are interviewed to collect information determining risk and eligibility. Eligibility criteria assign and accumulate 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 federal Part B services including preschool at the age of 33 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 2022-2023 school year, ECC served the following:

<b>Program</b>	<b>Registered/Placed (services provided for a minimum one day)</b>	<b>Funded Preschool Slots</b>
Head Start	111 children	102 children
Colorado Preschool Program*	84	130
Children With Disabilities	60	unlimited
Early Childhood At-Risk Enhancement	46	120
Tuition Pay	6	14
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>307 children</b>	<b>366+ children</b>

\*Replaced by UPK Colorado on July 1, 2023

As illustrated above, the number of children served by ECC during the 2022-2023 school year equated to just 67.5% of available preschool “slots” available (does not include Children With Disabilities figures, as this provides for an unlimited number of slots). This phenomenon aligns with statewide data: the 2023 Colorado Preschool Legislative Report shows that only 46.8% of funded preschool slots were utilized for full-day services (Colorado Preschool Program, 2023). Unused slots are attributed to a lack of space and staffing at the ECC.

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. Specific information is (most typically) provided regarding the families benefiting through ECC/Head Start during the most recent and fully-completed 2022-2023 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. Additional data sources include 2020 U.S. Census statistics and American Community Survey projections 2017-2021. 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 by the Colorado Preschool Program District Advisory Council and is updated as needed.

The process of community assessment began in 2002, as required by the U.S. 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 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 2016, 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 5,405 people, or 13%, from 2020 to 2029 (Colorado State Demography Office, 2023).

There currently are an estimated 2,404 children, ages five years and younger, in Montrose County; approximately 1,215 of these children are preschool-aged (Colorado State Demography Office, 2023).

The U.S. Census American Community Survey 2017-2021 reports that, among Montrose County residents aged five years or older, 17.7% speak a language other than English in the home (nearly exclusively Spanish), a figure slightly higher than the statewide figure of 16.2%. 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%):

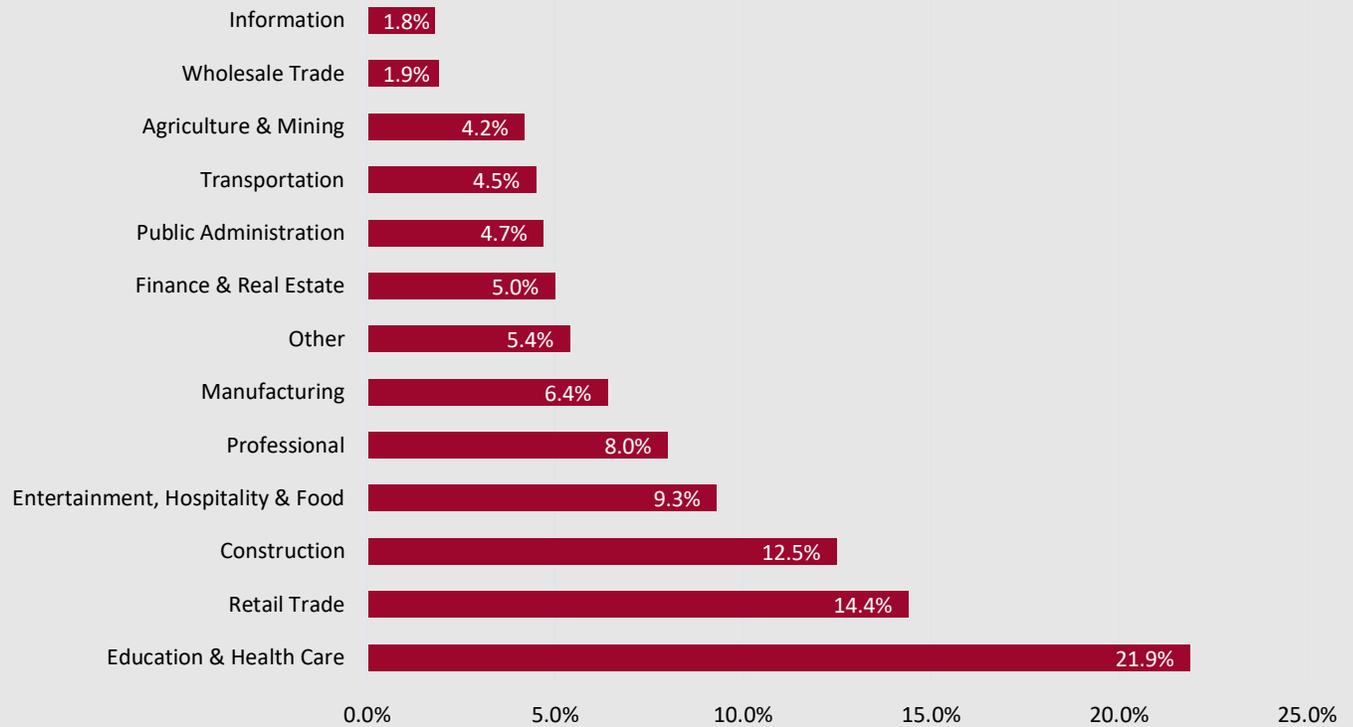
Population Geography	White*	Black or African American*	American Indian and Alaska Native*	Asian/Pacific Islander*	Some Other Race	Two or More Races	Hispanic/Latino Origin
Colorado	70.7%	4.1%	1.3%	3.5%	8.0%	12.3%	21.9%
Montrose County	78.2%	0.4%	1.4%	0.8%	9.1%	10.0%	21.2%

\*Not Hispanic or Latino

## Service Area - Economy, Employment, and Income

The area’s economy finds 59.2% of the workforce employed in the private sector, 12.4% employed by government, 10.3% employed by private not-for-profit, and 18.1% self-employed (American Community Survey, 2017-2021). The private, non-farm sector is made up of those working in the following trades:

### Montrose County Employment by Industry



The American Community Survey reports that 55.6% of households in Montrose County are family households (two or more people related by birth, marriage, or adoption); these households have a median income of \$72,515 per year.

The average hourly wage in the county still is far lower – at \$23.88 per hour – than the \$38.98 per hour state average, illustrating the need for dual-income family households to make ends meet (Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, Quarter 1, 2023):

Geographic Area	Unemployment Rate (August 2023)*	Average Hourly Wage (1st Quarter 2023)*	Average Weekly Wage	Average Annual Wage
Colorado	3.5%	\$38.98	\$1,559	\$81,068
Montrose County	3.5%	\$23.88	\$955	\$49,660

### **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 18,952 (American Community Survey, 2017-2021).

The availability of affordable dwellings throughout much of the service area is limited. With the capacity to serve only 252 clients through its federal and state voucher systems, Montrose County Housing Authority continues to see long wait periods for eligible families to receive assistance; the current wait time is six months, with 35 individuals on the waitlist for one of its units (Montrose County Housing Authority, 2023). Even with voucher assistance, high rental rates currently present a significant difficulty as families try to secure affordable rentals; the median monthly rent rate in the County is \$988 (American Community Survey 2017-2021).

Purchasing a home is equally challenging as the area continues to see rising home prices. From a 2011 recession-low of \$139,495 average single-family house sale price, the 2022 median sale price has tripled to \$415,000 (Colorado Association of Realtors, 2023). There is no indication that the real estate market is beginning to stabilize. The median sales price increased by nearly 5% from 2022 to 2023, while the average sales price increased by 10%.

### **Service Area - Social and Human Services, Child Welfare**

Many Montrose County families access public financial support. Further, Kids Count in Colorado! 2023 reports:

- 23.8% of Montrose County children are born to single mothers
- 2.5% of Montrose County families receive TANF assistance
- 46.9% of Montrose County families receive WIC vouchers.

Montrose County has significantly higher rates of child abuse and neglect, and out-of-home placements, than statewide averages (Kids Count!, 2023), 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	6.4	8.6	17,9574 (2.0%)
Montrose County	15.6	18.8	140 (2.2%)

\*Colorado Department of Education, 2023

In 2022, the Dolphin House Child Advocacy Center (Montrose) provided services for 299 primary victims and 318 secondary victims of child abuse (children 0–17 years old), providing follow-up support for 15 families.

In an attempt to counter child abuse, Hilltop’s 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. Community providers providing these services include Axis, River Valley Health, Peak, PIC Place, Northside Health Clinic, Integrated Insight Therapy, Pediatric Associates, and school-based mental health professionals. 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 2022-2023 school year, the following referrals were documented:

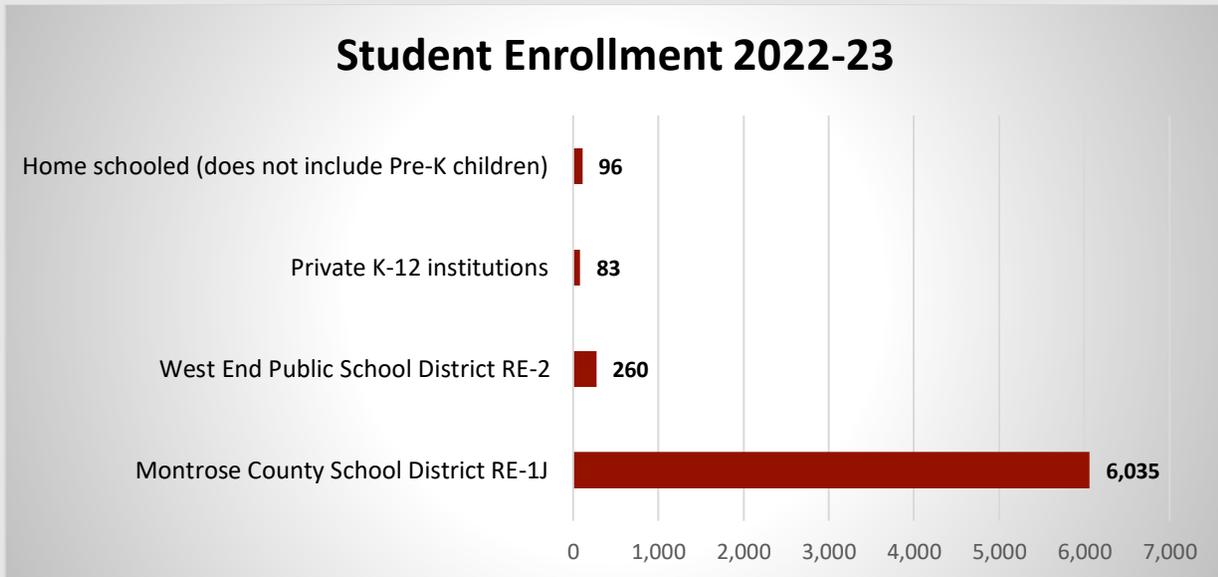
- Cobble Creek Angel Tree Community (Christmas presents/gift cards) – 37
- Emergency/crisis intervention – 35
- Kids Aid (backpack food program) – 30
- Tom Goodrich Warm Hearts Memorial Project (coats) – 25
- Child mental health – 25
- Mental health services – 25
- Parenting education – 5
- Adult Education - 1

### **Service Area - Educational Institutions and ECC Service Delivery Sites**

Numerous entities provide educational opportunity in Montrose County: Colorado Mesa University-Montrose (CMU-Montrose) provides degree programs at the associate, bachelor, and master levels, with total enrollment in 2022-23 of 223 undergraduates, including 60 high school students, a slight increase from 2021-22 (221 undergraduates, 43 high school students).

Conveniently located in neighboring Delta County, Technical College of the Rockies offers certification programs including EMT, automotive services, computer-aided drafting and design, cosmetology, medical assistant, and veterinary assistant. 2022-2023 enrollment included 30 Montrose/Olathe high school students, an additional 93 full- and part-time post-secondary Montrose County residents, as well as 38 community/supplemental education enrollees.

The majority of Montrose County Pre-K-12<sup>th</sup> grade students enrolled during the 2022-23 school attended Montrose County School District RE-1J as detailed by the following figures:



Only 39.2% of students in grades 3, 5, and 7 (grades selected by CO Dept. of Education for standardized testing) in Montrose County are meeting or exceeding expectations in English/Language Arts, compared to 43.2% in Colorado (Kids Count!, 2023).

Specific to early childhood education, the community’s licensed facilities are concentrated in the more populous area of Montrose. The following chart outlines the number of preschool facilities in the ECC/Head Start service area. (Bright Futures, Fall 2023):

Geographic Area	Total # Licensed Facilities	# ECC/ Head Start Facilities	Total # Slots (full- and half-day)	Current # of Open Slots
Montrose County	26* (Including private homes)	3	844	32
Montrose	24	2	760	29
Olathe	2	1	84	3

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

**Families in the Service Area - Ethnic Composition and Languages**

Colorado Department of Education enrollment figures (pre-K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade) for the 2022-2023 school year show a greater portion of students who identify as Hispanic enrolled in Montrose County School District RE-1J schools than the community-at-large:

Population [FF]	White*	Black or African American*	American Indian and Alaska Native*	Asian/Pacific Islander*	Some Other Race	Two or More Races	Hispanic/Latino Origin
Montrose County*	78.2%	0.4%	1.4%	0.8%	9.1%	10.0%	21.2%
MCSC RE-1J	57.48%	0.50%	0.53%	0.62%		2.0%	38.87%

\*American Community Survey 2017-2021

Of the 6,035 students enrolled in pre-K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade during the 2022-23 school year, 43% (2,593) students were race/ethnic minorities.

**Families in the Service Area - Residency/Mobility**

The majority of local individuals and families consider Montrose County their long-term residence. 86% of residents live and work in Montrose County and 75.2% of households are owner-occupied (American Community Survey, 2017-2021).

**Families in the Service Area - Childcare Needs**

In a 2022 report by Early Milestones Colorado, 28% of low-income families report they do not have the child care they need (*Still Struggling: Colorado Families’ Views on Child Care and Hope for Universal Preschool*, 2022). The situation is particularly tough for those with infants, according to the report, wherein nearly one in three families of children under age one are unable to secure the child care that they need to work.

Montrose County families share in this struggle, with 34% of family households with two children considered child care cost-burdened, an increase from 29% in 2022 (County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, 2023). The current average cost for full-time childcare is \$60 per day for a child younger than two years, \$50 per day for a toddler, and \$45 per day for a preschooler (Bright Futures, 2023). With average rent at \$1,022/month, a single-parent, female-led family with two children can easily spend 90% of family income on 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 Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (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's TANF program administered by Colorado Works.

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. Early Milestone's reports that 83% of families that participated in their 2022 survey would be likely to send their children to preschool if it were affordable to their family (*Still Struggling: Colorado Families' Views on Child Care and Hope for Universal Preschool*, 2022).

Since 1988, the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) has funded preschool programming for children 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 the 2021-2022 school year, with the Colorado Department of Education estimating fewer than one-half of funded spaces (46.8%) were utilized for full-day services, leaving 15,620 spaces unused by eligible 3- and 4-year-olds (CPP Legislative Report 2023). MCSD RE-1J's Early Childhood Centers has been the only CPP provider in the Montrose-Olathe community.

Universal Preschool Colorado (UPK) ushers in the next era of early childhood education in the State of Colorado. In July 2023, CPP was replaced with UPK through the passing of House Bill 22-1295, creating a no-cost preschool program under the newly formed CO Department of Early Childhood. Recognizing the importance of equal access to early childhood education, UPK ensures all Colorado 4-year-olds have access to at least 15 hours of preschool instruction per week, as compared to CPP which served only those with qualifying risk factors. Low-income three-year-olds with one additional qualifying factor (IEP, homelessness, dual language learner, or foster/kinship care) are also eligible for 10 hours of preschool instruction under UPK.

Regional Local Coordinating Organizations (LCOs) are responsible for assisting families with questions they have about the program along with help completing the online registration. LCOs also work with local providers to register them as a qualifying preschool and report availability.

Bright Futures, the region’s Early Childhood Council acts as the Local Coordinating Organization (LCO) for coordinating the UPK delivery system in Montrose County.

UPK is touted as a game changer for early childhood education in Colorado, helping the many working families who did not qualify for financial support in the past. Children who qualify for other funding sources like the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program and Head Start can “stack” these resources on UPK hours to meet their families’ needs. This is a significant step in making high-quality early education affordable for all families. Early reports project UPK saving impacted families an average of \$4,300 per year. In Fall 2023, the CO Department of Childhood reports preschool enrollment up 40% across the state.

As UPK is still in its early stages of development, it is still too soon to report on the impact on Montrose County families. It is anticipated that preschool enrollment for four-year-olds will continue to increase in Montrose as cost is no longer a barrier. As a UPK provider, Montrose Early Childhood Centers (ECC) along with MCSD RE-1J will continue to monitor preschool enrollment numbers and determine needed adjustments to programming to reflect this changing landscape.

Additionally, Montrose Early Childhood Centers (ECC) continues to serve children also enrolled in kindergarten. Of the children entering Montrose County School District RE-1J kindergarten in the 2021-22 school year (most recent available data), ECC provided preschool services for 46%. A 2022 ECC-conducted survey of 358 parents of incoming kindergartners indicated 80% of these children had some childcare or preschool experience; among the 20% without this experience; the top reasons given included stay-at-home parents and relatives providing care.

### **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 with (potential) developmental concerns, and helps to prepare them for successful start in their education. The local Child Find Coordinator provides screenings for individual families/children throughout the year; from June 1, 2022, to May 31, 2023, 217 screenings and 84 evaluations were completed with those living in the ECC/Head Start service region; of those evaluated, only five children did not qualify for special education services because they did not meet the required service threshold.

Children identified as qualified through Child Find benefit from an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) and are provided services through federal Part C funding for infants and toddlers. Community Options is the local agency responsible for providing therapeutic services for these children. 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, 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, 2023), with significant provider shortages resulting in chronic 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:

<b>Kids Count! In Colorado Report</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
<b>Montrose County Uninsured Children</b>	6.2%	6.2%*	8.6%	8.6%	7.2%
<b>Montrose County Children Eligible yet not Enrolled in Medicaid or CHP+</b>	1.5%	10.1%	13.0%	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; 2023 data reported by CO Center on Law & Policy, Human Services Gap Map.

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 local 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). River Valley serves an estimated 9,000+ patients (unduplicated count) via 40 examination rooms at three facilities located in Olathe, Montrose, and Delta.

PIC Place (Partners in Integrated Care) serves patients living at or below 250% of federal poverty levels, 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 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 approximate 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.

Numerous Montrose County families wrestle with nutritional challenges, including the ever-growing concern of childhood obesity; this is most particularly an issue for those of low-income who rely on less expensive foods (typically highly-processed items other than lean meats, fresh fruit, and vegetables). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that youth, ages 2-19 years and living at/below 350% of the federal poverty level, are 3.5 times more likely to be obese than their more affluent peers. 2023 County Health Rankings and Roadmaps data reveals that 27% of Montrose County adults are obese and, further, that 11% of Montrose County residents are food insecure and eight percent have limited access to healthy foods.

Eligibility for free/reduced lunch in the Montrose County School District RE-1J is another indicator of the need for supportive nutrition services – 52.1% of MCDS RE-1J students are eligible for free/reduced lunch, compared to the statewide average of 40.2%.

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 the preparation of fresh foods.

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

Among Montrose County adults 25 years and older:

- 11.2% have less than a high school education
- 31.7% graduated high school
- 23.7% have some college/no degree
- 6.9% have an associate degree
- 26.5% hold a bachelor's degree or higher (American Community Survey, 2017-2021).

During the most recently reported school year, K-12 dropouts in MCSD RE-1J decreased to 2.3%, down from 2.8% the previous year (2020-21). The 2022 graduation rate also dropped significantly from 77.3% in 2020-2021 to 73.9% in 2021-22 and continues to lag the state average. While the District's overall graduation rate dropped, rates from Montrose and Olathe high schools were in alignment with or better than the statewide average (Colorado Department of Education):

Geographic Area	Total Pupil Count 2021-22	Graduation Rate 2022	Dropout Rate 2022
Colorado	476,226	82.3%	2.2%
MCSD RE-1J	3,141	73.9%	2.3%
Montrose High	1,563	82.1%	3.3%
Olathe High	313	89.8%	1.6%
Peak Virtual Academy	220	89.7%	2.7%
Vista Charter School	209	18.3%	4.3%

## **Community Resources**

The following provides a comprehensive list of community agencies and programs currently working in collaboration with Early Childhood Centers/Head Start:  
(located in the city of Montrose, unless otherwise noted)

### **PRE-K THROUGH 12<sup>TH</sup> GRADES, HIGHER AND CONTINUING EDUCATION PROVIDERS**

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 PROVIDERS**

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

### **PRIMARY AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CARE, HUMAN SERVICES, AND FAMILY SERVICES PROVIDERS**

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 County School District RE-1J Special Education  
Pegasus Equine Therapy

**LOW-INCOME HOUSING AND SHELTER PROVIDERS**

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**

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**

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 2022-2023 school year are as follows for Early Childhood Centers, including 111 Head Start enrollees\* (total 307):

	White	Hispanic	Native American	Black	Asian	Pacific Islander	Other
Enrollment	269	186	11	5	3	0	20
% of Enrollment	88%	61%	4%	2%	1%	0%	7%

\*During the 2022-23 school year, 111 children were enrolled at least one day in Head Start's 102 funded slots.

\*\*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 52% of the children enrolled during the 2022-2023 school year. The second most common language is Spanish, spoken as the only language by 12% of children. An additional 21% are bilingual, with the remaining 15% of children using sign language, other spoken languages, or not reporting. These percentages are in alignment with overall MCSD 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* 2021	School Children (5-17years) Living in Poverty* 2021
Colorado	11.8%	10.9%
Montrose County	18.7%	17.7%

\*Income at/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 situation of all families served by ECC in the 2022-2023 school year is reported as:

- 37% of children were living in families at or below 100% of federal poverty level
- 48% of children were living in families with income above poverty level

- 15% of children were living in families not required to provide proof of income as a result of meeting other eligibility criteria.

The employment situation among Head Start families is even more concerning: In the 2022-2023 school year, 40% of Head Start families reported being single-parent households and 60% two-parent households. Additionally, families reported the following employment status:

- 85% had at least one parent employed at the time of child enrollment, dropping to 56% employed at the end of the school year.
- 11% had at least one parent enrolled in training or school at the time of child enrollment.

Head Start parent respondents to ECC's 2022-2023 survey self-report the following educational attainment:

- 24% non-graduates
- 30 % with high school diplomas/GEDs
- 36.5% with associate degrees and/or some college or advanced training
- 9.5% with bachelor's and/or master's degrees.

Forty (40) of 307 children automatically qualified for Head Start programming due to family homelessness, receipt of public assistance, or foster care placement, and seven children qualified with an IEP.

### **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 14 cases reported during the 2022-2023 school year.

### **Eligible Head Start Children and Families – Health and Nutrition**

At ECC in 2022-2023, 100 (91%) of 111 Head Start children were enrolled in Medicaid or CHP+; seven had private health insurance, and four 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 2022-2023 school year, 99.6% 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 students' heights and weights. Of the Head Start children enrolled at ECC during the 2022-2023 school year, 4% qualified as overweight, and 14% 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 (82 Head Start children received a professional dental

examination during the 2022-2023 school year, and none had signed waivers from participation).

MCSO RE-1J data collected during the September 2023 registration process identified the following risk factors among 276 total (102 Head Start) children entering preschool:

Risk Factor	All ECC Programs (276)		Funded Head Start Slots (102)	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Qualifies for Free/Reduced Meals	176	64%	96	94%
Homeless	38	14%	29	28%
In Family Experiencing Domestic Violence	90	33%	37	36%
In Family Experiencing Substance Abuse	84	30%	30	29%
Child of Teen Parent	15	5%	9	9%
Parent Not Having Completed High School/Equivalent	117	42%	44	43%
In Family Experiencing Frequent Moves	58	21%	29	28%
Potential Developmental/Social Delay	31	11%	6	6%
Speech/Language Delay/Concerns	165	60%	62	61%
In Family Impacted by Natural Disaster	87	32%	33	33%
In Family Experiencing Military Deployment	2	0.7%	2	2%
Family or Child Experiencing Mental Health Concerns	89	32%	35	34%
Family Member with Learning Disability	105	38%	35	34%
In Family Experiencing Family Crisis	113	41%	35	34%

### **Eligible Head Start Children and Families – Childcare and Preschool**

The Montrose and Olathe communities continue to need quality early learning and care opportunities for preschool-age children. The following figures illustrate the significant potential for Head Start in the ECC service area, with an estimated 293 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 2022-2023
1,215	395	102

\*Colorado State Demography Office, 2023

\*\*Based solely on economic factors' eligibility

ECC had no children on its waiting list by the end of the 2022-2023 school year as the Montrose County School District RE-1J requested that the ECC enroll all students on the waiting list before the school year ended.

### **Eligible Head Start Children and Families – Children with Disabilities**

During the 2022-2023 school year, 21 Head Start enrollees had IEPs (a decrease of 12 from the prior year), as did 60 enrollees through the Children with Disabilities program, and 15 enrollees in other programs, for a total 96 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.

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 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 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 because 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, 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, distributed at local grocery stores, community service agencies, post offices, libraries, medical facilities, public schools, private/public preschools, and businesses.
- Public service announcements, submitted to local newspapers, local cable access channels, radio stations, and other regionally distributed media publications.
- Facebook, Twitter, and other social media outlets, disseminating program information and updates, and the MCSD website provides information on ECC programming.
- Annual re-enrollment of returning children, and discussions regarding younger siblings, held on an ongoing basis; active and encouraged word-of-mouth promotion.

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 2022-2023 school year, the 95 children diagnosed with an identified disability – or 31% of 307 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.

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, finding 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.

### **Conclusions Based on Data Analysis (including transition to UPK)**

Since initiating the annual community assessment process two decades ago, Montrose County has experienced significant population growth and continued low wages. These factors strain infrastructure as agencies scramble to keep up with community demand. Housing, healthcare, education, and social/human services all have been impacted by this changing landscape. Recovery from the pandemic, along with rising inflation and high interest rates, only exacerbates this situation.

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

- Affordable housing is limited. As noted, population growth in Montrose County has been substantial over the last decade, and this is projected to continue, creating a competitive housing market. This presents greater problems for lower-income families, many of whom are Head Start eligible.
- Jobs that pay competitive wages remain 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. Lower wages result in families' inability to survive on one or even two parents working full-time jobs, especially as childcare costs increase. Further, Montrose County's isolated and rural location, combined with an unpredictable economy, makes it difficult to attract and retain qualified professionals in health care, childcare, and preschool teaching.
- 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.
- UPK presents new opportunities along with challenges. Fall 2023 enrollment at ECC indicates an increased demand for services. This increased demand has a ripple effect on programming and operations:
  - Financial impacts - To accommodate changes to enrollment processes and prepare for UPK rollout, staff logged more summer hours than in previous years.
  - Presently, ECC/Head Start is serving an increasing number of children identified as special needs. This has required additional staffing to ensure coverage for students with IEPs.
  - Changes to classroom composition – there are classrooms with predominantly three-year-olds, or four-year-olds instead of mixed groups, changing peer interactions/socialization along with instructional delivery.

- Less personal interaction with families during enrollment – UPK’s online enrollment system versus the in-person enrollment of the past means Family Advocates have fewer interactions with families and limited opportunities to get to know them.
- Changes to parent communication – Since the state has taken over the preschool enrollment process, ECC has seen a shift in the relationship-building that came with our (previous) local enrollment process. Separate communication is going to the families, causing potential mis-communication issues throughout the course of enrollment.
- Adequate facilities must be available to accommodate the growing number of children enrolled in programs, particularly those with disabilities. Montrose County School District RE-1J recognizes this need and intends to secure a bond to address district facility issues, including space for the Montrose ECC.

## 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. A formal strategic planning process occurred in September 2023, involving individuals representing the MCSD Board of Education, 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 pursue the following goals and objectives in 2024:

### **Instructional Goal:**

ECC will provide a high-quality, research-based instructional experience that is relevant and engaging for all students to develop kindergarten readiness.

#### Objectives:

1. To ensure that all teaching teams score at the competitive CLASS threshold of Head Start guidance.
2. To expand instructional practices to include inclusion and differentiation in every ECC classroom so that learning is engaging to all students.
3. Develop ECC Kindergarten readiness SMART goals for all five learning domains.

### **Culture Goal:**

ECC aims to create a culture that prioritizes respect and value and is continuously monitored to ensure that staff, students, and families experience an enjoyable, safe, and inclusive environment.

#### Objectives:

1. Collect and analyze all relevant staff data that will inform positive ECC culture (i.e., staff succession survey, staff satisfaction survey, etc.).
2. Develop a 2024-2025 school year budget that will prioritize a positive culture for ECC staff.

### **Systems Goal:**

ECC aims to create well-structured and sustainable support systems for staff, students, and families and maintain safe and engaging facilities to enrich the ECC community.

#### Objective:

1. Create an induction program for all first-year teachers, teachers who obtain a waiver, and new teaching teams.

## VII. APPENDIX

### **Community Assessment: Sources of Data**

Information has been obtained via scanning websites and email correspondence with the following:

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 Center on Law & Policy, The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Colorado 2022; 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 2023; 789 Sherman Street #300, Denver, CO 80203; (303) 573-5669; Web site at: <https://gapmap.org>

Colorado Children's Campaign; Kids Count in Colorado!, 2000-2023 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>

Colorado Preschool Program; Web site at <https://www.cde.state.co.us/cpp/2023cppl Legislativereport>

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

County Health Rankings and Roadmaps; Web site at <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/explore-health-rankings/colorado/montrose?year=2023>

Dolphin House Child Advocacy Center; 236 S. 1<sup>st</sup> St. #311, Montrose, CO 81401; (970) 240-8655; Web site at [www.montrose-child-advocacy.org](http://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. (2022). *Still Struggling: Colorado Families' Views on Child Care and Hopes for Universal Preschool*. Web site at: <https://earlymilestones.org/resources/>  
[https://earlymilestones.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/EM-Preschool-StillStruggling\\_updated.pdf](https://earlymilestones.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/EM-Preschool-StillStruggling_updated.pdf)

Franko, M., Brodsky, A., Wacker, A., & Estrada, M. (2017). *Bearing the cost of early care and education in Colorado: An economic analysis*. Denver: Butler Institute for Families, Graduate School of Social Work, University of Denver.

Montrose County Housing Authority; 222 Hap Court, Olathe, CO 81425; (970) 323-5445; Web site at <https://montroshousingauthority.com/>

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

Montrose Association of Realtors; 125 Merchant Drive, Montrose, CO 81401; Web site at <https://montrose.stats.showingtime.com/docs/lmu/x/MontroseCounty?src=map>

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/>

State of Colorado, Department of Early Childhood, Web site at <https://cdec.colorado.gov/>

State of Colorado, Department of Education, Colorado School Districts; Web site at <http://www.cde.state.co.us>

State of Colorado, Department of Labor and Employment; Web site at <https://www.colorado.gov/cdle>

State of Colorado, Department of Local Affairs; Web site at <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/dola>

State of Colorado, Department of Public Health and Environment; Web site at <https://www.colorado.gov/cdphe>

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

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Kids Count Data Center; Web site at <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/>

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/>

U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis; Web site at <http://www.bea.gov>

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; Web site at <http://www.bls.gov/>

U.S. Census Bureau; *American Community Survey, 2017-2021*. Web site at [https://data.census.gov/profile/Montrose\\_County,\\_Colorado?g=050XX00US08085](https://data.census.gov/profile/Montrose_County,_Colorado?g=050XX00US08085)

U.S. Department of Health Resources and Services Administration; Web site at <https://data.hrsa.gov/>