

**Leap Coalition**  
**Early Childhood Paraprofessional Program**  
**Program Development Document**

Updated: 12/18/2017



**Our Goals:**

Our goals **for children & families** include giving all kids positive attention, and being able to change the trajectory of struggling kids. Larimer County has many classrooms where the teachers have a lot of tools to support social-emotional strengths, but many of these supports take extensive teacher-time. We want teacher to have the opportunity to spend real time implementing recommended success plans and be able to give high-level support to children and their families.

Our goals **for paraprofessionals** include providing opportunities for less experienced teachers or volunteers to work in high quality settings that nurture and support children and staff. We want to encourage anyone interested in working in Early Childhood to be fulfilled, invested and supported by the environments they work in. We want teachers who are new to the field to experience classrooms that limit chaos and model safety and regulation. We want opportunities for aspiring teachers to gain required experience hours for credentials in the highest quality settings possible, and we want to encourage experience in home care settings.

Our goals for **mentor teachers** include providing additional classroom support while they implement successful plans for struggling children. It is our intention for mentor teachers to actively feel more supported and more successful, and improve their overall job satisfaction. Additionally, we hope provide a path for these teachers to become leaders in the field and for them to feel valued for their expertise and skills.

Our goals **for programs** include raising workforce retention rates and creating outcome measurements to document the impacts we make in children's lives. We want to question industry biases and our traditional expectations, and potentially reduce additional workload for schools and volunteers.

Our goals **for the community** including creating of a high-quality mentorship program, which incorporates new early childhood professionals as well as community volunteers. We want to promote quality programs as models for our community and raise parent and community awareness of mutual exceptions for classrooms with challenging behaviors.

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**Our Solution**

ECPP will match the classrooms of high needs kids with meaningful support. The goal is to get more hands in classrooms which are providing high quality social emotional supports for struggling children and families.

The program seeks to combine the talents of intentionally selected paraprofessionals, volunteers, and interns with mentor teachers, early childhood mental health professionals, and an ECPP Program Advisor.

The Pilot program will be gathering baseline data and training mentor teachers in the fall 2017. In the spring of 2018, six classrooms will participate in a pilot program. Students in the Early Childhood Program at Front Range Community College who are already seeking internship hours will work in classrooms which have been identified as high quality and supportive. The programs of identified classrooms will be ones who have already participated as a site for internships with Front Range Community College. Participants will attend planning meetings, orientation trainings and be willing to be part of evaluation measures.

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**Implementation**

**1. A Site identifies a specific child or a classroom need**

*It has been the development committees experience that all classrooms have a need for additional supports in social emotional progress for children, specifically when they are high quality settings dedicated to serving children with challenges. A classroom unable to identify helpful areas of support would not be a good fit for the program. However, a classroom does not need to be “struggling” in order to recognize support that would help a child or all children in a classroom setting.*

**2. The site contacts an Early Childhood Mental Health Professional (ECMH), Classroom Coach or Classroom Expert to provide insight and an action plan:**

The ECMH professionals are called on (if not already present) to observe the child's behavior in the classroom and meet with the mentor teacher and all classroom staff. They may create a behavior plan for the child, and/or a classroom level plan, if necessary, possibly including their own involvement. This plan could direct involvement from the ECMH professional if needed.

*The development committee recognizes that there are not enough ECMH professionals to service the needs of all classrooms in the county. Currently, we are looking at different models of support-plan creation that include classroom coaches from the early childhood council, particularly skilled mentor teachers and program directors. As we build capacity for more classrooms to be serviced by EMCH providers, we may adjust the expectations for programs in this area.*

These experts may also be helpful in communicating plans with the child's home caregivers, coordinate appropriate meetings and provide additional resources to the family, as needed.

**3. The Program applies to participate**

- Program signs the MOU for the program, including the Code of Conduct
- Program agrees to send mentor teacher or administrator to orientation training
- Program participates in baseline data evaluation

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**4. The ECPP provides Mentor Teacher Training**

This orientation is attended by ECPP key administrators (currently development committee volunteers) and mentor teachers or administrators from participating programs. It will cover general program and evaluation expectations as well as answer questions about responsibilities. At this time, it is expected that all teachers approved as mentors will have the early childhood educator skills to provide a supportive program. This orientation will be held at an evening meeting and is expected to be less than two hours.

*The development committee recognizes that a different model of training or up-front support for mentor teachers might be necessary, helpful or impactful. We may expand this orientation or training in the future.*

**5. The Paraprofessional/Volunteer/Intern applies to participate**

- Para signs the MOU for the program, including the Code of Conduct
- Para agrees to attend orientation training
- Para participates in baseline data evaluation

**6. The ECPP matches great paras with great programs**

**7. The ECPP provides Paraprofessional Teacher Training**

This orientation is attended by ECPP key administrators (currently development committee volunteers) and paraprofessionals. It will cover information about the ECPP Program, including general program and evaluation expectations, and provide time to answer questions about responsibilities. Additionally, it will cover agreed upon general policies and procedures for all early childhood classrooms and an overview of important factors in a supportive environment for social emotional development.

It is our goal to take as much burden in training off of the programs as possible. Any Para who has not completed required pre-service trainings may also be offered a path to completion of these at the time of this orientation.

*The development committee hopes to engage the state's new model for creating a list of approved "substitute pools" in order to approve or qualify paras as a group on a semester basis. However, this orientation does not eliminate a program's need to orient paras to their specific program.*

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**8. The Mentor Teacher provides a ready classroom**

A mentor teacher who has taken the ECPP training will ready their classroom to receive para support by creating strong classroom practices, and being willing to follow all expectations of the ECPP. They will also have met with the ECMH professional and are ready to implement the child's specific behavior plan.

The mentor teacher will meet with the para to go over classroom policies and norms and willing to answer their questions, so they can integrate with other staff and classroom culture as an additional leader.

**9. The Paraprofessional begins supporting the classroom**

During specified hours, a para who has completed the ECPP training and met with the mentor teacher previously, will enter the classroom and be prepared to lead with children. They will not be responsible for the specified high-needs child directly, but rather they will be working with the larger class, allowing the mentor teacher to focus on implementing the behavior plan, one-on-one.

Paras will not be counted in ratio numbers. The mentor teachers must remain in the classroom and able to continue to supervise the children in their care as they work with high-needs plans. The paraprofessionals are here to learn, practice classroom management skills, be observed and receive feedback. They are expected to be professional, accountable for their assigned hours, to follow the site's code of conduct and to be an integral part of the classroom family.

**10. Ongoing evaluations, feedback loops and support will be provided to paras and mentor teachers**

The ECPP provides a streamlined way for all parties involved to connect and share reports throughout the para's assignment, including the site administrator, the mentor teacher, the mental health professional, and the para themselves. Throughout the process, the ECPP will facilitate the evaluation procedures, and collect data to inform the community, drive change, and improve the program.

Throughout their assignment, paras will be willing to ask questions, reflect on their learning, and complete all paperwork to receive their credits and/or stipends. They may also be called on to be part of family planning meetings. Mentor teachers will provide strengths-based

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feedback to the para and to the ECPP Advisor throughout the program.

The mentor teacher will receive feedback from classroom experts and the ECPP Advisor, and make classroom changes, as needed to increase effectiveness of the behavior plan.

Evaluation forms will be collected at mid-semester and end of semester.

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**ECPP Code of Conduct**

- We communicate about concerns and issues, attendance and follow through and internal relationships with each other and with all program administrators. We bring issues to relevant people as they arise in order for problems to be solved in a way that creates learning and growth.
- We participate in the data collection and program evaluation process with integrity and honesty and clarity
- Paraprofessionals will not be left alone with children or expected to count toward classroom ratios at any point.
- Mentor teachers will oversee and support all responsibilities for children, including behavior plans for struggling children.
- Mentor classrooms and paraprofessionals will agree to work together for the duration of the semester.
- Paraprofessionals will be seen as an important leader in the classroom and be given opportunities to learn and grow into this position as classroom relationships are built.
- All parties agree that the paraprofessional is involved in the program as a learner and will be observed and provided feedback for growth. Additionally, that the learner will be invited and encouraged to ask questions and reflect on learning.
- All parties will participate in orientation and be aware of FRCC expectations and agree to uphold FRCC and NAEYC standards in the classrooms.
- All parties agree to abide by program specific rules, standards and codes of conduct.
- All parties agree to abide by state licensing standards and rules.
- Paraprofessionals and mentor teachers will be provided with opportunities to meet with one another throughout the semester.
- Mentor classrooms and paraprofessionals agree to be part of the behavior plans and goals outlines for the classroom.
- ECPP will work with programs and paraprofessionals to help all parties meet all expectations.
- ECPP will provide an orientation for programs and paraprofessionals to attend in order to align expectations.
- ECPP will provide mentor and professional development opportunities for mentor classrooms throughout the semester.
- ECPP will match program needs and paraprofessional learning needs with intention.
- ECPP will facilitate evaluation measures, procedures and collection and use the information in a way which informs the community and drives change within the ECPP program.

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**Additional Information**

**Current Collaborations:**

1. Front Range Community College
  - -Hosting training events
  - -Providing coordination and administration support
  - -Providing MOUs with pilot sites
  - -Providing para and mentor teacher support
  - -Program Development Committee participation
2. Programs Participating in Pilot Program: (Arts and Imagination Preschool and Daycare, Goddard School, Laura's Learn and Play, Poudre School District, Teaching Tree Early Learning Center, and Young Peoples Learning Center)
  - Program administrative support
  - Mentor teacher training
  - Coordination of classroom expert supports
  - Program Development Committee participation
3. Early Childhood Council of Larimer County & Leap Program
  - Meeting coordination assistance, note taking and development tracking
  - Classroom coaching support to programs
  - Program Development Committee participation

**Potential Future Collaborations:**

Colorado State University, Early Childhood Teacher Training Programs

Colorado State University, School of Social Work

Larimer County Workforce Center

Additional private or non-profit preschools and home care settings

Additional school district classrooms

*This list needs to be expanded in the future by the development committee*

The ECPP provides orientation training and ongoing support for Paraprofessionals as well as mentor teachers and classrooms. At some point, the ECPP may be able provide stipends for Paras or programs that participate to offset the additional costs incurred. Additionally, some programs may choose to compensate paras, pay for training opportunities or invest in the program in another way.



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**Additional Questions to be Answered**

- What should the qualifications be for eligible ECMH professionals?
- Do we want to have para classroom coaches?
- Do we want to encourage long-term volunteers?
- How can we increase our quality goal?
- What training do we want to have for mentor teachers in the future?
- What other collaborations work well in order maximize support and impact?
- What funding sources encourage participation and maximize impact?