

## Eagle County Schools leading charge to fix county's 'child-care crisis'

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EAGLE — Eagle County Schools will lead efforts to improve and expand child care options around Eagle County.

The school district landed a \$167,500, two-year contract to start addressing what is being called a "child care crisis" (<http://www.vaildaily.com/news/report-points-to-lack-of-child-care-in-eagle-county/>) across Eagle County.

That child care crisis was the conclusion from a \$75,000 study split by Eagle County (\$50,000) and the school district (\$25,000), which asserted that Colorado is America's seventh most expensive state for child care and Eagle County is Colorado's seventh most expensive county. Families pay between \$11,000 and \$13,000 annually for child care, said Eric B. Schnurer, president of Public Works, a research firm from West Chester, Pennsylvania, that conducted the initial study, which is calling for an early childhood roadmap. (<http://www.vaildaily.com/news/commissioners-still-want-to-fund-child-care-program/>)

Eagle County is doing the same thing in the Roaring Fork Valley, awarding a \$180,000 contract to Cradle to Career (<http://publicclerfiche.eaglecounty.us/WebLink/DocView.aspx?dbid=0&id=26497&page=1&cr=1>) with the Aspen Community Foundation.

"The district is honored to have been selected by the county to manage this critical project for our community," said Tammy Schiff, the school district's chief communications officer.

### EAGLE RIVER VALLEY ROADMAP

The first stop on that early childhood roadmap is to create a community-based advisory group, to include both public and private organizations, especially those that work directly with young families and children.

After beating four other bidders (<http://publicclerfiche.eaglecounty.us/weblink/0/doc/26776/Page1.aspx>) to win that \$167,000 contract from Eagle County, the school district will take on that job for the next two years.

Schiff and Shelley Smith, the district's director of early childhood programs, will lead the school district's efforts. Andrea Abbott, executive director of Heartland Solutions, a Loveland consulting firm, will help coordinate the advisory group's efforts, the school district said.

"Eagle County Schools applied to the request for proposal from the county so that we could see the excellent recommendations that were provided in The Early Childhood Roadmap Community Engagement project utilized to address the gaps in early childhood education throughout Eagle County in the years ahead," Smith said in a prepared statement.

The school district has already started down its own early childhood road.

The school board expanded the district's preschool program as part of November's \$144 million voter-approved ballot initiative.

Smith said that expansion has two components:

- The Preschool Plus summer program provides services in one classroom at nine schools through the summer. The summer program is designed to help support working families and provide more consistency for children, Smith said.
- The extended day is the after-school program. The district provide services in one classroom in each school from 3 to 5 p.m.

The extended day and Preschool Plus summer program serve as many as 135 children. Even without them, the school district's existing program serves more than 300 children, Smith said.

### FOLLOW THE MONEY

In addition to the \$347,500 spent on the Eagle County school district and the Aspen Community Foundation's Cradle to Career, Eagle County is contributing \$352,300 from its general fund for local child care programs. The state is adding \$522,000 from the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program, said County Commissioner Jill Ryan.

The state grant will fund approximately 65 child care spots. Payments go directly to providers, and providers do not have to be licensed, Ryan said.

To be eligible for a subsidized childcare spot, the income for a family of four cannot exceed 165 percent of the federal poverty level (<http://familiesusa.org/product/federal-poverty-guidelines>), about \$50,000. Children must be 13 or younger and U.S. citizens or legal residents.

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### TO GET INVOLVED

The Eagle County school district is seeking local residents interested in serving on the advisory group. Email Shelley Smith at [shelley.smith@eagleschools.net](mailto:shelley.smith@eagleschools.net) (<mailto:shelley.smith@eagleschools.net>) to learn more.

