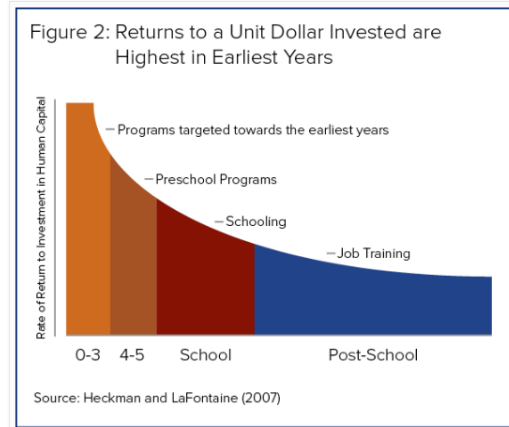


## Support Early Intervention Budget Request

**Department Priority: R-03**

### GENERAL BACKGROUND

Early Intervention (EI) services support children from birth to age three who have developmental disabilities or delays. The program was created in Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Through the EI program, children and their families can access services such as Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Speech-Language services, behavioral interventions, and assistive technology. These services improve outcomes in health, language and communication, cognitive development, and social/emotional development. **EI can reduce and often eliminate the need for Special Education and other public services later in life, so funding EI represents a good return on investment for Colorado.** Well-established evidence from large national studies demonstrates this. For example, **up to half (between 43-50%) of all children who receive EI services do not go on to need Special Education services** when entering Kindergarten, and economists estimate a **13% return on investment per child per annum** for high-quality 0-5 programs, with the highest return being for programs targeted towards the earliest years, such as Early Intervention.



### THE PROBLEM

The need for EI continues to grow in Colorado, and states are prohibited from having a waiting list for these effective and time-sensitive services. Failure to serve all eligible children in a timely fashion puts federal funding for this critical program at risk. If caseload growth is not adequately funded, families will experience delays as EI Brokers and providers will struggle to maintain a workforce adequate to serve all eligible children. Those children who miss out on Early Intervention will likely go on to need additional services later. Because intervention is likely to be more effective and less costly when provided between 0-3, the most critical years for child brain development, services for these children will likely end up costing Colorado more over time.

### THE SOLUTION

**The Joint Budget Committee should approve the Governor's 2025-26 budget request.**

#### *Caseload Request*

Funding caseload is essential to program compliance and maximizing Colorado's return-on-investment in EI. The Department's approach is efficient because it leverages dollars that were previously dedicated to workforce investments toward caseload, minimizing the amount of new funds being requested.

#### *Bill Request*

A critical component of this proposal is the request for legislation to align state law with Part C program requirements by recognizing EI as an entitlement program. This change will allow the Department, EI Brokers, and providers to be responsive to the needs of Colorado communities, meet federal requirements, and resolve historic caseload forecasting inaccuracies. It also aligns with the General Assembly's historical treatment of the program because, by funding caseload growth each year to avoid a waiting list, Colorado effectively treats the program as an entitlement already.