



July 3, 2018

Denver Mayor's Children's Cabinet

Brief History

When Mayor Michael Hancock was elected in 2011, he made his goals for Denver, Colorado very clear: improved governance, rigorous collection and use of data, and success for all of Denver's children. His agenda has from the beginning driven the Denver Children's Cabinet (DCC) to be a "space for city appointees to convene and find ways to work better across silos," says Lisa Piscopo, the Deputy Director of Policy and Analysis in the Denver Office of Children's Affairs. The DCC was created by Mayoral executive order¹ in 2012 as "the policy making group to coordinate city-based programs and services in order to create opportunities for Denver's children and youth to succeed," and is convened and managed by the Office of Children's Affairs (OCA, established in 1995).

Mission Statement

The Denver Children's Cabinet will improve communication between agencies, coordinate and align programs and services, and develop strategies to address gaps and remove barriers that hinder opportunities for Denver children and youth.

¹ <https://www.denvergov.org/content/dam/denvergov/Portals/executiveorders/139-Denver-Childrens-Cabinet.pdf>

Location:

City and County of Denver, Colorado

Target age group:

Children and youth in Denver

Established:

July 2012

Method of establishment:

Executive Order

Organizational home:

Office of Children's Affairs

Funding source:

The establishing Executive Order does not provide funding, but the Office of Children's Affairs chairs and provides staff capacity to the cabinet through its funding.

Full time employees:

Technically no FTEs are dedicated to the Children's Cabinet, but a variety of the 18 OCA personnel staff the cabinet.

Members:

As mandated by the executive order: Director of Children's Affairs; Managers of Dept. of Human Services, Parks and Recreation, Safety, Finance, Environmental health, Community Planning and Development; Chief of Police; Directors of Corrections and Undersheriff, the Office of Economic Development, Peak Performance, the Office of Strategic Partnerships, Development Services, Denver's Road Home, Career Service Authority, Denver Housing Authority, Community Health Services; City Council Member; City Librarian; Denver Public Schools representative; Denver Preschool Program representative; and a board member of the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District.

What makes Denver's Children's Cabinet Unique?

The Denver Children's Cabinet shines in the area of data collection, aggregation and usage. The executive order that established the cabinet specifically listed "quantifying the City's investment in programs" and "establishing a broad set of children's metrics that establish the baseline for child well-being" as responsibilities of the DCC. Therefore, it is no surprise that from the beginning, the culture of the DCC has been marked by an orientation around data; every initiative starts with a return to the questions 'what data do we have?' and 'what does it tell us?'

Though data collection and use in Denver is hindered by many of the same barriers faced by staff in other localities (as detailed below), the DCC has innovated and overcome many of the hurdles faced by children's cabinets to create exemplary mechanisms for the collection, aggregation and use of data to "better coordinate services for children and youth across City agencies and partners." One advantage the DCC has had in overcoming these hurdles is being housed within a dedicated local government office (the Office of Children's Affairs). Though the executive order that established the DCC didn't come with dedicated funding, it is staffed by the OCA, which provides employee time for the collection and aggregation of data for the DCC. In return, the DCC provides the weight of collaboration among 22 city and quasi-city agencies to the OCA's work.

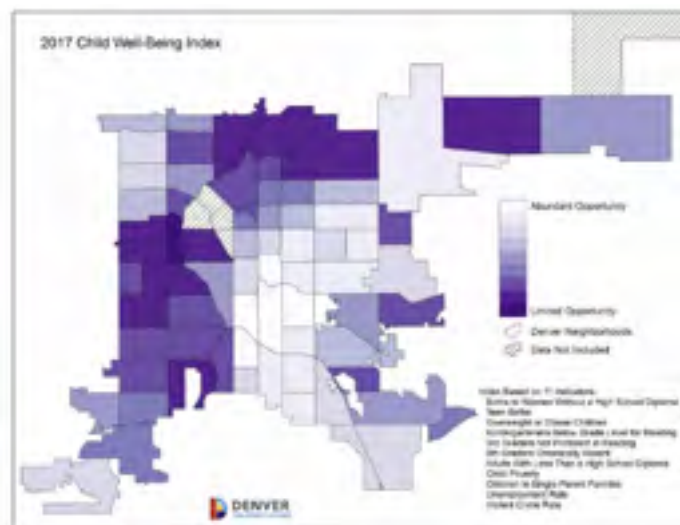
Data Aggregation

The data products most exemplary of the DCC's data aggregation successes are the Office of Children's Affairs' yearly "Status of Denver's Children: A Community Resource" and the yearly fiscal map, "Denver Children's Cabinet Inventory of Investments in Children and Youth."

The Status of Denver's Children overlays data from the Census and local agencies and programs with geospatial data on Denver neighborhoods to create a picture of how Denver kids are doing on an 11-point child well-being index (including indicators such as teen births and chronic absenteeism). It also maps the outcomes of children and youth in each neighborhood, organizes them under each of the 5 goals shared by the Mayor, the OCA and the DCC as related to the opportunities available in those neighborhoods (for example, access to Head Start sites), and compares these maps year-to-year. This particular aggregation of data provides stakeholders and decision-makers with a clear picture of how children and youth are doing in Denver, whether progress has been made towards shared goals and whether opportunities are in place to support future progress towards those goals.

"It is possible to statistically aggregate key indicators to highlight areas of cumulative disadvantage. These areas can then be used to identify and focus on societal and systemic problems that limit opportunity for children in Denver. Unpacking the complex barriers that our children face will ultimately lead to solutions for meaningful change to improve outcomes for all Denver's children."

Executive Director Ann De Groot



Budget Details are Data Too

Most cities collect budget data around how much each agency or department is spending, but go no further to analyze their investments. Denver has collected and aggregated data not only around the spending of individual agencies, departments, and programs, but the investments of those agencies, departments, and programs in services aimed at each of Denver's five goal areas (plus basic needs). Furthermore, the fiscal resource map breaks down money spent into "prevention" and "intervention," to insure that agencies aren't falling into the trap of spending only on intervention.



Aggregating the data in this fashion has provided a touchstone around which stakeholders are able to measure and work towards government efficiency and progress towards shared goals. One example of this is the allocation of resources to Denver's publically funded preschool program. In the case of the Denver Preschool Program, data has been used to understand both where pre-school eligible children live and the needs of the families of those children. As a result, the scale of subsidies for families is changing such that the gap is filled for families within an income range that doesn't either entirely cover quality child care but also doesn't qualify the family for cost-free services. Conversations like these combat the "peanut butter effect," which Deputy Director of the OCA, Dionne Williams, explains as spreading money around without any impact and without a target or strategy for getting the families who need more subsidized dollars those extra dollars. This conversation has catalyzed conversations among many agencies about changes that can be made about how to target those families for the provision of primary care, how to leverage state human services dollars, and the details of the Denver Preschool Program's sliding scale.

The fiscal map and child well-being index are also used to inform city budget decisions. When submitting budget requests to the Office of the Budget, agencies and departments are now required to use data to show how the budget request fits into city priorities. The Office of the Budget provided the OCA with the opportunity to review requests filed under 'youth priority,' which allowed the OCA to "stress test" the requests against the fiscal map and indicator metrics, and come up with a list of follow-up questions and recommendations. The fiscal map and child well-being index are also used to inform city budget decisions. When submitting budget requests to the Office of the Budget, agencies and departments are

"The fiscal resource map enables city leaders to identify and align spending with priorities. In addition, understanding the nature and extent of existing investments across age groups, populations and issue areas can help the Children's Cabinet build on existing supports and services rather than create parallel solutions that lead to piecemeal or fragmented solutions."

2017 Status of Denver's Children

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Piscopo explains that presenting the data in a common language has allowed the Children’s Cabinet to start using the data to make more meaningful change across the city: “Now that everyone has a common language, we can start using that to make more meaningful change...This is significant because we acquired an abundance of data – we had the fiscal map, the inventory, but then how do we use that to improve outcomes for kids?” As part of the Mayor’s Peak Academy initiative, the early childhood team within the Children’s Cabinet convene as a sub-working group. They review the status book and the fiscal map to identify trends, vulnerabilities, and highlighted issues, and brainstorm as a cross-agency group about what collaborative action can be taken to mitigate challenges that agencies are facing in that particular goal area. Through this focused work, the ECE workgroup of the Children’s Cabinet proposed to Mayor Hancock and his executive staff innovations targeted to improve access the child care and create an early literacy campaign.

Building a Data Culture

Collecting the amount of data required to produce a fiscal map or status report may seem daunting to those used to working within siloed government agencies. As Deputy Director of the OCA, Piscopo has faced head-on the challenge of collecting data from dozens of city agencies and outside organizations. Piscopo underlines that the request she makes of organizations is not a small one – collecting and organizing data on certain metrics and categorizing budget requests by goal consistently takes time and commitment from agency staff. To obtain the necessary buy-in from agency staff Piscopo started her first round of data collection with a presentation on the purpose of the data collection to every organization, department and agency from which she needs data. She continues to provide presentations in cases of staff turnover and says that communicating the value of this work to staff is critical to getting consistent and accurate data. Piscopo also credits the usefulness of the aggregated data with bringing agencies and organizations to the table more consistently, explaining that the agencies have to see it as more than just another checkbox to be completed and forgotten. Agencies have begun to find it useful to look at the data and have conversations about how trends fit with the cities goals, the mayor’s goals, other agencies, etc.. Data discussions are incorporated into the Children’s Cabinet’s agenda, where there is an ongoing conversation about how cross-systems policy decisions and initiatives outside of each silo’s agenda could be used to improve outcomes city-wide.

Points of Contact:

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Status of Denver’s Children: A Community Resource

<https://www.denvergov.org/content/dam/denvergov/Portals/713/documents/reports/StatusOfDenversChildren.pdf>

Denver Children’s Cabinet Inventory of Investments in Children and Youth

<https://geospatialdenver.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=939edc78fa0e4c799089f233ff07395a>