

Collin County Early Childhood Coalition

Coordinating Efforts to Improve the Wellbeing of Children and Families

County Health Rankings & Roadmaps

Building a Culture of Health, County by County



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Part of an evaluation for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for their
County Health Rankings & Roadmaps program, from October 2020 to March 2022



Collin County, Texas

With a mixed landscape of urban, suburban, and rural communities, Collin County is one of the fastest-growing counties in the nation and is ranked among the healthiest and most prosperous counties in Texas. Collin County is north of Dallas County and is considered to be part of the Dallas metropolitan area. Collin County's southwest urban corridor, encompassing Plano and McKinney, is where most people live, while most of the county is rural and sparsely populated. Although the wealth of the county is a strength, the US Census 2019 *American Community Survey* reveals that the poverty rate for children from birth to 18 years old is 7.0%, and poverty is evident in locations throughout the county.

According to the 2021 *Texas Academic Performance Report*, half or more of the students in the Eastern rural region are designated Title 1 students or part of low-income households—98% of students in the Blue Ridge Independent School District are Title 1 students. Families living in poverty face various challenges, such as rising costs of living, a lack of a regional transportation system, and a lack of affordable-housing options. These conditions impact the day-to-day lives of the county's low-income families, increasing parental stress and impacting the development and health of young children. As Tameka Caldwell former program manager with ChildCareGroup summarizes, "Children cannot thrive if their families—parents that are providing for them—are so weighted down with all they are dealing with. For children to thrive, parents need to thrive."

Coordinating efforts to improve the health of families living in poverty

No matter where you are in your journey of working with young children, the coalition is a great place to be for the networking, resources, legislative updates, [and] advocacy. The coalition is a great place to be."

– LaQuitha Hasley, ChildCareGroup

Early childhood practitioners in prosperous counties like Collin County have a difficult time making the case and securing funding to expand access for resources supporting families living in poverty. In 2016, under the leadership and funding from the United Way of Metropolitan Dallas's Texas Home Visiting Program, the Collin County Early Childhood Coalition was formed to coordinate and provide support to families with young children and to improve the overall quality of services for families living in poverty. The coalition is a partnership of nonprofit organizations, school districts, municipal agencies, and businesses and uses a workgroup structure to address issues that impact families with children in an age range of prenatal to five years old. The coalition is built on the premise that strengthening families will ultimately prevent developmental and learning challenges, increase children's academic success, and improve the long-term positive health outcomes for children and families. Taking an upstream perspective, the coalition is open to addressing any

Collin County Early Childhood Coalition

Established in 2016

The Collin County Early Childhood Coalition focuses on important issues for children from birth to age five as well as their families. We work together with individuals, agencies, businesses, nonprofits, and school districts to ensure that every child in every neighborhood has the opportunity and access to thrive.

COLLIN COUNTY, TX

Geography: rural, suburban, and urban

Population: 1,034,730

People of color: 43%

Median household Income: \$96,913

issue that impacts the health and well-being of families with children in an age range of prenatal to five years old. The coalition also believes that more coordinated and aligned services and supports to these families will improve the integration of best practices, the quality of services, and—ultimately—families' access to the resources they need.

Resources for jobs that provide families a living wage

Financial hardship and poverty can negatively affect children's cognitive, behavioral, social, and emotional development; thus, supporting the education and employment opportunities for parents can increase families' economic stability and improve the health of children. One of the coalition's four workgroups, Resources for Jobs that Provide a Living Wage, emerged out of a review of local data, with the goal of improving the financial stability of low-income parents. A guided analysis of their 2016 County Health Rankings found that child poverty was on the rise in Collin County. The goal of this workgroup is to connect parents with financial and educational resources to help them improve their employment opportunities and wages, thereby increasing the well-being and health of the family.

Collin County Early Childhood Coalition: Working Groups

1. Resources for Jobs That Provide a Living Wage
2. High-Quality, Affordable Childcare
3. Social-Emotional Learning and Parent Education
4. Parent Resources

"We know that child poverty is increasing. Connecting parents to community resources is a key strategy for impacting child poverty."

—Kristin Linscott, Plano Public Library

The workgroup is composed of various providers who work closely with families. Some members include faculty from the Collin College Child Development and Education Department and staff from the National Center for Families Learning, the Texas Workforce Commission, and the Plano Public Library. Other partners include a local nonprofit resource and assistance agency that provides job training to homeless women. The workgroup enables participants to coordinate their efforts and engage in peer learning around best practices in order to better support families, particularly those who are living in poverty.

Leveraging local community assets through partnerships with the library

A key success of the workgroup has been leveraging the public library to deliver services and supports to families in need. Rather than asking busy parents to travel to multiple locations, the public library offers a wide range of employment, social-emotional, and targeted support to parents, such as courses on job-skills training, career exploration, and financial literacy. Being part of the coalition helped Kristin Linscott, Development Coordinator at the Plano Public Library, connect local school personnel, childcare providers, and nonprofit social service agencies with an array of early learning programs already available through the system's five libraries, and to envision new program options. Linscott recalls attending a meeting where a local school district presented data showing a rise in childhood obesity in Collin County. This inspired her to work with library staff and family-serving nonprofit organizations to promote and expand existing physical activity programs of the library. Linscott says that attending coalition meetings, hearing about current challenges and needs of young

children and their parents from leaders in the early learning ecosystem, facilitates collaboration and intentionality in program development.

Nurturing Communities of Practice among Early-Childhood Providers

The Collin County Early Childhood Coalition offers capacity-building opportunities for early-childhood practitioners, advocates, and service providers on a regular basis. These opportunities include a variety of trainings, opportunities, and presentations from guest speakers who offer culturally relevant, evidence-based, and promising approaches. The coalition aims to create a community of practice that increases awareness of available resources, strengthens the network of agencies serving children and families, and increases the overall quality of services provided. Each coalition meeting includes an educational component, where members learn about a topic related to early childhood. The coalition members have an opportunity to share information about their own organization, their current scope of work, and the opportunities to partner. The coalition often brings guest speakers who present on innovative programs, family needs, and best practices for supporting families.

A new approach to addressing childhood trauma

“COVID brought to the forefront the importance of childcare. Everyone has been through the pandemic and has experienced some level of trauma,” said Barbara Batista, coalition member and Director of the Child Development Lab School at Collin College. The societal changes that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic led coalition members to actively seek opportunities to discuss trauma-informed best practices for childcare professionals. The Collin County Early Childhood Coalition responded to communities’ need and organized and hosted a virtual professional development opportunity, “A New Approach to Addressing Childhood Trauma,” with child psychiatrist Dr. Joshua Sparrow. The free workshop offered childcare professionals and community members an opportunity to learn how to best support children from a trauma-informed place.

Helping Children Develop a Healthy View of Race

The killing of George Floyd catalyzed conversations about race across the country. The coalition was quick to respond to this critical moment and brainstormed ideas to encourage families to talk to their children about race and, in the process, potentially shape a positive relationship to race early in their child’s development. The coalition members generated several ideas to support parents but quickly realized that they themselves needed to be better informed about race and that they had a lot to learn from the lived experience and cultural context of people of color. This led several coalition members to create a group in which they could learn about race in a safe manner. They organized a reading group to discuss Isabel Wilkerson’s *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*. The group is an intentional space that meets separately from the coalition’s main meetings and has helped members consider their work as early childhood providers and practitioners through a racial equity lens.

The coalition members have described the conversations as formative in developing their own racial consciousness, understanding their own social position as practitioners, and equipping them with a better understanding of the lived experiences of the populations they serve. The reading group has helped participants shift their mindsets on racial equity and reflect on how their own blind spots may have limited their ability to advocate for children and families of color. Having an intentional space in which to talk about race has given the coalition

“We are learning how racial concepts are developed and in a way that supports parents [to] teach their children about race.”

– Coalition Member

members the opportunity to build relationships, center the experiences of coalition members of color, and offer White members a space in which to learn how to be better supporters for their colleagues, children, and families of color.

Using Data and Guidance to Establish Priorities and Workgroups

During the formative stages of the Collin County Early Childhood Coalition, the coalition's leadership received guidance from the County Health Rankings and Roadmaps (CHR&R) program. This guidance helped the coalition utilize and interpret County Health Rankings data as well as county and local data from the pediatric hospital Children's Health and school districts to establish their priorities and the four workgroups: Resources for Jobs that Provide a Living Wage; High-Quality, Affordable Childcare; Parent Resources; and Socio-Emotional Learning and Parent Education. This guidance was also crucial in helping the leadership broaden their understanding of social determinants of health and, subsequently, the coalition's understanding of the many factors that impact the ability of children and families to thrive. As Denise Gomez, Manager of Community Relations at Children's Health, also shared, "CHR&R guidance helped the coalition develop a strategy and accountability; guidance helped with having someone keeping them accountable to move on."

"Data informed the need for services. Sectors came together and evaluated the data through their own lens, and that informed positive outcomes...people began asking, 'Is your program reflecting the community that is presented in the data?'"

— Tameka Caldwell, former Collin County Early Childhood Coalition Member

The Collin County Early Childhood Coalition promotes a practice of regularly discussing and interpreting county data to help them understand the landscape of resources, challenges, gaps, and needs of families with young children. For example, Gomez presented and led various workshops to discuss findings from Children's Hospital's *Beyond ABC* reports. The *Beyond ABC* report included local school districts' Title 1 funding allocation data, which helped the coalition members target their resources because it highlighted the pockets of childhood poverty within the county. The coalition members agreed that accessing data is critical to informing their collective decision making and expressed an interest in opportunities to learn how to take their data to action, such as informing their advocacy efforts in the future.

The coalition has begun the process of reexamining the current workgroups to determine whether any changes are needed to achieve their goals. Being up to date with the most recent community needs health assessment information, County Health Rankings, and other sources of local data helps the coalition adjust its priorities and strategies to make the most impact on the health of children and families in Collin County.

As LeAnn Hampton, coalition factor explains, "for the coalition to support the community in making progress on the important issues impacting families with children prenatal to age five, we must make our decisions based on the latest data. Only by studying the data, listening to stakeholders, and implementing research-informed strategies will we be able to make an impact on the most pressing needs facing children and families."

Collin County Early Childhood Coalition

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