



# Governance

A key factor in the design of a publicly-funded preschool program in Colorado is identifying a program administrator (referred to here as governance). There is not one correct

form of governance that is right for all states. Each must identify priorities, consider its own unique needs, and look at the pros and cons of different choices.<sup>1</sup>

## National Landscape

States use one of three key models of governance of early care and education:<sup>2</sup>

**Created model:** An early childhood-specific lead agency is responsible for multiple programs and functions.

**Consolidated model:** Multiple program functions, including preschool and child care, are managed by a single agency that also has broader responsibilities.

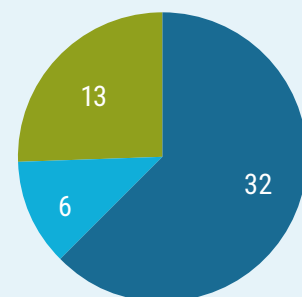
**Coordinated model:** Early childhood programs are administered by two or more agencies that work together to align rules, processes, and funding requirements.<sup>3</sup>

A state may consider several factors when choosing a governance model, such as how well their current structure is working and whether it meets the needs of parents, children, and providers.

## State Landscape

Colorado uses the **coordinated** governance model. The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) is the governing body for the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) and Colorado Preschool Special Education. The Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) is the governing body for the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) and for child care licensing and quality, which also apply to the state's preschool programs. Program providers and agencies must coordinate to align standards, funding requirements, eligibility criteria, and data.

GOVERNANCE MODELS IN USE  
BY US STATES (INCLUDES DISTRICT  
OF COLUMBIA)



■ Created  
■ Consolidated  
■ Coordinated

1 Weyer, M. & Fischer A. (2020, November). *Early Learning Governance Models*. Presentation to the Colorado Preschool Policy Leadership Committee.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

# Stakeholder Input on Colorado's Current Approach

Stakeholders and community members identified several benefits and challenges of Colorado's current approach to governing early care and education. Common themes from the Future of Preschool in Colorado engagement process are included here.

## BENEFITS

**Departmental Specialties.** Within both CDE and CDHS, there are program components that work well and achieve key goals of the early childhood system. Housing CPP and Preschool Special Education within the education system supports alignment between early childhood and grade school. The licensing and quality improvement systems at CDHS set common standards across school- and community-based programs.

**Existing Infrastructure.** Colorado has systems within existing agencies to distribute and blend funding, oversee program administration, provide technical assistance, and manage provider qualifications. Maintaining this existing infrastructure may maximize certain efficiencies.

## CHALLENGES

**Lack of Alignment.** There is not enough coordination or alignment between state agencies or across funding streams. Preschool programs have to manage different operational standards, funding criteria, and reporting requirements within a single classroom. This process is time-consuming and costly for providers, which impacts program quality and capacity.

**Bureaucracy.** Existing state agencies are large and cannot easily shift or respond to the needs of community programs and families. Complex rules, regulations, and contracting and application processes discourage participation.

## NEEDED ADJUSTMENTS

Stakeholders identified several factors that they would like built into any universal preschool governance model:

**Equity Focus.** All populations need equitable access to high quality, culturally-responsive preschool opportunities. A governance model that anticipates and supports families' language and cultural needs will help make sure all families can participate.

**Family Access.** Families need an easy path to identifying and accessing preschool that fits their lives. Successful governance will build and adequately fund a strong referral system, actively reach out to all families, and honor family choice.

**Inclusive Approach.** Stakeholders want a governance model that invites and involves all program types, families, and community leaders in decision-making processes.

## FUTURE OF PRESCHOOL IN COLORADO ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

**Preschool Policy Leadership Committee (PPLC):** Thirty-one governor-appointed members who explore policy ideas for designing and implementing universal preschool.

**Preschool Policy Advisory Group (PPAG):** Open to anyone with an interest in informing program design, this group is focused on shared learning and input.

**Community Input Sessions:** One-time meetings hosted by more than 40 local or special-interest groups to get input on people's goals and concerns for universal preschool.

*\*For more information about the engagement process and methodology, visit [earlymilestones.org/futureofpreschool](http://earlymilestones.org/futureofpreschool).*





# Stakeholder Input on Possible Solutions

Through the engagement process, three governance options were evaluated for administration of universal preschool in Colorado:

- 1 Colorado Department of Education
- 2 Colorado Department of Human Services
- 3 New State Agency



## 1 COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

### PROS

- ✓ **Preschool-Grade School Alignment.** CDE administration of universal preschool can strengthen ties between early childhood and K-12 systems. It may also support a more seamless transition from preschool to grade school for families.
- ✓ **Special Education Needs.** CDE has a strong record of inclusive preschool classrooms that include both students with special education needs and typically-developing peers. Federal preschool special education funding<sup>4</sup> also requires administration by the state department of education.
- ✓ **Workforce.** Universal preschool teachers will have the credibility of being part of the state education system. This may lead to better professional development, pay, and benefit opportunities.
- ✓ **Colorado Preschool Program.** CDE has over 30 years of experience and positive outcomes with the administration of the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP). This success may inform universal preschool implementation.

### CONS

- ✗ **Prioritization of School-based Programs.** Most CPP program sites are based in public and charter school settings. CDE administration of universal preschool may also result in an imbalance between school- and community-based preschools.
- ✗ **Academic Focus.** The department has an academic focus for K-12 students that might reduce the focus on whole-child, developmentally appropriate practice in preschool settings. Academic equity gaps at the older ages also raise concerns about pushing the factors that drive those gaps down to the preschool years.
- ✗ **CDE Board Governance.** CDE is governed by an elected board independent of any governor's administration. Over time, this may cause a divide between administration and board aims for the universal preschool program.
- ✗ **Early Childhood Disconnect.** The early care and learning system serves children starting at birth and includes the important infant and toddler years. Placing universal preschool within CDE, which has a primary focus on K-12, may create or deepen a division between preschool and birth through age three services. CDE also does not have the same safety and quality accountability infrastructure that is built into the broader early care and education system.

<sup>4</sup> State Formula Grants. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Retrieved March 30, 2021, from <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/state-formula-grants>

## PROS

- ✓ **Range of Services.** CDHS manages a number of programs for children and families. Housing universal preschool in the department may streamline family access to services and resources.
- ✓ **Funding Alignment.** CDHS already manages the state's child care assistance funding. The department could align CCCAP with universal preschool funding to reduce the coordination burden on programs and families.
- ✓ **Developmentally Appropriate Programming.** The department has experience supporting young children's growth and development through existing early childhood programs. CDHS may be well-prepared to support a developmentally appropriate focus within the universal preschool program as well.
- ✓ **Universal Applications.** Opportunities exist to develop a universal application process that would help families sign up for other human service programs when they register for universal preschool.

## CONS

- ✗ **Oversight Function.** Community members and local programs may associate CDHS with its regulatory and oversight functions, such as licensing and child welfare. It may be more difficult to build public confidence in its ability to support implementation of a whole child preschool initiative.
- ✗ **Lack of Educational Focus.** CDHS does not have the same educational expertise and infrastructure as CDE, including specialized services, such as support for second language learners. This may impact their capacity to support the educational component of universal preschool.
- ✗ **Divided Preschool.** If CPP and/or Preschool Special Education stay within CDE and universal preschool is administered by CDHS, preschool administration in Colorado will be split across two agencies. This may increase existing challenges with cross-agency coordination.
- ✗ **No Child Outcome Tracking.** CDHS does not currently have a system for tracking child outcomes or for following children's outcomes into school years.

## PROS

- ✓ **Leverage Agency Strengths.** The intent behind this solution is to move all early care and education programs to a single department. This new entity could use and build on the strengths of both CDE and CDHS, while avoiding the challenges of cross-agency coordination.
- ✓ **Mixed Delivery.** A new agency can support the goal of providing preschool in both school- and community-based settings without leaning toward one or the other.
- ✓ **Alignment.** A new agency may be able to blend funding at the state level to ease the burden on programs and families. It can also align program standards and requirements to streamline operations for participating early care and learning programs.
- ✓ **Fresh Start.** A new agency may be a chance to realize the values shared during this engagement process. There is hope this department would embrace a flexible, efficient, family-centered, and user-friendly approach.

## CONS

- ✗ **Costs.** It will take financial, logistical, and political resources to create a new agency, so it is important to make sure the end result will be worth the costs involved. Voters may also perceive a new agency as an expansion of government.
- ✗ **Unrealized Alignment.** A new agency may just move programs, processes, and people without creating the desired coordination, alignment, and flexible culture.
- ✗ **K-12/Special Education Disconnect.** Federal special education funds are administered by state departments of education. A new state agency may not be able to take on this role, fragmenting preschool services for children with special needs. A new agency may also complicate transitions between early childhood and K-12 education services.
- ✗ **Age Complications.** Some existing programs that could be moved into a new agency have age eligibility that extends beyond early childhood. For instance, CCCAP can serve children from birth through age 12.

