



THE FUTURE OF PRESCHOOL IN COLORADO | BRIEF 6 OF 7

Participation

Participation refers to which children and providers are eligible to enroll in or offer services as part of Colorado’s universal preschool program. Though all 4-year-olds may be eligible to enroll, some are unable to participate because of geographic constraints or diversity of available providers. Upcoming decisions about expanded preschool, such as eligibility of program types (e.g., centers, family child care homes) may also impact provider participation. This brief explores factors that may affect child and provider participation in universal preschool.

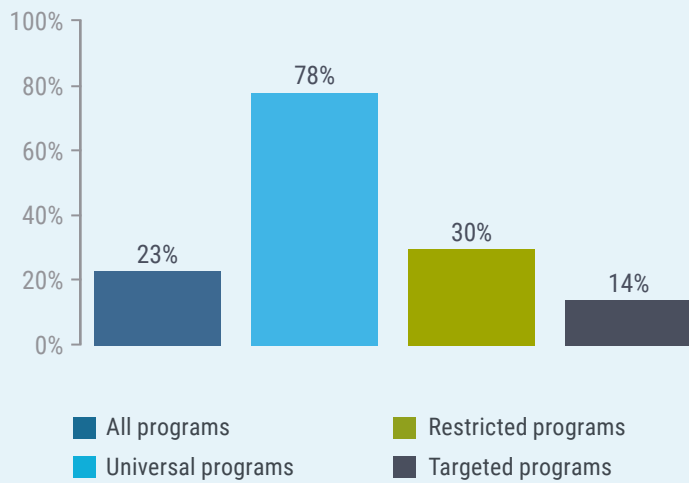
National Landscape

States with publicly-funded preschool programs have common eligibility criteria. The criteria for children typically focus on age and eligibility for kindergarten, while the provider criteria focus on licensing status and ability to meet guidelines and standards.

Universal preschool programs typically do not have income or “risk factor” criteria for child eligibility, while **targeted** programs do. Some programs are meant to be universal, but enrollment has been **restricted** by funding limitations or other external factors. Enrollment or participation in these programs varies considerably.

CHILDREN		PROVIDERS	
ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA	ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATION PROCESS	ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA	ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATION PROCESS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 or 4 years old at the start of the school year • Ineligible for kindergarten 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certification of child eligibility by lead agencies, school districts, or programs • Proof of age (birth certificate or other documents) and residency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Licensed or accredited • Ability to meet state program guidelines and/or early learning standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Periodic (1 to 3 years) competitive funding applications • Selection by state governing agency

PERCENT OF FOUR-YEAR-OLDS ENROLLED, NATIONAL AVERAGES¹



Early Milestones has adopted the following definitions:

UNIVERSAL: Available to all age-eligible children in applicable geographic area and funded for all who enroll OR systematic progress toward full availability and funding

TARGETED: Available to children who meet certain criteria, often income level and/or academic risk factors

RESTRICTED: No income or risk criteria, but universal access is limited by funding or other implementation factors

Colorado Landscape

Colorado currently has two publicly funded preschool programs: the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) and Head Start. These targeted programs serve children who need extra support before entering kindergarten. In 2019, 23% of all 4-year-olds in Colorado were enrolled in CPP. Provider eligibility to offer services for these programs varies, but focuses on the ability to provide the type or level of services required by program standards and guidelines.

	CHILDREN		PROVIDERS	
	ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA	ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATION PROCESS	ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA	ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATION PROCESS
COLORADO PRESCHOOL PROGRAM (CPP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3-year-olds meeting 3 of 10 family risk factors 4- or 5-year-olds meeting 1 of 10 family risk factors Ineligible for kindergarten 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School districts certify eligibility May include: family interviews, developmental, vision and/or hearing screenings, and referrals from partner agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Licensed school- or community-based preschools or centers Ability to approximate CDE Quality Standards for Early Childhood Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Periodic funding applications Selection by school districts/district advisory councils
HEAD START	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 or 4 years old Family income, use of public assistance, and/or homelessness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Head Start programs certify eligibility Proof of age (birth certificate or other documents), residency, and household income 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public, private, nonprofit, or for-profit Center- or home-based Able to deliver full range of Head Start services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grantee agencies apply through competitive federal application Grantees select local programs

¹ Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Garver, K. A., Hodges, K. S., Weisenfeld, G. G. & Gardiner, B. A. (2020). The State of Preschool 2019: State Preschool Yearbook. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

Stakeholder Input on Participation

Stakeholders and community members identified several successes and challenges for ensuring participation in expanded preschool. Common themes from the Future of Preschool in Colorado engagement process are included here.

PROVIDER PARTICIPATION

Mixed Delivery. Colorado's early care and learning system includes programs within public schools, child care centers, family child care homes, and stand-alone preschools. Stakeholders emphasized the need for funding that encourages the participation of all program types. This might include strategies that equitably distribute funds across program types or the creation of reimbursement methods that minimize administrative burdens. (See Brief 3: Funding.)

Misalignment of Funding & Standards. Many programs do not currently participate in publicly funded programs such as the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program or the Colorado Preschool Program. This is partly due to the difficulty of piecing together budgets and meeting varying requirements of different public funding streams. State-level alignment of funding streams and program requirements may encourage participation in universal preschool and other public funding programs as well.

Rules & Program Requirements. Stakeholders are concerned that universal preschool will be burdened by too many rules and regulations, low reimbursements, and too much paperwork. Streamlining and simplifying rules and processes is likely to be a key factor in encouraging providers to deliver universal preschool across the state.

CHILD PARTICIPATION

Family Choice. Most families need full-time care, and many want services that are culturally aligned and convenient. Services offered in a variety of settings (e.g., centers, schools, family child care homes) and that have cultural, linguistic, and special education capacities are more likely to meet the diverse needs of all families. Wrap-around care and transportation between preschool and child care settings are also likely to boost participation.

Language Diversity. Stakeholders identified the lack of language and cultural diversity within preschools as a concern. To ensure equitable enrollment in the program, diverse language families may need targeted recruitment efforts, and the state should explore solutions to increase access to diverse language preschool providers.

Rural Communities & Preschool Deserts. About 38% of Colorado's zip codes are classified as child care deserts.² As a result, many families in Colorado have limited access to preschool options. For these communities, participation will depend on building a supply of quality preschool options, supporting transportation solutions for families, and offering business development assistance for providers.

Access & Navigation. Families often struggle to find high quality preschools and navigate systems that are supposed to provide information and services. Simplified mechanisms for finding and enrolling in services may boost child participation. This could include enhanced resource and referral systems, streamlined application processes, and preschool navigators.

MIXED DELIVERY: Offering of early care and learning services by different types of providers, including both public school and community-based settings. *Mixed delivery* can also refer to different types of community settings, including centers, stand-alone preschools, and family child care homes.

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.*

² Malk, R., et al. (2016, October 27). Child Care Deserts: Analysis of Child Care Centers by ZIP Code in 8 States. Center for American Progress.

