

THE FUTURE OF PRESCHOOL IN COLORADO | BRIEF 5 OF 7

Program Quality & Standards

To best prepare all children for kindergarten, universal preschool must commit to evidence-based quality standards and continuous improvement. This brief compares Colorado's quality standards with national trends and offers input from statewide stakeholders.

National & Colorado Landscape

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) offer guidance on quality standards that encourage positive outcomes for children, including teacher education levels, developmentally appropriate curriculum, adult-child ratios, and family engagement.¹

STANDARD	NATIONAL SAMPLE (50% PRESCHOOL PARTICIPATION OR BETTER) ²	COLORADO PRESCHOOL PROGRAM (CPP)
COMPREHENSIVE, ALIGNED, SUPPORTIVE, & CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS	All 9 states meet or partially meet standard	Comprehensive and aligned
MAXIMUM CLASS SIZE: 20 STAFF-TO-CHILD RATIO OF 1:10 OR BETTER	6 states meet or partially meet this standard	Maximum class size: 16 Staff-to-child ratio of 1:8
LEAD TEACHER HAS A BACHELOR'S DEGREE & SPECIALIZED TRAINING IN ECE	5 states meet or partially meet this standard	Bachelor's degree not required ECE coursework required for lead teachers
TEACHER COMPENSATION ON PAR WITH K-12	6 states meet or partially meet this standard	Not required at state level Required by some districts
STRUCTURED CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS & DATA-SUPPORTED CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT	7 states meet or partially meet this standard	Classroom observation used to inform improvement and QRIS rating
COMPREHENSIVE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT	Encouraged in all 9 states	Encouraged
SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES	All 9 states meet or partially meet standard	Required

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.

² NY, GA, VT, WV, IA, FL, OK, WI, and DC

Stakeholder Input on Colorado's Current Approach

Stakeholders and community members identified several quality-related successes and challenges for current Colorado preschool programs. Common themes from the Future of Preschool in Colorado engagement process are included.

SUCCESSES

Group Sizes and Ratios. NIEER recommends a maximum class size of 20 and a staff-to-child ratio of 1:10 or better for preschool classrooms.² Colorado's maximum class size is 16, and CPP's staff-to-child ratio is 1:8.

Comprehensive Early Learning Standards. The Colorado Department of Education developed a set of comprehensive standards to guide quality and developmentally appropriate learning.

Professional Development & Training. Colorado's Professional Development Information System allows educators to participate in professional development online, map out career trajectories, and receive support for continued learning.

Inclusive Classrooms. Most children with disabilities are served in inclusive classrooms with developmentally appropriate support. Colorado has a well-supported screening and referral network and targeted funding for children with special needs.

CHALLENGES

Educator Compensation. Well-trained, committed, and professional educators are essential to a quality preschool program. Low wages, a lack of benefits, and high turnover rates threaten the stability and motivation educators need to provide quality instruction or to even enter or remain in the field.

Per Student Spending. Colorado spent \$2,787 per child enrolled in CPP in 2019, well below the national average of \$5,374 per child.³ While this amount may be supplemented somewhat with local funding, Colorado's spending is still well below those states that enroll 50% or more of their 4-year-olds in a state preschool program.

Defining Quality. Colorado Shines offers families a standardized rating system to identify quality programs. However, some stakeholders are concerned that quality measures may not apply equally to all programs, such as family child care homes and rural programs.

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.*



³ 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.

⁴ Ibid.



Stakeholder Input for Universal Preschool Quality Standards

Through the engagement process, stakeholders and community members identified opportunities and concerns around preschool quality standards for decision-makers to consider.

OPPORTUNITIES

- ✓ **Funding High Quality.** Stakeholders hope funding will match the increased focus on preschool quality. This includes improved compensation and training for educators to better support the diverse needs of children. Funding should emphasize support for dual language learners and students with special needs.
- ✓ **Mixed Delivery.** Colorado children are currently served in a variety of settings, including family child care homes, community-based centers, and school district programs. Coordination by state program administrators will be needed to provide seamless and comprehensive opportunities across all settings.
- ✓ **Alignment.** The most successful programs effectively align standards and provide curriculum and implementation supports so that all children receive the same quality education regardless of setting.

CONCERNS

- ✗ **Affordability.** There is not currently enough funding to serve all children in high-quality environments. Colorado will need to increase funding and maintain quality without passing the cost on to providers or families.
- ✗ **Educator Burden.** Research shows a correlation between teacher education level and positive child outcomes.⁵ At the same time, there is concern that requiring a bachelor's degree may hamper efforts to attract and retain early educators, especially those who have historically experienced less access to higher education.
- ✗ **Local Choice and Local Control.** Aligning standards for a statewide program in a way that respects the local needs of Colorado's 64 counties and 179 school districts will require considerable engagement and input.

⁵ Lin, Y. & Magnuson K. (2018). Classroom quality and children's academic skills in child care centers: understanding the role of teacher qualifications. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*. 42 (1) 215-227