



THE FUTURE OF PRESCHOOL IN COLORADO | BRIEF 4 OF 7

Workforce

Colorado’s early care and education (ECE) industry faces challenges with recruiting, retaining, and properly incentivizing a qualified workforce. The field’s annual turnover rate is four times greater than among elementary school teachers. Low pay, poor working conditions, and the high cost of entry into the field all contribute to workforce shortages. COVID-19 has only worsened this issue with furloughs,

layoffs, and increases in educator stress that left many wondering if continuing in the field was worth it.

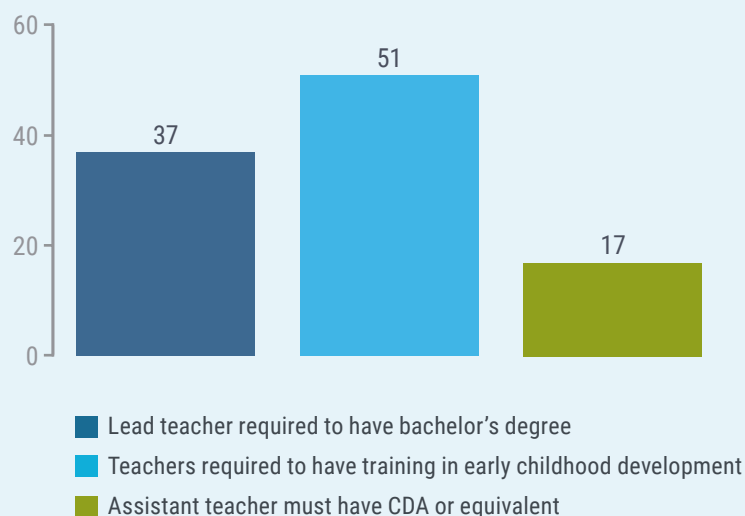
As preschool expands in Colorado, stakeholders worry educators may not have the right education, experience, or compensation to serve all eligible children.

National & Colorado Landscape

Standards for early childhood educators differ across the United States, with many states balancing requirements for specific degrees with the reality of low wages across the field. The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) recommends a set of benchmarks that produce quality preschool experiences, including standards for teacher education and professional development. Low pay results in high turnover of the workforce and an ongoing need to train and educate new teacher to enter the field.

NATIONAL EDUCATOR CREDENTIAL REQUIREMENTS (N=62)

Education and training of early childhood educators is essential to quality programming. Requirements vary nationally, but most state preschool programs prioritize training in early childhood education.¹



The following table shows teacher education, training, and compensation-related figures for states with over 50% preschool enrollment of 4-year-olds and for the Colorado Preschool Program.²

	REQUIREMENT/PRACTICE	NATIONAL SAMPLE (50% PRESCHOOL PARTICIPATION OR BETTER) ¹	COLORADO PRESCHOOL PROGRAM
LEAD TEACHER CREDENTIALS/TRAINING	Bachelor's degree	Required for all or some in each of the 9 states ³	Not required
	EC specialization, credential, or endorsement	Required in all 9 states ³	ECE credits in 4 areas
	Hours of annual professional development	At least 15 hours/year required by 7 states ³	15 hours (3 in social-emotional)
ASSISTANT TEACHER CREDENTIALS	High school diploma/GED	Minimum requirement in 3 states ³	Not required
	Child Development Associate	Minimum requirement in 4 states ³	Not required
IN-CLASS SUPPORT	Coaching or mentoring	Required by 4 states ⁴	Not required
PAY PARITY	Same starting salary and salary schedule as K-3 or K-12	Required in 7 states ⁴	Not required
LEAD TEACHER PAY	Median hourly wage	\$13.74 average ⁵	\$15.25 ⁶
	Range of median hourly wages	\$11.12 to \$18.02 ⁵	School or academic year ⁷

Stakeholder Input on Colorado's Approach

Stakeholders and community members identified several successes and challenges surrounding Colorado's early childhood workforce. Common themes from the Future of Preschool in Colorado engagement process are included here.



SUCCESSSES

Diversity. Colorado has prioritized initiatives to build the racial and ethnic diversity of the early childhood workforce with targeted recruitment and other opportunities. This diversity is essential for providing quality, culturally responsive experiences for young children.

Doing Their Part. Early educators were essential to Colorado's pandemic response. Educators quickly adapted to new policies and student needs.

Professional Development and Pathways. The state Professional Development Information System (PDIS) serves as a valuable resource for educators, offering online classes, career navigation, and curriculum support. To date, PDIS has been used by over 77,000 early childhood professionals who have taken over 420,000 courses.⁸

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.



CHALLENGES

Professional Recognition. Efforts to increase compensation contend with a perception that ECE professionals are less valuable or qualified than their K-12 peers. Early educators worry they will be asked to do more without recognition of the existing difficulty of their profession.

Recruitment & Retention. Colorado's various pathways to the field are complicated by education requirements and cost. Communities of color experience this at higher rates and are underrepresented in lead teacher and management positions. Lead teachers experience a 16% turnover rate, with greater frequency for assistant teachers (22%) and floaters (40%).⁹

Teacher Compensation. Average annual incomes for early childhood educators are close to the federal poverty level for a family of four and income for Colorado EC educators is close to minimum wage.^{10, 11} These low wages are a major factor in the shortage of early educators in Colorado, as well as the high turnover rates in the field.

HOT TOPIC: EDUCATOR QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

One of the most debated topics was teacher education requirements. Evidence suggests that children experience better educational and developmental outcomes when their teachers have a bachelor's degree and specialized training in early childhood¹², but unlike many states Colorado does not require early childhood teachers to have a bachelor's degree.

Stakeholders discussed the potential to elevate the workforce by requiring a bachelor's degree, but worried about creating additional burdens for an already stretched field. Suggested solutions included scholarships, forgivable loans, and commensurate pay increases to incentivize teachers to get a bachelor's degree before eventually requiring it for lead teachers.

Stakeholder Input for Supporting the Workforce

Through the engagement process, stakeholders and community members identified opportunities to support the workforce during this preschool expansion, as well as questions and potential negative consequences for decision-makers to consider.

OPPORTUNITIES

✓ **Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Education.**

Stakeholders emphasized the need for teachers who mirror the diversity of their communities, are trained in cultural competencies, and can be linguistically responsive to their students' needs.

✓ **Capacity to Maintain Quality.** NIEER recommends a staff-to-child ratio of 1:10 or better.¹³ Colorado will need more teachers to meet this suggestion as more children become eligible for preschool.

✓ **Continuing Education and Professional Development.** To maintain a qualified ECE workforce, all teachers, regardless of geographic location, will need access to mentoring, coaching, specialized courses, online training modules, and other professional development resources.

✓ **Compensation and Professional Parity.** Financial support from state, community, and business sources would promote parity between early educators and their K-12 peers. Retaining quality educators requires providing benefits such as health insurance, paid time off, planning time, and professional development.

CONCERNS

- ✘ **New Requirements & Alignment.** Requirements for program quality and educator credentials vary based on funding source and departmental oversight. New requirements for universal preschool may add to the confusion across programs and systems.
- ✘ **Equity.** Women of color make up over 40% of the early childhood workforce, but are disproportionately represented in assistant and substitute teacher roles. This results in average earnings of \$1.70 per hour less than white peers.¹⁴ Such disadvantages may continue without targeted education and training opportunities.
- ✘ **Affordability vs. Quality.** Parents and providers may be unable to shoulder the increased cost of maintaining quality programs, given narrow margins already experienced across the sector.
- ✘ **Capacity.** Colorado does not have enough educators to serve all of the 4-year-olds who would be included in the expanded preschool program. Existing recruitment and retention efforts may not be enough.
- ✘ **Family Child Care Homes.** More than half of the state's three- and four-year-olds are served in family child care homes, which can be well-suited to meeting the cultural and linguistic needs of diverse families. Many family child care home providers and educators are concerned that they will be left out of a statewide preschool initiative and that families will be negatively impacted.

NOTES

- 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
- 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 Weisenfeld, G.G., Frede, E., & Barnett, W.S. (2018). Implementing 15 essential elements for high quality pre-k: an updated scan of state policies. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.
- ⁵ Whitebook, M., Austin, L.J.E., & Amanta, F. (2015). Early Childhood Workforce Index – 2018. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley.
- ⁶ LMI Gateway: Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education (does not include workforce classified as child care workers)
- ⁷ LMI Gateway: Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education 10th percentile-90th percentile
- ⁸ Colorado Department of Education (2017). Colorado Shines.
- ⁹ Early Milestones Colorado. (2020, February 4). Colorado's early childhood education workforce. Denver: Early Milestones Colorado.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Economic Policy Institute. (2020, October). Child care costs in the United States - Colorado. Economic Policy Institute.
- ¹² 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 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2017.10.003>
- ¹³ 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.
- ¹⁴ Whitebook, M., Austin, L.J.E., Edward, B., & Chavez, R. (2019). Racial Wage Gaps in Early Education Employment. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment.

