

SUPPORTING FAMILIES THROUGH MIXED DELIVERY IN COLORADO'S UPK PROGRAM



Universal Preschool (UPK) Colorado, created by House Bill 22-1295,¹ will launch in August 2023. UPK offers voluntary preschool to every Colorado child in the year before they are eligible for kindergarten. Children will attend preschool through a statewide network of early care and education (ECE) programs in a mixed delivery model.

WHAT IS MIXED DELIVERY?

Mixed delivery **brings together a variety of provider types and program settings, both public and private**, to serve children. In UPK, any program is eligible to participate if it is licensed and meets certain requirements. This includes:

- ✓ Faith-based early learning programs
- ✓ Elementary schools, including charter schools
- ✓ Family child care homes
- ✓ For-profit and nonprofit center-based child care programs
- ✓ Stand-alone preschools

HOW MIXED DELIVERY WORKS

UPK is voluntary for both providers and families. Interested programs sign-up with the number of children they can serve. Interested families sign-up in the same system. Families rank their preference of participating programs (up to five programs). The system generates matches based on families' rankings and program availability.

[1] In November 2020, Colorado voters passed Proposition EE. This gave a portion of the state tax on tobacco and nicotine products to a universal, voluntary preschool program. The program, UPK Colorado, was established in statute by House Bill 22-1295.

As of March 6, 2023 more than 1,600 programs across all 64 counties are participating in UPK, and more than 27,000 families have applied.

WHERE MIXED DELIVERY IS ALREADY WORKING

SUMMIT COUNTY. Early Childhood Options, Summit County's Early Childhood Council, promotes collaboration around preschool. Community providers and Summit County Schools each provide about half of the 3- and 4-year-old preschool slots. This approach has brought greater access and smoother transitions into kindergarten. It has also provided better support for children with special learning needs.

DENVER. Since 2007, the universal Denver Preschool Program (DPP) has successfully operated a mixed-delivery program. Like UPK, parents get to choose the best DPP preschool for their family. On average, 60% of the program's tuition goes to Denver Public Schools and 40% goes to community providers.

FOR MORE INFORMATION.

- [Colorado Department of Early Childhood: Universal Preschool](#)
- [Still Struggling: Colorado Families' Views on Child Care and Hopes for Universal Preschool \(Early Milestones Colorado\)](#)
- [The Right Direction: Mixed Delivery Early Care and Education \(Bipartisan Policy Center\)](#)
- [A Mixed-Delivery System is the Most Sustainable and Efficient Solution to Meet Policy Objectives \(Early Care and Education Consortium\)](#)
- [State Strategies to Strengthen Infant-Toddler Care as Public Pre-K Expands \(ZERO to THREE\)](#)

[2] In center-based and home-based care settings, tuition for 4 to 5 year-olds may offset the higher cost of serving infants and toddlers. Expanding preschool only through public schools would have vast fiscal implications for community-based child care programs. Programs may close or infant-toddler care may become even more unaffordable for families. After UPK implementation in Tulsa, Oklahoma, costs for care increased by one-third with infant-toddler care increasing by more than 50% in some places.

[3] In Spring 2022, Early Milestones surveyed 2,200 Colorado families who have at least one child under age six.

WHY IS MIXED DELIVERY IMPORTANT?

A mixed delivery model is mandated in House Bill 22-1295 and was proven to be the right approach for Colorado through robust stakeholder feedback.

MAXIMIZES PROGRAM CAPACITY. To meet family demand and serve as many children as possible, this model leverages all qualified programs across Colorado.

DOES NOT DISRUPT THE CHILD CARE SECTOR. In other states, expanding preschool has reduced child care capacity and increased costs.² A recent Early Milestones survey showed almost 3 in 4 families (73%) already report difficulty finding child care.³ Mixed delivery gives children more access to preschool and lessens the chance of upsetting the entire child care sector. This is important because reliable, accessible child care is critical to Colorado's economy.

MEETS COMMUNITY NEEDS. Community needs, capacity, and geography are vastly different across Colorado. Mixed delivery creates local flexibility so that UPK implementation matches communities' unique needs and assets.

CENTERS ON FAMILIES. Most importantly, mixed delivery lets families choose the right UPK program for their child. Early Milestones' survey showed that families have diverse preferences about the type of program they want. These preferences are based on unique and different family factors, making choice critical.

- Most families (94%) said that a program's hours and days of operation and location were the top two factors in choosing an ECE program. Next most common was whether the provider had spots available.
- Of families with multiple young children, 93% said that having their children cared for in the same setting is important.

PREFERRED PRESCHOOL HOURS (N=1,370)

