



Trust for
Learning



EARLY MILESTONES
COLORADO

Investing in Colorado's Early Education Ecosystem

A 5-Year Campaign for Ideal Learning

NOVEMBER 2024



Colorado has seen monumental investments into our universal preschool program and our early childhood workforce with the infusion of federal stimulus funds and local and state tax efforts. **We are starting to see changes at the federal and state level that recognize the importance of this work and value the time, energy, and talents that it takes to effectively care for children and help them reach their full potential.** However, it is not enough to sustain and support this field, and more investment is necessary to ensure all children can access high-quality early education. This is a space of tremendous growth and also a place for continued focus as we move forward.

Working alongside Trust for Learning and Early Milestones has been tremendous. The mission-focused vision and tenacity of the teams across these organizations have brought to light new opportunities and initiatives, grounded in equity, that will lead our state and our country forward toward a more equitable and successful future for children.”

—Dr. Lisa Roy, Executive Director, Colorado Department of Early Childhood



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Overview

The *Expanding Ideal Learning Environments in Colorado* initiative is a partnership between Trust for Learning and Early Milestones Colorado. The partnership advanced ideal learning in Colorado through about \$500,000 in direct investments, along with strategic partnerships and the support of a full-time local advocate and expert.

The initiative has served more than a thousand children learning with the grant partners. Across the state, thousands more will benefit in the years to come, owing to investments in the policy landscape, educator development, classroom materials, and curriculum implementation. Lessons of this journey can help to inform other states and municipalities as they prepare to implement ideal learning-aligned programs.

Over a five-year partnership, Trust for Learning and Early Milestones made great progress in advancing ideal learning approaches in Colorado through:

- **Dissemination** of several key resources
- **Development** of an ideal learning advisory group
- **Influencing** state policy
- **Support** for on-the-ground practice changes with a cohort of grantees across the state

The Trust's experience demonstrates how direct investment, movement building, and thought leadership – the three pillars of its theory of change – can expand ideal learning environments for all children.



5 years

of partnership



\$500,000

in direct investments



\$1,000+

children served

Introduction

The Partners



Trust for
Learning

Ideal learning made real for all

Preschool, Head Start, child care, and early elementary settings set the course for success in school and life, but high-quality programs remain out of reach for most families, particularly low-income families and families of color. This gap drives the work of Trust for Learning (the Trust), a philanthropic partnership supporting the expansion of publicly funded early childhood education programs and policies aligned with the evidence-based principles of ideal learning environments.



EARLY MILESTONES
COLORADO

ADVANCING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN'S SUCCESS

Early Milestones Colorado (EMC) is a nonprofit organization that advances success for young children by accelerating innovation, the use of best practices, and systemic change. They work to ensure that all children and families, especially those who have been historically marginalized, have access to the opportunities and resources needed to be valued, healthy, and thriving.

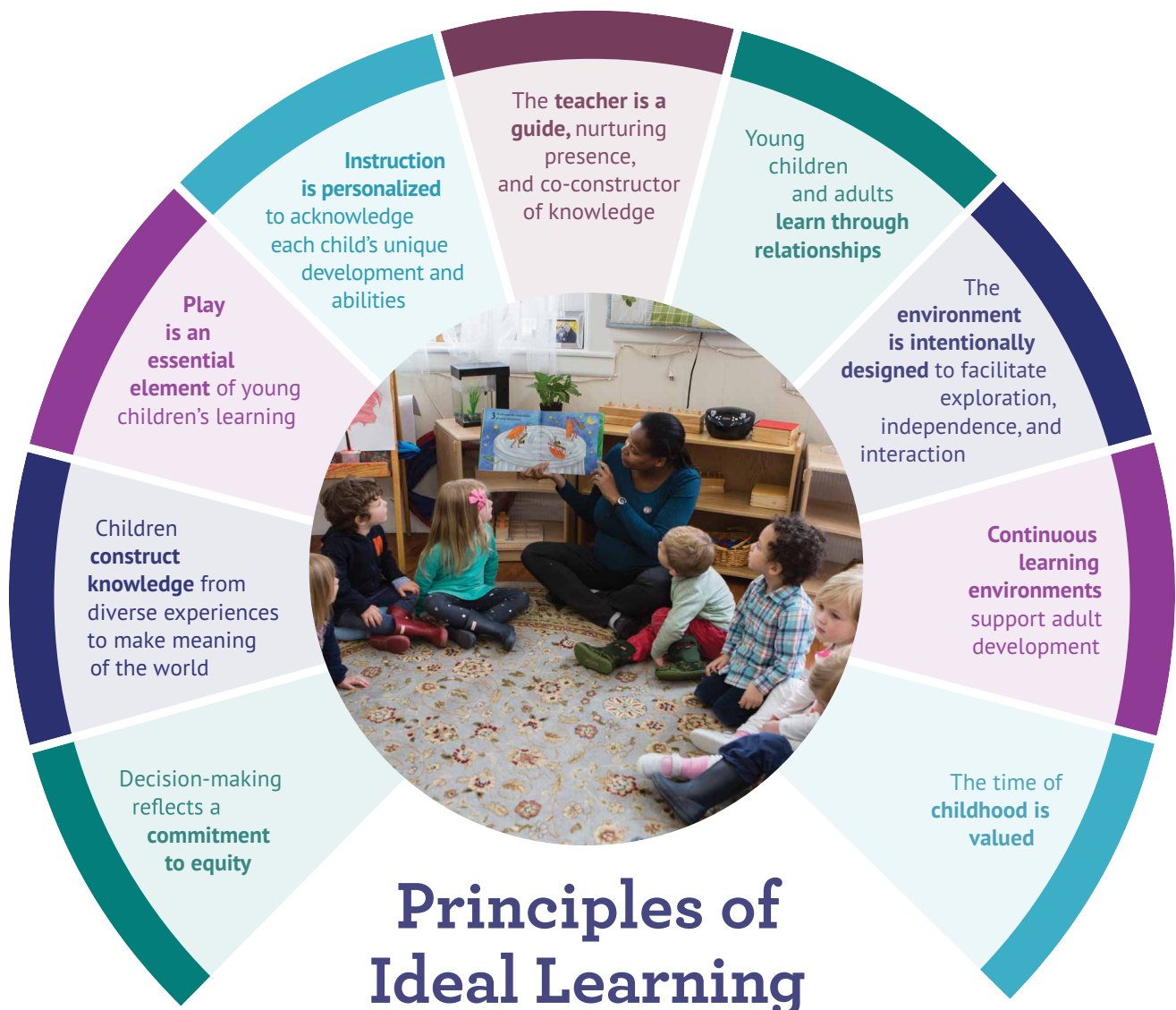
In 2018, EMC and the Trust began collaborating to advance ideal learning environments in publicly funded settings throughout Colorado. Over the next five years, this partnership brought increased awareness about ideal learning, significant policy developments, and an expansion of ideal learning-aligned programs serving children and families across the state. The direct investments promoted evidence-based practices in six communities, improving the learning environments of more than 350 young children annually.

Furthermore, the overall project fueled the development of policies and collaborations that continue to advance ideal learning throughout the state. This report recounts the history and context of the partnership, impact to date, and key lessons learned along the way. **The partners hope that administrators, policymakers, and funders can draw upon it to advance ideal learning policies and environments in other states.**

The Nine Principles of Ideal Learning

Drawn from cognitive and developmental sciences and taking into account the varied contexts within which early educators and care providers serve children from the prenatal period to age eight, each principle aligns closely with developmental science, trauma-informed practice, and research on racial, linguistic, and cultural inclusion.

Since its founding in 2013, the Trust has worked nationally to promote ideal learning environments for all young children by directly investing in community partners and by shaping the larger policy environments that influence their work. The organization's theory of change depends on movement building and thought leadership as well as direct investments; all three elements came into play during the Colorado experience, reinforcing each other and driving systems change.



The Colorado Opportunity

In 2018, Trust for Learning published a request for proposals (RFP) seeking new initiatives to catalyze ideal learning in the public sector. Of the 15 proposals received, Early Milestones Colorado (EMC) emerged as a finalist for its plan to analyze the policy conditions needed to support the expansion of publicly funded ideal learning across the state. The project proved extremely timely, as several developments were afoot that would make Colorado fertile ground for the expansion of ideal learning programs.

Colorado had a long history of prioritizing early education, dating back to the [Early Childhood Colorado Framework](#) of 2008 and creation of the

[Colorado Shines](#) quality-rating system. There was also a network of 35 [Early Childhood Councils](#) that fostered collaboration between families, programs, and local decision makers.

Then, in November 2018, the same month that EMC and the Trust began their formal partnership, Coloradans elected Governor Jared Polis, who had pledged to establish universal full-day kindergarten and preschool in every community across the state. Momentum was also building in support of a ballot initiative that would establish a nicotine and vaping tax to fund the [Colorado Universal Preschool Program](#) (universal preschool; UPK).



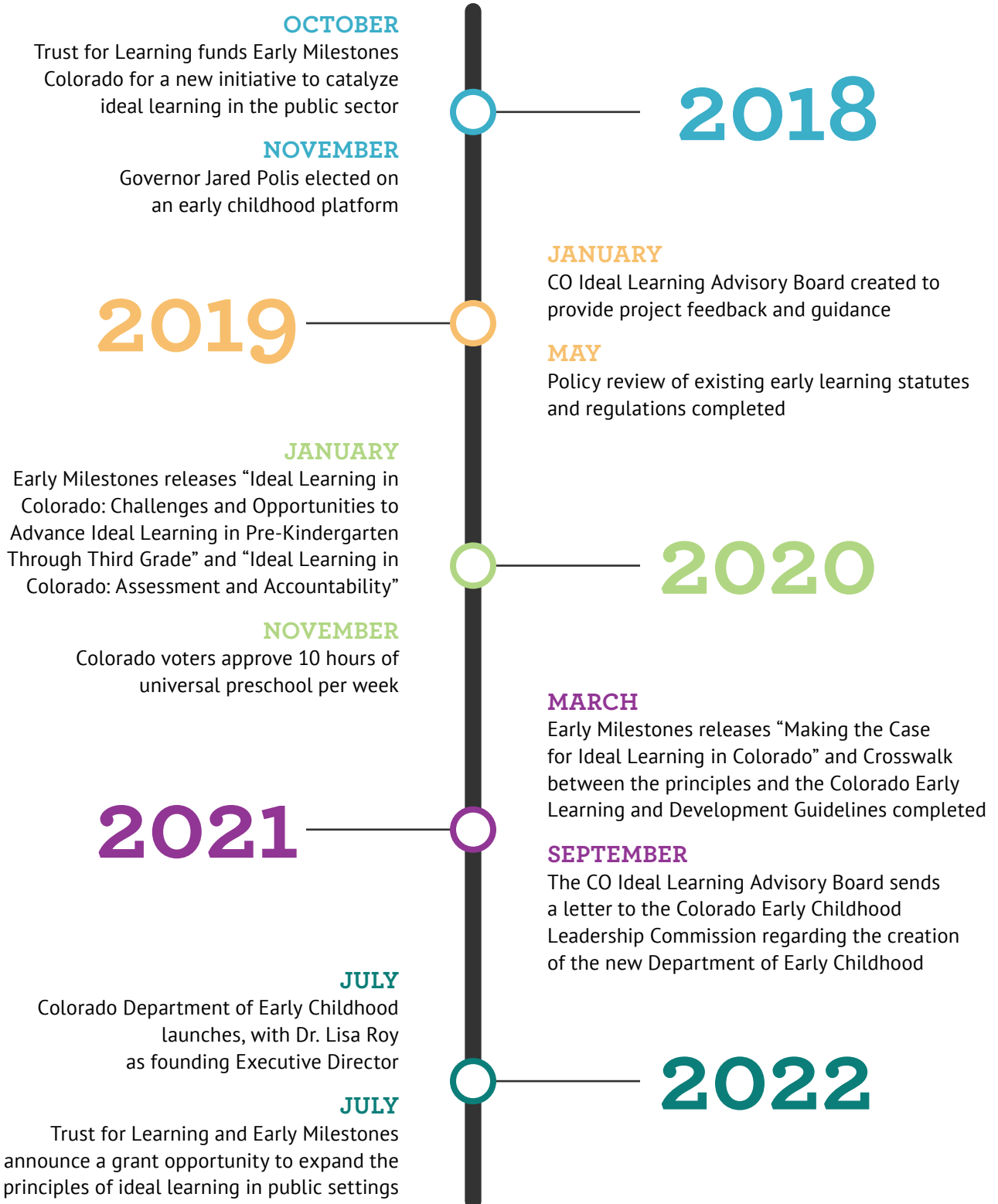


As EMC and the Trust began to work together, the next three years saw rapid momentum on state policy despite a lack of concerted policy progress on the national front. By 2020, the Colorado Legislature passed bipartisan legislation funding full-day kindergarten for the first time in the state's history and approved a proposed ballot measure for the upcoming election to allow voters to decide whether to fund UPK through the creation of a tobacco tax. Over the next year, advocates throughout Colorado joined in informing the electorate about the issue, and in November of 2021, voters overwhelmingly passed the proposition.

Building on the work EMC had already begun, the voter-driven passage of UPK created a unique opportunity to review current early childhood practices and spread a vision for ideal learning across the state. The new preschool program offers voluntary preschool to every Colorado child the year before they are eligible for kindergarten. Families can choose the right setting for their child to attend preschool, whether it is in a licensed community-based, school-based, or home-based preschool setting. Furthermore, the program allows for a variety of ideal learning approaches.

Timeline

Building on early childhood momentum in the state, this partnership evolved over a five-year period.



2023

JANUARY

Elevating Family Voices Workbook becomes available in English and Spanish

APRIL

A new Early Childhood Colorado Framework launches, including sections on economic mobility and elevating the workforce as an essential component of the early childhood system

AUGUST

UPK launches in Colorado

SEPTEMBER & NOVEMBER

The Trust submits comments regarding CO Quality Standards as part of rulemaking process

SEPTEMBER

Trust for Learning and Early Milestones host a virtual grantee convening

NOVEMBER

Voters pass UPK prop II

MARCH

Trust for Learning and Early Milestones present at Rocky Mountain Early Childhood Conference

MARCH

Colorado releases its Comprehensive Early Childhood Workforce Plan

2024



The Trust's Colorado Collaborator

Cathrine Aasen Floyd, the Trust's Director of Ideal Learning Initiatives, is a coalition builder with experience in state and federal systems, public and charter school districts, non- and for-profit community organizations and family child care. She possesses expertise in quality improvement, programming, policy studies and education finance, along with passion for social justice and equity building. Her joy in learning and hearing different perspectives enable her to authentically partner and support all voices in collaboration.

Strategies for Driving Environment and Policy Change

The Trust's initial grant to EMC funded a review and analysis of state laws and regulations, as well as stakeholder interviews, to explore the possibilities for the expansion of holistic, child-centered ideal learning environments in Colorado. The January 2020 [Ideal Learning in Colorado](#) report made several recommendations to increase support for ideal learning principles and approaches within the state. These included:

- **Leveraging** current state assets (e.g., Early Learning and Development Guidelines) that support Ideal Learning, pre-K through third grade
- **Inventorying** existing schools with successful models, including data on outcomes and student demographics
- **Supporting** Colorado's alternative accountability pilot project
- **Formalizing** an ideal learning collaborative that builds upon current interest and commits to tackle next steps

Over the next several years, the Trust worked closely with local partners to pursue many of these recommendations and to build sustained movement around ideal learning. Central to this work was the hiring of a full-time staff person in Colorado and the creation of an advisory board of early childhood experts to provide guidance and outreach to the field.

Colorado Ideal Learning Advisory Board Members

- **Brenda Bautsch Dickhoner**, Parent and President and CEO at Ready Colorado
- **Jeff Beal**, Director of Research, Evaluation, and Development at HighScope Educational Research Foundation
- **Elena Bodrova**, Knowledge Advisor at Tools of the Mind
- **Heather Craiglow**, Director of the Head Start Collaboration Office at the Colorado Department of Early Childhood
- **Enola Garland**, Program and Operations Manager at the Early Childhood Council Leadership Alliance
- **Priscilla Hopkins**, Executive Director of Early Education at Denver Public Schools
- **Deborah Leong**, President and Co-founder of Tools of the Mind
- **Maegan Lokteff**, Executive Director, Early Childhood Council Leadership Alliance
- **Katy Mattis**, Director of Assets and Tools at the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector
- **Christina Riley**, former Managing Director, Instructional Products at EL Education
- **Dr. Lisa Roy**, Executive Director at the Colorado Department of Early Childhood
- **Martha Teien**, Executive Director at Mountain Montessori; former President of the Colorado Montessori Association



The Trust's theory of change envisions learning environments and the policy environment as interconnected systems for enhancing equity. Movement building, thought leadership, and direct investments all play a part in this ongoing work.



Strategy: Movement Building

The formation of an ideal learning advisory group helped to ensure that community needs and whole-child perspectives figured in decision-making processes and that the collaboration between the Trust and Milestones optimized the incorporation of ideal learning in Colorado. The advisory team offered guidance, shared expertise, and provided access to essential information for project completion, as well as disseminating project findings—via Early Childhood Councils and other communities—and shaping future initiatives. Thanks to this group, publications and initiatives were more relevant, culturally appropriate, and sustainable.

Once the ballot initiative passed, Trust staff, along with the advisory council, engaged regularly in movement-building efforts to support the adoption of ideal learning approaches in the field. The Trust's Cathrine Aasen Floyd regularly met with early childhood councils and superintendent groups about the significance of early learning practices grounded in the science of child development. Advisory board members and EM staff also participated in outreach activities and conference presentations. This level of engagement could not have been accomplished without an in-state staff presence.



“

One key lesson that other states and municipalities can take from Colorado's experience is the importance of collaboration across sectors. By bringing together policymakers, educators, families, and organizations like Trust for Learning and Early Milestones, we have been able to align efforts and push for systemic changes that benefit all children. Working with Trust for Learning and Early Milestones has been an inspiring and enriching experience. These organizations bring a wealth of knowledge, resources, and advocacy to the table, supporting the implementation of high-quality, developmentally appropriate early learning practices.”

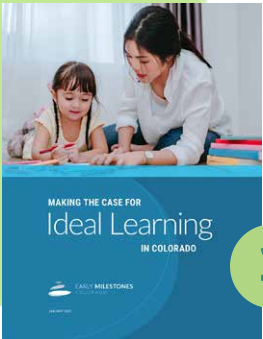


— Martha Teien, MEd, Montessori Doctoral Candidate,
University of Wisconsin-River Falls,
Director of Mountain Montessori

Strategy: Thought Leadership

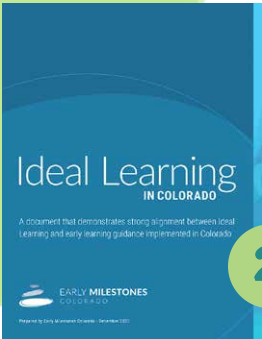
The Trust and EMC communicated the power of ideal learning across the state, activating a robust network of champions. Engaging local media extended the message beyond those who could be reached in person, including parents and educators. The Trust also engaged in the policymaking process, submitting public comments and testifying in support of ideal learning policies and practices. These actions required constant monitoring and engagement.

During this period, Early Milestones produced several resources. These materials targeted multiple audiences—educators, administrators, and policymakers—making the case for ideal learning approaches. The Trust has submitted these and similar documents for use in Colorado’s Universal Preschool resource bank, which is being designed for educators and administrators.



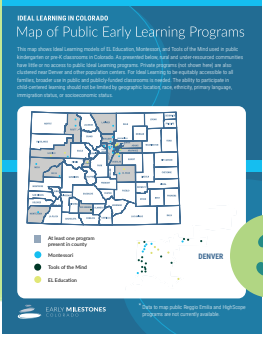
1

BRIEF connecting child development theory and research to ideal learning principles



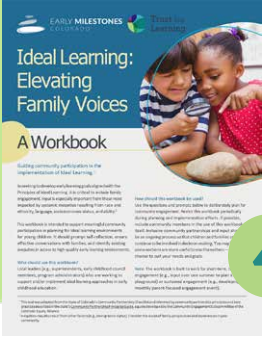
2

CROSSWALK of the principles with the state’s Early Learning and Development Guidelines and teacher quality standards



3

MAP of ideal learning programs showing disparate access to publicly-funded settings across the state



4

TOOL for local leaders and program administrators to support community participation and family engagement in planning for ideal learning environments



“

Information and knowledge sharing are powerful tools to support spreading the word about why ideal learning is essential and helping others understand the impact this can have on child development. These opportunities have the potential to make the idea of ideal learning a common understanding for all those invested in early childhood and ensure this is included in conversations and practice.”



– Dr. Lisa Roy, Executive Director,
Colorado Department of Early Childhood

“

The Trust and Early Milestones facilitated the creation of materials (written and online) that answered questions about the ideal learning Model and what it looked like in different ideal learning programs (Tools of the Mind, Reggio, Montessori, and High Scope). These were really useful in explaining and clarifying what an ideal learning program was and how it was different from other early childhood programs.”

– Dr. Deborah J. Leong,
Co-founder and President of Tools of the Mind
and Professor Emerita of Psychology at
Metropolitan State University of Denver



Selected Media Appearances

Trust for Learning's investment in media strategy to amplify partner voices resulted in numerous mentions in local TV, radio, and print.



THE COLORADO SUN



Opinion: Colorado needs the right plan to match the people and money it has committed to expand early education

Pre-K must be easy to find for parents, and high-quality for kids

by Cathrine Floyd & Deb Leong

[READ](#)



Universal preschool is coming to Colorado, advocates push for programs that will address equity gaps

The advocacy group Trust for Learning is recommending principals of ideal learning as Colorado expands preschool.

[WATCH](#)



Universal preschool: Colorado childcare industry struggles to attract workers

Advocates warn we may not have the workforce in place to educate all the kids

featuring Maegan & Cathrine

[WATCH](#)



Colorado education leaders work to figure out some of the key issues surrounding the quality and equity of a statewide pre-K plan

Plans for universal pre-K

featuring Maegan Lokteff

[WATCH](#)



Early childhood experts want Colorado to ensure that children in the upcoming universal pre-school program get high quality instruction

Advocates say simply setting up hundreds of pre-school programs isn't the answer.

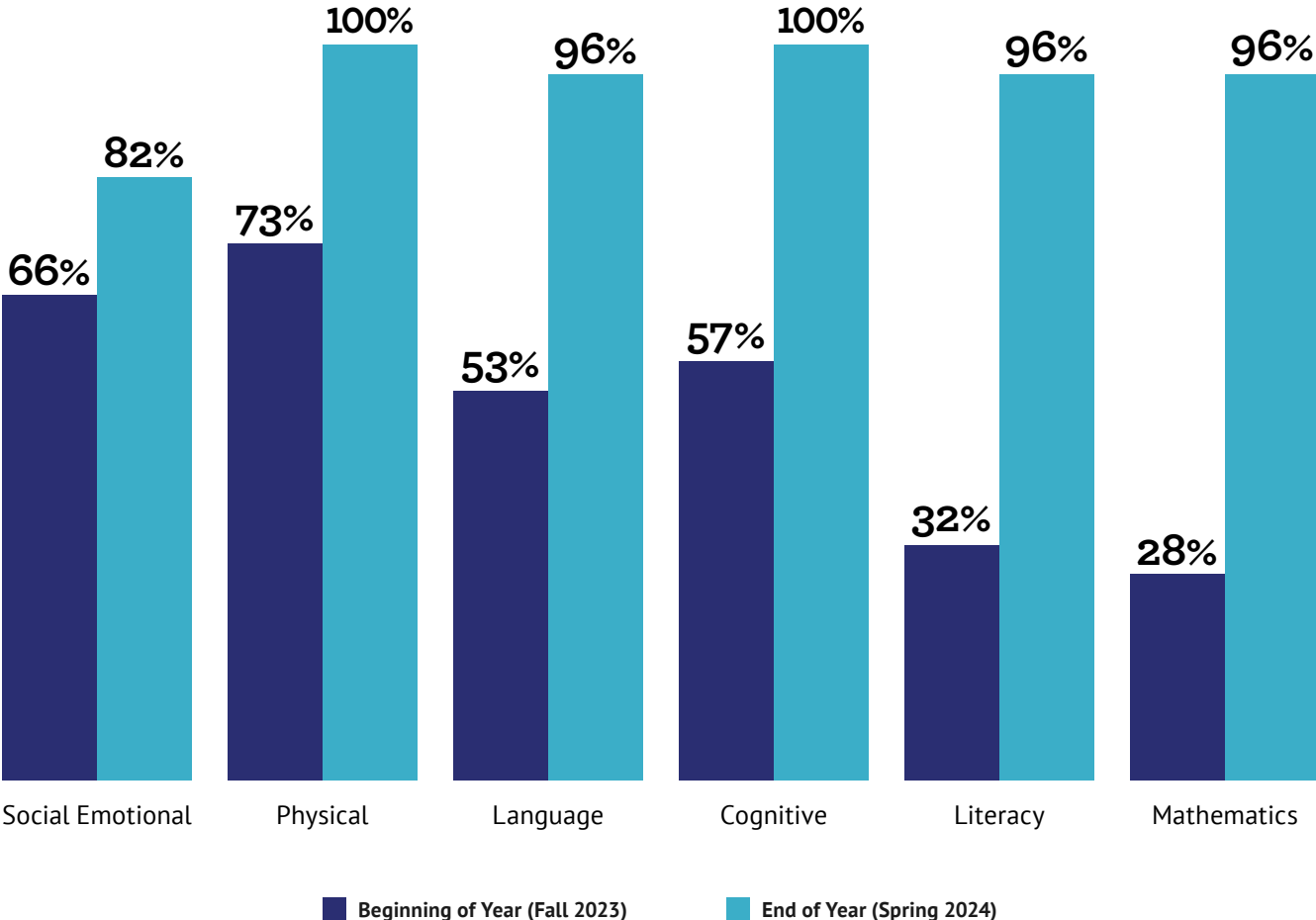
featuring Deb Leong

[LISTEN](#)

Strategy: Direct Investments

In addition to its partnership with Early Milestones, the Trust also directly invested in local early learning providers. In March 2022, the Trust and Early Milestones announced a \$100,000 grant opportunity to support school- and community-based programs to strengthen their alignment with ideal learning prior to implementation of UPK. These investments seeded individualized, experiential, child-centered learning approaches. Only programs that accepted public funding were eligible, and grants primarily went to providers serving historically marginalized communities. Projects emphasized ongoing professional development for educators, intentionally designed learning environments for children, and meaningful engagement with parents. Mutual learning and support emboldened the cohort of six grantees to meaningfully and sustainably advance ideal learning environments.

Percent of children meeting or exceeding expectations for their age:



Montessori Collective classroom quality measures using the Developmental Environment Rating Scale.

Insights and Takeaways

The Trust's experience in Colorado yielded several insights that may be instructive for others looking to pursue comparable endeavors in other states:

A trusted local partner is the foundation for success.

EMC is a trusted leader in Colorado, bringing credibility with stakeholders to the partnership. The organization possesses a depth of institutional knowledge and expertise about the Colorado landscape. Trust for Learning's support deepened local relationships that were critical to executing a successful strategy. The Trust also had capacity on the ground in Colorado with one full-time employee who is also from Colorado and who possesses deep experience and existing relationships.

Priscilla M. Hopkins, Executive Director, Denver Public Schools, states: "Through our collaboration [with the Trust and EMC], we are jointly upholding high expectations and all of the components that create ideal learning for young children. These organizations have challenged me to raise my expectations and commit to high-quality early education programs."

Collaboration among funders is challenging.

As a national philanthropic partnership, the Trust had hoped to also engage local funders in these efforts, especially the grant opportunity to support local programs. While some local funders expressed interest in partnering, many were unable to quickly divert funds to directly support the work. Ideally, these local funding relationships would be in place prior to investing in a multi-year state-based strategy.

A multiyear commitment is necessary.

The Trust began with a one-year grant, and it soon became apparent that a dedicated, multiyear commitment would be necessary. However, our iterative approach - funding year over year in one or two-year increments, with grants specific to each phase of the project - allowed us to be strategic, layering new funding upon past efforts and building a public case over time.



Direct investments in local programs seeded changes that are continuing.

Local partners who received grant funding indicated that they plan to continue implementation and refinement of their efforts to align their practice with the principles of ideal learning environments. Specifically, administrators plan to continue educator and staff training and coaching and replicate their initial efforts in more classrooms. Educators report they plan to continue to use training, coaching, and materials from the investment in the years to come.

Educators desire more flexible training offerings.

Teachers and administrators highly valued the training they received through this initiative. Some encountered challenges, however, related to the time commitment. Several suggested more flexible scheduling, accessibility in other

languages, and practical techniques that could be utilized in classrooms. Another suggestion was to organize visits to classrooms that use ideal learning approaches. In the past, the Trust has funded the conversion of in-person trainings into online modules and has seen the benefits of expanding linguistic access. This feedback has also inspired the Trust to develop a “Cross Pollination Fund” to support local partners to travel to exemplary ideal learning sites for training and engagement in a national community of practice.

Dr. Lisa Roy points out, “Continued opportunities to develop promising training and technical assistance, including eLearning, instructor-led training, coaching, consulting, and peer mentoring could be potential tools that can impact the early childhood workforce to gain a deeper understanding of what we mean by ideal learning and find ways to incorporate this into professionals’ specific context and practice.”





Materials for policymakers are useful in laying the groundwork for action.

The resources that Early Milestones developed during the first few years of the initiative were helpful in communicating with district leaders, program administrators, and policymakers in their own language. For example, the [crosswalk of the ideal learning principles](#) with state early learning and development guidelines showed decision-makers how ideal learning approaches aligned with existing state requirements, and the [Elevating Family Voices workbook](#) offered administrators practical solutions to engage families.

At the same time, teaching and administrative staff involved in the grant expressed concerns about families' capacity to participate in their children's education. Staff suggested that more preparatory work might have more fully engaged families in the purpose of the transition and the reasons for a play-based, whole-child curriculum.

Engaging media consultants can amplify the work.

In partnering with a communications firm, the Trust was able to elevate its voice and those of our partners in the state. Additionally, media exposure showcased ideal learning environments to make a compelling case for state and local policymakers. For example, Floyd and Leong's [September 2021 editorial](#) in the Colorado Sun urged, "The state's new Department of Early Childhood must start with a strong blueprint to design a high-quality program. Our youngest kids have unique potential and unique needs that can guide these plans." In a [local TV news appearance](#), Floyd explained, "We know that children learn best in experiential environments. If you don't really understand how children learn before the age of 8, you may be doing things that may seem intuitive but they actually don't work."

We are still coming to terms with the pandemic.

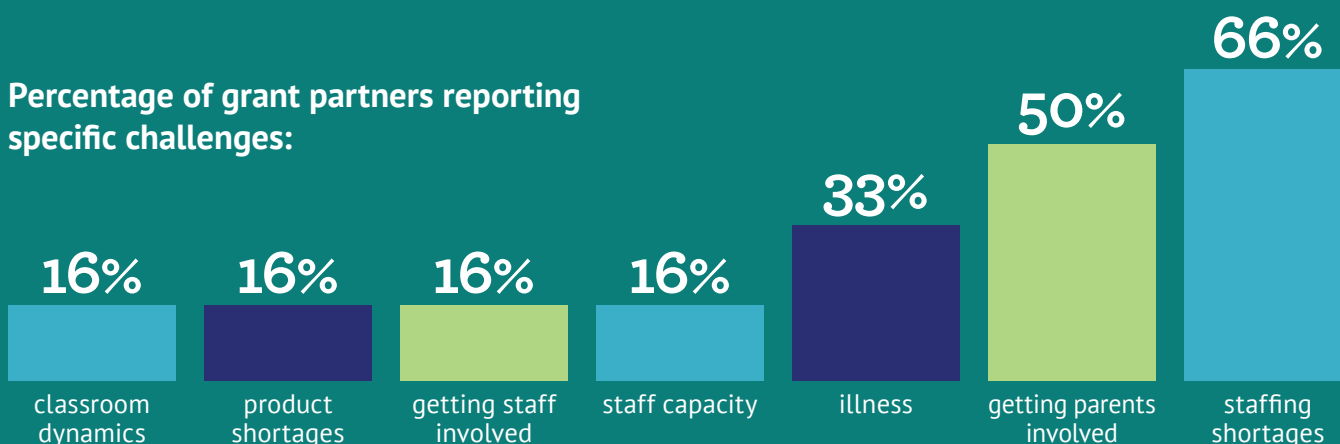
Most of the experiences chronicled in this report overlap with the COVID-19 pandemic, but the challenges and opportunities that the pandemic exposed were already in place before March 2020, and they remain with us today. In many ways, the grantee partners reflected what many early childhood education programs have been experiencing in the last few years and the impacts of the pandemic. For example, programs reported staffing shortages that have plagued classrooms throughout the nation. In addition, the trauma experienced by both children and adults has created greater needs than ever before.

Half of the grantee partners cited difficulty in engaging families, and over a third reported staff illness and capacity as issues. Anecdotally,

educators mention professional burnout and difficulty engaging parents and caregivers in children's learning. They point to the behavioral challenges of a generation of young children who were denied social-emotional development opportunities. Federal funding from the American Rescue Plan Act has alleviated some of the immediate pressures on the field, but the lack of sustainable, dependable financial support remains a concern.

At the same time, the global pandemic presented a historic opportunity for reinvention and reclaiming priorities, and in light of the multiple overlapping crises families were experiencing, the investments in Colorado's early learning ecosystem arguably had an especially profound impact.

Percentage of grant partners reporting specific challenges:



Impacting policy requires both long- and short-term strategies.

The Trust provided input on the development of program rules and regulations during opportunities for public comment. However, equally as important in guiding policy is the development of resources such as the Trust's [Measuring the Quality of Early Learning Environments: A guide to evaluating ideal learning environments for young children](#), which is reflected in the state's call for individualized program observations, consideration of resources, and emphasis on family voice.

Continued policy engagement is needed.

There have been many policy developments over the last three years to establish governance and structural elements of the UPK program, but many implementation issues remain that will require additional guidance and resources. In particular, the Trust is awaiting information about the Department's Resource Bank that is being established to assist providers with program implementation.

Learning Environment Partners

Denison Montessori

Denison is Denver Public School's largest traditional Montessori school and a Title 1 school. Through this grant opportunity, administrators sought to address the impacts of toxic stress and trauma on children and adults, especially those living in the historically marginalized communities surrounding the school, which had become an increasing issue since the COVID-19 pandemic. Teaching staff in the Primary Program received coaching support on the Sustainably Integrated Trauma Informed Education ([SITE](#)) framework, which educated them about brain development and trauma. Denison served as a pilot site for implementing SITE in Montessori school settings.

Children Served:

- **142** students
- **3-6** ages
- **63%** eligible for free & reduced lunch
- **77%** minority
- **18%** English language learners
- **15%** have special needs

Educators Served:

- **19** staff served
- **39%** persons of color
- **24%** bilingual

Eagle County School District

[Eagle County](#) (ECDS) is a district in central Colorado with a focus on creating blended classrooms where children who have special needs learn alongside their typically developing peers and where multilingual learners are valued for the diversity that they bring to the classroom. The funding enabled the purchase of materials for both indoor and outdoor use, which included adaptive, bilingual, and social-emotional resources to fully engage students with diverse language, developmental, and academic needs. Of particular note, the school constructed an accessible pathway to the playground. One child was delighted that her friend, who uses a wheelchair, would be included, saying, "Now [they] can play with me anywhere outside!"

Children Served:

- **15** students
- **59%** Hispanic
- **76%** speak Spanish
- **59%** enrolled in Head Start

Eagleton Elementary

[Eagleton Elementary](#), a preschool through 5th grade school located in Northwest Denver, enhanced their focus on learning through relationships and a commitment to play. Teachers used the [Tools of the Mind](#) curriculum, a play-based ideal learning approach that scaffolds learning for students as they develop self-regulation, social-emotional, and academic skills.

Tools of the Mind invites students to express themselves and participate in dialogue through Share the News, Message of the Day, and play planning time. These activities give them the structure to learn prewriting and writing skills as well as self-regulation. First-year ECE teachers found Tools to be helpful with classroom management.

Children Served:

- 32 students
- 3 & 4 ages
- 92% eligible for free & reduced lunch
- 9% have an IEP
- 63% English language learners
- 78% Hispanic
- 59% speak Spanish
- 88% minority

Educators Served:

- 4 staff served
- 50% Spanish as primary language
- 50% minority

If you walk into my room you will see a joyous place to learn where students are truly at the center of their learning, thanks to the Tools of the Mind training.”

—Eagleton Teacher

Without my having to say anything, students really own the rituals and routines of the class.”

—Eagleton Teacher

YMCA of Northern Colorado

The [YMCA of Northern Colorado](#) is one of the largest providers of early care and education in the area, providing preschool and Head Start programming, as well as infant and toddler care for a large percentage of low-income families. Their mission statement asserts, “Families deserve consistent care, enrichment, and early childhood education that grows with the child and guides them to meet developmental milestones.”

As part of enrollment, families receive a membership to the Y and are encouraged to attend various programming offered for children and adults. Program staff pride themselves on their work with both children and their families and adherence to the ideal learning principle “decision-making reflects a commitment to equity.” It is through this lens that the program used its funding to expand their bilingual preschool and infant/toddler curriculum at Longmont Inspire Preschool.

To enhance its program, leaders purchased materials to create a bilingual lending library to strengthen home connections, and hired a social-emotional learning (SEL) consultant to visit classrooms and engage children in activities related to mindfulness, self-regulation, and social-emotional skills. The consultant also provided five training sessions for staff on how to integrate these SEL lessons into their classrooms.

In interviews, teachers spoke very positively about their experiences working with the SEL consultant and her ability to convey SEL lessons in a way that their students understood and retained. One teacher told a story about a child in her classroom who particularly benefited from the consultant’s visits as he was facing difficult transitions at home: “Every time that she came, he would be her helper. And they had that routine and that balance together of, ‘Hey, when we’re very angry, we can stomp our feet, and go to Cozy Corner.’ And I feel like she impacted him in a big, big way because she was an extra person that was there for him [and] gave him that comfort.”

Children Served:

- 97 preschoolers
- 90% low income families
- 67% minority
- 59% Hispanic/Latino
- 36% ESL
- 10% in foster care
- 22% have an IEP

Educators Served:

- 16 staff served
- 60% Caucasian
- 5% Hispanic/Latinx
- 5% Pacific Islander
- 75% bilingual

I’m very grateful that all of this has been happening. It has really impacted the classrooms and it’s helped a lot. And it’s just very good to come into the classroom and see the kids happy and see parents happy. Especially those [who] might not see the help outside of the [YMCA] and that feel lost outside.”

—YMCA of Northern Colorado Teacher

Paradise Place

Located in Crested Butte, Colorado, Paradise Place embraces the principle that the *time of childhood is valued* by celebrating children with the vision, “We don’t mold children, we reveal them.”

Interviews with teachers at the end of the grant period revealed that children’s behaviors changed significantly with the new environments. As one teacher said, “[There were] decreases in challenging behaviors because the children were engaged in the activities. They were able to make choices with what they were using in the classroom. I could see a shift in individual learning, as well as social-emotional learning. They were working more collaboratively with one another, and they were working on those core friendship skills of sharing, turn-taking, turn-requesting, and playing together.”

Children Served:

- 55 students
- 90% white
- 10% minority
- 9% receive special education
- 30% income less than 275% of the federal poverty level

Educators Served:

- 10 staff served
- 20% Hispanic

Montessori Collective

The [Montessori Collective](#) works with traditional elementary schools to convert them into Montessori-inspired spaces and provide teacher training at no cost to the schools or teachers. Montessori Collective partnered with [Goldrick Elementary](#), a public school in Denver, serving primarily low-income families of color without access to an ideal learning-aligned education. The project enabled the conversion of one early childhood education (ECE) classroom into an ideal learning environment and allowed one teacher to be trained at the Montessori Education Center of the Rockies.

Children Served:

- **16** students
- **81%** eligible for free & reduced lunch
- **36%** multilingual learners
- **1%** American Indian or Alaska Native

Educators Served:

- **13%** Black or African American
- **72%** Hispanic, Latino, Latinx, or Chicanx

The landscape of the classroom looks totally different. It's a really calm environment. It's really clear that [the kids] know what to do."

–Montessori Collective educator

It's an awesome opportunity for kids to learn independence and problem-solving skills...It's really cool being able to bring that opportunity to a school that wouldn't have it otherwise."

–Montessori Collective educator

His level of independence changed a lot. I saw him wanting to do things more by himself than he was before. His behavior in school changed. He would be nervous to come to school and see me in the hallway and start crying. But the next year I could just tell that he felt more self-esteem. He was able to express his feelings differently. His fine motor skills really improved. He is obsessed with Legos, and he can do Lego sets for 10-year-olds by himself, and it's just cool to see he has the stamina to sit there and follow the directions. We hear from his teacher that he gets along with others really well. A big focus last year was math, and he knows all of his numbers. He can write out sums, which is really cool."

–Robin Miranda, Assistant Principal, Goldrick Elementary, on her son

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to [Kacee Miller](#) and [Emily Landes](#) at Early Milestones Colorado for providing such considerate support for this project. Thanks to [KP Creative Strategy](#) for designing this report.



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ADVANCING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN'S SUCCESS