

# Listening to Families: Latina mothers on what quality preschool should look like

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## Introduction

It's important to know what families want in a quality preschool program. Their ideas can help make Universal Preschool better and easier for everyone to use. Early Milestones partnered with Julio Alas, Ed.D., a recent University of Colorado-Denver doctoral graduate, to support his doctoral research project. Early Milestones provided gift cards to seven immigrant Latina mothers living in the Roaring Fork Valley to contribute their feedback for the study through this partnership.

## What Families Said

Mothers from the Roaring Fork Valley talked about the need for caring and skilled teachers, safe and welcoming classrooms, and strong support for children's learning and social development. All interviews were conducted in Spanish. All names have been changed to protect participant anonymity.

Daelani, **a mother who has enrolled her son in a community-based preschool program for three-year-olds**, describes observations of her child's teachers that she thinks are important. For her, teachers who have a passion for the work is critical so that they can show up in caring and supportive ways for all the children in their care. She said, "Entonces, no veo que solo es [mi hijo], sino que sí veo como que las maestras [...] se enfocan mucho en [todos] los niños. [Lo] hacen porque les gusta, no [solo] por trabajo. Y eso también es muy importante para mí [...] que no lo hagan solo porque están agarrando [un] cheque [...] yo siento que uno tiene que hacer [un] trabajo con algo que a uno lo apasiona o le gusta para que no se sienta como trabajo y uno hacerlo bien."

**English translation:** So, I don't see that it's just with [my son], but I do see that the teachers [...] they focus a lot on [all] the children. [They] do it because they like it, not [just] for work. And that's also very important to me [...] that they don't do it just because they're getting [a] paycheck [...] I feel that you have to have [a] job with something that you're passionate about or that you like so that it doesn't feel like work and you do it well.

Esperanza, **a mother with a child enrolled in a school district preschool program**, describes that she likes the way the teachers interact with the children in her child's program by not being so demanding with them and instead giving the children time and space to adjust to the program and to being around other classmates. She said these traits are not often seen in other teachers and that is a problem. "Pues me gusta la forma en cómo las maestras [les] enseñan para que aprendan [y] que no los tienen como exigentes, sino que les dan como su tiempo para que ellos vayan adaptándose a cada cosa o a otros compañeros. Ellos son [...] bien amables, que a veces no se ve mucho en maestras, son menos comprensivas, y ese problema no me gusta[...]"

**English translation:** Well, I like the way the teachers teach [them] so that they learn [and] that they don't demand so much from them, but give them their time so that they can adapt to each thing or to other classmates. They're [...] very kind, which sometimes you don't see much in teachers, they are less understanding, and I don't like that problem [...]

Throughout her interview, Romelia, **a mother with a child enrolled in preschool**, said that she thought the academic rigor in schools in Mexico is much higher and better than what she has observed in the U.S. She attributed much of this to a lack of teacher training and compensation. "[El] nivel de aprendizaje acá es mucho menor al de México. Sí, porque las maestras de preescolar no tienen ningún perfil académico de acuerdo a eso [...] ¿Cuál pienso que sea el mayor problema? Acá [...] según mi opinión, [...] no tienen ese incentivo económico las maestras. Porque según me han dicho [que] no ganan [bien], no puedo decir que ganen \$20-\$30 la hora, \$25 la hora, entonces quiero pensar que





por eso aquí en [los] Estados Unidos la gente no tiene ni ganas, ni tiempo para invertir en [capacitarse...] Yo pienso que les deben de pagar mejor a las maestras.”

**English translation:** [The] level of learning here is much lower than in Mexico. Yes, because preschool teachers don't have any academic profile to support that [...] What do I think is the biggest problem? Here [...] in my opinion, [...] teachers don't have that economic incentive. Because according to what I've been told [that] they don't earn [enough], I can't say that they earn \$20-\$30 an hour, \$25 an hour, so I want to think that's why here in [the] United States people don't have the desire, or the time to invest in [training...] I think that teachers should be paid better.

Issy, a mother who has her child enrolled in a school district preschool program, states that coexistence with other children is something important that she wanted for her child. She explained what she wanted for her son. “Convivencia. Que conviviera con los niños y que se supiera desarrollar más [...] en jugar con los niños en cosas didácticas [...] yo quiero que mi niño juegue con los niños, que él vaya conociendo para cuando toque llegar a la escuela, él sepa que se tiene que retirar de mamá, que tiene que ir a estudiar, que [debe] tener compañerismo, que tiene que empezar a conocer valores, responsabilidades, de ir sabiendo tener responsabilidades de levantarse [para ir] a la escuela [...]”

**English translation:** Coexistence. That he coexists with the children and that he is able to develop more [...] in playing with the children with didactic things [...] I want my child to play with the children, for him to get familiar and for him to know that he has to leave his mother, that he has to go study, that [he must] have companionship, that he has to begin to know values, responsibilities, to know that he has responsibilities to get up [to go] to school [...]

## Key Takeaways

While these stories are from a small sample of Colorado mothers, they make an important point. When families speak about their children's experiences in preschool, they often highlight the deeply human elements that define quality early childhood education – compassionate teachers, supportive environments, and opportunities for growth, both academic and social.

As we build and invest in Colorado's free Universal Preschool, we must keep these priorities in mind.

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