

Family & Community Engagement

Colorado Universal Preschool **Quality Standards** | Brief 3 of 4 | June 2025

Why It Matters

Research shows strong partnerships with families and communities help create safe, welcoming, and enriching learning environments. When families are meaningfully engaged in their children's learning, it supports school readiness and long-term success.¹

What's Required

Preschool providers must have policies and procedures that ensure:

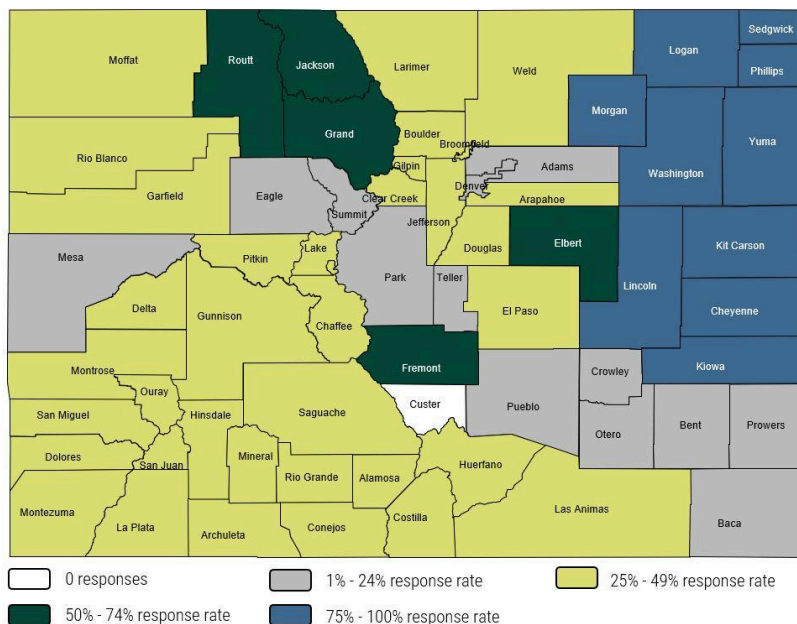
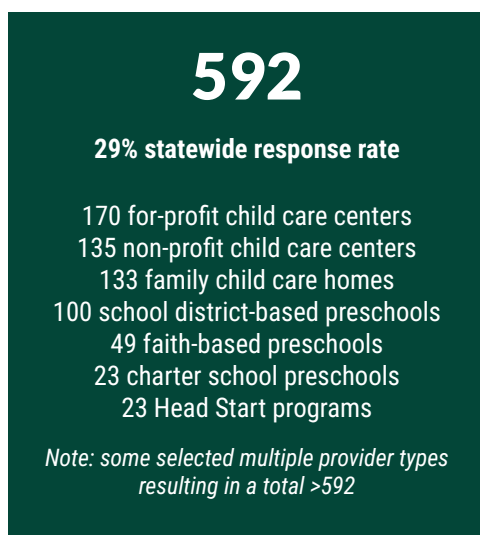
- Effective communication and language access
- Families share their priorities, interests, home routines, and cultural and social practices
- Shared goals for children, including multilingual learners
- Family and community input on how the preschool operates
- Supportive transitions into and out of preschool
- Quality interactions between families, staff, and the preschool



Provider Quality Self-Reports

In August 2024, the Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC) invited all 2,045 preschool providers participating in the 2024-25 school year to complete a voluntary online self-report. The form asked about Family & Community Engagement. The self-report form was open for four weeks. CDEC also asked the 32 Local Coordinating Organizations to help spread the word.

A total of 592 preschool providers from 63 of Colorado's 64 counties completed the self-report. These providers represented a wide range of preschool settings.



¹ Crosnoe R., Leventhal T., Wirth R. J., Pierce K.M., & Pianta R. C. (2010). Family socioeconomic status and consistent environmental stimulation in early childhood. *Child Development*, 81, 972–987.

WHAT PROVIDERS SAID

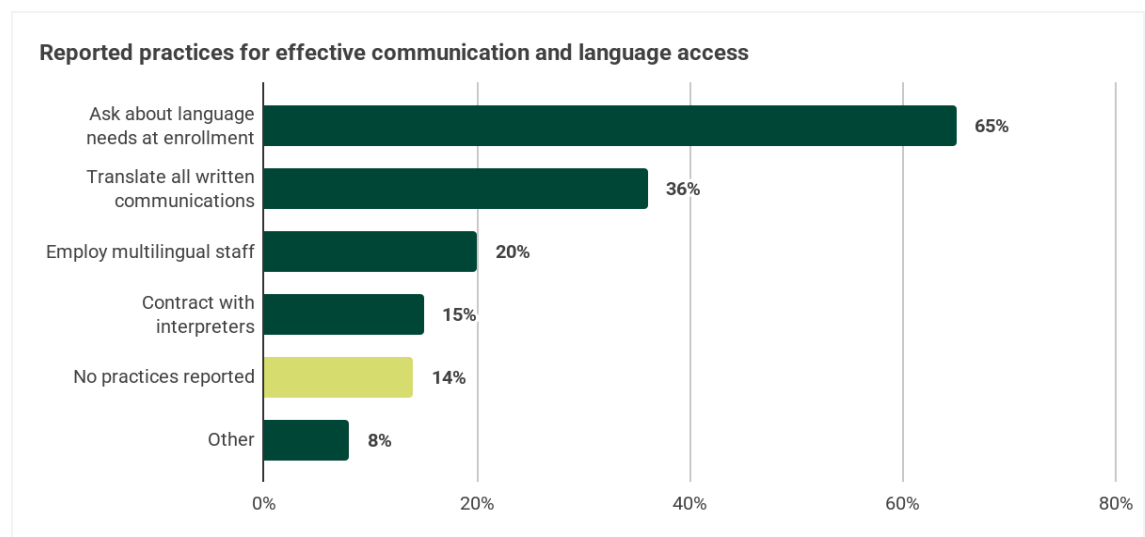
These findings reflect what preschool providers reported about their own practices. The information was not verified. Because participation was voluntary, this information should not be seen as a full picture of the Universal Preschool Program. The goal of reviewing the 2024-25 responses was to support resource development, not to assess quality.

Preschool providers were asked to report which policies they have in place and to describe their approach. The self-report form included multiple options so providers could show how their current policies align with the quality standards. Providers could also share more detail through a written response.

Effective communication and language access

Most providers (86%) said they use at least one practice to support this requirement. The practices reported varied widely (see chart). Many providers who selected “Other” reported using translation apps to communicate. Some providers indicated that serving families who speak a language other than English was not of interest to them. These comments highlight a need for increased awareness.

About 25% of Colorado children under age 5 have at least one parent who speaks a language other than English at home.² Research shows that dual language learners (DLLs) benefit greatly from preschool, which makes this requirement key for equitable access to preschool.³



Families share their priorities, interests, home routines, and cultural and social practices

When children see their family's culture represented in the classroom, they feel more connected and valued. This helps build confidence and a positive self-image.⁴ Most providers (97%) reported using at least one practice to support this requirement.

- **93%** host **family events**
- **77%** incorporate **questions in enrollment process**
- **72%** have **parent-teacher conferences**
- **70%** ask families to **complete questionnaires**
- **15%** conduct **home visits**

Shared goals for children, including multilingual learners

Most providers (94%) said they use at least one practice to create shared goals. However, they were more likely to use foundational practices (marked with an asterisk) rather than practices directly linked to developing shared goals.

- **76%** co-develop goals with families through **individual conferences** with each family
- **71%** put **learning in context** for children so they can connect a topic to their lives*
- **59%** develop learning content **inclusive of the multiple cultures** of participating families*
- **53%** co-develop **individualized learning plans** for children that are informed by, shared, and discussed with families
- **36%** conduct **surveys or focus groups** to gather input from families on shared goals for their children

² https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/mpi-nciip_dll-fact-sheet2022_co-final.pdf

³ <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/22286/413026-Supporting-Immigrant-Families-Access-to-Prekindergarten.PDF>

⁴ <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/tyc/dec2019/valuing-diversity-developing-understanding-behavior>

Family and community input on how the preschool operates

Most providers (94%) reported using at least one practice to support this requirement. As with the previous requirement, some responses reflected basic practices (marked with an asterisk). Other practices more actively involved families and the community in shaping preschool operations.

- **64%** provide a **handbook** (in multiple languages as needed) to all families*
- **53%** collect **feedback from families on operations**, such as curriculum, staffing, and facilities
- **45%** have a **website** where families and the community can access preschool policies, procedures, and resources*
- **22%** have a **family-community advisory board** that meets regularly to provide input on preschool operations
- **18%** host **community conversations** to get community input and involvement

Supportive transitions into and out of preschool

Most providers (97%) said they use at least one practice to support this requirement.

- **67%** have children **practice kindergarten (K) routines**
- **62%** contact families **prior to starting preschool**
- **61%** provide **resources on effective transitions**
- **60%** host **orientation sessions for new families**
- **54%** provide **books and interactive materials about K**
- **47%** provide a **portfolio of the children's work**
- **27%** organize **visits to nearby K classrooms**

Quality interactions between families, staff, and the preschool

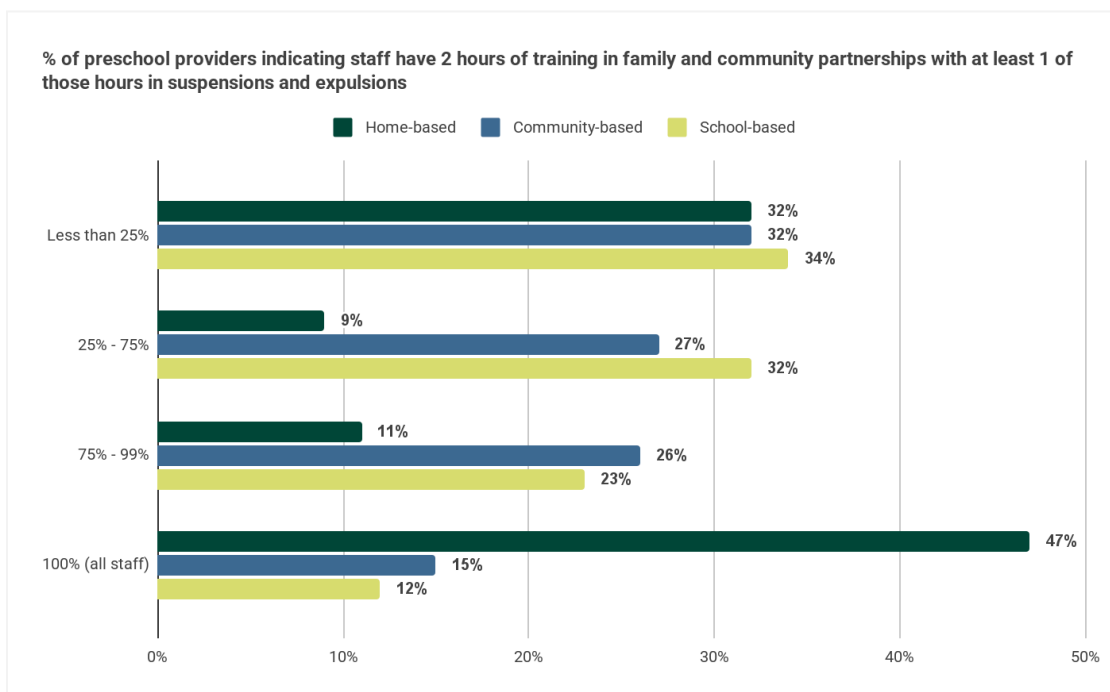
Most providers (97%) reported using at least one practice to support this requirement.

- **76%** foster **open and respectful communication** in all interactions
- **67%** encourage **families, community, and staff to provide feedback** and suggestions
- **61%** provide **staff training on effective communication and relationship building** with families
- **60%** establish **guidelines or standards** for interactions between families, staff, and the preschool
- **52%** collect **feedback from families on their interactions with staff** and use the feedback for future training

STAFF TRAINING

Providers were asked about staff training. Across all preschool settings, few providers reported that all staff met training requirements related to Family & Community Engagement (see chart).

Providers were not asked how close their staff were to meeting training requirements. For those not there yet, support may be needed to reach the requirement.



Key Takeaways

To meet the goals of the Universal Preschool Program, providers need to understand that they are **expected to serve any Colorado family seeking preschool** to ensure equitable access.



Recognize Quality

Many providers already use practices that match the Family & Community Engagement standard.

- Less than **3% of providers reported having none of the required policies** in place; however, providers more commonly rely on one-way communication methods – like sharing a handbook or stating the importance of family perspective.
 - While providers were less likely to report use of two-way communication methods that actively engage families – like forming a family-community advisory board – many (76%) reported holding **individual conferences with families** to co-develop children's learning goals.
-



Provide Resources

Providers want more tools and support to better understand and apply the quality standards.

- Providers reported a need for **sample policies or templates** to help them meet the Family Community & Engagement requirements. Make sample policies available in multiple languages with a **focus on transcreation**, not only translation.
 - 88 of self-report respondents indicated, “yes, I have policies and/or procedures that have been translated into a language other than English AND am willing to provide samples to CDEC”
 - Providers also requested **tools to assess staff training** in relation to the requirements.
 - More professional development is needed on **best practices for collecting and using family feedback, hosting community conversations, and working with English language learners**.
-



Make Connections

Providers are looking for help to connect with local partners to strengthen their work.

- Explore opportunities to **centralize language access supports**, such as translation and interpretation services, that may be beyond the capacity of smaller community-based or family child care home preschools to offer.
 - Many providers said they are connected with Early Childhood Councils, Local Coordinating Organizations, and Family Resource Centers. These partnerships can be used to **offer resources and training** to meet the new requirements.
-



Acknowledgements

The Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC) generously provided data from the online self-report forms completed by providers. Katie Squibb, PhD, and Morgan Janke, MPA, from Early Years Forward, conducted the analysis for this brief.



EARLY MILESTONES
COLORADO