

Colorado Universal Preschool Quality Standards

An Overview | Brief 1 of 4 | June 2025

Why It Matters

The first five years of a child's life are key to their future success. During this time, children grow quickly in many areas, such as learning, language, social skills, memory, and self-control.¹ To help every child in Colorado thrive, the state asked the Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC) to create standards based on best practices that build on Colorado's long history of improving preschool quality.² This brief is part of a series that explores the new quality standards.

Quality Standards

The standards aim to support strong outcomes for children and families. Some parts of the standards are basic requirements. These include meeting the required number of contact hours, following child care licensing rules, meeting staff-to-child ratio and group size limits, offering equal access to enrollment, following IDEA and ECEA laws for children with IEPs, and limiting suspension and expulsion. All providers must meet these rules to be part of the preschool program.

INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE

The curriculum, or teaching approach, must support the whole child. It should help children grow in all areas and use assessment to guide teaching. The curriculum or approach must:

- align with the Colorado Early Learning & Development Guidelines and Academic Standards
- use assessment to inform instruction
- be culturally, developmentally, and linguistically appropriate
- meet the needs of all children, including children with diverse needs

Every 3 years, an independent observer will visit each preschool. They will look at how children experience instruction.

HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT

Supporting children's health is a key part of whole child development. Providers must have policies and procedures in place to connect families to:

- Voluntary screenings (developmental, social-emotional, dental, vision, and hearing) within 45 days of enrollment
- Referrals for children when families want and need specialized services
- Translation and interpretation services, so families can access information in their home language

Each year, families will be invited to share their experiences with these services.

FAMILY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Families are their child's first caregiver and teacher. Providers must have policies and procedures in place to make sure each child's preschool education is meaningful, culturally relevant, and built on strong school-family partnerships.

Each year, families will be invited to share their experiences with these services.

¹ Bernier, A., Carlson, S. M., & Whipple, N. (2010). From external regulation to self-regulation: Early parenting precursors of young children's executive functioning. *Child development*, 81(1), 326-339.

² Colorado Universal Preschool Program Act, [Colo. Rev. Stat. § 26.5-4-205](#) (2022).

The standards will be phased in over time to allow preschool providers to serve families while adopting new practices, as needed.

Decisions about program quality must be made with consideration for how they will impact families' access to services.

TEACHER QUALITY: Creating multiple pathways for educators to obtain the training and qualifications that lead to quality experiences for children is important. Colorado's Competencies for Early Childhood Educators outline what teachers need to know and be able to do to support children's learning and development from birth to age eight.

Provider Quality Self-Reports

In August 2024, the CDEC invited all 2,045 providers in the Universal Preschool Program to complete three voluntary online self-report forms. These forms asked about their practices in three key areas - Instructional Practice, Healthy Development, and Family & Community Engagement. The CDEC also shared the invitation with the 32 Local Coordinating Organizations to help spread the word. The form remained open for four weeks.

The responses reflect what preschool providers reported about their own practices. The information was not verified. Because the survey was voluntary, the results represent only a portion of preschool providers and should not be seen as a full picture of the entire Universal Preschool Program. While self-reporting may help with future monitoring, the goal of reviewing the 2024-25 responses is to support resource development, not to assess preschool quality.

INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE	HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT	FAMILY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
757	605	592
37% response rate	30% response rate	29% response rate
205 for-profit child care centers 151 non-profit child care centers 152 family child care homes 188 school district-based preschools 50 faith-based preschools 24 charter school preschools 32 Head Start programs	176 for-profit child care centers 153 non-profit child care centers 133 family child care homes 109 school district-based preschools 50 faith-based preschools 23 charter school preschools 24 Head Start programs	170 for-profit child care centers 135 non-profit child care centers 133 family child care homes 100 school district-based preschools 49 faith-based preschools 23 charter school preschools 23 Head Start programs
<i>Note: some selected multiple provider types resulting in a total >757</i>	<i>Note: some selected multiple provider types resulting in a total >605</i>	<i>Note: some selected multiple provider types resulting in a total >592</i>

Key Takeaways

- ① **Recognize quality.** Many providers are already using practices that match the quality standards.
- ② **Provide resources.** Providers want more tools and support to better understand and apply the quality standards.
- ③ **Make connections.** Providers are looking for help to connect with local partners to strengthen their work.

Additional findings will be shared in the three briefs that complete this series.

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