



Colorado

Colorado Preschool Program

The Colorado Preschool Program serves children lacking overall school readiness due to risk factors associated with poor academic performance, including low-income, homelessness, and limited English proficiency. The state's Department of Education provides funds to local school districts that decide whether to administer the program directly or contract with community-based providers. School districts determine the family risk factors upon which to base eligibility and hours of operation.

Eligibility

Income: eligibility for free lunch is a qualifying factor

Age: 3-year-olds, and 4- and 5-year-olds not eligible for public school kindergarten

Priority: in order to participate, a child must have significant family risk factors, which are defined by the local school district. These may include but are not limited to: eligibility for free or reduced lunch, homelessness or frequent housing relocation, teenage or unwed parent, parent(s) did not complete high school, and/or child has delayed social skills. To be eligible, 3-year-olds must have three or more risk factors present in their lives.

Length of Program

Hours/day: locally controlled; a minimum of 360 hours per year, generally two and a half hours four days per week; the fifth day may be used for home visits, planning, or staff development

Days/year: locally controlled; may be year-round or academic year

Eligible Providers

School districts, child care program, Head Start agencies, other community agencies

Number Served¹

8,050 (2003-04): 63 percent are in schools; 37 percent are in community-based settings

Total Annual Budget

\$26,589,159 (2003-04); \$31,287,685 (2002-03) from the state general funds

Monitoring

All pre-k programs must be licensed according to child care licensing standards. In addition, local District Councils are responsible for monitoring programs at least twice per year. District Councils must select methods for measuring and reporting child progress, but are discouraged from using standardized testing. All districts must report on child progress to the department of education each year in their final report. The department of education may also require reports on parental involvement and year-end

¹ For updated figures on the program budget and number served, please see the NIEER State Preschool Yearbook at: <http://nieer.org/yearbook/states/>

satisfaction with the program. Each year, the state department of education selects some school districts for on-site visits.

Governance

How are state pre-k programs integrated into community-based settings?

The statute and regulations both specifically authorize school districts to contract with Head Start and community agencies for the provision of Colorado Preschool Program services. The regulations state, “it is the intent of the Colorado General Assembly and the Colorado State Board of Education to fund those districts that demonstrate a use of collaboration with the community in order to show effective use of the resources in the program.”

Are there requirements to integrate the state pre-k and subsidized child care programs at the state or local level?

The Colorado Department of Education administers the Preschool Program. While no formal requirement to integrate the programs exists at the state level, there are monthly team meetings across the child care and education agencies to coordinate early care and education policy. A portion of the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant is subcontracted to the department of education to deliver subsidized child care services.

At the local level, the school district superintendent must appoint a District Council to develop and oversee the local preschool plan. The Council must have representatives from a publicly funded early care and education program (i.e., Head Start, private child care, or a community college). District Councils develop plans for how best to work with community providers and schools. The Colorado Department of Education reviews local District Council plans and selects districts on a competitive basis. The District Council must consider whether (1) there is an established preschool program currently provided by the school district, Head Start agency, or child care agencies that could be expanded or modified to include the district preschool program; (2) the district preschool program could be provided more efficiently by a Head Start agency or child care agencies while maintaining the quality of the program; (3) the Head Start or child care agencies could maintain the criteria established by the department of education; and (4) the school district or the Head Start or child care agencies could provide extended day services for children enrolled in the program in need of such services.

Procedures and Supports for Community-based Providers

What are the rules/guidelines for notifying and selecting pre-k providers?

Every five years, the District Council must issue a request for proposal to solicit potential new providers to the Preschool Program. Local Councils make recommendations to the School Board, which makes the final selection of Preschool Program providers. The selection process does not vary based on the type of program. Applicants must meet all standards prior to approval as a Preschool Program provider. In most cases, the providers are visited prior to approval.

What resources are available to help providers become eligible to deliver pre-k services?

The state provides technical assistance, and program funds can be used for renovation. Other resources that are not restricted to the Preschool Program include a T.E.A.C.H. program that provides scholarships for early childhood teachers to further their education, and the Qualistar program that provides quality improvement funds to targeted child care programs.

Do teachers working in community settings earn comparable wages and benefits once they obtain the same credential as teachers in school-based settings?

There are no state rules governing comparable wages.

Supports for Working Families

Is there any explicit discussion in the legislation or regulations of extending the day, coordinating with the child care subsidy program, or helping working families?

Yes, the statute authorizes any school district with the Preschool Program to coordinate the services with extended-day services if a need for such services exists. Extended-day services may be funded with parent fees, public money, and/or private funds.

What policies help working families access pre-k and other supports?

District Councils are encouraged to explore coordination with community providers to create extended-day services, but wraparound is neither required nor funded using Preschool Program funds. Transportation is not mandated by the program, but is an allowable use of funds. Assistance is provided in securing and maintaining eligibility for services such as child care, health insurance, and family supports. District Council plans must address the family support services that contribute to the health and well-being of the children, including: nutrition, immunizations, health care, dental care, social service programs, mental health programs, recreation opportunities, and coordination with a parenting program.

Funding

What is the per-child payment for the pre-k program?

The amount varies by school district. The average per-child payment is \$2864.38, and the range is \$2,586 to \$5,999.

How does the state pre-k funding affect other potential sources of funds for a provider?

Receipt of Preschool Program funds has no impact on child care or Head Start program funding. Child care providers can still receive child care subsidy to blend with CPP funding to support a full-day program, and Head Start grantees can blend federal Head Start and state Preschool Program funds to extend the day of year.

Sources

- Interview: Lori Goodwin Bowers, Colorado Department of Education, 05/25/2004
- Website: www.cde.state.co.us/earlychildhoodconnections/early.htm
- Legislation: Colorado Statutes, Title 22 Compensatory Education, article 28. Colorado Preschool Program Act/22-28-111.
- Program Guidelines and Requirements: Amended Rules for the Administration of the Colorado Preschool Program Act
- Sub-contracting requirements: CO Code 22-28-105(2)(a.3)

For information about national trends, read CLASP's *All Together Now: State Experiences in Using Community-Based Child Care to Provide Pre-kindergarten* at http://www.clasp.org/publications/all_together_now.pdf.