



FACT SHEET

The State of Early Childhood in Colorado

April 10, 2015

The Colorado General Assembly implemented the Colorado Preschool Program, or CPP, in 1988.¹ The CPP provides at-risk 3- and 4-year-olds—determined by factors such as free and reduced lunch, low parental education levels, and homelessness—with access to preschool in order to reduce dropout rates and the need for public assistance. The Colorado school finance formula determines funding levels for the CPP, and overall funding for the program has been stagnant even though state funding increased \$5 million in the 2012-13 school year.² Colorado is also a recipient of a Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant that provides funds to expand early education access and quality. The program currently serves 21 percent of 4-year-olds and 7 percent of 3-year-olds in all settings, including public schools, child care centers, and family child care homes.³

Colorado children would benefit from additional resources to improve access and quality

One of the leading research institutions on state preschool programs, the National Institute for Early Education Research, or NIEER, has established 10 benchmarks of quality. Colorado meets just six of them. The state has the opportunity to improve quality by requiring teachers to have a B.A. degree, providing at least one meal per day, and providing vision, hearing, and health and at least one support service.⁴ Colorado would be more likely to improve quality and expand access with a substantial increase in funding of the program.

- In 2013, Colorado ranked 37 out of 41 states in per-student funding.⁵
- Colorado currently spends \$2,159 per student, well below the national average of \$4,026 and substantially short of the spending rates in states with programs that meet almost all the benchmarks, including Oklahoma and Georgia.⁶

In 2013, Colorado ranked

37^{out}
of 41
states in preschool
per-student funding

Colorado currently spends

\$2,159
per preschool student

Early childhood education can support Colorado's most vulnerable populations

Many Colorado children live in families feeling severe financial strain. Growing up in such an environment affects young children's ability to thrive, putting them behind their wealthier peers on a number of developmental, educational, and social measures. The stress that often comes with living in poverty can also adversely affect brain development in children's early years. High-quality early education has been proven to alleviate these risk factors and help close the school-readiness gap.⁷

- 43 percent of Colorado children under age 6 live in low-income families.⁸
- 8 percent of Colorado children live in areas of concentrated poverty, putting them at a greater risk of starting kindergarten behind.⁹

Child care is out of reach for many Colorado families

Colorado is one of 31 states where the cost of child care is higher than that of in-state tuition and fees at a public college.¹⁰ In Colorado, where 61 percent of children under age 6 have all available parents in the workforce, child care is not a luxury—it is a necessity.¹¹

- For a family with children in Colorado, the median income is \$68,100 per year.¹²
- The average annual cost of a child care center in Colorado is \$13,143 for an infant and \$9,871 for a 4-year-old.¹³

Endnotes

1 Colorado Department of Education, "Colorado Preschool Program: 2011-12 Handbook" (2011), available at http://www.cde.state.co.us/sites/default/files/documents/cpp/download/cppdocs/cpp_handbook.pdf.

2 W. Steven Barnett and others, "The State of Preschool 2013: State Preschool Yearbook" (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2013), available at <http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/yearbook2013.pdf>.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Jack P. Shonkoff and others, "The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress," *Pediatrics* 129 (1) (2012): e232–e246, available at <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/129/1/e232.short>.

8 National Center for Children in Poverty, "Colorado: Demographics of Young, Low-Income Children," available at http://www.nccp.org/profiles/CO_profile_6.html (last accessed March 2015).

9 Kids Count Data Center, "Children Living in Areas of Concentrated Poverty" (Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation,

2013), available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/6795-children-living-in-areas-of-concentrated-poverty#detailed/2/2-52/false/1376,1201,1074,880,11/any/13891,13892>.

10 Child Care Aware of America, "Parents and the High Cost of Child Care" (2013), available at http://usa.childcareaware.org/sites/default/files/cost_of_care_2013_103113_0.pdf.

11 Kids Count Data Center, "Children Under Age 6 with All Available Parents in the Labor Force" (Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013), available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5057-children-under-age-6-with-all-available-parents-in-the-labor-force#detailed/2/2-52/false/36,868,867,133,38/any/11472,11473>.

12 Kids Count Data Center, "Median Family Income Among Households with Children" (Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013), available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/65-median-family-income-among-households-with-children#detailed/2/2-52/false/36,868,867,133,38/any/365>.

13 Child Care Aware of America, "Parents and the High Cost of Child Care."

14 Authors' calculations based on Child Care Aware of America, "Parents and the High Cost of Child Care."

61%

of children under age 6 have all available parents in the workforce

For a typical family with an infant and a 4-year-old in Colorado, the average cost of child care at a center amounts to

1/3

of annual income¹⁴