



## **Free Full-Day Preschool and Full-Day Kindergarten in Colorado**

As Governor, within two years I will bring together a winning coalition to establish universal full day Kindergarten and Preschool in every community across our state.

High-quality, full-day kindergarten and preschool promote school readiness, close achievement gaps, and support the healthy development of all children. Access to quality preschool and kindergarten would also save parents' money on day-care and allow parents the flexibility to go back to work sooner, not only helping families pay rent and put food on the table, but also generating additional tax revenue for the state and decreasing reliance on public assistance programs.

Because child care is full day and elementary school is full day, part-day preschool and part-day kindergarten interrupts the continuity of learning and put many parents in a difficult bind. Research links full-day Kindergarten and preschool with better academic and social outcomes, leading to a stronger economy and less crime.

### **Full-Day Kindergarten**

Colorado would achieve universal full-day kindergarten by making state Kindergarten funding full-time (equivalent to the full-day for 1st grade) for all students in public schools. Currently, Colorado funds about 5,400 full-day kindergarten slots under the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) but only children who meet at-risk factors are eligible. The middle-class deserves a free, high quality, full-day kindergarten program too, and that's what my plan provides.

### **Full-Day Preschool**

Structure and Quality - While the full-day Kindergarten program works through school districts, Preschool incorporates a larger set of quality providers. My goal is to invest in creating universal access to high-quality early childhood classrooms. A universal system that values parent choice includes a mixed delivery system that includes traditional public schools, public charter schools, child development centers, Head Start programs, and family child care homes.

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According to the new Preschool Yearbook, Colorado serves 23% of 4-year olds and 8% of 3-year olds in mostly half-day programs (2,5 hours/day). To achieve universal preschool in Colorado, I support creating a new program, the Colorado Universal Preschool Program (CUPP), which would direct state funding to the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) to provide formula funding to any three- and four-year old Colorado child whose parent wants the child in preschool. The program would direct COE to allocate the amount of a full PPF to any high-quality preschool provider (school district, charter school or community-based organization, such as a Head Start or child care program) that a parent chooses, as long as the provider, after the first three years of the program, is rated at least a level 4 out of the state's 5-level rating under the Colorado Shines rating system. CUPP would be co-administered by COE and Department of Human Services.

CUPP would layer on top of existing Head Start and child care funding for low-income children already served to provide preschool access for all Colorado children whose parents want it. To transform CPP into the universal full-time CUPP program, we would adjust funding to full-time Per Pupil Funding. COE also provides funding for a limited number of slots for the Early Childhood At-Risk Expansion (ECARE) program, which has more flexible funding options that include full-day pre-k and k. This program would also be folded into the new CUPP funding system, as would other funding for early childhood education.

**Local Early Childhood Councils** - would ensure quality in all early care and education settings, including helping build supply and improvements, in addition to their current role as integrating entities and community hubs for all early childhood services and supports.

**Specific Needs** -The CUPP would have a special fund to invest in more facilities (with BEST funding, working with businesses/non-profits to leverage private capital); and greater workforce support, such as coaching, job-embedded professional development, evidence-based communities of practice, and scholarships to increase credentials and degrees. The state's Every Student Succeeds Act plan promotes the state's professional development information system (PDIS), which outlines workforce coursework competencies framework for birth to 3rd Grade educators and aligned with educator effectiveness.

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This is the foundation for coursework in CO community colleges and we need to make sure that our educators are well-trained to meet the needs of young children and that they have career opportunities to support themselves and advance in their career.

## **Basic Standards**

All CUPP-funded programs would be required to have at a minimum:

- Support for inclusive practices for children with special needs
- Support for dual language learners
- Family engagement
- Comprehensive services (health, mental health, nutrition, dental)
- Coordination among all early childhood education programs, including in child care, Head Start, and school districts. Preschool policy must be connected with child care policy in every local region to ensure continuity of care for families with young children.

## **Other CUPP Provisions**

- The CUPP would encourage shared services where a network of early childhood programs would build shared organizational capacity; small centers and home-based child care providers form alliances on business practices like fiscal management, data reporting, staff and human resources, and other overhead expenses to streamline administrative costs and strengthen quality and shift dollars to serving more children with quality services.
- Innovative and diverse delivery systems to address the rural and frontier communities, such as mobile/modular/temporary classrooms to address barriers such as transportation.
- Fully implement the new Every Student Succeeds Act requirement for school districts to form agreements with Head Start and child care providers on key coordination issues, including joint professional development, records, transition issues, and parent communication and involvement. CUPP should also require coordination on data, standards, curriculum, assessment, outcomes, recruitment, and retention efforts to support a preK-3rd Grade alignment.
- Continuous development of CUPP policy and practice will draw on the successes and lessons learned from Colorado's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant, implementation of the newly reauthorized Every Student Succeeds Act, recently released Head Start Performance Standards and the reauthorized Child Care and Development Block Grant.

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## **Birth-to-Three**

To expand the state's child development efforts during the peak years of brain development, the preschool policy should include a state investment in the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership to expand access to quality care for the state's most vulnerable infants and toddlers. This federally funded program aims to improve child care for infants and toddlers by bringing the quality components of the Early Head Start program into child development centers and homes. This expansion would be targeted to low-income children, children with special needs, and children experiencing homelessness.

Together we can ensure that kids get the learning support they need in their most important early years. While in some families, a parent can stay home full-time to support their 3-5 year old, in too many others that simply isn't a realistic option. That's why we need to bring full day kindergarten and preschool to every community across Colorado.

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