

IMPLEMENTING 15 ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR HIGH-QUALITY PRE-K: Colorado

The Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) was launched in 1988 in an effort to target 3- and 4-year-olds in need of language development support, with the goal of lowering school dropout rates and reducing dependence on public assistance. In 1992, CPP became a permanent program and expanded its target population to all children who lack overall school readiness due to family risk factors.

In the 2016-2017 school year, 98% of the 179 school districts in Colorado offered CPP. Two types of slots can be allocated to districts: CPP slots, which can be used to serve eligible pre-K students, and Early Childhood At-Risk Enhancement (ECARE) slots, which can be used to serve pre-K students or to provide full-day opportunities for eligible kindergartners. Two half-day slots can be combined to create full-day opportunities for pre-K children with very high needs.

Essential Elements

Fifteen Essential Elements clustered in three categories—Enabling Environment, Support for Educators and Young Learners, and High-Quality Instruction—have been identified among exemplary pre-K programs (Minervino, 2014). Note that practice in the field may vary so as to be either better or worse than might be expected based on specific policy or guidance. Consistency or quality of practice across large-scale programs is more difficult to assess than policy.

Enabling Environment		Rigorous, Articulated Early Learning Policies								Strong Program Practices				
Political Will	Strong Leaders	BA + comp	Class size	Two Adults	Hours/Dosage	EL Standards	Effective Curriculum	Special Ed	DLL support	HQ Teaching	PD	Child Assessments	Data Driven	Integrated System
○	●	—	●	●	—	●	○	●	—	ND	○	●	●	○

Key: ● Fully Met ○ Partially Met — Not Met ND Not determined

Political will. Gov. Hickenlooper (D), currently in his last term due to term limits, has been seen as a strong supporter of pre-K. Prior to being Governor, he was mayor of Denver, which has created a pre-K program in addition to CPP. Beginning in 2010-2012, the state enacted consecutive budget cuts, including a reduction in funding available for K–12 students. During those years, funding for CPP dropped by \$6 million to \$67 million. Funding for CPP has since recovered, with total state and local funding (through a required local match) at \$88.5 million in 2016-2017. CPP/ECARE enrollment increased slightly from the previous year with 21,622 (23% of the state’s 4-year-olds; and 8% of 3-year-olds) being served in 2016-2017.

CPP funding is determined through the Colorado school finance formula, with preschoolers receiving half the amount for students in grades 1 through 12 given they receive half-day programming. These funds are distributed directly to public schools, which are given a predetermined number of half-day slots to serve eligible children. The state’s budget limitations and the potential impact of TABOR (the



1992 Taxpayer's Bill of Rights) seemingly limit any major progress and raise questions about the political will broadly in the state for change.

The Colorado Children's Campaign has been advocating for pre-K issues, specifically focusing on system building efforts, increasing access to full-day pre-K and K, and promoting quality across the early childhood sector.

Compelling vision and strong leadership. CPP is administered through the Office of Early Learning and School Readiness (OELSR) which is housed in the Teaching and Learning Unit under the Achievement and Strategy Division, one of six divisions within the Colorado Department of Education (CDE). CPP has 8 FTEs assigned to its administration. OELSR is also responsible for Results Matter, the state's QRIS; preschool special education; early learning standards resources; and the kindergarten entrance assessment.

CPP funds flow from the state directly to school districts. Local district advisory councils provide oversight, with final approval required by the school district superintendent. Any child who receives CPP funding is considered a school district student, even if they are served through a non-public school, community provider.

Education and compensation. CPP lead teachers are not required to have a BA, but instead be Early Childhood Teacher (ECT) qualified by Child Care Licensing under the Colorado Department of Human Services. This equates to having a Child Care Professional Credential (CCP), CDA, or an associate degree in Early Childhood Education/Child Development. Colorado does not require salary parity between k-3 teachers and CPP lead teachers in public or non-public school settings.

Adult-child ratio and two adults in the classroom. Legislation mandates that preschool classrooms with children who are receiving CPP funds are allowed to have a maximum group size of 16 children with two teachers or one teacher per 8 children. There are no waivers to override group size or ratio limits for CPP.

Learning time. CPP is funded for a minimum of 10 hours per week, five days per week, although the state statute requires that children attend four days per week, with the fifth day being funded for home visits, teacher planning time, completion of child assessments, or staff training. Schedules are determined locally and based on the needs of children and families. District advisory councils are encouraged to blend CPP funding with other sources such as Head Start, child care subsidy, and parent tuition so that children can participate in full-day programs. However, enrollment by schedule is not collected by the state.

Age-appropriate learning standards. Originally established in 2007, the Colorado Building Blocks for Early Development and Learning was revised in 2011 to align with the Colorado P-12 Academic Standards. Building Blocks was replaced by the Colorado Early Learning and Development Guidelines (ELDG) in January 2013. The ELDG address all developmental and academic fields, are inclusive of all children ages birth to 8 years; and align with the [Colorado P-12 Academic Standards](#), which include preschool and have incorporated the Common Core State Standards. There is a training course on the Early Learning and Development Guidelines in the Professional Development Information System, a statewide web-based system supporting professional development for Colorado's early childhood

workforce.

System that ensures effective curriculum. The Colorado Quality Standards provide guidance for curriculum selection and a matrix to evaluate the degree to which the children are actively involved in the learning process and the variety of developmentally appropriate activities and materials are available. The state does not provide a list of state recommended or approved curricula. Curriculum selection and implementation is conducted at the local level. The state CPP Regional Support Specialists work at the district, program, or classroom level on curriculum selection, training, and coaching. There is not a system to ensure that curricula are implemented with fidelity.

Support for students with special needs. Children who receive special education services may attend CPP classrooms; but are not counted in the state preschool enrollment. CPP teachers are required to possess specific qualifications regarding working with children with special needs and participate in professional development. In addition, inclusion specialists are available to support preschool teachers and/or children

Support for dual (English) language learners (DLL). Colorado is not able to report the number of DLLs enrolled in CPP. Bilingual instruction is permitted and there are some minimal policies to support families of preschool DLLs, including that contact with the family about the child and preschool program are required to be presented in the family's home language, including recruitment, enrollment and outreach as well as information on the child's progress.

High quality teaching. The state does not collect ECERS or CLASS scores, but is able to report that in 2016-2017, 37% of early childhood care and education programs funded by CPP who have participated in the QRIS have achieved a "high-quality" rating (Levels 3-5) in Colorado Shines. Level 5 requires an average ECERS total score of 5.75 or higher, with no classrooms below 5.0.

Professional development. While the CPP classrooms must offer teacher-pupil contact time at a minimum of 360 hours per year, they are funded to operate a minimum of 450 hours per year. The 90 hour difference in the program requirements is to enable preschool teachers to have additional time to attend staff training, provide home visits, assess children, and do child planning based on those assessments.

As previously reported, CPP Regional Support Specialists offer support, including coaching, to CPP. However, this is optional. Teachers are required to participate in 15 clock hours of professional development annually.

Child Assessments. All programs serving children funded through CPP use formative assessment to monitor progress and illustrate growth between fall and spring in key areas of learning and development. The Colorado Achievement Plan for Kids (CAP4K) legislation (2008) mandates that every child in CPP have an Individual School Readiness (ISR) plan. The ISR is informed by ongoing assessment of a child's progress in developmental and academic domains. In 2015-2016, all programs chose to use Teaching Strategies GOLD. Tools are reviewed periodically and must meet certain requirements including online infrastructure, assessment of whole-child domains of learning and development, automated federal reporting, and well-defined objective progressions of development. High Scope COR



was approved for use during 2018-2019. The state offers a variety of trainings and meetings, including webinars, to support the use of child assessments.

Data-driven decision-making. Each year, participating CPP programs submit an annual report to the state which is then reviewed using a rubric to provide feedback. Programs also submit audited revenue and expenditures for district-level programs, documentation of family outcomes, longitudinal data on child performance in statewide assessment in grades K-12, graduation rates, retention rates, and placement in special education in grades K-12. In addition, twice a year, district advisory councils visit all settings operating CPP classrooms using the Colorado Quality Standards to identify strengths and areas for growth. Although not required, many districts serving CPP use ERS/ECERS and CLASS for classroom observations and participate in the state's QRIS.

Status and growth data are reported to the Colorado Legislature through an annual report provided at the commencement of the legislative session. Under Results Matter, the process for evaluating program effectiveness is ongoing and based on performance-based assessments, parent surveys, K-12 assessment data and retention rates, and program quality ratings. State policy requires the use of an approved assessment system to measure child outcomes.

There has not been a third-party external evaluation of CPP.

Integrated System. Many of the components of Colorado's early childhood system have been intentionally aligned and managed by CDE. All early learning programs, including CPP, participate in the Results Matter reporting system. The Results Matter program includes child assessment data which is entered into a web-based platform that is available to educators, principals, families, and in aggregate to state leaders and policy makers. Colorado's Early Childhood Credential 2.0 is aligned with the Colorado Shines workforce qualifications quality indicator. The Early Childhood Competencies Framework is aligned with Colorado's Quality Standards for Teachers and Principals that has been adopted by the Colorado State Board of Education. However, programs are not required to utilize the Regional Support Specialists for coaching and curriculum selection is a locally determined decision with limited state support.