

Critical “Must Haves” in Colorado’s Universal Preschool Policy

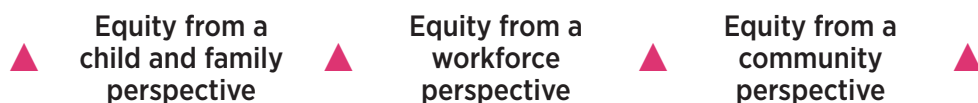
The Early Childhood Leadership Commission (ECLC) embraces the following as essential components when reviewing, considering, and recommending policies related to universal preschool.**

- ❑ **Equity drives decisions and priorities:** CO recognizes that equity does not mean equality (the same answer, size, approach in every instance), rather it allows flexibility based on the context to best meet needs.
- ❑ **Universal and targeted:** CO designs universal preschool to serve ALL children while providing for additional resources and supports for those furthest from opportunity.
- ❑ **High quality standards:** CO sets culturally responsive, comprehensive, high quality standards across all aspects of a program AND provides pathways and supports to achieve them.
- ❑ **Child and family centric services:** CO designs programs and systems based on family voice and needs, while continuously engaging families to improve child and family experience, health, and wellbeing.
- ❑ **Child and program outcomes:** CO demonstrates outcomes and impact with the necessary tracking and reporting systems to ensure accountability.
- ❑ **Access:** CO expands and increases options for family choice, including settings in licensed community-based centers, family child care homes, and school settings.
- ❑ **Diverse workforce:** CO supports and champions a diverse workforce by prioritizing standards that promote equitable opportunities for preparation and compensation, professional development, and educational and training pathways for early childhood professionals in all settings.
- ❑ **Mixed delivery system:** CO invests in building capacity of communities, programs, and workforce to ensure licensed community-based centers, family child care homes, and school settings provide quality programming.
- ❑ **Streamlined administrative burden:** CO creates efficiencies in administrative and eligibility functions at family, program, and community levels to reinvest in services and workforce.
- ❑ **Strengthened and expanded resources:** CO creates policies and allocates funding in a way that strengthens the broader early childhood system, including birth to 3 services.

Colorado’s Early Childhood Leadership Commission - Stewards of Equity

The Early Childhood Colorado Framework is founded upon the pillars of access, quality, and equity in serving all children and families in our state. These guiding principles speak to the commitment of the early childhood community to declare unequivocally that racism has no place in our communities.

The ECLC is charged with playing a key role in identifying, evaluating, and recommending policy alternatives aligned with key preschool design and implementation questions arising from the Future of Preschool Policy Development process. The ECLC believes that Colorado’s universal preschool program will be successful when, and only when, policies and practices are in the pursuit of equity:



What is Equity-mindedness in Policy?

For many children in our state, their experience is inequitable from birth. This is evidenced by numerous indicators that show that children of color consistently face barriers that lead to lower educational attainment, poorer health outcomes, and other lifelong challenges. The importance of early care and education in challenging and breaking through these systemic inequities cannot be overstated. Three-month-old babies can visually categorize faces by race. Toddlers begin to connect racial features to a person’s behavior. Preschoolers can identify and act out against racial injustice on their own. Children’s experiences in their formative years have the power to change our world.

We express our sincere gratitude to all who have dedicated their work and lives to fighting for access, quality, and equity within communities. We stand with you and know that we have much more work to do together.

ECLC Statement on Equity, August 2020

“Equity is not ‘nice to have.’ It’s a ‘got to have.’ Unless we focus on African American and Latino students, our country will not get to where it needs to be.” -Jamie P. Merisotis, President and CEO, Lumina Foundation

An equity focus in policy recognizes the need to eliminate disparities in outcomes of children and families from underserved and underrepresented populations.

It is deliberately color-conscious and seeks to prevent or eliminate gaps for Native Americans, African American, Latinx, refugee, and other marginalized children and families.

It prioritizes institutional or program accountability rather than child or family challenges/gaps/deficits and monitors the impacts of specific groups to see when policies and practices are creating or worsening inequality.

Applying an equity-minded focus requires policymakers to consider who benefits, who loses, and how children and families in greatest need fare as a result of the policy.

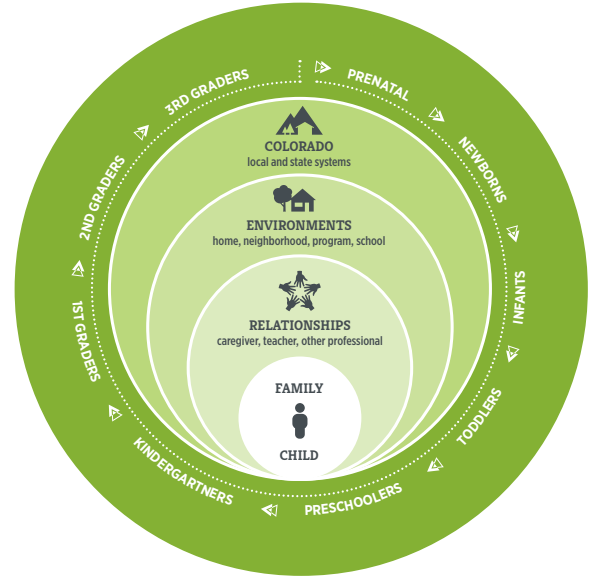
An equity-minded lens can also help identify equity “assets,” or policies that may already be in place that advance equity.

Protocol for Assessing Equity-Mindedness in State Policy, Center for Urban Education, Rossier School of Education, University of Southern California, January, 2017

Equity Considerations

The ECLC will continually consider, review, and provide policy recommendations by asking these questions:

- How is this policy prioritizing those most in need, under-resourced, or furthest from opportunity?
- To what degree have parents and community members designed, influenced, and recommended this policy?
- To what degree have local programs, early care and education providers, and school districts weighed in on this policy recommendation?
- How might this policy break down systemic racism?



Other Key Questions to Consider in the Review and Discussion of Preschool Policies

- How does this policy meet the needs of working parents (e.g. full day, full year, non-traditional hours)? How does it promote a two-generation approach with comprehensive supports for the most under-resourced? How does it support parent choice and access to quality settings (e.g. licensed community-based centers, family child care homes, and school settings)?
- How does this policy ensure cultural relevancy and responsiveness in program services and delivery? How does it promote language justice and accessibility of services in the family's home language? How does it serve preschoolers with disabilities, English language learners, and other children with unique needs?
- To what degree does this policy move all early childhood professionals in community-based centers, family child care homes, and school settings towards a liveable wage? How does it support the infrastructure necessary to support equivalent pay? How does this policy expand and align professional development and credential attainment? How does this policy support a diverse workforce?
- How does this policy support program and quality standards? To what degree does it promote mixed delivery settings in an equitable fashion? How does it support evidence-based family and community engagement? How does it ensure a commitment to a whole child and family approach, build protective factors, and strengthen child outcomes? How does it address comprehensive health—including social/emotional, physical, and oral health?
- How does this policy align authority to create an environment for efficient and effective inter- and intra-governmental cooperation, including local, state, and federal? How does the policy ensure that the broader system take responsibility to streamline funding and regulations for families, providers, and/or communities? To what degree does this policy create the needed monitoring, tracking, and accountability systems to ensure positive child and family outcomes?
- How does this policy incentivize innovation and flexibility to best meet the needs of children, families, and communities? How is this policy responsive and adaptive to lessons learned?
- How does this policy strengthen the broader, prenatal to age 8 early childhood system? To what degree might it have an unintended consequence on broader early childhood systems, including birth to 3 services?
- How does this policy interact with current and proposed preschool policies? How does it build towards a cohesive system that promotes equity?

**Applies to Universal Preschool as Stipulated by Proposition EE

Summary of Preschool Program Details in Proposition EE Initiative: Expand and enhance the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) or any successor program in order to offer at least ten hours per week of voluntary preschool free of charge to every child in Colorado during the last year of preschool before entry to kindergarten.		
Program Design Requirements	Funding and Governance	Expansion Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows for parent choice • School-based and community based programs must meet quality and program guidelines • Must support and strengthen the diversity of the workforce • Will help to achieve state and local mixed delivery goals • High quality programming that helps prepare children for kindergarten • Coordination with existing systems, initiatives, funding streams, and advancing alignment with K-12th grade systems to support children's transitions to school • Opportunities for evidence-based parent, family, and community engagement • Evaluation of early childhood education program effectiveness including impact of preschool on child and family outcomes 	<p>Priority funding: Through expansion of CPP or any successor program, offer at least ten hours per week of voluntary preschool free of charge to every child in CO during last year of preschool before entry to kindergarten.</p> <p>Remaining money: Programming for low income families and children at risk of entering kindergarten without being school ready.</p> <p>Uses of funding by designated department: Designated department means one or more departments that the general assembly has determined to be best qualified to administer CPP or any successor program to ensure the availability of quality, voluntary, mixed delivery preschool by appropriating money from the preschool programs cash fund to the department or departments.</p> <p>The designated department may use money appropriated from the preschool programs cash fund for the costs of a third-party entity that administers the program on behalf of the designated department.</p>	<p>To meet an expansion of the current preschool population, money may be used to ensure the availability of quality, voluntary, mixed delivery preschool by which the designated department deems appropriate including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruiting, training, and retaining early childhood education professionals; • Expanding or improving the staff, facilities, equipment, technology, and physical infrastructure of preschool programs offered by licensed provider to increase preschool access; • Parent and family outreach to facilitate timely and effective enrollment; • And other uses consistent with the universal preschool program.

Source: Cigarette, Tobacco and Nicotine Products Tax, HB20-1427, Colorado General Assembly, Pages 33-35