Early Learning in Colorado: 2017
July 2017

Colorado families need access to affordable child care and preschool to support working parents and to ensure that children start kindergarten ready to learn. During the first five years of life, children learn critical skills such as language and socio-emotional regulation, which provide a foundation for lifelong learning. High-quality preschool and child care can support healthy development and enable parents to work. Unfortunately, too many children are left behind by the status quo. In fact, differences in children’s cognitive abilities by income are evident at only 9 months old and significantly widen by the time children are age 2. Early learning has positive impacts for children, families, and the economy. It’s time to work to put these programs within reach.

Colorado families need access to high-quality child care and preschool
Colorado has 397,216 children under age 6, 63 percent of whom have all available parents in the workforce.

High-quality child care and preschool programs help narrow school readiness gaps, which is particularly important for children of color and those living in low-income families. Thirty-seven percent of Colorado children under age 6 live in low-income families.

The supply of high-quality child care is limited. Many states have implemented quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) to assess and support quality in early care and education programs. Currently, 45 percent of Colorado child care centers participate in QRIS.

The cost of child care is out of reach for families
Annual costs at a child care center in Colorado average $26,039 for an infant and a 4-year-old, which is 34 percent of the median income for families with children.

For low-income families and people of color, the average cost of child care would constitute the majority of income in most cases.
The current child care system is failing Colorado families
On average, the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) serves only 8 percent of federally eligible children in Colorado. This results in only 16,900 Colorado children served through CCDBG funds. Of those served, 76 percent attend licensed or regulated center-based care.

Colorado families need greater access to high-quality preschool programs
The Colorado Preschool Program provides preschool for eligible 3- and 4-year-olds. Eligibility requirements include risk factors such as being in foster care, a family history of abuse or neglect, and low parental education levels, as well as locally determined risk factors. This preschool program meets, on average, 6 quality benchmarks set by the National Institute for Early Education Research and spends $4,001 annually per student.

In Colorado, 14 percent of 3-year-olds and 31 percent of 4-year-olds are enrolled in a public preschool program.

Investing in high-quality early learning programs affects economies
Making child care more affordable for families can increase mothers’ workforce participation, resulting in a boost to the state’s economy.

In Colorado, if child care costs did not exceed more than 10 percent of a family’s income, the state’s economy would increase nearly $44.37 million.

We can do better for Colorado families
The Center for American Progress proposes two solutions to put high-quality child care and preschool within reach for Colorado families and create an early childhood learning continuum for children:

• If child care costs are capped at 10 percent of a family’s income, Colorado families would save $7,290 a year.
• Voluntary universal preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds. This would increase access for 116,500 children in Colorado.

Cost of child care as a share of income for people of color

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>73%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian and Pacific Islander</td>
<td>31%</td>
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<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>55%</td>
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<td>Latino</td>
<td>60%</td>
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Cost of child care as a share of income for low-income families

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<tr>
<td>100 percent of the federal poverty level</td>
<td>106%</td>
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<tr>
<td>150 percent of the federal poverty level</td>
<td>71%</td>
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<tr>
<td>200 percent of the federal poverty level</td>
<td>53%</td>
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4 Endnotes


11 Note: In states that do not serve 3-year-olds or with no preschool program, enrollment rates include federal Head Start only.
