



DRAFT Universal Preschool Recommendations Listening Session

December 2021

Overview

Building on its longstanding commitment to early childhood care and education, Colorado is creating a new state department to oversee early childhood programs, including the development and implementation of a voter-approved universal, voluntary preschool program.

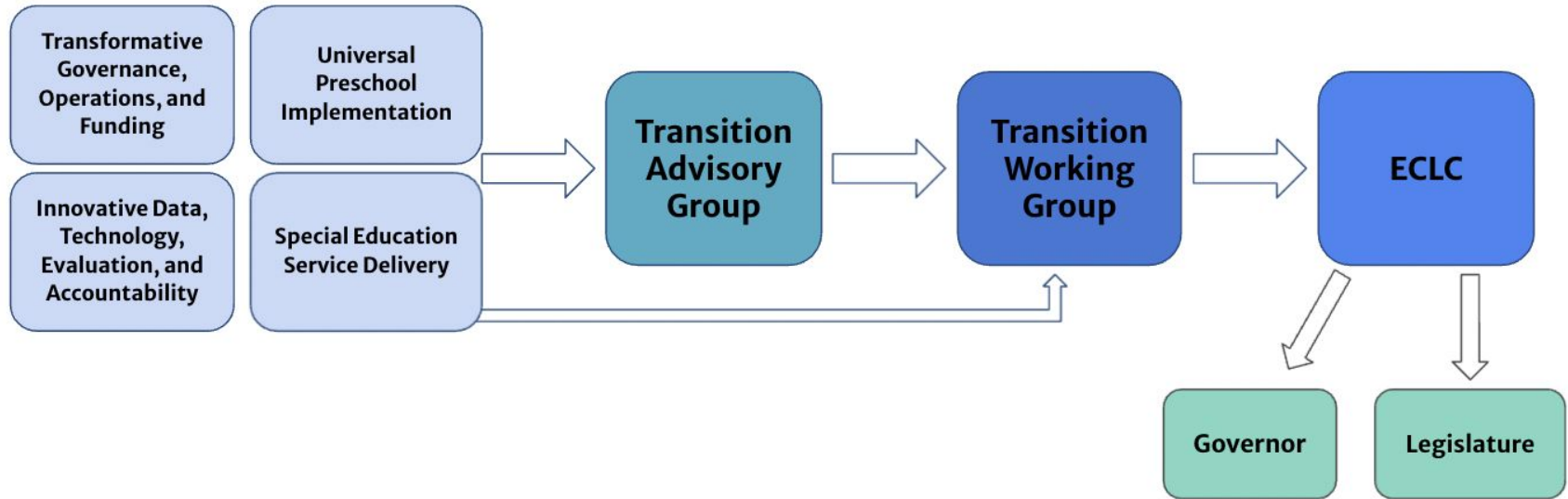
As the state moves forward in designing both the department and the program, it has and will continue to seek significant engagement from families, providers, school districts, advocates, community leaders, and other stakeholders. This input will be key to ensuring success for young children and families across the state.

Today's event seeks to review key elements of the draft universal preschool recommendations, answer questions about how this will affect children and families in your community, and outline next steps in the process.



Transition Planning Process

ECLC's Transition Planning Process



Stakeholder Engagement

This process cannot be successful without the engagement of a diverse array of stakeholders. Many thanks to the stakeholders who have played such an instrumental role in this work.

- 56 TAG members have attended 9 meetings to date
 - 8 surveys were given to TAG members to collect additional feedback
- Hundreds of individuals have attended the 38 subgroup meetings
 - 37 named members of the Special Education subgroup
- More than 300 individuals have attended ECLC listening sessions for families, providers, and the workforce
- Statewide listening tour
- Monthly town halls and newsletters

Department of Early Childhood - Transition Plan

The Department of Early Childhood Transition Plan was approved by the ECLC on Nov.10, 2021, and submitted to the Governor and the Legislature.

Department of Early Childhood Transition Plan

The Executive Summary is available in English, Spanish and Arabic.





Draft Universal Preschool Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Building and Strengthening Early Childhood Infrastructure

To achieve the goal of a universally available preschool program that helps to prepare all children for school and beyond, Colorado should address its infrastructure needs, including leadership, capacity, workforce, resources, and more.

In order to realize this goal, stakeholders emphasized the importance of investing in an infrastructure with:

- 1) Local leads empowered and charged to solve local challenges, foster partnerships, create alignment across all local entities, and allocate funding equitably across providers in their communities.
- 2) A demonstrated commitment from the Department of Early Childhood to provide resources to local leads and communities and to ensure that Colorado's aligned early childhood vision is executed successfully across the state.

Recommendation 1a: Local Leads

Local leads should be the Department of Early Childhood's (DEC) partners in each area of the state to help organize the local early childhood landscape and serve as the singular local level point of contact on early childhood in their community.

- Local leads should bring community partners together to build a unified, long-term early childhood community plan and to request state-administered early childhood dollars in alignment with that plan.
- Local leads should be selected through a rigorous application process conducted by DEC, and applications should demonstrate buy-in from other local partners.
 - DEC should select the best fit entity to fulfill these duties and hold such entities accountable to fulfill the charge.
 - Any public agency (e.g., a county) or Colorado based nonpublic organization (e.g., an ECC) could apply.

Recommendation 1a: Local Leads (Continued)

With the appropriate support of the Department of Early Childhood, local leads should be charged at minimum to:

- Coordinate the universal preschool application process
- Ensure universal access to the preschool program
- Manage mixed delivery
- Allocate funding equitably
- Ensure understanding of quality
- Increase community capacity
- Support local workforce

Recommendation 1b: Department of Early Childhood's Role

DEC should clearly define the scope of authority and expectations for local leads, collaborate with them as implementation partners, fully support them, and create an accountability mechanism with clearly delineated responsibilities for them.

- **As part of overseeing local leads, DEC should provide training, technical assistance, and resources to local leads, promote collaboration and collective learning, and elevate examples of success from Colorado and nationally.**
- **If a community is unable to identify an appropriate local lead, DEC should fulfill these responsibilities itself or through another partner.**

DEC should also establish a statewide vision for early childhood and align all funding, initiatives, and efforts toward achieving it.

Recommendation 1b: Department of Early Childhood's Role (Continued)

DEC should leverage existing and build early childhood infrastructure to successfully deliver universal preschool by:

- Empowering local leadership
- Building capacity, immediately and over time
- Incentivizing local share
- Funding equitably
- Aligning regulations and programs

Recommendation 1b: Department of Early Childhood's Role (Continued)

DEC should establish a unified state-level vision and align all funding, initiatives, and efforts toward achieving it by:

- Unifying applications
- Defining quality
- Defining competencies for the workforce
- Working toward a liveable wage for the early childhood workforce
- Promoting inclusive classrooms
- Setting mixed delivery guidelines
- Collaborating with the Colorado Department of Education to support students with special education needs.

Recommendation 2: Universal Preschool Application

DEC should work to develop a single, unified application for families to access universal preschool that is equitable and streamlines the enrollment and eligibility process for both families and early childhood providers.

This application should:

- Be designed with the user experience in mind and offer families a simple and engaging interface.
- Collect only as much information from families as necessary for universal preschool enrollment.
 - Families who need additional funding should also be able to fill out information to determine eligibility for other services.
 - There should be easily integratable and interoperable technology that verifies eligibility for additional funding by checking against other programs families may already be eligible for or utilizing
- This application should ensure that families are able to go to one place to apply for all early childhood services for their children.

Recommendation 3: Eligibility and Prioritization

DEC should work with stakeholders and experts to create a base rate for universal preschool and additional adjustments or incentives to ensure access for all children that can build upon the base rate.

This rate must balance the tensions between universally funding quality for 10 hours a week and providing additional hours for Colorado's children with greatest needs.

These additional adjustments can include:

- Weighting for underserved populations, including children experiencing risk factors, dual language learners, children in foster care, children experiencing homelessness, and children receiving special education services.
- Regional considerations such as economies of scale in rural areas.
- Potential for half-day or full-day spots.
- Any other additional incentives such as teacher qualifications, implementation of mixed delivery, care for infants and toddlers, and quality.

Recommendation 3: Eligibility and Prioritization (Continued)

In the process of determining eligibility and prioritization, DEC should also ensure:

- Current Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) funding is integrated into universal preschool funding, and total funding for preschool does not drop below current levels, including keeping current funding for in-need three year old access consistent.
- The universal preschool rate is not tied to the school finance formula and reflects differences in risk factors, regional needs, and special education services.
- The universal preschool rate is kept stable or increases over time to support a reliable system.
- There is a plan for funding allocation in times of scarcity and excess, including how to ensure the available targeted funds are allocated to meet family needs.

When allocating additional funding for full-day services, DEC should review the current CPP risk factors, needs of the state, and national standards as a starting point to determine eligibility to ensure students who are eligible for additional services do not lose that access.

Recommendation 4: Quality and Evaluation

To support a **high-quality universal, voluntary preschool program**, DEC should:

- Review standards from CPP, National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), Head Start, and guidance on any new federal preschool funding to find opportunities to simplify and align as it designs standards for the universal preschool program (e.g., screening referrals, ratios, class size, teacher degrees)
- Contract with an external evaluator to measure the success of universal preschool, including measuring child outcomes, and provide recommendations to improve the program in future years.

To create a **quality, unified early childhood system**, DEC should:

- Establish a single set of standards for the quality experience children should be having in classrooms regardless of funding source, and align resources and supports to help local communities achieve it;
- Consider a phased approach to quality to support all communities as they seek to scale quality, due to the current constraints of the system;
- Create free and widely accessible professional development on the early learning and development guidelines; and
- Work with local leads and eligible providers to build capacity to meet quality standards.

Recommendation 5: Workforce

To successfully launch universal preschool by 2023, DEC will require a strong early childhood workforce. DEC should build on the ongoing work of the ECLC, Office of Early Childhood, Department of Higher Education (CDHE), and Department of Education (CDE), and should:

- Immediately focus funding resources on ensuring there are enough workforce members available to work on day one of universal preschool implementation and they are appropriately compensated, while also ensuring continued access for all ages before preschool and addressing shortages across the age continuum.
- Review the current workforce qualification pathways to create a simple process for the workforce and providers to attain credentials and qualifications.
 - Ensure the process for joining the early childhood workforce is welcoming and there are minimal barriers to entry, including being thoughtful about those who speak additional languages.
 - Consider how to recruit and incentivize different populations (e.g., high school students, teachers from other countries, parents) and reduce the barriers that prevent them from joining the workforce.
 - Consider an induction model that could decrease the time it takes to get a teacher in a classroom by using an onboarding process to meet regulations and requirements.

Recommendation 5: Workforce (Continued)

- Clearly articulate the most recently revised competencies needed by the workforce, align the system of training, and review regulatory barriers to promote attainment of these competencies through identified partners, including higher education pathways.
- Increase access to professional development to attain these competencies through freely available training, reduced bureaucracy, and increased options for stackable, credit-bearing and work-based learning opportunities.
- Develop and share evidence-based strategies in conjunction with leads from CDHE, CDE, and the Department of Labor and other organizations to sustainably recruit, compensate, develop, and incentivize new members of the workforce.
 - Align available supports for teachers across programs, contracts, and funding streams, and fund additional evidence-based supports.
 - Implement strategies to increase compensation, with a goal to reach a liveable wage (e.g., incentivizing providers to increase providing grants that help compensate the workforce, paying signing bonus, supporting shared services, and other innovations to increase availability of benefits).
 - Create free and widely accessible professional development on the Colorado early learning and development guidelines once reviewed and adopted by DEC.
 - Increase access to flexible credit-bearing and degree pathways aligned to the defined competencies.

Recommendation 6: Special Education

The Transition Working Group's (TWG) recommendations related to special education as detailed in the DEC Transition Plan, including that the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) should continue to administer IDEA Part B, are also relevant for the implementation of universal preschool.

While this report does not suggest any programmatic or structural changes related to accountability and oversight of special education, it does recommend two critical steps DEC can take to build and strengthen inclusivity and supports for children with disabilities, including:

1. Considering additional funding for children with disabilities in the universal preschool program rate; and
2. Ensuring strong collaboration between DEC and CDE on special education service delivery, including that both agencies support the implementation of inclusive classrooms for children with special needs.

Recommendation 6: Special Education (Continued)

To best support children with special needs, DEC should:

- Establish clear expectations for supporting children from specific subgroups including children with special needs and dual language learners, consulting with stakeholders with requisite representation and expertise
- Create an interagency agreement(s) with CDE as soon as possible to:
 - Define the roles and responsibilities of the two departments, local education agencies, and all types of preschool providers;
 - Ensure data collection and sharing such that all critical data can be disaggregated;
 - Support programs and communities to provide inclusive, individualized, meaningful, culturally relevant, active and participatory learning for all children;
 - Determine how community-based programs providers will be held accountable for providing access and supports in implementing a mixed-delivery preschool program.
 - Ensure the new preschool program's requirements are integrated with the existing requirements LEAs have for the provision of special education services;
 - Ensure all federal regulations are complied with;
 - Eliminate or reduce duplicative regulations; and
 - Ensure they are addressing all legislative requirements for universal preschool



Questions?



Next Steps

Feedback Form

The draft recommendations can be found at:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1QvUkSJAbcHnSVxLmsbDDKw9rjf0MXmiV/view>

Stakeholders can offer written feedback on the draft report through an online public form until **December 15**. The feedback form can be found at: <https://forms.gle/8hcZ7Hv2R7YRGafm9>

All of the feedback and recommendations will be considered by TWG to inform the recommendations due to the ECLC by **Jan. 1, 2022**.

Upcoming Listening Sessions, TAG and ECLC Meetings

Listening Sessions:

- Dec 11 at 10:00am
- Dec 13 at 10:00am
- Dec 13 at 5:30pm
- Dec 14 at 11:30am

Transition Advisory Group:

- Wednesday, Dec. 15: 3-5:30 p.m.

Early Childhood Leadership Commission:

- Thursday, Dec. 16: 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
- Tuesday, Jan. 11: 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

What happens next?

By Jan. 1, 2022, TWG must submit the completed universal preschool recommendations to the ECLC.

By Jan. 15, the universal preschool recommendations, as approved by the ECLC, must be submitted to the Governor; the Public and Behavioral Health and Human Services Committee and the Education Committee of the House of Representatives; and the Health and Human Services Committee and the Education Committee of the Senate.

Thank you!

Please submit your feedback on the draft report through an online form by **December 15**. The draft recommendations and feedback form can be found at

www.earlychildhoodcolorado.org/transition