

HB18-1134 - Use of Colorado Preschool Program Positions
1:30pm Senate Education SCR 352 - (2) on calendar

- Thank you Mr Chair. My name is Bill Jaeger and I work at the Colorado Children’s Campaign and appreciate the chance to testify in support of HB 1134 and thank the sponsors for bringing it forward.
- We support HB 1134 because it ensures that slots allocated for early learning are focused on children with demonstrated challenges that put them at risk of not being ready for school.
- Children who have access to CPP compared to at-risk peers with no preschool access are 1) more likely to be meeting grade level expectations upon kindergarten entry, 2) less likely to be identified with a reading deficiency under the READ Act, 3) less likely to be retained, and 4) more likely meet or exceed expectations on science, social studies, reading, and math assessments in middle and high school.
- Given this evidence of success, the legislature chose to expand the program by 8,200 slots in 2013 and 2014. In the expansion, the legislature decided to use a new mechanism called the “Early Childhood At-Risk Enhancement” (or ECARE) program. School districts are allowed to use ECARE slots for full-day kindergarten or preschool, at their discretion.
- This bill clarifies that however a district is using an ECARE slot – whether for preschool or a full day of kindergarten – the child being supported must meet one of the eligibility requirements for the program.
- The state uses eligibility criteria that ensure children have at least 1 of 11 research-based risk factors. This helps ensure that the program provides early learning opportunities for the students who may benefit the most from a high-quality early learning experience and who also face the most barriers to accessing one. This is a *targeted* program, not a *universal* one, recognizing that with limited resources we need to invest in strategies that provide the taxpayer with the greatest return.
- It is worth noting that, while the majority of children in the program are economically disadvantaged (63%), more than 1/3 are not economically disadvantaged, but still face family risk factors that jeopardize their school readiness such as evidence of abuse in the home, involvement in the foster care system, homelessness, or a delay in development.
- These criteria currently apply in cases where ECARE slots are used to provide access to preschool, and this bill would ensure that the same criteria apply when an ECARE slot is used to provide access to a full day of kindergarten.
- With limited resources, these programs still cannot serve all of the eligible children. As such, we must focus limited resources on those who are most likely to benefit rather than expand these programs beyond their intended scope. This ensures that taxpayers get the biggest return on their investment in promoting school readiness.
- We urge your support of HB 1134. Thank you.