

HB 18-1379 Colorado School Finance Act
Bill Jaeger, Testimony in House Education, April 16, 2018

Thank you Madame Chair and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify. My name is Bill Jaeger and I lead the Children's Campaign's work on early childhood issues and am excited to support the additional 1,000 preschool and full-day kindergarten slots in the School Finance Act.

The bill sponsors are to be applauded in particular for addressing one of the greatest deficiencies in our education system: our failure to invest in early education. Of all of the ways we could elevate Colorado children's academic achievement and future life prospects, few have as strong a research base as expanding access to quality early education. And as the evidence for these programs just continues to grow, other states in every corner of the country are taking action to fund early childhood education while Colorado stands flat-footed.

With 78% of kindergarteners already in a full-day program, local communities and schools are pulling resources from other areas to make ends meet. This means fewer resources for other programming and/or requiring parents to pay tuition – both are equity considerations. The demand for FDK has grown dramatically over the past 10 years (rising from 15% of children in a full-day in 2001 to 40% of children in a full-day in 2007 to nearly 80% today). The realities of work and the recognition of the value of a full-day experience has meant parents are demanding full-day kindergarten throughout our state and our districts are responding – but with the commensurate commitment from the General Assembly.

On the PreK side, only 1 in 4 four-year-olds have access to our state-funded preschool program. This is puzzling that we would so substantially limit access given the results of these investments. Children served by the program 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 to meet or exceed expectations on science, social studies, reading and math assessments in middle and high school. A recently published analysis of the most comprehensive, high quality experimental and quasi-experimental studies of the impact of early childhood education conducted between 1960 and 2016 found that, on average, participation in ECE leads to statistically significant reductions in special education placement (-8.1 percentage points), grade retention (-8.3 percentage points), and increases in high school graduation rates (+11.4 percentage points).ⁱ In short, quality early education more than pays for itself over a child's life.

We appreciate this proposed investment in young children and encourage you to support it. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

ⁱ <http://journals.sagepub.com/stoken/default+domain/ycdsVk2Xu4vSV8gxECVS/full>