

# WHOLE CHILD, WHOLE FAMILY, WHOLE COMMUNITY

## A New Vision for Universal Preschool Quality Standards

As Colorado prepares to establish quality standards for its Universal Preschool (UPK) program, the state has the opportunity to be a national model for supporting early childhood. The Children's Campaign's vision is that Colorado's universal preschool standards will support the *whole child* so that all Colorado children can have a strong start in life.

Quality standards for early childhood programs must reflect both the unique needs of children in their earliest years and the realities of early childhood providers. Successful standards can help ensure children are served by programs that are prepared and supported to meet their needs. They can also offer providers, families, and communities a common framework for understanding what makes a quality preschool program.

The Children's Campaign has identified attributes of high-quality preschool standards that can be used to inform our state's early childhood community as it takes on this important work.



### We support the development of quality standards that are:

#### **Play-based and grounded in early childhood development**

Quality standards for the new Colorado Universal Preschool Program (UPK) should reflect the importance of play and of nurturing all facets of a child's development. This includes social-emotional health and well-being (sharing, asking for help, self-regulation, problem solving, friendship skills, and more), physical safety, and physical, behavioral, and oral health, in addition to widely accepted academic milestones.

#### **Inclusive**

Effective quality standards must be inclusive of *all* students and families, and should be written with the following principles in mind:

- Racial equity
- Language justice
- Family, provider, and community engagement and collaboration
- Inclusion of and support for students receiving special education services

## Streamlined

Quality standards for UPK should align with pre-existing state and national standards as much as possible in order to ease the burden on providers and create more opportunities for successful compliance. Early care and education providers face significant administrative and legal requirements. Depending on funding streams, they are frequently required to comply with multiple sets of standards, some of which may even directly contradict one another. This places an unnecessary burden on providers who already have a difficult and busy job. We are grateful that the Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC) has completed a crosswalk of existing standards as a first step in this process.

## Adaptable

Early care and education providers use a wide variety of highly effective curricula and pedagogical approaches and provide care in a variety of settings. What makes sense for a Family Child Care Home (FCCH) provider may not work for a private child care center, and vice versa. There is no single set of standards that fits every provider's needs and capabilities perfectly. Standards that do not allow for flexibility may unnecessarily constrain providers who are already providing quality care, leading to fewer providers participating in UPK.

## Rigorous

Ensuring the safety of children and the quality of their care and education is a multifaceted and complicated endeavor. The quality standards for Colorado's Universal Preschool Program should be a national model of rigor, effectively preparing all children for school and life. Our quality improvement system should also serve as a national model, so that providers across all settings and across all geographies feel welcome to participate in UPK and supported to raise their quality level to meet UPK standards, when necessary.

## Supported

Implementation of Colorado's UPK quality standards must come with substantial support for providers in the form of qualified licensing specialists, funding, professional development opportunities, language access support for providers who offer care in a language other than English, and other strategies designed to assist providers in meeting standards while providing quality care. It's important to acknowledge that providers in rural Colorado may face very different barriers to accessing support than providers in the Denver metro area.



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