

# Draft Universal Preschool Colorado Quality Standards

## Overview

This document outlines the draft Universal Preschool Colorado Quality Standards. Universal Preschool Colorado offers voluntary preschool to every Colorado child the year before they are eligible for kindergarten. Families can choose the right setting for their child to attend Universal Preschool, whether it is in a licensed community-based, school-based or home-based preschool setting. House Bill 22-1295<sup>1</sup> tasked the Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC) with developing quality standards for Universal Preschool. These *draft Universal Preschool Quality Standards* have been designed to ensure that preschool services are both high quality to prepare children for kindergarten and accessible throughout the state.

## Inputs

A scan of national and community-informed best practices with regard to school readiness, academic and cognitive development, healthy environments, social-emotional learning, and child and family outcomes was conducted in Spring 2023. A report crosswalking the principal legislative requirements for Universal Preschool Quality Standards with two existing Colorado standards and five national standards was developed (see [Quality Standards Crosswalks](#)). In addition, 26 national and Colorado-specific standards and practices were reviewed.

Input was gathered from 560 stakeholders through a preliminary survey (see [Preliminary Stakeholder Input Report](#)) to inform the development of these draft standards in Spring 2023. In addition, the feedback gathered through the Universal Preschool Community Input Sessions held July through December 2021 was considered. Overall, the input from more than 670 stakeholders representing members of the early childhood workforce, families, providers, school districts, human services leaders, local Early Childhood Councils, Local Coordinating Organizations (LCOs), state agencies, and others representing under-served and under-resourced communities informed the development of these draft standards.

## Centering Families and Preschool Providers

A mixed delivery model is mandated in House Bill 22-1295. Mixed delivery brings together a variety of preschool provider types and program settings, including school-based, community-based and home-based, to serve children. Any program is eligible to participate in Universal Preschool if it is licensed and meets certain requirements. This includes: elementary schools, including charter schools; faith-based early learning programs; family child care homes; for-profit and nonprofit center-based child care programs; and stand-alone preschools.<sup>2</sup> For this reason, in this document any preschool program charged with delivering Universal Preschool in any setting will be referred to as a “Universal Preschool provider” and Universal Preschool “educators” are the staff responsible for direct care and education of children in those settings. Universal Preschool “administrators” are the staff who design and implement program operations to assure that Universal Preschool Quality

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<sup>1</sup> In 2020, Colorado voters passed Proposition EE. This gave a portion of the state tax on tobacco and nicotine products to a universal, voluntary preschool program. The program, Universal Preschool Colorado, was established through House Bill 22-1295.

<sup>2</sup> [Supporting families through mixed delivery in Colorado's UPK program](#)

Standards are met. In some cases, such as a family child care home, the Universal Preschool “educator” and Universal Preschool “administrator” may be the same individual.

In Colorado, Universal Preschool is voluntary for both providers and families. Per [Colorado Revised Statute § 26.5-4-205](#), if necessary to ensure the availability of a mixed delivery system within a community, the CDEC may allow a preschool provider that does not meet the quality standards to participate in the preschool program for a limited time while working toward compliance with the Universal Preschool Quality Standards.

## Resource Bank

To support Universal Preschool providers in a variety of settings (including community-based, home-based, and school-based settings), the alignment of the *draft Universal Preschool Quality Standards* with existing program standards and resources currently used by early childhood programs is important. The development of a Colorado online Universal Preschool Resource Bank (UP-RB) is mandated in House Bill 22-1295 to support Colorado providers in meeting Universal Preschool Quality Standards. The UP-RB will include national resources aligned with best practices and represent the best of what Colorado has built and accomplished in supporting the learning, development, and well-being of children aged 3-4 in early childhood settings. The UP-RB is critical to the success and support of participating providers being able to meet the Universal Preschool Quality Standards; for this reason, the UP-RB should be developed and available to providers prior to holding programs accountable for meeting Universal Preschool Quality Standards. It should be organized by the three Universal Preschool Quality Standards and include:

- Vetted and approved curricula, assessments, and screeners
- Definitions for best practice in specific activities such as screening, early childhood mental health, and family engagement grounded in the work of Colorado experts in these areas
- Aligned and approved training and professional development resources such as PDIS modules, coaching initiatives and guidance for approaching embedded professional learning across a variety of program settings and types

To facilitate a positive Universal Preschool provider experience, which is necessary to ensure availability of preschool services to all families across Colorado, and to allow for data collection to demonstrate Universal Preschool impact, the following phased approach is recommended:

1. In the 2023-24 school year, a voluntary survey should be sent to all Universal Preschool providers to self-report on their current quality practices. This information, in combination with stakeholder engagement by Early Milestones Colorado, can be used to inform the development of the resources that are made available to Universal Preschool providers in the future.
2. In the 2024-25 school year, the Universal Preschool Quality Standards should begin to go into effect. To be supportive of preschool providers, the intention is to have key components of the online Resource Bank in place and available to them before they are required to meet the Universal Preschool Quality standards.

## Basic Requirements to be a Universal Preschool Provider

Several aspects of the Universal Preschool program are foundational and represent the baseline of eligibility to serve as a Universal Preschool provider, Preschool providers must comply with all of the requirements outlined in their Universal Preschool Provider Service Agreement with the CDEC. These should include, but not be limited to:

- **Contact Hours.** The minimum number of contact hours of instructional services for Universal Preschool services *must not be less* than 360 hours per school year.
- **Compliance with Health and Safety Regulations.** All preschool providers must be licensed by the [Division of Early Learning Licensing and Administration](#) (DELLA).<sup>3</sup>
- **Ratios and Group Sizes.** Preschool providers must at least maintain the minimum ratios and group sizes outlined in the DELLA child care licensing rules.
- **Equal Opportunity.** Preschool providers must provide eligible children an equal opportunity to enroll and receive preschool services regardless of race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, gender identity, lack of housing, income level, or disability, as such characteristics and circumstances apply to the child or the child's family.
- **Teacher Qualifications.** For the 2024-25 school year, the Universal Preschool Quality Standards will maintain the teacher qualification requirements established in the DELLA child care licensing rules. Please note: requirements for Universal Preschool teacher qualifications are NOT included in the *draft Universal Preschool Quality Standards*. Determining teacher qualification requirements for providers participating in the Universal Preschool Colorado program is an ongoing, separate process. The goal of the process is to engage providers toward simplification of career pathways while supporting a diverse and competent Universal Preschool Colorado workforce through the alignment of requirements with existing CDEC and Colorado Department of Education (CDE) qualification and credential systems.
- **Disciplinary Measures.** Preschool providers must have discipline policies and reporting procedures that align with [C.R.S. 22-33-106.1](#), which limits the suspensions and expulsions of preschool children and requires reporting on children who are removed from class, suspended or expelled, and the incident that led to the disciplinary action.
- **Children with IEPs.** Preschool providers may need to meet additional requirements if they are serving children with individualized education programs (IEPs). The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) administers preschool special education in accordance with IDEA and ECEA for children ages three through five. All participating providers serving children with IEPs must meet the [CDE Standards for Placement of Preschoolers with IEPs in Educational Programs](#). Participating providers that did not serve preschoolers with disabilities prior to the 2023-24 school year must meet additional training requirements and have an agreement with a Special Education Administrative Unit (AU). Questions about ongoing implementation of IDEA requirements for preschoolers, should be directed to the AU in the family's district of residence or CDE's [Early Childhood Special Education](#) team.

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<sup>3</sup> [Child Care Licensing | Colorado Department of Early Childhood](#)

## Universal Preschool Quality Standard 1: Instructional Practice

*Instructional Practice (IP) is considered to be everything preschool providers ‘do’ with children. A well-balanced pedagogical approach or curriculum supports the development of the whole child and incorporates assessment.*

- IP-1** Universal Preschool providers will utilize an early learning and assessment approach (approved for inclusion in the UP-RB) that:
- Aligns with Colorado’s Academic Standards and Early Learning and Development Guidelines
  - Uses assessment findings for instructional decision-making
  - Is culturally and developmentally appropriate (play-based)
  - Is inclusive and appropriate for the diverse needs of individual learners (ex: dual language learners)
- IP-2** Within 6 months of employment, lead educators in Universal Preschool classrooms and family child care homes will have completed 8 hours of professional development (PD) in the Universal Preschool provider’s selected early learning and assessment approach (including best practices in developmental and cultural appropriateness, meeting the needs of dual language learners, inclusion of children of all abilities, and teacher-child interactions).<sup>4</sup>
- IP-3** Approximately every 3 years<sup>5</sup>, Universal Preschool providers will receive an independent on-site observation of environmental quality (physical and relational) from Colorado Shines or an alternative (approved for inclusion in the UP-RB).

## Universal Preschool Quality Standard 2: Healthy Development

*Healthy Development (HD) ensures preschool providers support the healthy bodies and minds of children. Addressing children’s development is a critical component of a whole child approach.*

- HD-1** Universal Preschool providers will document their policy/process to:
- Support children and families experiencing trauma and/or adversity by utilizing best practices<sup>6</sup> in early childhood mental health (ECMH), such as access to ECMH Consultation
  - Offer, or coordinate with local partners to offer, voluntary health screening (hearing, vision, dental), feedback, and referral to additional resources upon family request, in the family’s home language<sup>7</sup>
  - Offer, or coordinate with local partners to offer, developmental (physical and social-emotional) screening (approved for inclusion in the UP-RB), feedback, and referral to additional resources upon family request, in the family’s home language<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> All professional development (PD) hours may be counted towards “ongoing PD” as required by Child Care Licensing. **Note:** previously completed professional development hours will be counted towards this requirement.

<sup>5</sup> This schedule is aligned with Colorado Shines to avoid duplicative observation for those Universal Preschool Providers who choose to participate in Colorado Shines

<sup>6</sup> Best practices in ECMH and consultation as defined by CDEC’s [existing definitions, frameworks, and resources](#), all of which will be included in the Resource Bank

<sup>7</sup> Those who suspect their child might qualify for an IEP, should reach out to the Child Find [contact](#) in the school district in which their family lives.

- HD-2** Within 12 months of employment, all educators and administrators in Universal Preschool classrooms and family child care homes will have completed 8 hours of professional development in early childhood mental health/appropriate discipline practices, trauma-informed care, and best practices in developmental screening and referrals.<sup>8</sup>
- HD-3** Universal Preschool providers will notify participating Universal Preschool families of the opportunity to participate in an annual Universal Preschool Survey of Families' Experiences with screening, referral and early childhood mental health practices.

### **Universal Preschool Quality Standard 3: Family & Community Engagement**

*Family and Community Engagement (FC) allows for affirmation of all aspects of children's identity and acknowledges families as their child's first caregiver and most important teacher.*

- FC-1** Universal Preschool providers will document their policy/process for<sup>9</sup>:
- Using interpreters or other language resources to effectively communicate with families in their home language
  - Seeking input from families on priorities, interests, home routines, cultural and social practices
  - Partnering with families around goals that inform interactions and instruction with children, including dual language learners
  - Engaging families and community partners in decision-making about Universal Preschool provider operations
  - Involving families in transition of their children into and out of the program, including between classrooms and into kindergarten
- FC-2** Within 12 months of employment, lead educators and at least one administrator for Universal Preschool classrooms and family child care homes will have completed 8 hours of professional development in meaningful and culturally appropriate family and community engagement.<sup>10</sup>
- FC-3** Universal Preschool providers will notify participating Universal Preschool families of the opportunity to participate in an annual Universal Preschool Survey of Families' Experiences with meaningful and culturally appropriate involvement in the program.

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<sup>8</sup> All professional development hours may be counted towards "ongoing PD" as required by Child Care Licensing. **Note:** previously completed professional development hours will be counted towards this requirement.

<sup>9</sup> Best practices in Family and Community Engagement as defined by CDEC's [existing definitions, frameworks, and resources](#), all of which will be included in the Resource Bank

<sup>10</sup> All professional development hours will be counted towards "ongoing PD" as required by Child Care Licensing