

# OPERATIONS EVALUATION

## 2017-2018 Program Year



## Evaluation Brief 1: Introduction and Overview of DPP Families and Providers

Prepared by The Butler Institute for Families  
Graduate School of Social Work | University of Denver

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# Introduction

Since it was approved by voters in 2006, the Denver Preschool Program (DPP) has worked to increase access to quality preschool in Denver. DPP offers tuition assistance on a sliding scale to all families with a 4-year-old who live in the City and County of Denver and attend a participating DPP preschool. DPP also provides a variety of quality improvement (QI) resources to participating preschools and is a national advocate and example for expanding access to early childhood education. DPP is funded by a City and County of Denver sales tax, which was first approved by Denver voters in 2006 at 0.12 percent. In 2015, voters reauthorized this tax and increased funding to 0.15 percent.

Since fall 2016, the Butler Institute for Families at the University of Denver (Butler) has partnered with The Implementation Group to evaluate DPP's program operations. This operations evaluation assesses the extent to which DPP's services result in children's access to quality preschool. Specifically, the operations evaluation explores:

- › How DPP implements its services;
- › Families' and providers' perceptions of DPP's effectiveness;
- › Knowledge and behavior changes resulting from the services; and
- › The impact of DPP services on family access and provider quality.

For the evaluation of the 2017-2018 program year, we present the results in three briefs. This is the first brief, which describes DPP families and preschool providers. Brief 2 presents results related to the delivery of DPP tuition credits, and Brief 3 examines delivery of DPP QI resources.

# Methods

We utilize multiple methods to collect primary data from various stakeholders, and also analyze secondary data from DPP administrative records. Data sources and data collection procedures are described below.

## Surveys

The evaluation team administered surveys in spring 2018 to examine parents' and preschool providers' experiences with DPP. Table 1 reports survey sample sizes and response rates.

**Table 1.** Survey responses

	Surveys distributed	Surveys returned	Response rate
<b>DPP preschools</b>	243	207	85%
<b>DPP parents</b>	761	272	36%
<b>Non-DPP preschools</b>	166	36	22%
<b>Non-DPP parents*</b>	n/a	14	n/a

\*Because we distributed survey links through community organizations and flyers, a response rate is not available.

### DPP Surveys

We sent online provider surveys to the main contact person at each active DPP preschool provider. Parent surveys were distributed to a random sample of DPP families with a 4-year-old child enrolled at a DPP school, which was stratified to represent the overall population of DPP families by tuition tier, school type (community or DPS), and region of the city. We mailed paper-and-pencil surveys to parents and sent online surveys if an email address was available.

### Non-DPP Surveys

We also administered surveys with preschool providers and families who were not currently participating in DPP. Because of the small sample sizes obtained for these hard-to-reach groups, results included in these briefs include responses from both 2017 and 2018 surveys. For non-DPP preschools, we mailed paper-and-pencil surveys to a total of 166 programs. (Note: non-DPP preschools that completed the survey in 2017 did not receive the survey again in 2018.) To reach families with a 4-year-old who were not participating in DPP, we used a variety of approaches, including: 1) sending surveys to families who had “pending” DPP applications, 2) administering surveys at non-DPP preschools, and 3) distributing flyers at DPS elementary schools, DPP partner organizations, and community organizations in neighborhoods across Denver (e.g., community centers, recreation centers). We also shared the survey on Butler’s website and Twitter account.

## *Interviews*

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Evaluators conducted follow-up interviews with a subsample of survey respondents to gather in-depth information about their views of DPP's services in spring 2018. A total of 15 individuals from DPP preschools were interviewed, including both community ( $n = 12$ ) and DPS preschools ( $n = 3$ ), as well as a mix of centers ( $n = 13$ ) and home providers ( $n = 2$ ). Interviews with DPP families included parents whose child attended community ( $n = 10$ ) or DPS preschools ( $n = 5$ ), and included representation of families whose children were identified as black or African American, Hispanic, white, and other races/ethnicities. In addition, we interviewed seven non-DPP preschools and three non-DPP parents to further understand their experiences and identify ways to reach out to those who are not currently participating in DPP.

## *Secondary Data*

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Records related to preschools and students who participated in DPP during the 2017-2018 program year (September 2017 through August 2018) were obtained from DPP's enrollment and eligibility contractor, MetrixIQ. Information about families and preschools from previous years came from past years' annual evaluation reports. We received QI resource records from Denver's Early Childhood Council, one of DPP's quality improvement contractors. Data about preschool quality, including CLASS<sup>®</sup> scores and Colorado Shines ratings, and achievement awards were obtained from DPP administrative records.

## *Data Analysis*

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For quantitative data, we used descriptive analyses, including counts, percentages, and means. Other analyses included bivariate statistical tests, such as correlations,  $t$ -tests, and analysis of variance (ANOVA) to examine the relationships between beneficiaries' views of DPP, the services delivered, and program quality. Qualitative data from interviews were transcribed and analyzed using a two-step process. Initially, analysts coded the data according to broad thematic categories. This resulted in a list of themes and excerpts from interviews that corresponded with each theme. Next, the analysts proceeded with a second, more fine-grained analysis in which we assigned the data to sub-themes.

# Results

## *DPP Applications and Tuition Credit Recipients*

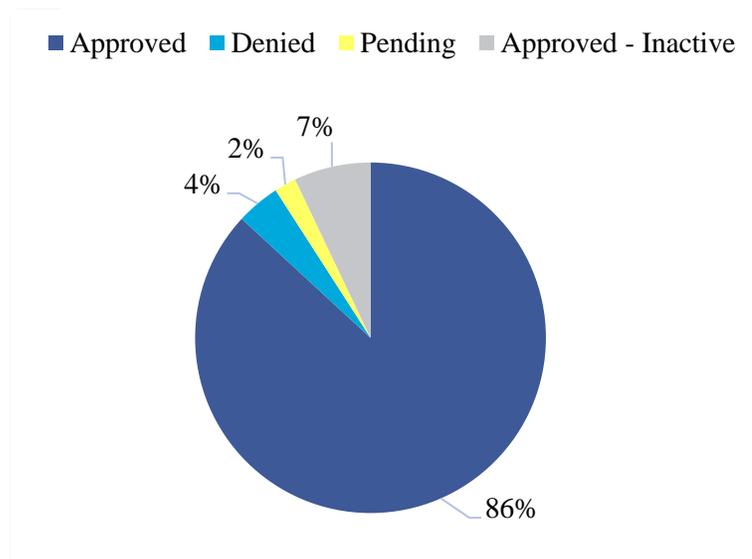
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### **Application Status**

During the 2017-2018 program year, DPP received 5,388 student applications, and 93 percent of all applications were approved to receive a tuition credit (Figure 1). A small proportion of applications, 7 percent, were classified as “approved – inactive.” These types of applications included students who were approved, but DPP did not receive attendance records for them; students who no longer attended an active DPP preschool; or those who attended a preschool that became inactive during the program year.

Four percent of applications were denied for the following reasons: 1) the family did not live in the City and County of Denver, 2) the child did not meet the age requirement, 3) the child received tuition credits the year prior, or 4) the child was not enrolled in a participating DPP preschool. “Pending” applications (2 percent) were missing information or awaiting action by Denver Public Schools (DPS).

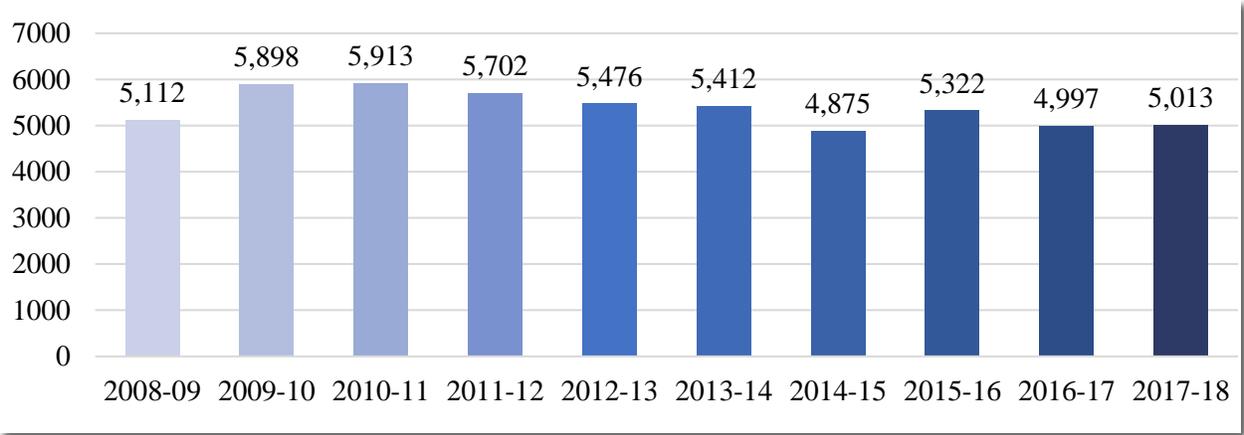
**Figure 1.** Status of DPP applications ( $n = 5,388$ )



### **Application Trends**

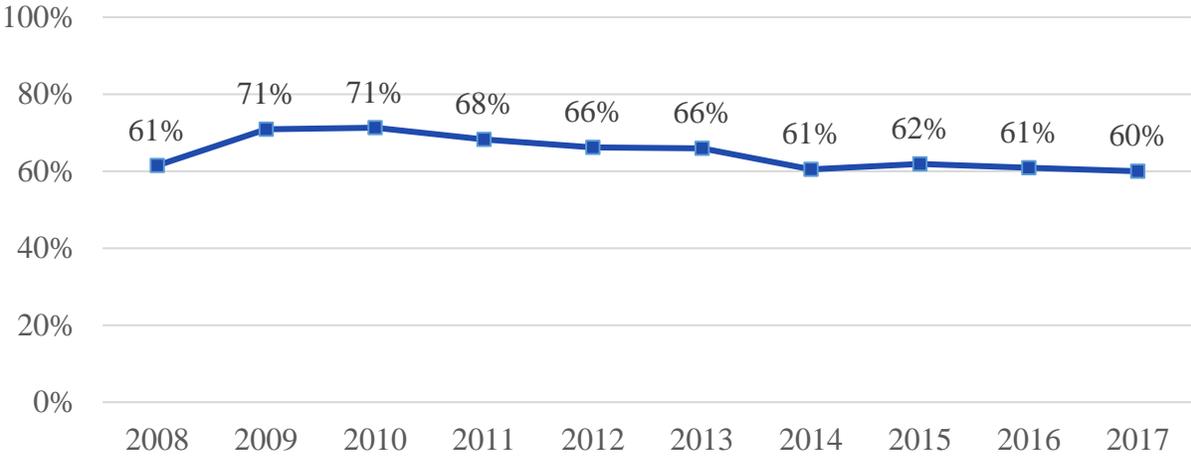
DPP approved 5,013 applications in 2017-2018 (Figure 2). Overall, DPP enrollments have fluctuated between about 5,000 and 6,000 approved students since the program began, with a gradual trend toward lower enrollments in more recent years.

**Figure 2.** Number of approved DPP student applications by school year, 2008-present



Based on the population of 4-year-olds in Denver County, we estimate that DPP approved 60 percent of eligible children to receive DPP tuition credits during the 2017-2018 program year.<sup>1</sup> As shown in Figure 3, across the years the rates generally ranged between about 60 to 70 percent of Denver’s 4-year-olds since the start of DPP. Thus, even though the trend of DPP enrollment is down slightly, DPP’s enrollment saturation among Denver’s 4-year-olds has remained fairly consistent over time. This is likely due to a general population decline in the City and County of Denver.

**Figure 3.** Proportion of Denver 4-year-olds enrolled in DPP over time<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> State Demography Office. (n.d.). Population by Single Year of Age – County. Retrieved from <https://demography.dola.colorado.gov/population/data/sya-county/>

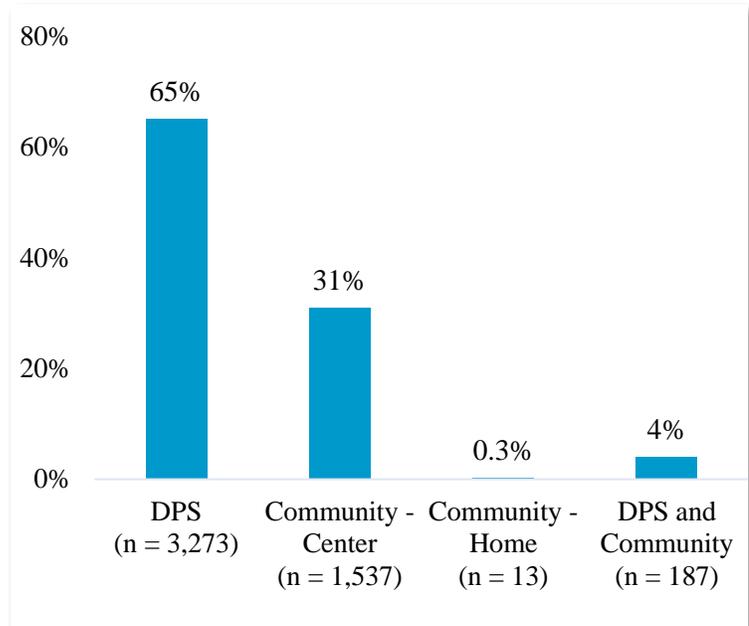
<sup>2</sup> Please note that population-level data on Denver’s 4-year-olds is available by calendar year (January-December), while DPP enrollments are tracked by program year (September-August); therefore, the proportions served in each year are estimates.

### Preschool Type

Most parents submitted DPP applications for DPS preschools (65 percent), while 31 percent applied for community center-based preschools (Figure 4). Less than 1 percent of DPP applications were for community home-based providers.

Notably, some families ( $n = 249$ ; 5 percent) applied for a tuition credit for more than one preschool, either because they changed schools or attended more than one school at the same time (e.g., on alternate days or afterschool). Of those, 187 applied to both DPS and community preschools (four percent of applications), as shown in Figure 4.

**Figure 4.** DPP approved applications by school type



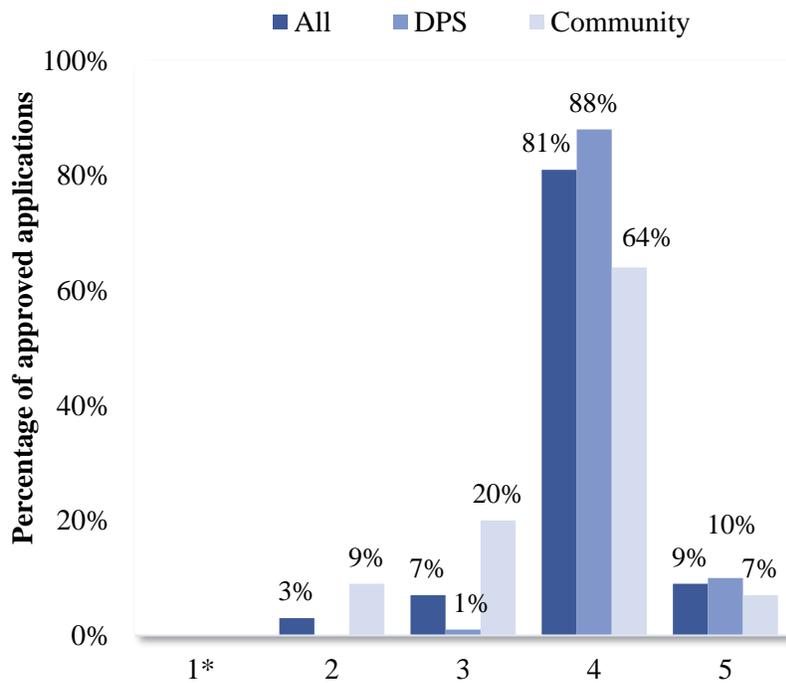
### Preschool Quality

Overall, 81 percent of DPP students attended preschools with a Colorado Shines rating of level 4, which included most DPS students (88 percent) and 64 percent of students from community preschools. Of DPS students who did not attend a level 4-rated school, most were enrolled in a level 5 preschool.<sup>1</sup> Please note, due to Colorado Shines rating alternative pathways, Head Start and DPS preschools enter the Colorado Shines rating system at least a level 4, which explains DPS' homogenous quality ratings.<sup>2</sup> There was more variation in the quality ratings of community-based preschools, which ranged from 1 to 5. Please note that DPP preschools with a level 1 rating are required to achieve a level 2 rating within six months of joining DPP; they receive their first Pre-K CLASS<sup>®</sup> observation and Colorado Shines Level 3-5 assessment (or an approved Colorado Shines alternative pathway) within one year of joining DPP. Programs that do not earn a rating level 3 or higher receive additional coaching and quality improvement resources to support their improvement.

<sup>1</sup> Of DPS students whose school did not have a rating of 4 or 5, ( $n = 49$ ), 13 were listed as "DPS school assignment pending," and 36 attended the same DPS charter school, which had a quality rating of 3.

<sup>2</sup> Colorado Office of Early Childhood. (2015). Colorado Shines Program Guide. Retrieved from [https://www.coloradoshines.com/resource/1440607605000/asset\\_pdfs1/asset\\_pdfs1/ColoradoShinesProgramGuide.pdf](https://www.coloradoshines.com/resource/1440607605000/asset_pdfs1/asset_pdfs1/ColoradoShinesProgramGuide.pdf)

**Figure 5.** DPP students by Colorado Shines rating: Overall and by school type<sup>1</sup>



\*\*Less than 1 percent of children were listed as attending a school with a rating of “1.”

**Colorado Shines Ratings<sup>1</sup>**

**Level 1:**

- State license

**Level 2:** Level 1 requirement, and

- Quality improvement plan,
- Level 2 Quality Indicator Program Assessment,
- Level 2 E-learning courses, and
- Staff registered in PDIS

**Levels 3-5:** Level 2 requirements, and

- Assessed and rated on: 1) workforce qualifications, 2) family partnerships, 3) administration, 4) learning environment, 5) child health and the Environment Rating Scale(s)

<sup>1</sup><http://coloradoshines.force.com/programs?p=Your-Program-Colorado-Shines>

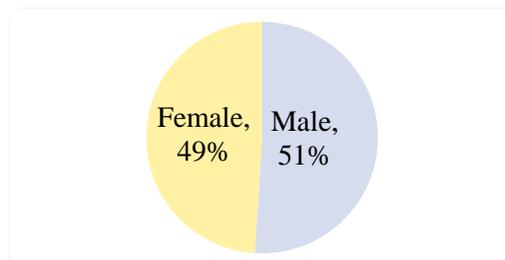
<sup>1</sup> Ratings data is not reported for students who did not have a school listed in MetrixIQ data ( $n = 2$ ). Ratings data by school type does not include students who attended more than one preschool ( $n = 250$ ).

## Child and Family Characteristics

As shown in Figure 6, there were similar proportions of male and female students (51 percent versus 49 percent, respectively).

Historical data on the race and ethnicity of DPP students are provided in Table 2. The proportion of Hispanic students has decreased over time (55 percent in 2007-2008 versus 40 percent in 2017-2018). Conversely, the proportion of White (not Hispanic) students has increased over time (from 22 percent to 32 percent).

**Figure 6.** 2016-2017 DPP approved applications by child's sex  
(*n* = 5,003)\*



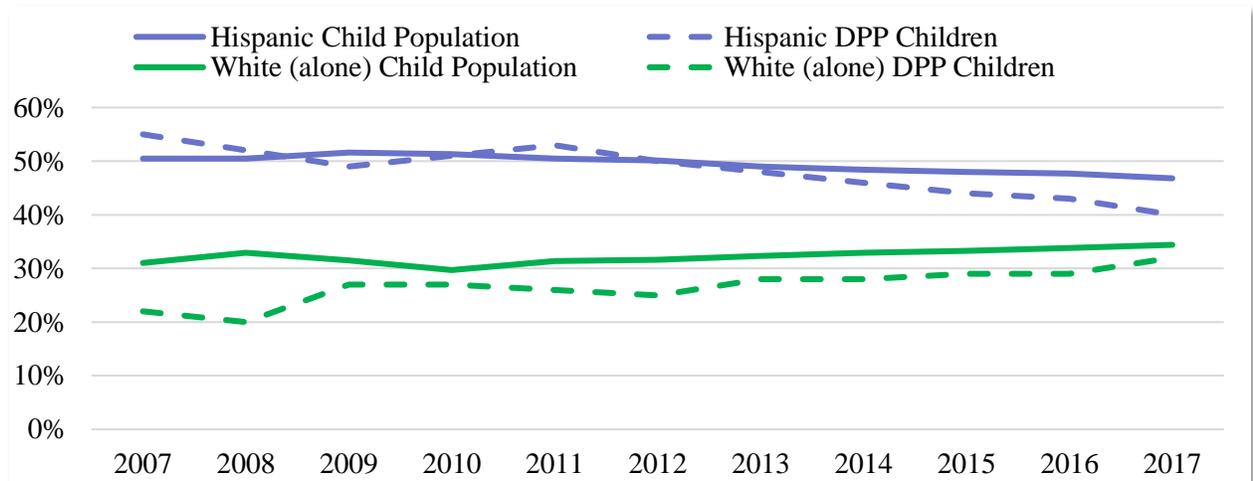
\*Sex was not specified for less than 1 percent of children

**Table 2.** DPP approved applications by school year and race/ethnicity

	2007 -08	2008 -09	2009 -10	2010 -11	2011 -12	2012 -13	2013 -14	2014 -15	2015 -16	2016 -17	2017 -18
<b>American Indian or Alaska Native</b>	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
<b>Asian or Pacific Islander</b>	2%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	4%	3%	4%	3%
<b>Black (not Hispanic)</b>	9%	13%	13%	13%	13%	13%	12%	12%	13%	12%	12%
<b>Hispanic</b>	55%	52%	49%	51%	53%	50%	48%	46%	44%	43%	40%
<b>White (not Hispanic)</b>	22%	20%	27%	27%	26%	25%	28%	28%	29%	29%	32%
<b>Other/ Missing/ Not Provided</b>	11%	11%	7%	5%	4%	8%	8%	9%	10%	11%	12%

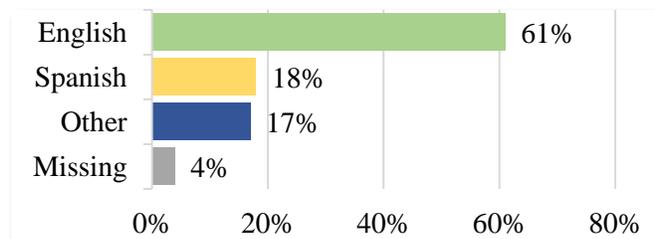
We examined whether these DPP students' demographic trends mirror those of Denver as a whole.<sup>1</sup> Figure 7 shows the proportion of Hispanic and White (alone) children served by DPP, as well as the proportions of Hispanic and White children ages 0-18 in Denver during the same period. As shown, during recent years, DPP has served a smaller proportion of Hispanic children than are present in the larger population. Since the start of DPP, DPP has served fewer White (not Hispanic) children than are present in the population, though it appears that the percentage of White children served by DPP is approaching the rate of the overall population.

**Figure 7.** Comparison of DPP demographic trends to those of Denver children ages 0-18



As shown in Figure 8, English was the primary language spoken at home for more than one-half of DPP students (61 percent), which was followed by Spanish (18 percent). Other languages included Arabic, Russian, and Vietnamese. Data on primary home language was missing for 4 percent of the cases.

**Figure 8.** 2017-2018 DPP approved applications by primary home language (*n* = 5,013)



<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). American Community Survey 2007-2017 Single-Year Estimates: Children Characteristics. Table S0901. Retrieved from American Fact finder, January 2019: <http://factfinder.census.gov>

## Reported Family Income

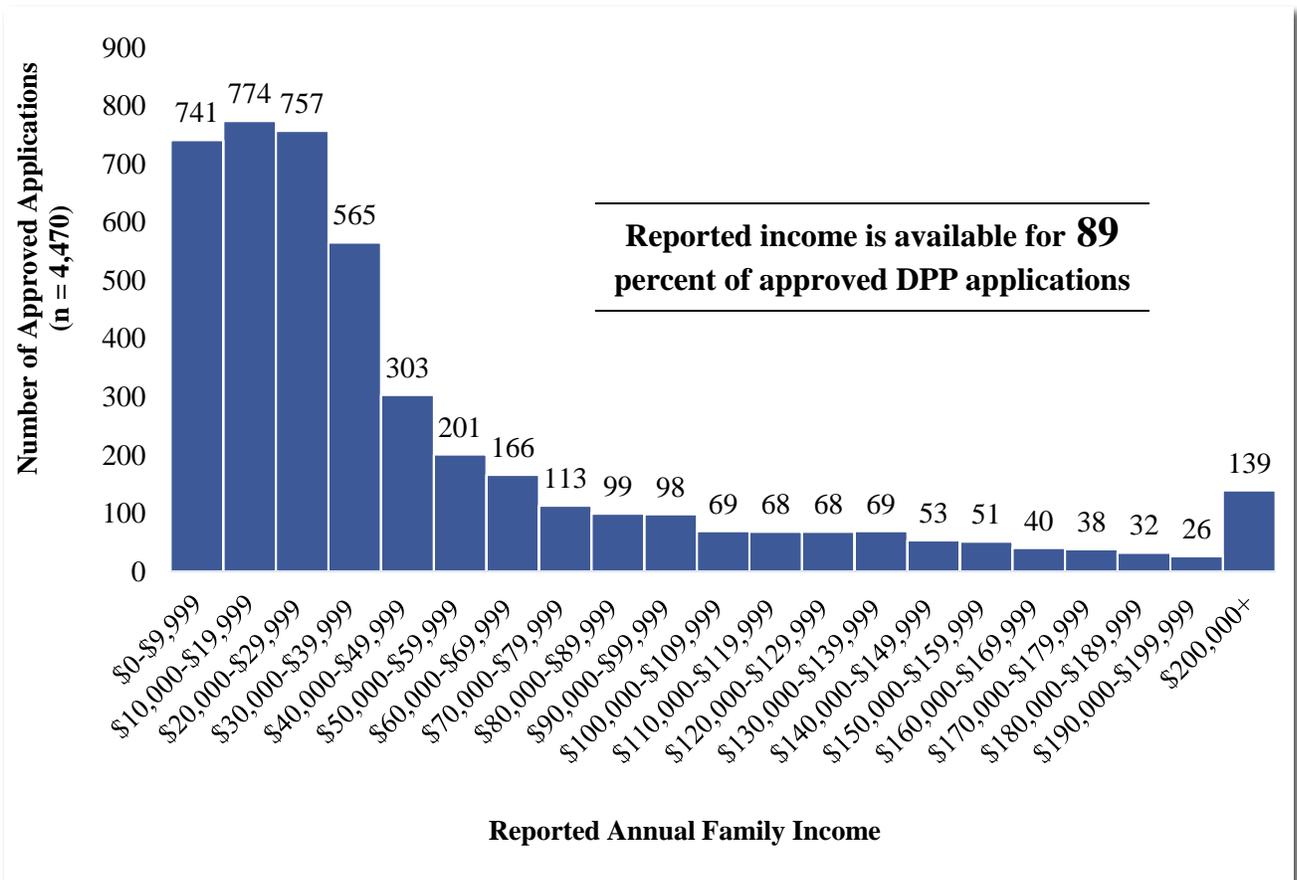
As was the case during previous years, a large proportion of families (51 percent) served by DPP in 2017-2018 had incomes below \$30,000. The number of DPP students by income category is provided in Figure 9. Note: about 8 percent of DPP applicants opted out of providing income information, and for another 3 percent, the reported income amount was missing.

In the general population, **17** percent of Denver families had incomes below \$35,000.

By contrast, **58** percent of DPP families had incomes below \$35,000. Thus, while DPP serves families of all income levels, those with lower incomes are key DPP beneficiaries.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). American Community Survey 2017 Single-Year Estimate: Income in the Past 12 Months. Table S1901. Retrieved from American Fact finder, January 2019: <http://factfinder.census.gov>

**Figure 9.** 2017-2018 DPP approved applications by reported family income



### Tuition Credit Tiers

Similar to previous years, many DPP families have four (37 percent) or five (21 percent) household members. Household size and household income are used to determine the family’s tuition credit tier. (For the Federal Poverty Level [FPL] percentages that correspond with the DPP tuition tiers, see the table, right).

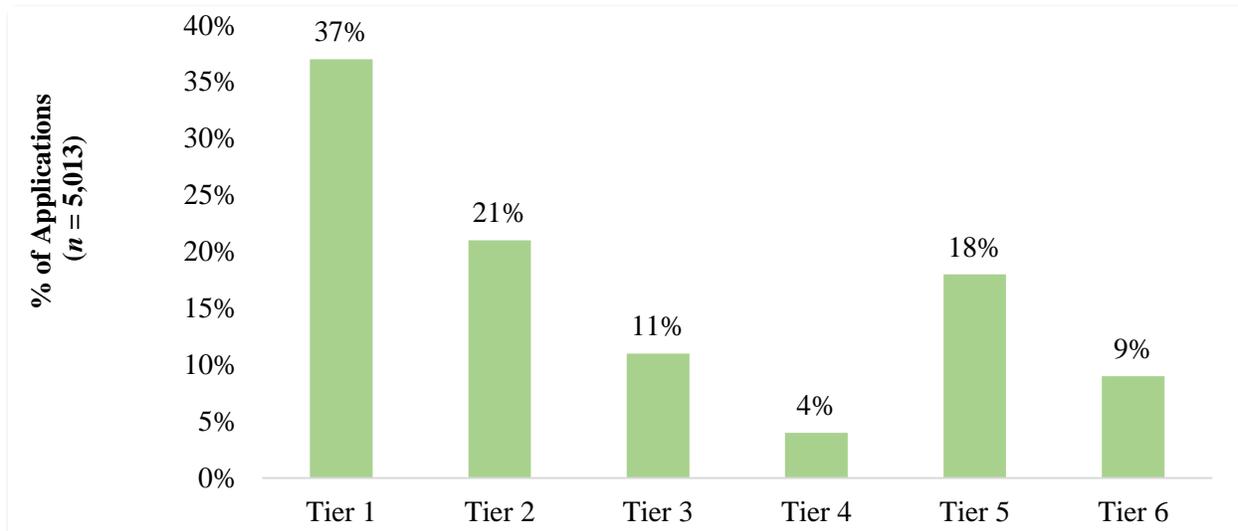
As shown below in Figure 10, 58 percent of families fall into the lowest two tiers, indicating greater need for preschool tuition assistance. The distribution across tuition credit tiers is similar to previous years.

**Table 3.** DPP income tiers

Income Tier	Percentage of FPI	2017-2018 Monthly Tuition Credit
1	< 100%	\$617
2	100% - 185%	\$555
3	185%-285%	\$494
4	285%-300%	\$432
5	> 300%	\$123
6	Income Opt Out	\$62

\*At a Level 4-rated preschool; full day attendance

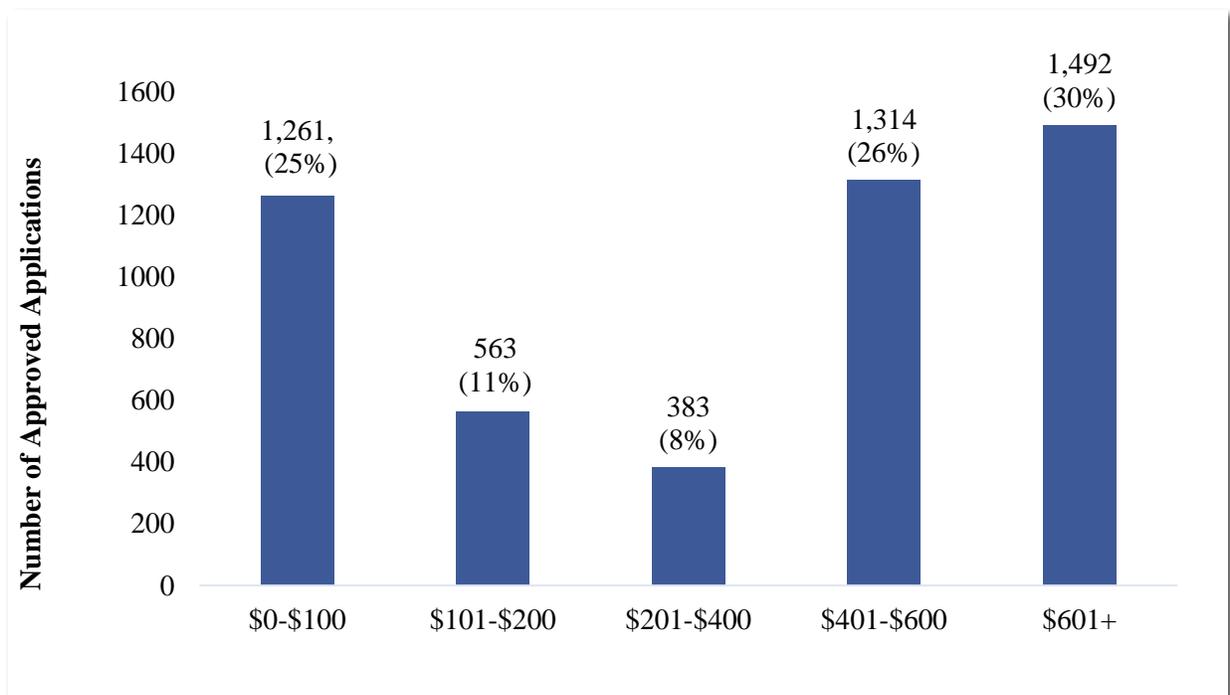
**Figure 10.** 2017-2018 DPP approved applications by tuition credit tiers



Each family’s tuition credit amount is calculated based upon the tuition credit tier (described above), the quality rating of the preschool, and the hours the child attends preschool. Figure 11 shows tuition credit amounts across DPP families. As shown, the majority of families had a tuition credit of more than \$400 for the first (or only) DPP preschool they attended.

Families who received a tuition credit for a second preschool tended to receive more than \$400 for their second preschool as well (data not shown). Please note that this is the approved tuition credit amount that was calculated at the time of the family’s enrollment in DPP, but the actual amount delivered may have been adjusted based on changes to the child’s preschool attendance or because the child did not attend a DPP preschool for the full year. For information about tuition amounts paid out to families, see Brief 2.

**Figure 11.** DPP applications for the 2017-2018 school year: Tuition credit monthly amounts<sup>1</sup>



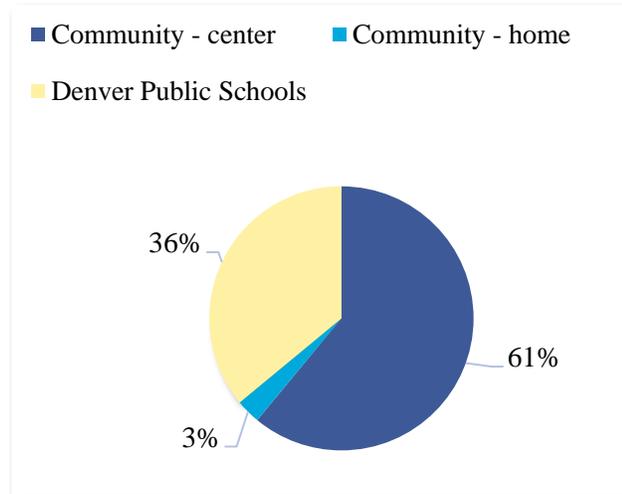
<sup>1</sup> Reflects the first (or only) preschool the child attended.

## DPP Preschools

A total of 241 DPP preschools were active at the end of the 2017-2018 school year, which is similar to past years. (Note: throughout the program year, a total of 247 schools were active, indicating that six schools became inactive during the year.)

Based on DPP program records on the number of preschools in Denver, we estimate that 82 percent of eligible centers participated in DPP during 2017-2018. Including both preschool centers and home providers that serve preschool-age children, an estimated 62 percent of Denver providers were part of DPP.

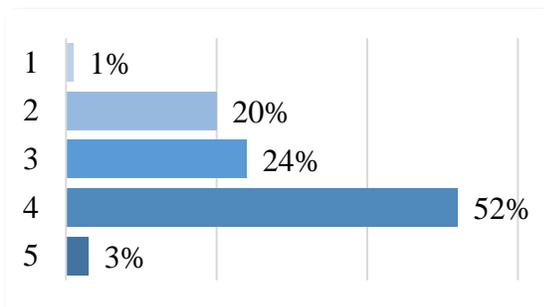
**Figure 12.** DPP active preschools by type ( $n = 241$ )



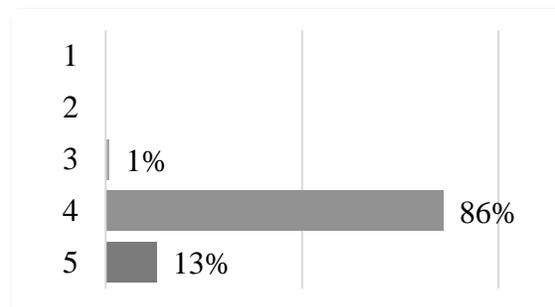
Community preschool centers comprised the majority of DPP preschools (61 percent), while DPS preschools made up 36 percent (Figure 12). Only about 3 percent of preschools ( $n = 7$ ) were home based.

The majority of DPP preschools had a Colorado Shines quality rating of level 4 (Figures 13 and 14), with an average rating of 3.7. By contrast, the average Colorado Shines rating of all licensed preschool providers in Denver is 2.6.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 13.** DPP active preschools by quality rating: Community preschools ( $n = 153$ )



**Figure 14.** DPP active preschools by quality rating: DPS preschools ( $n = 88$ )



<sup>1</sup> Colorado Department of Human Services - Office of Early Childhood (2018). *Colorado Licensed Child Care Facilities Report* [Data file]. Retrieved from <https://data.colorado.gov/Early-childhood/Colorado-Licensed-Child-Care-Facilities-Report/a9rr-k8mu>

# Summary

During the 2017-2018 program year, DPP approved applications for more than 5,000 children, which represents about 60 percent of Denver's 4-year-olds. Most children attended high-quality preschools, with Colorado Shines ratings of level 4 or level 5. Hispanic families made up the largest proportion of DPP participants in terms of race and ethnicity; however, the percentage of DPP families identified as Hispanic has declined during the last 10 years. As in past years, the majority of DPP families reported annual household incomes below \$30,000.

DPP had 247 active preschool sites 2017-2018, roughly two-thirds of which were community-based preschools and one-third were DPS. We estimate that 82 percent of eligible Denver preschool centers participated in DPP, and three-quarters of DPP preschools had a Colorado Shines rating of level 4 or 5.

# OPERATIONS EVALUATION 2017-2018 Program Year



## Evaluation Brief 2: Tuition Credits

Prepared by The Butler Institute for Families  
Graduate School of Social Work | University of Denver

# Introduction

This is the second of a series of three briefs presenting Denver Preschool Program (DPP) operations evaluation results for the 2017-2018 program year. Brief 2 focuses on results related to the delivery of DPP tuition credits. For more information about DPP, see Brief 1, or visit [dpp.org](http://dpp.org).

This evaluation utilizes multiple methods to collect primary data from a variety of key stakeholders, including:

- › A **family survey** completed by 272 DPP parents, using a stratified sample to represent the overall population of DPP families by tuition tier, school type (community preschool or DPS), and region of the city;
- › A **preschool survey** completed by a contact person at 207 DPP preschools;
- › **Follow-up interviews** with 15 DPP parents and 15 DPP preschools; and
- › **Surveys and/or interviews** between 2016 and 2018 conducted with 36 preschool programs and 10 parents who are not currently participating in DPP.

We also analyzed secondary data from DPP preschool program records. For more information about the methodology for this evaluation, see “Evaluation Brief 1: Introduction and Overview of DPP Families and Providers.”

## Results

The evaluation of DPP tuition credits focuses on three main topics: knowledge of the tuition credits, how tuition credits are delivered (e.g., the application process, reimbursements to preschool providers), and perceived impacts of the tuition credits. Results pertaining to those topics are reported in the sections below.

### *Knowledge of Tuition Credits*

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Here, we explore parents’ and preschool programs’ awareness and knowledge of DPP tuition credits, including those participating in DPP, as well as those not currently participating in DPP.

#### **DPP Parents**

As was the case during the 2016-2017 program year, most DPP parents who completed the survey in 2017-2018 reported at least *some* knowledge of DPP (70 percent), while 30 percent knew *very little* or *nothing at all*. Notably, there were no statistically significant differences in overall knowledge of DPP based on type of site (community vs. Denver Public Schools), race/ethnicity, home language, region, or income.

As shown in the box (right), the most common ways that parents heard about DPP were from preschool staff, DPS, or a friend. Notably, only about one-third of DPS families (35 percent) reported learning about DPP from DPS.

The top three ways parents heard about DPP were from a preschool staff member (24%), Denver Public Schools (23%) or a friend (12%).

**When did parents find out about DPP?\***

- More than six months before preschool started – 68%
- Less than six months before preschool started – 14%
- After preschool started – 10%

\*8% did not remember

For parents with at least some knowledge of DPP ( $n = 191$ ), we asked follow-up questions about DPP and the tuition credits. Most parents found out about DPP more than six months before the start of preschool (68 percent; see box, left). There were no significant differences between groups of parents concerning when they found out about DPP.

Focusing on DPP’s tuition credits (*How much do you know about the DPP tuition credit?*), the majority of parents had at least *some* knowledge (69 percent),

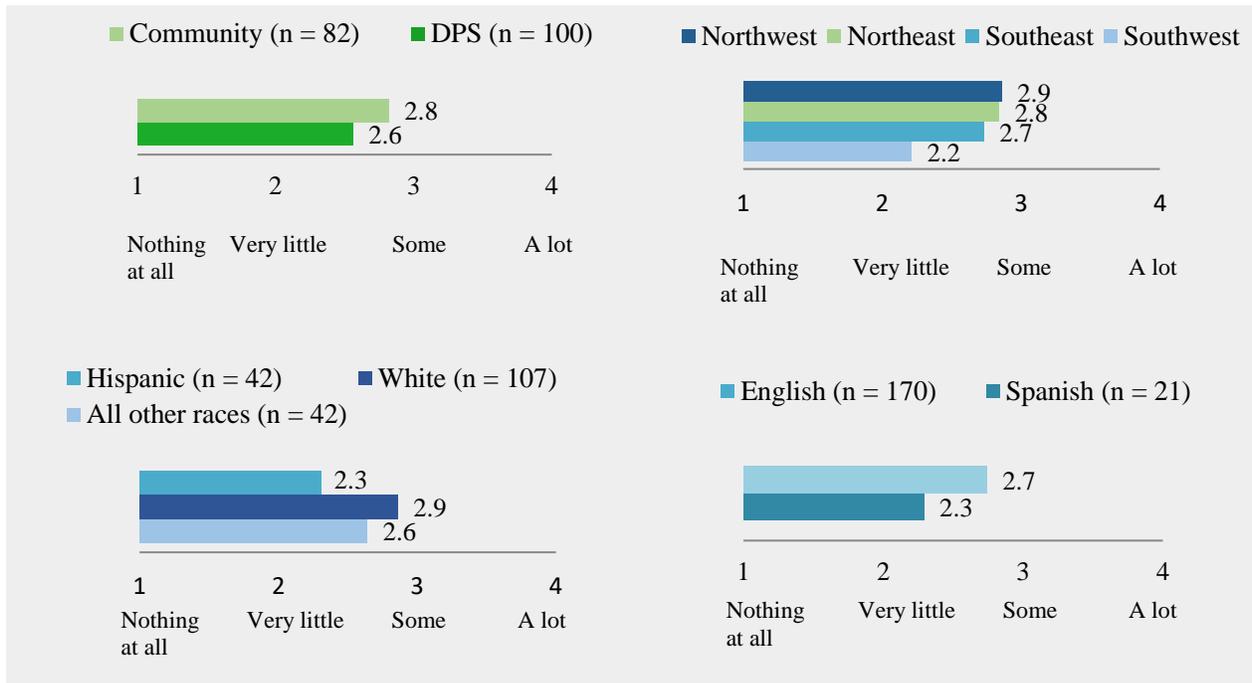
while 31 percent knew *very little* or *nothing at all*. While the rate of parents with some knowledge of DPP in general and tuition credits in particular were almost identical (70 percent vs. 69 percent, respectively), knowing about DPP did not necessarily mean that parents understood the tuition credits. In fact, almost one-third of parents (32 percent) with at least some knowledge of DPP reporting knowing *nothing at all* or *very little* about DPP tuition credits.

As shown in Figure 1 on the next page, parents with greater knowledge of DPP tuition credits, on average, were: those whose child attended a community preschool (vs. DPS), English-speaking parents (versus Spanish-speaking), and/or parents with a child identified as white (vs. Hispanic).<sup>1</sup> In addition, families from Southwest Denver reported significantly less knowledge than did parents from Northwest and Northeast Denver. Finally, families’ reported income was positively correlated with knowledge of tuition credits – the higher the income, the greater the knowledge (see box, right).<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Tuition credit knowledge by site type:  $t(179.78) = 2.17, p = .03$ ; by race:  $f(2, 106.81) = 6.46, p = .002$  (Brown-Forsythe); post-hoc Games-Howell test for White and Hispanic:  $p = .003$ ; by home language:  $t(189) = 2.48, p = .01$ ; by region:  $f(3, 109.34) = 5.76, p = .001$  (Brown-Forsythe); post-hoc Games-Howell for Northwest and Southwest, and Northeast and Southwest ( $p < .05$ ).  
<sup>2</sup>  $r = .20, p = .01$

**Figure 1.** Parents’ knowledge of DPP tuition credits: Comparisons of average ratings by site type, child race/ethnicity, region, and home language



In interviews, parents also conveyed varying levels of knowledge about DPP and the program’s tuition credits. Some parents appeared to have a thorough understanding of DPP’s tuition credits; for example, one said, *“My understanding is that the Denver Preschool Program was initiated to make sure that four year old preschoolers have the opportunity to go to preschool. So, there’s the monetary help with the tuition based on family size and things like that.”* Other parents defined DPP in terms of its benefits for children: *“I think it helps get your child ready for school, kind of teach them independence, learning how to interact with others and adults.”* A few seemed less clear about DPP, saying they know *“a little bit,”* or *“I don’t [know], exactly. I know that some people told me about it, namely the staff over at [a DPS school].”*

## Do DPP parents know they receive a tuition credit?

Of DPP parents surveyed during the 2017-2018 program year, **86%** of community preschool parents reported receiving DPP tuition help, versus **44%** of Denver Public Schools (DPS) parents.

Among DPS parents, **45%** said they *did not* receive tuition help from DPP, and 11% did not know. These results suggest the need to “get the word out” to DPS families about the support they receive from DPP.

Suggestions from DPP parent interviewees for how to improve families' awareness of DPP included:

- **Advertising:** signs on buses/bus stops, advertisements on TV, and yard signs to promote DPP (see box, right).
- **Postal mail:** *“Maybe it would have been nice just to receive like a flyer or something in the mail, like they do with kindergarten.”*
- **Increased community presence:** *“DPP should be at more community events. I also think that it would be more beneficial to align with community resource connections and have their literature available. I think of family resource centers... I also think that DPP should be tabling at as many events as possible across Denver Metro.”*

**Get the word out through a yard sign campaign?**

*“Ask the local neighboring people to put signs out... a week of bright-colored signs in yards to really inspire people that there's a preschool program that's available for these kiddos.”*

– DPP parent interviewee

**Non-DPP Parents**

As may be expected, most non-DPP parents who took the survey during the 2016-2017 or 2017-2018 reported knowing *nothing at all* or *very little* about DPP (79 percent), while 7 percent knew *some*, and 14 percent knew *a lot*. Clearly, a critical barrier to these parents' participation in DPP is they simply do not know about it.

**Interviewer:** *I know you recently moved to Denver. Do you know anything about the Denver Preschool Program?*

**Non-DPP parent:** *I don't, no.*

One parent suggested that DPP could try to reach out to non-DPP families through mail or email. Another seemed to wish for more hands-on support: *“It would be helpful if DPP worked with me more to find a spot for him ... or offer me some other opportunity for him to learn.”*

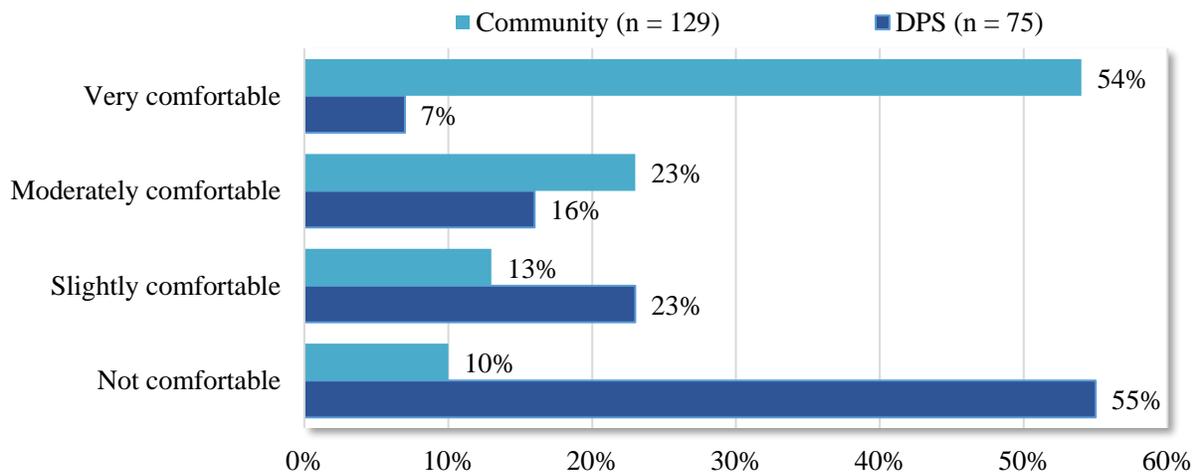
**DPP Preschool Programs**

Since DPP preschool staff may play a role in outreach regarding the tuition credits, we asked providers how comfortable they feel explaining DPP tuition credit amounts to families. However, there were large differences by preschool type, with community preschools reporting significantly greater comfort than DPS preschools (Figure 2).<sup>1</sup> In fact, the majority of DPS schools (55 percent) were not comfortable; this is likely because most DPS survey respondents were teachers (73 percent), and DPS handles the tuition credits centrally. Even so, it may be helpful for DPS teachers to have some knowledge about DPP tuition credits in order to answer parents' questions.

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<sup>1</sup> Comfort explaining tuition credits by preschool type:  $t(202) = 10.05, p < .001$

**Figure 2.** Comfort explaining DPP tuition credits to parents (percentage of DPP sites)



Interviews with preschool staff also suggested a difference in perceptions by type of DPP site: one community site director and teacher said, *“Oh yeah, I’m very comfortable with telling them about [DPP tuition credits].”* By contrast, a DPS teacher commented, *“The parent-type information I don’t know, or who qualifies for a financial discount...that’s the most challenging for me, is just not knowing all the ins and outs of it and how to explain it to parents.”* Not all community preschools felt comfortable, though; for example, one person said, *“[Parents] just ask if they would qualify, and I tell them they just have to apply and see, so I don’t know how that works exactly.”*

### Non-DPP Preschools

Most non-DPP preschool programs who took the survey in 2016-2017 or 2017-2018 ( $n = 36$ ) were *not at all* or *slightly familiar* with DPP tuition credits (72 percent), while 28 percent were *moderately* or *very familiar*.

Of the seven non-DPP preschools who completed an interview, some were familiar with DPP, even helping to canvas for the original DPP ballot initiative (see box, upper right). By contrast, another respondent described his or her knowledge as “zero” (see box, lower-right).

Non-DPP preschools with some knowledge of DPP indicated that DPP helps make preschool more affordable for families. One person mentioned learning about DPP through trainings: *“I’ve been taking a class up at [Clayton Early Learning]. I do that once a month... I listen to them and from what I can hear, there’s a lot of perks to it.”*

In the survey, the most common reasons non-DPP programs reported not participating in DPP included not liking the quality rating process (29 percent), being unsure if they were eligible (29 percent), and

*“I actually canvassed, 10, 12 years ago, to get the Denver Preschool Program going... I’m in awe of what you guys have accomplished.”*

– Non-DPP preschool interviewee

**Interviewer:** *How familiar do you feel like you are with the Denver Preschool Program?*

**Non-DPP Preschool:** *Zero.*

**Interviewer:** *Zero?*

**Non-DPP Preschool:** *I’ve heard the name pretty much for the first time this year.*

paperwork burdens (18 percent). Others explained in interviews that DPP simply did not seem to be a value-add for their program. As one person stated, “*you can go into Qualistar, go into the Council and get the same things that DPP is offering, so why would you buy-in and pay to get the same things?*” This comment could reflect a misconception that DPP charges preschools for its services, and/or possible costs related to participating in DPP (e.g., time spent on paperwork).

Some interviewees, however, were interested in joining DPP. As one person explained, “*I asked [about DPP] when I started working here, and [program leaders] said, ‘Well, we’re going to look at that again for the next school year’ because I’m always pushing. I think it’s good for everyone and for families especially to know that we’re part of a larger group of people that are caring for all the children in Denver.*”

## Tuition Credit Delivery

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This section explores parents’ and preschool programs’ views of DPP tuition credits, both in terms of the logistics of the process, as well as the amount of tuition credits provided.

### Process

The tuition credit delivery process starts with a parent filling out the DPP application. Once they are approved and begin attending, the child’s preschool is reimbursed for the tuition credit amount. This section examines this process from parents’ and preschools’ perspectives.

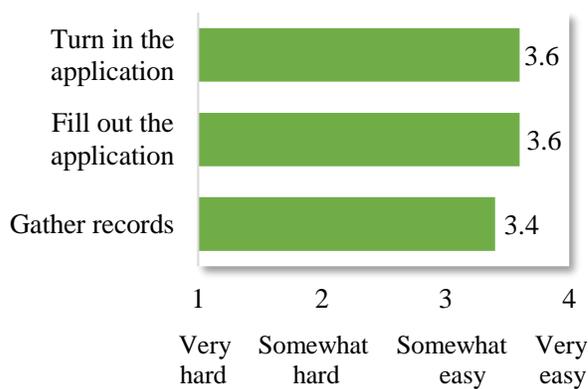
**Parents.** Respondents to the parent survey reported that the DPP application process was *somewhat* to *very easy*, on average (Figure 3, on the next page). The most challenging part was gathering records (e.g., child’s birth certificate, proof of income, and proof of address) – 14 percent of parents rated this as *somewhat* or *very hard*. Fewer than five parents rated gathering records as *very hard*, all of whom were in tuition tiers 1 or 2. Among those who rated it as *somewhat hard* ( $n = 34$ ), most (65 percent) were in tiers 5 and 6. This suggests that families with the lowest incomes tended to have the most difficulty obtaining records, while higher-income families (tier 5) and those who opted out of reporting their income (Tier 6) also had some difficulty. Ratings of the DPP application process were similar across parents from community and DPS preschools.

Many parents submitted their application through their child’s preschool (see box, right). Notably, 26 percent of respondents ( $n = 67$ ) indicated that they completed the application online; however, DPP’s application is not available online. Of parents who reported submitting online, most (72 percent) were from DPS preschools. Therefore, they may have been referring to completing the DPS application online.

### How did parents turn in the DPP application?

- ✓ Child’s preschool – 46%
- ✓ Online – 26%
- ✓ Mail – 10%
- ✓ Email – 12%
- ✓ Other (or don’t recall) – 6%

**Figure 3.** Ease of the DPP application process ( $n = 269-273$ )



Eighty-two percent of parents received help with their DPP application, and of those, the majority (55 percent) had more than one source of help. Support most frequently came from DPP (72 percent), DPS (61 percent), and/or a non-DPS preschool (43 percent). About one-quarter had help from a family member and/or friend (24 percent), while 16 percent received help from a community organization.

The most highly rated source of support with the application was DPP, with a mean score of 3.5 on a scale of *not at all helpful* = 1 to *very helpful* = 4, followed by DPS ( $M = 3.3$ ), friends ( $M = 3.1$ ), non-DPS preschools ( $M = 3.0$ ), and family members ( $M = 3.0$ ). Notably, on average, community preschool parents rated DPP’s help significantly higher ( $M = 3.60$ ), than did DPS parents ( $M = 3.3$ ).<sup>1</sup> One suggestion to improve the application process was to provide in-person supports; as one parent commented, *“I really think that DPP should consider figuring out a way to be in the communities, especially when we’re talking about immigrant-based populations and the high level of mistrust. Relationship is everything.”*

The box below shows parents’ comments about the DPP application process. As shown, parents generally reported that the process was easy. However, one person experienced frustration with having to resubmit attachments. Since DPP does not have an online system for submitting applications, it is possible that the application was submitted by email, or that the parent is referring to a preschool’s online application form rather than the DPP application.

**Views of the DPP application process in parents’ own words...**

*“Oh, it wasn’t too hard at all.”*

--DPS parent

*“It was super easy. Once I had all the documents I needed, like the birth certificate and proof of income.”*

—Community preschool parent

*“The paperwork was easy, but my attachments kept getting lost, which was really annoying. I had to resubmit them, like, several times. But once I finally got them all submitted, it was fine.”*

-- Community preschool parent

<sup>1</sup> Rating of help with application for DPS and community sites:  $t(146.44) = 2.28, p = .02$

We asked parents who knew they received a DPP tuition credit ( $n = 173$ ) whether the amount of the tuition credit met their needs. Most (76 percent) would *not* have sent their child to a different preschool if their tuition credit had been larger, 8 percent would have chosen a different school, and 16 percent said it depended on the amount of the tuition credit. Note: DPP tuition credit amounts are based on the family's tuition credit tier (which takes into account household size and income), as well as the quality rating of the preschool and the hours the child attends preschool. For more information, see "Evaluation Brief 1: Introduction and Overview of DPP Families and Providers."

Of those who may have chosen a different school ( $n = 41$ ), many were in DPP tuition tier 1 (27 percent) or tier 5 (37 percent). This suggests that families at both ends of the income spectrum – those with the lowest and highest incomes – are struggling with accessing their preferred preschool. The size of tuition credit parents needed for their school of choice varied widely, ranging from less than \$50 per month to more than \$750, with no discernable pattern in the amount needed by income level.

Similarly, many parents (85 percent) would *not* have sent their child to preschool for more hours if the DPP tuition credit were larger, while 8 percent would have, and 7 percent said it depended on the amount. Similar to results described above, most families needing a larger tuition credit were from either tuition tier 1 or tier 5, and the amount of tuition credit needed varied widely.

Nearly three-quarters of DPP parents (73 percent) would have used a DPP tuition credit to support their child's 3-year-old preschool year (see box, below), if it had been available.

#### **Tuition Credit Amounts**

Most DPP parents did not need a larger tuition credit to enroll in their preschool of choice or desired amount of time.

Those who needed a larger tuition credit tended to be at the lower and upper ends of the tuition credit scale.

#### **Do families need a tuition credit for their child's 3-year-old preschool year?**

If tuition credit help were available for 3-year-olds...

- 27% of parents would have enrolled their child in preschool as a 3-year-old
- 46% had their child in preschool as a 3-year-old but *could have used* tuition help
- 16% had their child in preschool as a 3-year-old and *did not need* tuition help
- 10% still would not have sent their child to preschool as a 3-year-old

**Preschools.** We asked staff from community preschools about the DPP tuition credit reimbursement process. (For DPS preschools, this process is handled at the district level.)

**Views of the DPP application process from preschool staff interviews...**

*“It’s super easy, and they’ve even made it easier this year with sending out those spreadsheets premade. That’s made a huge difference as far as being able to send in attendance.”*

*“It seems to work fine. I mean, we haven’t had any trouble with it.”*

Most felt that the process was *very easy* (64 percent), while another 30 percent felt it was *somewhat easy*. The remaining 6 percent ( $n = 6$ ) rated the process as somewhat difficult or very difficult and were asked what makes the process challenging. Responses typically related to staffing capacity (*“we are a small program, and it takes time to manage these pieces”*) and timing of the reimbursement (*“the late in the month payment”*).

*Quality Assurance Program Review.* DPP randomly selects a small sample of preschools and children (roughly 24 preschools) per school year to participate in the Quality Assurance Program (QAP) Review. The QAP review is meant to measure the compliance of providers with DPP policies and procedures regarding applications and tuition credits. The QAP review process evaluates attendance and participation, residency, payments, and document retention at the selected preschools.

The majority of DPP providers were unfamiliar with the DPP Quality Assurance Program (QAP) review, with almost three quarters of providers rating their familiarity as *not at all familiar* or *slightly familiar*. Twenty-one of 207 preschools that completed the survey reported having participated in the QAP review. Of the 21 programs who had reported participating in the QAP review, most rated the process *somewhat easy* or *very easy* (90 percent) and *somewhat helpful* or *very helpful* (91 percent). Providers described the process as *“unobtrusive to student’s learning,”* *“clear and convenient,”* and explained *“the representative provided thorough information.”*

## Tuition Credit Amounts and Months Received

The box (right) gives a snapshot of the most typical DPP student, whose family received about \$4,282 in tuition credits, on average, or \$475 a month. This is an increase from last year, when the typical DPP family received \$3,500 annually or \$420 monthly. Please note that the average monthly amount families received (\$475) is different from the amount calculated based on the tuition scale (\$617) because we have accounted for the cap on tuition credits for DPS students (\$8.2 million) and for tuition credits that were reduced due to partial preschool attendance.<sup>1</sup>

On average, DPP families received tuition credits for 8.5 months, representing most of a 9-month school year. Those who attended community preschools attended 9.1 months, on average, versus 8.1 months for those in DPS preschools. This difference is likely due, in part, to DPS schools being closed during the summer.

**Income opt-out.** This year, 451 parents opted out of providing their income information on the DPP application, resulting in their assignment to income tier 6. All other things being equal, families who “opt out” of providing income information receive the smallest tuition credits. Rates of opting out of reporting income information were similar across families from DPS and community sites (10 percent versus 8 percent, respectively).

A small number of families opted out of providing their income on the DPP application but provided an estimate of their household income on our evaluation survey ( $n = 28$ ). Most families would have been tuition tier 5 (82 percent), while small numbers of tier 4 and tier 1 families were also represented. All of these families would have received a larger tuition credit had they provided their income. Possibly, logistical barriers (e.g., the need to verify their income) and/or lack of knowledge about how DPP tuition credits are calculated contributed to parents opting out. In fact, 22 percent of tier 6 families reported that it was *somewhat hard* to gather documents for the DPP application.

In interviews, we asked parents how comfortable they felt providing their income on the DPP application. All responses indicated that parents were comfortable. For example, one parent noted that this is a regular occurrence: “*For any sort of application or registration or enrollment,*

### During the 2017-2018 year, a typical DPP child...



Attended full-day preschool for 9 months

Had a family income under the federal poverty level

Attended a preschool with a Level 4 quality rating ◆◆◆◆

Received about \$4,282 yearly in tuition support, or about \$475 a month.

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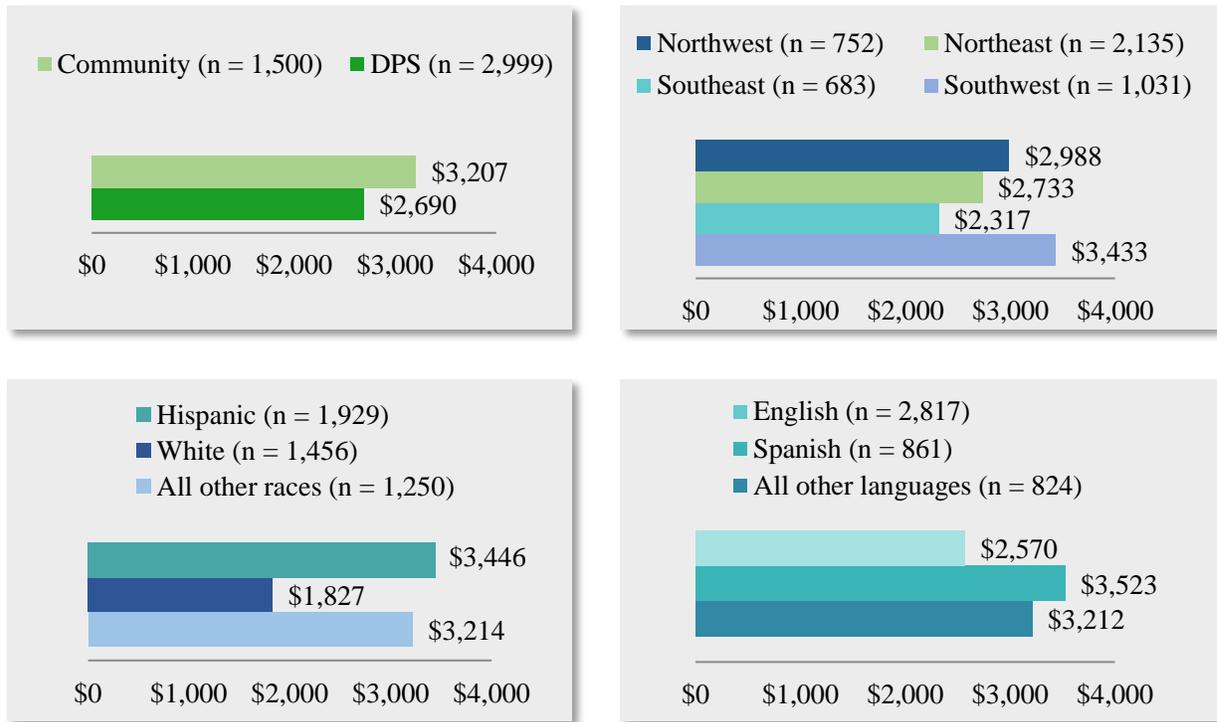
<sup>1</sup> To promote parity between Denver Public Schools (DPS) and community preschools, DPP established a cap on tuition assistance available to DPS families, which was \$8.2 million during the 2017-2018 school year.

*they always ask your income.*” Another parent explained, *“That’s fine, because that’s what you guys base it on, so, yeah, no, that didn’t bother me.”* However, it is important to note that this sample did not include parents who “opted out” of reporting their income.

**Who benefits most from DPP tuition credits?** As shown in Figure 4 on the next page, families attending community preschools, those living in Southwest Denver, children identified as Hispanic, and/or those with Spanish as their primary home language received the largest tuition credits, on average. Please note, the yearly tuition credit is also largely influenced by tuition tier (based on household income and family size), preschool quality, and the child’s preschool attendance, as these factors are used to calculate the tuition credits.

Overall, it appears that DPP is serving families of diverse demographic characteristics across Denver, with a particular focus on Hispanic, Spanish-speaking families in Southwest Denver. However, families from these groups tended to report the lowest levels of knowledge about DPP tuition credits, which further supports the need to increase outreach about DPP tuition credits and ensure that parents are aware of substantial the tuition credits that are available to them.

**Figure 4.** Average adjusted yearly tuition credit amount received by preschool type, region of Denver in which the family resides, child’s race/ethnicity, and home language<sup>1</sup>



### Perceived Impact of Tuition Credits

#### Access

DPP supports preschool access in several ways. First, DPP may make it possible for parents to enroll in their preschool of choice and/or for their desired number of hours – or simply make it possible to send their child to preschool at all. Second, DPP aims to help Denver families access *high-quality* preschool. Here, we explore these multiple facets of preschool access.

<sup>1</sup> Tuition credit amount by preschool type:  $t(1957.21) = 7.58, p < .001$ ; by race/ethnicity:  $f(2, 3825.49) = 388.23, p < .001$  (Brown-Forsythe); post hoc Games-Howell  $p < .01$  for all pairwise comparisons; by home language:  $f(2, 2987.33) = 142.39, p < .001$  (Brown-Forsythe), post hoc Games-Howell,  $p < .01$  for all pairwise comparisons; by region:  $f(2, 3334.60) = 62.21, p < .001$  (Brown-Forsythe); post Games-Howell,  $p < .01$  for all pairwise comparisons

There are many reasons why parents may choose a preschool. To provide context for evaluation findings related to DPP’s impact on families’ preschool choices, Figure 5 shows the percentage of parents who rated potential reasons for choosing a preschool as *very important*.

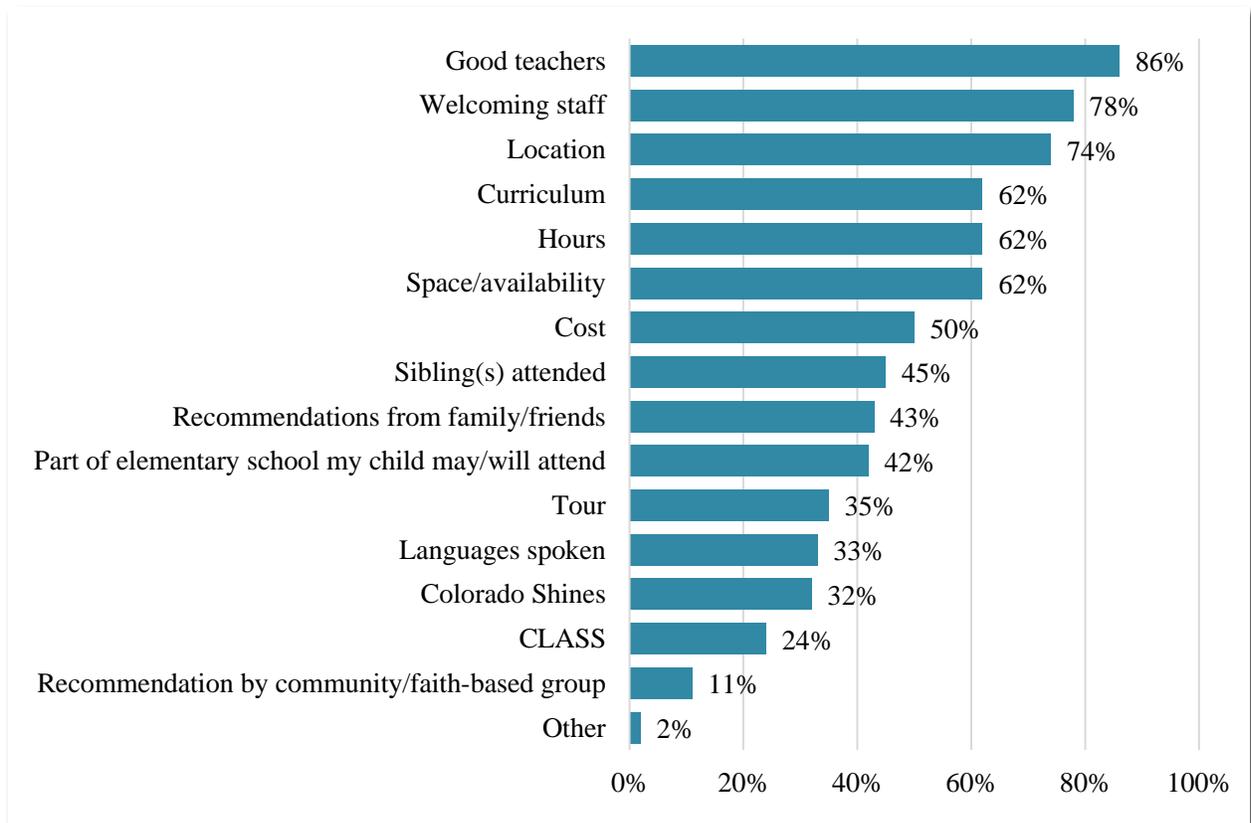
Results suggest that the preschool workforce is critical to many parents’ decisions, with good teachers and welcoming staff comprising the top two reasons (86 percent and 78 percent, respectively). About 60-75 percent reported that practical issues such as location, hours, and space were very important, as was the preschool’s curriculum. Notably, less than one-third reported that quality ratings such as Colorado Shines were very important to them.

**Choosing a Preschool**

**Interviewer:** *What kind of things did you think about when trying to decide on the preschool?*

**DPP Parent:** *Proximity to where we live, diversity within the school, happy space, good playground, positive environment in the school tour.*

**Figure 5.** Factors influencing preschool choice (*n* = 274)



Four out of five DPP parents sent their child to their school of choice in 2017-2018.

According to the DPP parent survey, 81 percent of parents were able to send their child to their preferred preschool, down from 89 percent in the 2016-2017 survey.

Of those who did not enroll in their first choice preschool ( $n = 50$ ), most reported that there were no spaces left (50 percent), it cost too much (12 percent), or the location did not work (8 percent).<sup>1</sup> Among those who were unable to enroll in their top choice due to space, 64 percent attended DPS preschools, suggesting that they did not receive their first choice in the DPS lottery. Please note that the proportion of families who did not receive their first choice because there were no spaces left increased since 2016-2017 (from 39 percent to 50 percent). Qualitative comments from preschool staff also reflected a lack of available spaces (see box, right).

**DPP preschool providers' views about preschool availability:**

*"There are still not enough preschool seats in our area."*

**What would happen to families without DPP tuition credits?**

In the parent survey, 27% of respondents indicated that without DPP tuition credits, their child would not be able to go to the same preschool ( $n = 46$ ).

*Of those ...*

- Most could not have sent their child to preschool at all ( $n = 24$ ).
- Some would have sent their child to a cheaper ( $n = 14$ ), and/or a lower quality preschool ( $n = 6$ ).

When asked about the role DPP tuition credits played in their preschool choice, 45 percent of parents (who knew they received a tuition credit) rated DPP tuition credits as *important* or *very important*, while 17 percent felt it was *somewhat important*, and 38 percent indicated it was *not important at all*.

As was shown in Figure 5 (on the previous page), cost was not a key consideration for some parents. Focusing on those parents for whom cost was rated as *very important* ( $n = 86$ ), 59 percent reported that DPP tuition credits were *important* or *very important* to their preschool choice. Thus, among families whose choices are highly constrained by cost, many parents feel DPP tuition credits make a difference. As one parent commented, *"It was great to know that tuition wasn't going to be as hefty a burden to us, to know that we weren't going to have to pay as much."*

Among parents for whom cost was important, ratings of the importance of the DPP tuition credit in their preschool choice were highest among parents who speak Spanish at home, have a child identified as Hispanic, and/or attend a DPS preschool.<sup>2</sup> This is notable given that these groups of families reported having the least knowledge of DPP tuition credits.

<sup>1</sup> Other reasons were selected by fewer than five respondents.

<sup>2</sup> Importance of tuition credit in preschool choice: by preschool type,  $f(1, 77.39) = 13.37, p < .001$  (Brown-Forsythe); race/ethnicity,  $f(2, 70.39) = 12.00, p < .001$  (Brown-Forsythe), pairwise comparisons for white vs. Hispanic and white vs. all other races,  $p < .01$ ; Home language,  $f(1, 17.03) = 5.70, p = .03$ .

Of DPP parents who knew they received a tuition credit ( $n = 171$ ), 77 percent said the DPP tuition credit would help them keep sending their child to the same preschool for the entire year. In fact, children in 85 percent of these families attended preschool for at least nine months. Thus, it appears that DPP support helps support preschool continuity. Furthermore, more than one-quarter of DPP parents reported that the DPP tuition credit allowed them to increase the hours their child is in preschool (29 percent). Of these families, 96 percent attended either full day or extended day preschool.

### Quality

Among DPP parents who took the survey, the top three ways in which they found out about preschool quality were: tour/visit of the preschool (45 percent), recommendations from friends/family (43 percent), and reputation in the community (40 percent). By contrast, 21 percent learned about preschool quality from the Colorado Shines rating, 16 percent from DPP's website, 5 percent from CLASS<sup>®</sup> scores, and 3 percent from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) status. This suggests that parents' assessments of quality are largely based on personal observation and word-of-mouth recommendations.

16 percent of DPP parents found out about their preschool's quality from DPP's website.

Even though most parents do not seem to use quality ratings to judge a program's quality, it is also important to examine the quality of DPP preschools families attended based on quantitative ratings, and whether there are disparities in preschool quality across groups of DPP families.

The box (right) shows average quality ratings across DPP families,<sup>1</sup> which are similar to results from the 2016-2017 program year. These averages are consistent with national trends.<sup>2</sup> There was little variation in Colorado Shines ratings by groups of families, with average ratings ranging from 3.7 to 4.1 regardless of the region of the city in which families lived, child's home language, or race/ethnicity

Average quality rating of preschools families attended	
Colorado Shines overall rating	4.0
CLASS <sup>®</sup> domains	
Classroom organization	6.0
Emotional support	6.4
Instructional support	2.7

Similarly, average CLASS<sup>®</sup> scores were similar across groups of families. Although some differences between groups were statistically significant due to the large sample size, it does not appear that these differences in quality (which were within a few tenths of a point of one another) are practically significant.

<sup>1</sup> If the family received a DPP tuition credit for more than one preschool, the quality rating of the first preschool was used.

<sup>2</sup> Office of Head Start. (n.d.). A National Overview of Grantee CLASS<sup>®</sup> Scores in 2017. Retrieved from <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/national-class-2017-data.pdf>

Nearly all preschool staff who completed the survey reported that DPP helps Denver 4-year-olds access quality preschool *moderately* or *very well* (94 percent), while only a few felt that it helps slightly well (6 percent).

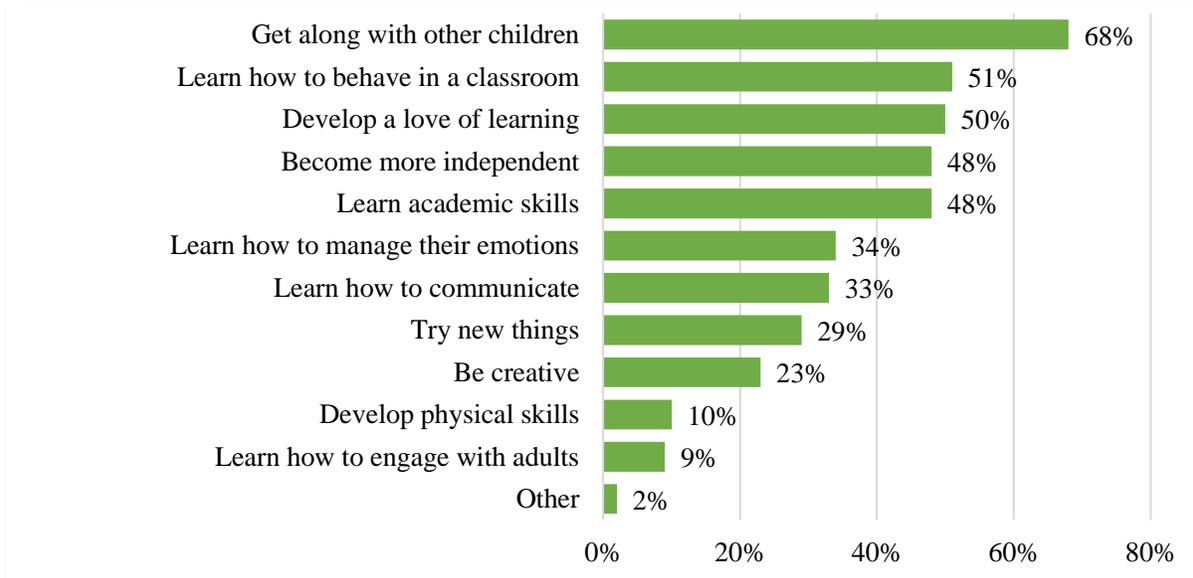
*“I believe that financial access to quality preschool is very important, and DPP tuition credits are paramount in giving families access to such programs.”*

-DPP preschool survey respondent

## Other Impacts

**Benefits of preschool.** DPP tuition credits help families access a variety of benefits related to preschool attendance. As shown in Figure 6, the top three benefits of preschool include opportunities for their child to learn how to get along with other children (68 percent of parents endorsed this item), learn how to behave in a classroom (51 percent), and develop a love of learning (50 percent). These results suggest that DPP parents tend to believe that preschool provides a social-emotional and academic foundation for kindergarten.

**Figure 6.** DPP parents’ perceptions of how preschool helps their child ( $n = 274$ )



## Economic Benefits to Families

According to survey results:

- 86% of parents reported having a child in preschool lets one or more adults in the family work,
- 58% found that it allows them to work longer hours, and
- 25% were able to go to school.

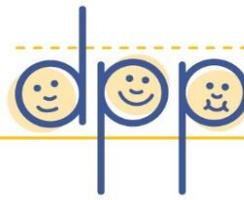
# Conclusions and Recommendations

During the 2017-2018 program year, DPP continued to serve a diverse group of Denver families, providing the largest tuition credit supports to families that often lack access to early childhood education services, such as families in Southwest Denver, those who speak Spanish at home, and have a child identified as Hispanic or Latino. Access to preschool, as DPP parents attested to, helps get children ready for preschool academically and socially, and may provide families with further benefits such as the ability to work or attend school. Moreover, DPP families typically attended highly rated preschools, with Colorado Shines ratings of 4 out of 5, on average.

According to feedback from both DPP beneficiaries and those who are not currently part of DPP, it appears that DPP would benefit from increased efforts to “get the word out” about its tuition credits. In fact, groups of families who report receiving the greatest benefit also report the lowest levels of knowledge about DPP tuition credits (families who are Hispanic, speak Spanish at home, and live in Southwest Denver). Given this, it is recommended that DPP consider ways in which to increase targeted outreach to these families. This could include neighborhood-specific mailings or yard signs, and/or increasing partnerships with community organizations that serve Hispanic and Latino families in Southwest Denver. DPP could also assess whether it would be possible to better target online advertising to reach these groups of families. Furthermore, given that word-of-mouth recommendations from friends and families is one of the most important ways parents report learning about DPP and preschool quality, perhaps DPP could consider providing an incentive or additional tuition benefit to parents who refer other parents to participate in DPP.

Although all DPS parents with a 4-year-old automatically apply to receive DPP tuition credits, most DPS parents are not aware of this. One possible reason, as was noted in the 2016- 2017 evaluation report, is that DPP tuition credits are not reflected on DPS families’ ECE invoices. As this appears to be a continued barrier to DPS parents’ knowledge of tuition credits, we recommend that DPP work with DPS to add this information to families’ invoices.

Given that the proportion of DPP families who were able to access their first-choice preschool declined since last year (from 89 percent to 81 percent), it is recommended that DPP consider ways that they could support increased preschool capacity in Denver. For example, perhaps addressing non-DPP providers’ reasons for non-participation (e.g., concerns about quality ratings, paperwork) and possible misconceptions could lead to more DPP preschools, which, in turn, could provide more options for families.



**DENVER  
PRESCHOOL  
PROGRAM**

# OPERATIONS EVALUATION 2017-2018 Program Year



## Evaluation Brief 3: Quality Improvement Resource Delivery

Prepared by The Butler Institute for Families  
Graduate School of Social Work | University of Denver

# Introduction

This third and final brief on the 2017-2018 Denver Preschool Program (DPP) operations evaluation presents results related to the delivery of DPP quality improvement (QI) resources.

The evaluation utilizes multiple methods to collect primary data from a variety of key stakeholders, including:

- › **A preschool survey** completed by a contact person at 207 DPP preschools.
- › **Follow-up interviews** with 15 DPP preschools.
- › **Surveys and/or interviews** conducted between 2016-2018 with 17 preschool programs *not* currently participating in DPP.

We also analyzed secondary data regarding quality improvement resources from Denver’s Early Childhood Council (DECC) and achievement award records from the Denver Preschool Program. For more information about evaluation methodology, see “Evaluation Brief 1: Introduction and Overview of DPP Families and Providers.”

## *Quality Improvement Resources*

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Based on evidence that high quality professional learning opportunities can support early childhood educators’ knowledge acquisition and improve professional practices,<sup>2</sup> DPP offers various quality improvement (QI) options to preschools. Such QI opportunities include training, coaching, quality navigator support, quality improvement planning, funding for materials and equipment, and achievement awards. These options target preschool quality, and lower rated preschools are offered the most support to improve their quality.

Other resources available to DPP preschool sites include: an in-person *Introduction to Quality* session for new DPP sites (or when a site has a new director), higher education scholarships through the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship Program, marketing support to all DPP sites to advertise their programs and services, and a monthly newsletter to inform providers on relevant policy, procedure, training, and QI.

### Preschools that completed the survey\* *n* = 207

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**93%** were center-based (7% were home-based)

**92%** of respondents were program directors/principals/owners and/or lead teachers<sup>1</sup>

**54%** of survey participants have worked in their current position for 5+ years

**91%** of survey participants have worked in early care and education (ECE) for 5+ years

On average, preschools report having the capacity to serve about **30 children** in their last year before kindergarten.

**3:** The average number of classrooms per site serving children in their last year before kindergarten.

\*The appendix provides a detailed breakdown of survey respondent demographic data.

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<sup>1</sup> Other roles include administrators or education/admissions coordinators

<sup>2</sup> Zaslow, M., Tout, K., Halle, T., Whittaker, J. V., & Lavelle, B. (2010). Toward the Identification of Features of Effective Professional Development for Early Childhood Educators. Literature Review. Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, US Department of Education.

Given the importance of QI resources in supporting early educators to deliver high quality practices, this report focuses on understanding what QI services DPP is providing and how those services are perceived by recipients. More specifically, we focus on the following QI content areas: (1) coaching; (2) QI navigator support; (3) professional development; (4) quality ratings; (5) QI plans; (6) spending on QI; and (7) achievement awards. Results pertaining to these topics are reported in the sections below.<sup>1</sup>

# Results

## Coaching

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Coaching refers to professional development where a coach observes a teacher's practices, provides constructive feedback, individualizes to the needs of the teacher, and focuses on discrete skills. Coaching is both time-intensive and sustained over time.<sup>2</sup> In DPP, coaches assess each preschool site's needs and deliver supports related to quality ratings (CLASS<sup>®</sup> and Colorado Shines), leadership growth, workforce and professional development, family engagement, curriculum and assessment, navigating hardships, and classroom management. Coaches also help create a quality improvement plan (QIP) with preschool sites and track their progress. Coaches are preschool providers' main point of contact to aid in utilizing DPP resources, promoting ECE best practices, and improving their preschool's quality.

Coaching is one of the most frequently utilized QI resources offered by DPP, as 76 percent of preschools reported receiving coaching during the last year.

In 2017-2018, DPP coaches delivered **3,417** hours of coaching to providers.

According to secondary data provided by DECC, 207 DPP preschools received coaching sessions. Clayton Early Learning conducted most coaching sessions (71 percent), while DECC conducted about one-third of the coaching (Figure 1), which is consistent with DPP's contracted time with each agency. On average, sites received 17 hours of coaching, ranging from 0.50 to 79 hours.

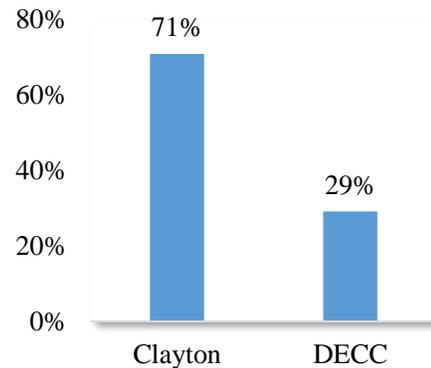
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<sup>1</sup> Bivariate correlations were used to understand associations among key variables. The following variables were considered: coaching hours, QI navigator contact, QI spending, hours of training, position tenure, preschool type, Colorado Shines Rating, and preschool size. Significant findings are reported in instances where  $p < .05$ .

<sup>2</sup> Kraft, M. A., Blazar, D., & Hogan, D. (2018). The effect of teacher coaching on instruction and achievement: A meta-analysis of causal evidence. *Review of Educational Research*, 88(4), 547-588.

Overall, community preschools ( $n = 137$ ) received almost 700 more coaching sessions than DPS schools ( $n = 70$ ); however, community and DPS preschools both received almost the same number of coaching sessions per site (Table 1). Community preschools received longer coaching sessions, lasting an average of 30 minutes more per session per site compared to DPS schools. Of the active sites that did not receive coaching ( $n = 34$ ), 41 percent were not located in Denver and therefore not eligible for coaching. Just over one-half (53 percent) of the sites that did not receive coaching were DPS sites. The final six percent were community sites located in Denver that were eligible, but did not participate in coaching.

**Figure 1.** Coaching sessions by organization ( $n = 2541$ )



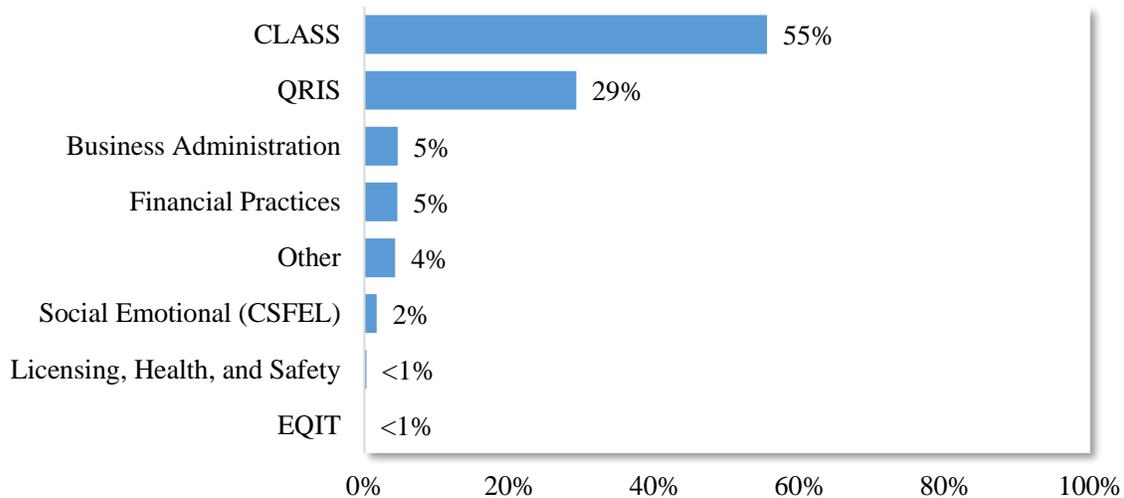
**Table 1.** Coaching sessions by preschool type

	Sites	Average # of sessions per preschool (Range)	Average session duration in hours (Range)	Total # of sessions
<b>Community</b>	137	12 (1 – 38)	1.6 (0.5 – 5.0)	1603
<b>DPS sites</b>	70	13 (1 – 66)	1.1 (0.5 – 2.5)	938

See Figure 2, below, for a detailed record of coaching sessions by topic. Overall, most coaching sessions focused on the CLASS<sup>®</sup>, followed by the Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS). Less than one percent of coaching sessions focused on Licensing, Health, and Safety or Enhancing Quality for Infants & Toddlers (EQIT).

Preschool staff found coaching most helpful in conjunction with the CLASS<sup>®</sup> ratings. *“I think [coaching] has done some good things. Even prior to the rating, they sit down with the teachers and they give them the CLASS<sup>®</sup> manual and go through what it looks like and explain every area. I saw the teachers change their learning environment and some of the activities that they were doing with the children to be more age- appropriate. So I did see some positive changes.”*

**Figure 2.** Coaching session topics ( $n = 2732$ )



Nearly one-half of survey respondents reported having contact with their DPP coach monthly (48 percent). One-quarter reported only receiving contact from their coach once a year or less (26 percent). The majority (69 percent) believed the frequency of coaching was *just about right*. Of the quarter of preschools who reported not receiving enough coaching, most reported only having coaching once a year or less (49 percent). It seems that monthly coaching sessions were most desirable, with 57 percent saying that frequency was just about right. When asked how coaching could be improved, one provider said:

*“Having more people and allowing more people to be coached and coming to the schools more frequently. This sounds silly but I love being coached because... ‘I want to learn something new, tell me what I’m doing that’s great, how are the kids engaged, how are they not engaged?’ When I’m teaching, I don’t see things like that.”*

Preschool staff enjoyed receiving feedback from coaches, and appreciated the unbiased, “*outside view*.” One provider added, “*It was helpful to have another set of eyes come in and meet with us and talk with us about the classroom program and the teachers’ work. We always find that helpful. There is always room or areas for improvement.*”

*“The teachers have liked the feedback. The teachers really want to become the best teachers they can, so they think, ‘These are the things that I can change in the classroom that will impact the children’s learning. This is how I can improve my skills.’ With the coaching, it’s right there, it’s happening, it’s hands-on.”*

-DPP Provider

Survey respondents rated their coach on a scale of *not at all knowledgeable* = 1 to *very knowledgeable* = 4, and, on average, rated their coach as knowledgeable about early learning ( $M = 3.5$ ). They also reported their coach listened to staff at their site on a scale of *not at all* = 1 and *very much* = 4, ( $M = 3.4$ ). One respondent appreciated how the coach took time to build rapport and said, “*Getting to know my style of teaching and how I learn best, that’s the most important. It seems like they took the time to build a relationship too, not just tell you all the things that you’re doing wrong.*”

Overall, on a scale of *not at all happy* = 1 to *very happy* = 4, providers were happy with how the coach interacts with their site ( $M = 3.42$ ).

Preschool staff also offered suggestions to make coaching even more helpful for their sites. A few providers commented on the allotted coaching hours and length of coaching sessions.

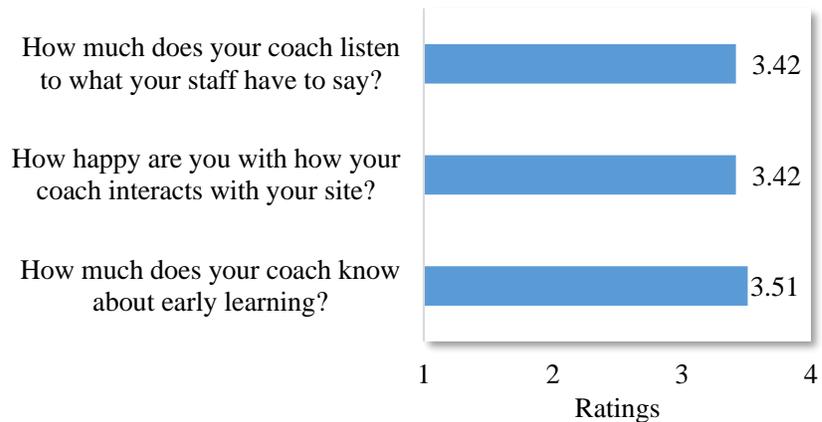
One person found the number of coaching hours allotted to their site for the year insufficient to make changes at their preschool, “*We didn't have a whole lot of coaching hours this year. I don't know how only having nine or twelve hours of coaching is even worth it. It just doesn't seem like there can be a whole lot accomplished in that short amount of time.*”

Another commented on the length of coaching sessions saying, “*When [our coach] came out, they were only here maybe an hour. I don't know what can be observed in that length of time. It doesn't seem like there was enough time in there to really see what's going on in the program.*” Others thought it would be helpful to have more coaching throughout the year and more opportunities for specific feedback.

Some preschool programs thought coaching could have been more structured. One person mentioned the need for a coach with Montessori experience. Providers also mentioned that coaching through DPP could be too much if coaching is already offered through their school’s organization.

Overall, coaching frequency was related to several program characteristics. Community preschools were significantly more likely to use more coaching hours. Preschool size, hours of training per site, and spending on materials were all positively correlated with coaching hour utilization per site. Colorado Shines ratings were negatively correlated with coaching hour utilization – the lower the rating, the more coaching hours the site used. This finding is expected, as DPP offers more supports to lower quality preschools to improve their quality.

**Figure 3.** Provider views of coaching ( $n = 146-148$ )



**More coaching hours are related to...<sup>1</sup>**

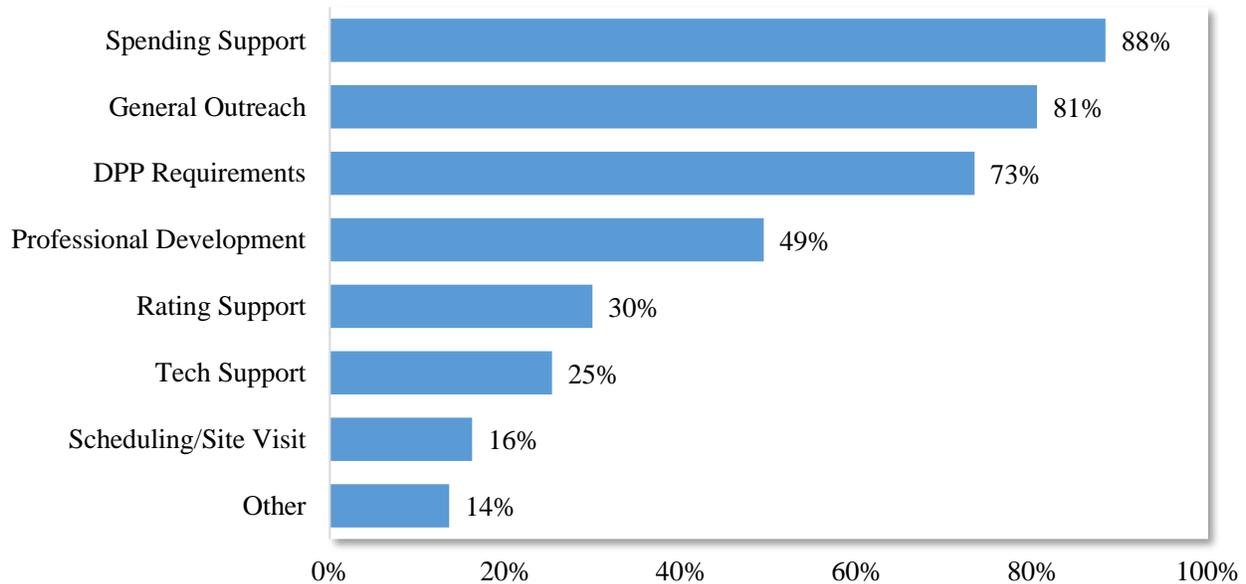
-  Preschool type (community sites)
-  Colorado Shines rating
-  Preschool size (# of classrooms)
-  Hours of training
-  Spending on materials and curriculum

<sup>1</sup> Preschool type:  $r = -.212, p < .01$ ; Colorado Shines rating:  $r = -.222, p < .01$ ; Preschool size:  $r = .147, p < .05$ ; Hours of training:  $r = .288, p < .05$ ; Spending:  $r = .263, p < .01$

## Quality Navigator Support

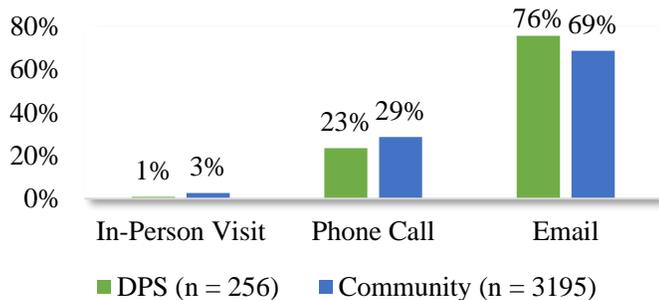
Quality navigators are another support offered to providers to promote the utilization of QI resources (typically funding for materials) and improve preschool quality. This year, quality navigators provided spending support and general outreach, including topics like *returning voicemails*, *new navigator calls*, and *DPP outreach*. Providers thought QI navigators were most helpful in navigating the QI resource website, sending reminders, and keeping them updated on training and other QI opportunities.

**Figure 4.** Navigator contact topics (n = 154)



Most survey respondents were aware of their access to a quality improvement navigator (82 percent) who supports programs in utilizing their QI resources and navigating the quality rating process. DECC data show that active DPP providers received 3,451 navigator contacts in total and, on average, 22 contacts per site (range = 1-72 contacts).

**Figure 5.** Quality navigator contact types



More than one-half of preschools reported meeting with their navigator monthly, and 87 percent reported that the frequency of contact with their navigator was *just about right*. Most contact was made via email, which many providers found most useful. One person mentioned, *“It’s been helpful to have somebody there just reminding you of things, mostly through email. I kind of live and die by my email and reminders, and then being able to directly forward those on to our teachers, as well.”*

**Table 2. Quality Navigator Contacts by Preschool Type**

	Average # of contacts per preschool (Range)	Total # of Contacts
Community sites ( <i>n</i> = 148)	22 (1-72)	3,195
DPS sites ( <i>n</i> = 6)	43 (31-50)	256
*139 contacts with the DPS early education administrative office and 88 contacts across 5 community organization administrative accounts are excluded from this table.		

Although the *amount* of contact with DPS preschools increased from the previous evaluation year, fewer DPS *sites* had contact with a QI navigator this year (from 37 to 6 sites). Important to note, the six DPS sites who were in contact with navigators were charter schools, which QI navigators typically approach like community schools. This decrease does not represent a decrease of communication between navigators and DPS schools, but rather an increase in communication with DPS’s early childhood education administrative office, which made 139 contacts with a quality navigator this year, compared to zero contacts last year. This can also be said for other larger organizations’ navigator contacts. A total of 88 contacts were made with the following schools’ administrative departments and were excluded from the table as we analyzed data at the preschool level: Catholic Charities, Mile High Early Learning, Montessori Children’s House Denver, Rocky Mountain SER, and Sewall Child Development Center.

Many preschools cited positive experiences with their QI navigators. One person explained, “*She reminds you of deadlines, she offers her support. She made a visit to see us to talk about what she can do to help support the center and what our needs are individually. That was really helpful, because generally they know what centers need, but they don’t always know on a one-to-one basis, and so it was helpful for her to come out into the site and meet you directly and spend time at your center. I took her on a tour so she got to know what we were about.*”

Respondents rated their navigator on a scale of *not at all knowledgeable* = 1 to *very knowledgeable* = 4, and, on average, rated their coach as knowledgeable about early learning (*M* = 3.26). They also reported whether their navigator listened to their staff on a scale of *not at all* = 1 and *very much* = 4, on average reporting that the navigator does listen (*M* = 3.27). Overall, on a scale of *not at all happy* = 1 to *very happy* = 4, preschools were happy with how the navigator interacts with their site (*M* = 3.48). Although email was the most utilized and useful form of communication with navigators, providers thought navigators were most helpful when they developed rapport and engaged in frequent communication. Providers cherished “*face to face meetings*” and enjoyed getting to know their navigator.

Overall, two program characteristics were related to the frequency of navigator contact. Like coaching, a lower Colorado Shines rating was negatively correlated with navigator contacts. The number of navigator contacts was also negatively correlated with the survey respondent's tenure in their current position.

For example, a person who had served in their current position for several years was less likely to have navigator contact.<sup>1</sup>

#### More navigator contacts are related to...

↓ Colorado Shines rating

↓ Current position tenure

### *Professional Development*

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DPP offers professional development opportunities for preschools, including a large menu of trainings. These opportunities are provided across Denver throughout the year and vary in duration. Some trainings are part of a larger series and some are a one-time opportunity. Most trainings are delivered in English and some are offered in Spanish. Trainings cover an array of topics including: leadership, child health and development, ratings, classroom environment, and curriculum-specific trainings.

A total of 84 preschools, representing more than 220 unique individuals, attended trainings, according to DECC records. Of those who completed the survey, 82 percent reported attending at least one training. On average, about three providers per preschool attended some type of training. Preschools received, on average, 16 training hours (ranging from 0 to 164 hours). Survey respondents thought the number of trainings offered by DPP were *just about right* (87 percent). One provider said, *"I think the training is always helpful. That's probably the best place to put those resources because teachers can always use extra training."* Providers also appreciate the variety of trainings and that the trainings are not exclusive to teachers, but also offered to directors and administrators.

**Location.** Preschool staff rated the location of the trainings on a scale of *not convenient at all* = 1 to *very convenient* = 4 and reported they were *moderately convenient* ( $M = 2.77$ ). There were several providers who were interested in attending trainings in the southern region of Denver, and mentioned potential neighborhoods including Lakewood and Lowry. In general, providers' main concerns regarded easy and safe access to public transportation to the training sites, as well as parking availability.

*"They offer a lot of training and professional development courses. That has helped us a lot in order to learn how to better teach, how to re-teach and how to work with our kids in all the different areas whether it's social-emotional, communication, literacy, math, play time, or play-based activities."*

-DPP Provider

**Day and Time:** Preschool staff found the days/times of the trainings to be *moderately convenient* ( $M = 2.83$ ) as well. Many would prefer to have coverage in their classroom during the day so they could attend trainings during school hours. One person said, *"It is difficult to ask teachers who work long days to go to trainings in the*

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<sup>1</sup> Colorado Shines rating:  $r = -.297, p < .01$ ; Position tenure,  $r = -.177, p < .05$

evenings or weekends. I would like to support short trainings in the afternoons.” They explained that it would be easier to find coverage in the afternoons when children are napping. There were, however, many other respondents who preferred weekend and evening trainings. A variety of training times offered during the week and on the weekend may offer enough variability to meet provider needs. Online trainings were also mentioned as a potential option for those who do not attend trainings (e.g., they are home providers and cannot find coverage).

**Topics.** In terms of future training topics, respondents offered a range of ideas from working with challenging behaviors to curriculum and licensing requirements. A list of common topic areas and provider examples are shown in Table 3. Many of these topics were suggested based on respondents’ perceptions of the needs of their preschool and on their own experiences. One director said:

*“There was a variety in what was offered in the teacher [trainings]. I remember that, but maybe more director training. There just isn't a ton. I get that we're a smaller group than the teachers but maybe something more for directors and administrators.”*

**Table 3.** Suggested future training topics

Topic	Examples
<b>Work environment</b>	Retention/burnout; work ethics
<b>Supporting child development</b>	Kindergarten readiness; play-based learning; social-emotional development; brain and language development; early literacy; math/science/technology activities for children
<b>Assessment/curriculum</b>	Child assessment; inclusive curriculum; project approach
<b>Classroom management</b>	Conscious Discipline; behavior strategies; family collaboration
<b>Children with disabilities</b>	Autism Spectrum Disorder; ADHD; inclusive classrooms
<b>Administrative</b>	Scheduling; marketing & advertising; tuition credit process and general information, recruitment; director-specific
<b>Certification</b>	ECT qualification; state level licensing requirements
<b>Trauma</b>	Trauma-informed care and classroom strategies
<b>Language/culture</b>	Spanish language immersion programs; cultural responsiveness; Bilingual CLASS <sup>®</sup> training
<b>Safety</b>	CPR/first aid; first aid procedures

Respondents from DPS preschools felt it would be helpful for DPP to coordinate trainings with DPS to avoid duplicate training topics and days. Many people also mentioned they were unsure if the trainings they attended were provided or funded by DPP. Some wished trainings could be offered to non-DPP teachers at their site. One person said, *“I think all of my teachers could*

*benefit from some of those trainings because their kids are going to eventually be in those pre-K programs. It would be nice to be able to spread the training.”*

### Quality Ratings

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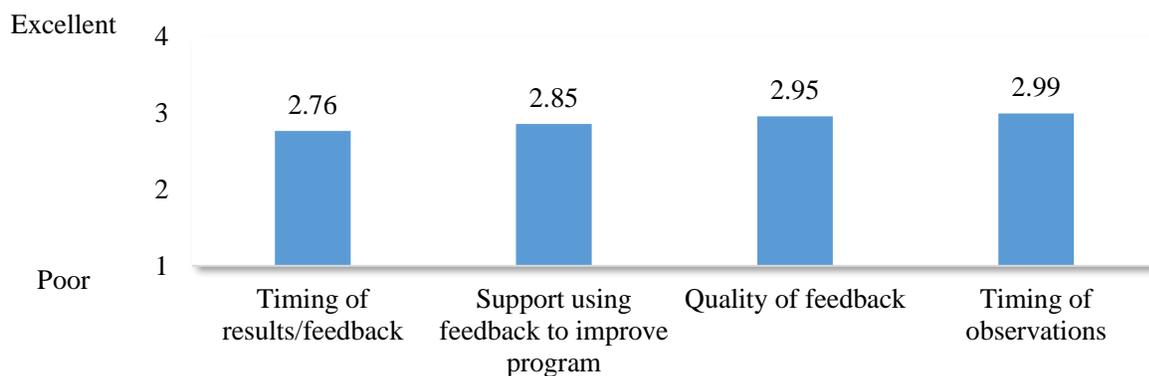
DPP preschools receive two main quality ratings: CLASS<sup>®</sup> and Colorado Shines. This section summarizes provider views on quality ratings. For a breakdown of Colorado Shines ratings for DPP sites, see Brief One in this series.

**CLASS<sup>®</sup>.** Most respondents reported having their most recent CLASS<sup>®</sup> observation during the 2017-2018 school year (63 percent), followed by 26 percent completing their most recent CLASS<sup>®</sup> in the previous school year (2016-2017). On a scale of *not at all familiar* = 1 to *very familiar* = 4, teachers rated their familiarity with the domains of Classroom Organization, Emotional Support, and Instructional Support highly ( $M = 3.33$ ,  $M = 3.31$ , and  $M = 3.20$ , respectively).

One respondent explained that the trainings provided by DPP around the CLASS<sup>®</sup> were helpful and expanded on their knowledge of the tool: *“There were some DPP trainings around the CLASS tools. Several teachers took that, which I think helped their understanding of the tool and also how they were evaluated and ways to improve the practice.”* Providers thought that outside observers offered an unbiased opinion of classroom quality. One person explained that the CLASS<sup>®</sup> tool impacted their teaching practice and their classrooms:

*“[The CLASS<sup>®</sup> observations] have been great for another set of eyes to be a very evaluative tool on our practice, teacher interactions, and then giving some good feedback on areas that we were not as strong ... We have meetings with our teaching teams, going back to that rating and having that very quantitative data to say this is what we found and these are areas to work on. It's also helped those rooms create goals around the areas for improvement.”*

**Figure 6.** Provider ratings of the CLASS<sup>®</sup> process ( $n = 142-149$ )



Survey participants generally rated all aspects of the rating process moderately well (Figure 6); however, some thought the timing of results and feedback could be improved. One person said, *“We got the scores last week, and there hasn't been a review set up yet, and I really think that could be sooner. Last year, when we got the scores and then met with them, three months had gone by. It was lost. It was just gone. I wonder if it's more beneficial if it's that same day, and if it's not that same day, it is within that same week.”*

Support using feedback was the second lowest-rated process for CLASS<sup>®</sup> support, and some providers mentioned the need for more explanation and specific next steps:

*“When I got the results, I wanted more substantial explanation as to what I could've done differently in that situation to improve that score, and even when I met after with the principal and a couple other people from admin, we weren't getting a good answer because it just wasn't there. Give some feedback and also next steps and maybe even like a resource behind it, ‘Check out this video,’ links to videos of teachers actually doing those components of CLASS<sup>®</sup>.”*

*“I focused on feedback, and it helped me understand what kind of activities or questions I can ask my students to really understand their thinking and reasoning.*

*For example, I would ask them more in-depth, open-ended questions. That gives me an insight of where the student was in their learning, whether I needed to go back and repeat something or give them another example to see whether they learned it or not. It was very beneficial.”*

-DPP Teacher

Providers from different programs had suggestions to improve the CLASS<sup>®</sup> process for their specific organization. Some DPS teachers discussed the different types of observations they receive and explained they would prefer CLASS<sup>®</sup> observations because they *“feel they're more in tune with what we're dealing with...with our kids at their age.”*

One teacher thought it would be helpful to connect a LEAP observer, a CLASS<sup>®</sup> observer, and the teacher to work as a team during coaching sessions. Another provider was interested in having an observer with Montessori experience to work effectively with their framework.

Providers thought longer observation windows and more than one observation may yield more accurate results. Also, most providers expressed interest in a yearly CLASS<sup>®</sup> rating. They mentioned how it would be easier to see improvement if they were rated more often. One provider explained, *“It would just give a chance for you to make improvements. You've got the whole year to make improvements,”* and another provider thought it would be helpful in that they *“could keep up with the information, because a lot changes every six months or every three months. I think it would help a whole lot [to have a rating yearly].”* There were a few providers who did not believe a yearly CLASS<sup>®</sup> rating would be beneficial. One provider thought it would *“be a waste of money,”* although they thought it may help teachers who consistently score lower ratings. Another provider thought a yearly rating would be too overwhelming, especially when there are other ratings that year. *“I'd rather stick with CLASS<sup>®</sup> one year and the quality rating the next year. I cannot do two-in-one. That's too overwhelming. It's too much.”*

Staff turnover is one of the most common challenges preschools experience. In the last school year, 26 percent of providers reported they experienced some type of staff turnover (consistent with a national early childhood learning turnover rate of 30 percent),<sup>1</sup> and some have seen the effects of turnover on the CLASS<sup>®</sup> rating. Interviewees explained that no matter how helpful the CLASS<sup>®</sup> process is, it is difficult to start from scratch every year if they do not maintain staff. One person said:

*“I do think that the classroom rating is important and that it helps but it really is hard on our coaches when they prepare us for it and then that person is gone. And now I have another set of new people. That’s the biggest problem. The classroom ratings are good but we need to sustain our staff first and not restarting over, training them again.”*

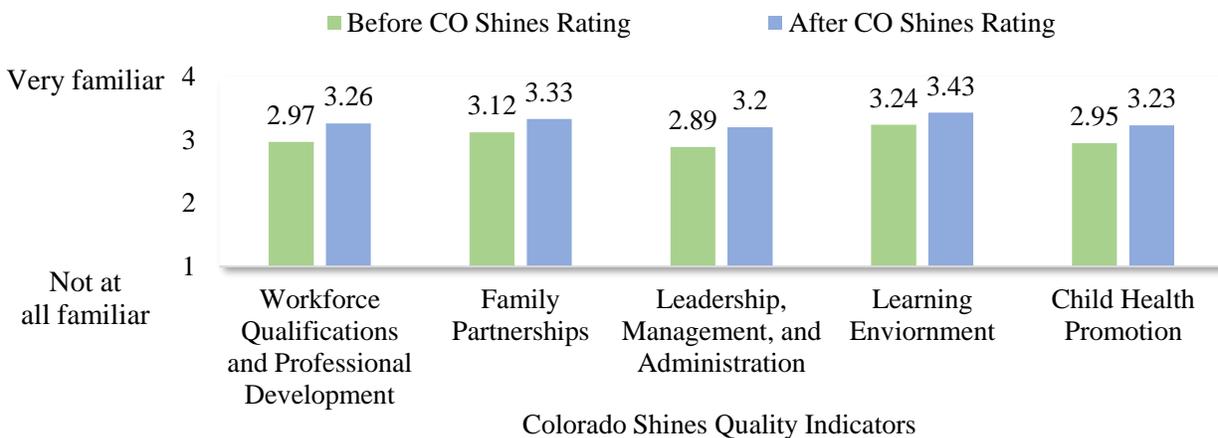
**Colorado Shines.** DPP requires preschool programs to participate in Colorado Shines, the state’s Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), and seek to obtain a high quality rating (Level 3 or above).

*“When I first started working in DPS and ECE, I was pretty shocked at the poor quality of ECE and that every teacher was doing their own thing. Now, because of CLASS and Colorado Shines, we’re held accountable. I definitely think it has improved the quality of ECE on a general scale, and for me, every couple years it makes me rethink my practice and hold myself accountable to providing the best preschool experience for the kids.”*

-DPP Provider

A large majority of providers reported their most recent quality rating was completed by Colorado Shines (85 percent) and half of providers said their Colorado Shines rating was completed in the last year. Paperwork typically took 1-5 hours with 65 percent of providers reporting it took five hours or less. According to Figure 7, providers became significantly more familiar with quality indicators after the Colorado Shines rating was completed at their site, with the most notable change in their familiarity of the Leadership, Management, and Administration quality indicator.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 7.** Familiarity with Colorado Shines quality indicators (n = 175-176)



<sup>1</sup> Whitebook, M., Phillips, D., & Howes, C. (2014). Worthy work, STILL unlivable wages: The early childhood workforce 25 years after the National Child Care Staffing Study. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley.

<sup>2</sup> Workforce:  $t(175) = 5.58, p < .01$ ; Family Partnerships:  $t(175) = 5.16, p < .01$ ; Leadership:  $t(175) = 6.47, p < .01$ ; Learning Environment:  $t(174) = 5.40, p < .01$ ; Child Health:  $t(174) = 5.53, p < .01$

DPP preschools reported on the accuracy of the quality indicator ratings based on their most recent Colorado Shines (on a scale of *very inaccurate* = 1 and *very accurate* = 4). Overall, they found the ratings of the quality indicators to be accurate, rating Workforce Qualifications and Professional Development and Family Partnerships ( $M = 3.40$ ) slightly higher than the other indicators ( $M = 3.33$ ).

One non-DPP preschool mentioned the Colorado Shines rating is accurate, but they still struggle to move up from Level 1 due to a variety of factors. They explained, “*we're stuck at a Level I, and I think we have a lot to offer. I think it's good to have outside evaluators come in and look at you and give you feedback on the quality of your program, but I think we struggle in that we are a very high-quality program, so I think it actually works against us...there are hoops sometimes. I think we struggle a little bit with that, and some of that's just our own attitudes, and some of it is not enough time in the day...*” Thus, although they find the rating accurate, additional support could push them to a level they believe more accurately represents their program.

### *Quality Improvement Plan*

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**Quality Improvement Plan.** Many DPP preschools reported having a quality improvement plan in place (64 percent). Of those, most mentioned their plan was developed during the 2016-2017 school year (35 percent) or 2017-2018 school year (46 percent). When rating the extent to which their quality improvement plan guides QI activities (based on a scale of *not at all* = 1 to *very much* = 4), most indicated that the quality improvement plan *moderately* drives their quality improvement activities ( $M = 3.05$ ). Preschools listed many other factors that affect their quality improvement activities including: family feedback, time, funding, teacher characteristics, teacher turnover, ratings, core values, children’s needs, and school-wide plans if part of a larger center.

### *Spending on Quality Improvement Resources*

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DPP offers funding for preschools to purchase materials, curriculum, and other resources. Based on secondary data records, 135 community preschools received QI funds, versus only 6 DPS sites (all of which are charter schools receiving QI funding directly; other DPS schools receive funding through central administration).

DPP provided a total of \$454,903 in QI funding in the 2017-2018 program year. Like the previous program year, the average amount of spending *per site* for community and DPS sites is comparable, but community sites used more of the *total* funds (Table 4). Also, as expected, most of the funds used by DPS were not provided to a specific DPS preschool, but rather were administered through a general DPS account.

In 2017-2018,  
DPP provided  
about  
\$454,903 in  
QI funding.

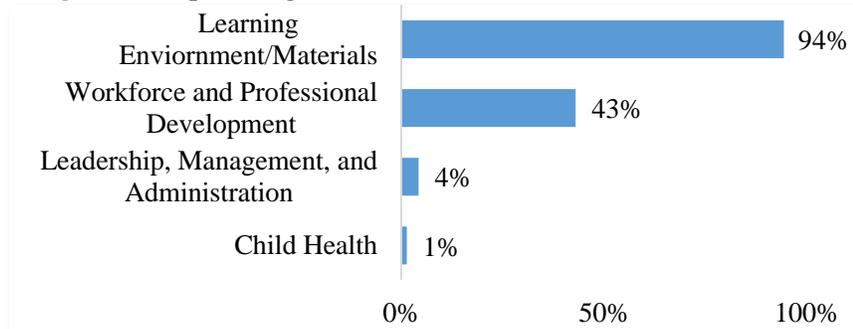
**Table 4.** DPP QI funds by preschool type

	Average spending per site (Range)	Total spending
<b>Community</b>	\$2,116 (\$175-\$6,847)	\$285,715
<b>DPS</b>	\$2,065 (\$1,590-\$2,823)	\$169,188*

\*The total for DPS includes funds used by the Denver Public Schools Early Ed Admin general account of \$156,800.00.

Almost all preschools that made purchases bought materials for the learning environment (94 percent). Nearly one-half of DPP preschools also put funds toward workforce and professional development (43 percent).

**Figure 8.** Spending areas (n = 141)



Preschools appreciated having funds to purchase curriculum and materials. One person explained, *“The last two years I purchased Conscious Discipline books to study, and this year we purchased the [Conscious Discipline] video series. All of our preschool parents, teachers, staff are coming to the book study. I think it has really helped our culture because I want there to be a culture of respect for parents and teachers and the children.”*

*“The funds help in terms of being able to send folks to conferences and bring in materials and things that have been really helpful to the classroom.”*

-DPP Provider

Several people mentioned that the funding for materials and equipment has made the biggest impact to improve the quality of their program. One person said, *“That’s probably made the biggest impact because you can’t always afford to send the teachers to the trainings, and where do you pull the money from to get the equipment that’s broken all the time?”* Even non-DPP preschools expressed interest in DPP services due to the materials they provide. A respondent from a non-DPP commented, *“I would say items for the classroom and even items...for the outdoor area would be something that excites me, and then of course anything that families can have assistance with as far as tuition. I think that’s very exciting.”*

Preschools were interested in funding related to infrastructure (playgrounds, buildings, etc.) that DPP does not address. They mentioned challenges with maintaining new building and equipment standards. One person wondered, *“When you’re in an older building, how do you maintain with the new standards? Your building codes change, your equipment gets old. Your fall zone needs repairing and those are enormous costs.”* However, please note that per city ordinance, DPP cannot provide funds for capital, such as building updates and outside playground equipment.

Although preschools found other sources of funding for playground equipment, such as the ECHO grant, many struggled obtaining this grant due to a lack of time and staffing to write the grant. One provider said, *“If they could help with the big steps like outside and the ECHO grant, that would be helpful,”* and another person added, *“I can't pay people to do a lot of my grant writing like other people can. I don't have that kind of money to do that, so I do the best I can with what I have.”*

Non-DPP preschools also mentioned the challenges that come with maintaining playground equipment and one person said, *“We're always writing grants because of playgrounds. They deteriorate, so that's one area that we're being very intentional about seeking grants for.”* Preschool staff stressed the importance of funding for infrastructure to maintain a safe environment. One provider explained, *“I want to revamp our playground. We are located on ... a really busy street. My next goal for our quality improvement is to do the playground and make it safer for parents dropping their children off and picking them up.”*

Overall, QI spending was related to number of coaching hours received and Colorado Shines ratings. There was a positive correlation between coaching hours and QI spending in that the more coaching the provider received, the more QI dollars were spent. As was the case for coaching and navigator contact, the lower the Colorado Shines rating, the more QI spending.<sup>7</sup>

#### More QI spending is related to...



Utilized coaching hours



Colorado Shines rating

Please note, the DPP framework is specifically designed to provide lower rated programs with more supports. Additional funding is offered to all programs, but lower rated programs (rating levels 1 and 2) receive more funding. These programs also cannot access one-half of their additional funding until they complete a specified number of coaching hours. Rating levels 3 and above have at least two-thirds additional funding available at the start of the year without having to meet the coaching requirement. Given the funding guidelines and incentives, the correlations that exist between funding and coaching and funding and ratings are logical, however, it is not assumed that these relationships are causal, and they may occur in either direction.

### *DPP Achievement Framework*

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DPP's achievement framework recognizes DPP preschools, teachers, and/or directors for building their professional knowledge and skills. By engaging in activities like obtaining credentials, attending trainings, and achieving benchmarks related to quality, eligible individuals and organizations earn monetary incentives. For information about achievement award amounts and eligibility, see the appendix.

**Total award amounts for community and DPS sites.** We analyzed the achievement awards earned by each preschool (including program- and individual-level awards) based on program records for the 2017-2018 school year. About one-half of DPP preschools (54 percent) received some form of achievement award. DPS preschools received slightly higher award amounts, on average, than community preschools, but this difference between groups was not statistically significant (Table 5).<sup>1</sup>

**Table 5. Achievement awards earned by DPP preschools: 2017-2018**

	Average awards per preschool (Range)	Total awards
Community ( <i>n</i> = 76)	\$1,054 (\$75 - \$6,300)	\$80,100
DPS ( <i>n</i> = 55)	\$1,386 (\$125 - \$3,630)	\$76,240

**Who participates in the DPP achievement framework?** Given that about one-half of DPP programs did not take part in the achievement framework, we compared the characteristics of those that did and did not participate. Results showed that participating programs tended to have higher quality ratings (based on CLASS<sup>®</sup> overall scores and domains and Colorado Shines overall scores) and received more DPP coaching.<sup>2</sup> This is to be expected, as some awards are based upon DPP coaching participation and CLASS<sup>®</sup> scores. However, it could also indicate that the achievement framework is largely reaching programs that already have high capacity.

**Programs that participated in the 2017-2018 achievement framework tended to...**

-  Have higher Colorado Shines ratings
-  Receive more DPP coaching
-  Have higher CLASS<sup>®</sup> scores

In 2017-2018, more than 400 teachers and directors received DPP achievement awards.

**Teacher and director awards.** In 2017-2018, 414 individuals received achievement awards.<sup>3</sup> This included 370 teachers, 39 directors, two family child care providers, and three people in both teacher and director roles. A total of 124 preschools had at least one person who received an award. Of those, 57 percent were community preschools, and 43 percent were DPS.

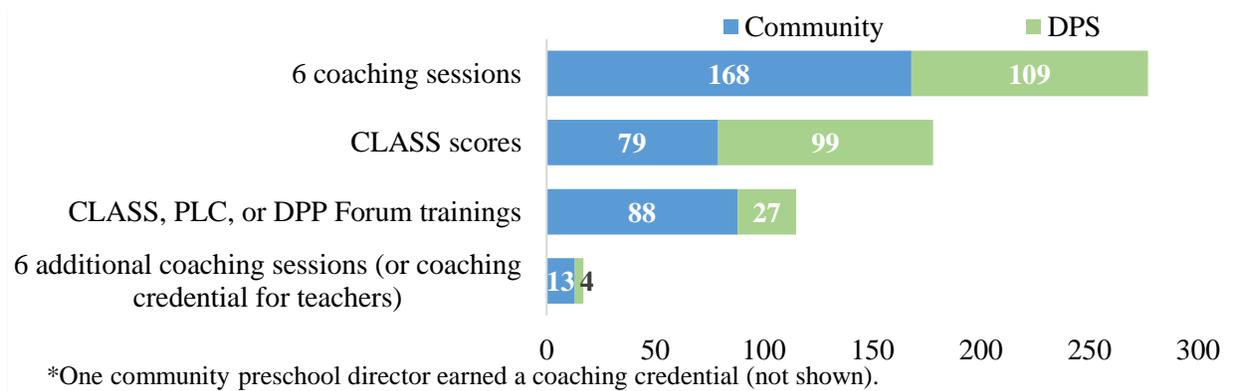
<sup>1</sup>  $t(129) = -1.89, p = .06$

<sup>2</sup> Colorado Shines:  $t(231.27) = -2.69, p = .01$ ; coaching hours:  $t(205) = -2.18, p = .03$ ; CLASS<sup>®</sup> overall score:  $t(229) = -5.18, p < .001$ ; CLASS<sup>®</sup> emotional support:  $t(155.05) = -4.25, p < .001$ ; CLASS<sup>®</sup> classroom organization:  $t(229) = -4.05, p < .001$ ; CLASS<sup>®</sup> instructional support:  $t(229) = -4.77, p < .001$ .

<sup>3</sup> The number of individuals is based on teacher/director IDs; for a small number of cases in which IDs were missing, teacher/director name and program name were used to identify unique individuals.

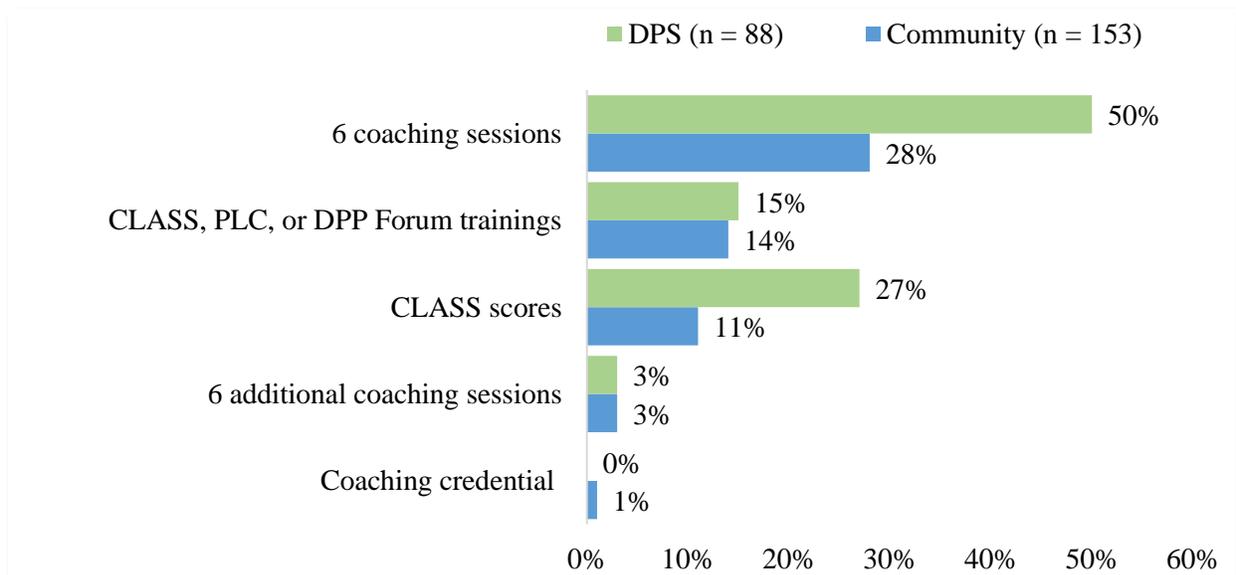
The most frequently earned individual-level award involved participating in six coaching sessions, which was followed by awards based on CLASS<sup>®</sup> scores (Figure 9). Both of these awards were distributed fairly evenly across staff from community and DPS preschools. Most awards for attending trainings went to community preschool staff (77%,  $n = 88$ ). Less than 20 people received awards for taking part in six *additional* coaching sessions.

**Figure 9.** Teacher and director achievement awards (number of awards earned by type)\*



**Program awards.** A total of 108 DPP preschools received at least one program-level achievement award, including 57 community preschools (centers and homes) and 51 DPS schools. As shown in Figure 10, the most commonly earned award was for the program completing an average of six coaching sessions per classroom. However, DPS preschools were much more likely to receive this award than were community preschools (50 percent versus 28 percent, respectively). Similarly, more DPS preschools received awards based on program-level CLASS<sup>®</sup> scores than did community preschools. Overall, rates of participation in additional coaching sessions or obtaining coaching credentials were low.

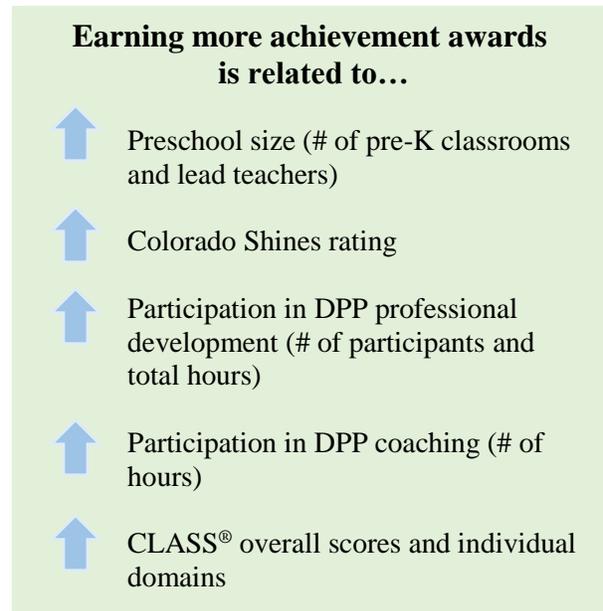
**Figure 10.** Program achievement award participation by preschool type ( $n = 243$ )



**What factors are associated with receiving larger achievement awards?** The total amount of achievement funds preschools received was significantly correlated with higher Colorado Shines and CLASS<sup>®</sup> ratings, as well as greater participation in DPP professional development and coaching.<sup>1</sup> Since achievement awards can be earned for taking part in DPP professional development, coaching, and based on CLASS<sup>®</sup> scores, it makes sense that that these would be related to higher award amounts.

Achievement award amounts were also significantly associated with larger preschool size. It is possible that larger preschools tend to earn larger awards because they employ more teachers who potentially could earn awards, and/or because these preschools have greater capacity to participate in the DPP achievement framework.

**Summary.** About one-half of DPP preschools took part in the DPP achievement framework during the 2017-2018 program year. It appears that participation in the achievement framework is associated with increased engagement in activities designed to improve preschool quality, such as coaching and professional development. However, it is not clear whether programs engage in these QI supports because of the achievement framework – or whether programs that already participate more in DPP’s QI resources tend to take part in the achievement awards. Future evaluation could explore reasons why many programs (particularly those with lower quality ratings) did not participate in the DPP achievement framework.



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<sup>1</sup> # pre-K classrooms,  $r = .21, p = .03$ ; # lead teachers,  $r = .24, p = .01$ ; Colorado Shines rating,  $r = .35, p < .001$ ; # training attendees,  $r = .51, p < .001$ ; # training hours,  $r = .48, p < .001$ ; # coaching hours,  $r = .25, p = .01$ ; CLASS<sup>®</sup> overall,  $r = .49, p < .001$ ; CLASS<sup>®</sup> emotional support,  $r = .40, p < .001$ ; CLASS<sup>®</sup> classroom organization,  $r = .39, p < .001$ ; CLASS<sup>®</sup> instructional support,  $r = .45, p < .001$ .

# Recommendations

**Coaching.** Preschools utilize a variety of DPP QI resources, including coaching, support preparing for CLASS<sup>®</sup> and QRIS ratings, and professional development, and rate these opportunities favorably. At the same time, there was wide variation in the frequency and dosage of coaching. Among respondents, monthly coaching was the most desirable frequency. In fact, there is general consensus that “higher dose” models of PD, which require ongoing exposure to material and repeated practice of skills, are most effective in supporting teachers.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, DPP should consider increasing the dosage of coaching, particularly for teachers who are interested in receiving more. An in-depth study of the coaching process, currently underway and led by The Implementation Group and the Butler Institute, is expected to provide greater insight into what is working well and possible areas of improvement within coaching.

**Rating support.** For preschools, CLASS<sup>®</sup> and Colorado Shines ratings are sources of both useful insight and stress. Staff appreciate the specialized coaching that goes into helping them prepare for ratings, but do not always feel that follow-up happens as quickly as it could. They also report insufficient feedback on ratings and ultimately do not always use their quality improvement plans to guide future QI strategies. DPP has an opportunity to use its position in the early learning community to facilitate more timely and relevant follow-up on ratings and insuring that QI plans are actively used to drive QI efforts at the site and classroom levels.

**Training opportunities.** Training records show a diversity of training options available to DPP programs. Trainings are typically offered throughout Denver on various days and times. We recommend DPP continue to offer various training types, locations, and times to meet the needs of working professionals. It is important to consider accessibility of training locations in terms of public transportation, parking, and safety. Increased online training options may be beneficial for providers who cannot attend training due to their staffing capacity. Providers generated various ideas for topics they would like to see covered in future professional development, such as social-emotional development, trauma-informed care, and bilingual CLASS<sup>®</sup> training. Also, some indicated a desire for more leveled training to meet the different needs of novice versus seasoned professionals. These recommendations should be reviewed compared against current offerings to inform future opportunities.

**Workforce compensation.** DPP preschools experience challenges that may impede their ability to engage in QI offerings and may ultimately be detrimental to the quality of their programs. The most commonly identified challenges involved turnover (e.g., new leadership, teacher turnover, and long staff vacancies). Given that the success of most QI offerings, such as professional development and coaching, are contingent on teachers staying in the classroom, DPP may want to consider ways to partner and promote increased compensation that will ultimately support staff retention. DPP has a unique bully pulpit in the community and a potential mechanism for piloting innovative compensation strategies that they may want to consider using to move the issue of workforce compensation forward with common partners and stakeholders.

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<sup>1</sup> Zaslow, M., Tout, K., Halle, T., Whittaker, J. V., & Lavelle, B. (2010). Toward the Identification of Features of Effective Professional Development for Early Childhood Educators. Literature Review. Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, US Department of Education.

# Appendix

Table A1. Survey Respondent Demographics

	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Type of Preschool</b>	204	Home-based: 3.8% Center-based: 92.6% Other: 3.9%
<b>Job Title</b>	207	Program owner of multiple preschool sites: 1.0% Site director/principal: 55.1% Lead teacher: 31.9% Other: 0.5% Owner and Teacher: 4.3% Other Leadership/Administrator: 4.3% Coordinator (Education, Admissions): 2.9%
<b>Years in Current Position</b>	207	Less than 1 year: 10.1% 1 to less than 3 years: 18.8% 3 to less than 5 years: 17.4% 5 to less than 10 years: 22.2% 10 or more years: 31.4%
<b>Years in ECE Field</b>	207	1 to less than 3 years: 2.4% 3 to less than 5 years: 6.8% 5 to less than 10 years: 15.0% 10 or more years: 75.8%
	<i>N</i>	Average per classroom (Range)
<b>Children in their last year before kindergarten</b>	207	29.89 (1 – 250)
<b>Classrooms for children in last year before kindergarten</b>	206	2.59 (1 – 18)
<b>Lead teachers for children in last year before kindergarten</b>	207	2.86 (0 – 20)
<b>Assistant teachers/paraprofessionals for children in last year before kindergarten</b>	205	2.95 (0 – 20)



## 2017-2018 DPP Teacher Achievement Awards

(Effective for Achievements Earned September 2017 – August 2018)

The Denver Preschool Program recognizes the time and effort it takes to build early childhood professional knowledge and skills. The DPP Teacher Achievement Awards detail the achievements critical to meeting DPP's core values of intentional teaching, highly effective teachers, and positive teacher-child interactions as well as the awards a lead teacher or assistant teacher in a DPP classroom can earn for completing each one.

### Eligibility Requirements:

- Teacher must work at a DPP Program located in Denver County and be a lead or assistant teacher exclusively assigned to a classroom with DPP-eligible children (children that live in the City and County of Denver and are in their final year of preschool before kindergarten)

Achievement	Award	Verification	Frequency Teacher Can Earn
<b>Coaching:</b> Teacher participates in six DPP coaching sessions	\$125	DPP will verify from coaching logs	Once per school year
<b>Coaching:</b> Teacher participates in six additional DPP coaching sessions or earns Colorado Coaching Credential: <a href="http://cocoaches.net/CoachingCredential.html">http://cocoaches.net/CoachingCredential.html</a>	\$150	DPP will verify from coaching logs or the copy of the coaching credential	Once per school year
<b>CLASS®, PLC or DPP Forum Trainings:</b> Teacher attends at least three sessions in a DPP-funded Good to Great (Pre-K CLASS®) module training series, four DPP Professional Learning Community (PLC) trainings, or four DPP Forum trainings during the school year	\$120	DPP will verify from the training logs and director confirmation the teacher works in a classroom with DPP children	Once per school year
<b>CLASS®:</b> Classroom achieves average Pre-K CLASS® Observation scores of at least 6.0 in Emotional Support, 6.0 in Classroom Organization and 3.0 in Instructional Support during the school year (measured by scores received during Classroom's official DPP Pre-K CLASS® Observation)	\$200	DPP will verify scores directly from the DPP Pre-K CLASS® Observation report.	Once per school year
<b>Total Maximum Teacher Award per Calendar Year</b>	<b>\$595</b>		<b>To be provided via a personal check</b>

**Timeline for receiving your check:** DPP will recognize your achievement as quickly as possible once we receive the completed Payment Form and verify the achievement. DPP will review data and mail checks on a monthly basis, but it could take up to 60 days to review all documentation.

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## 2017-2018 DPP Director Achievement Awards (Effective for Achievements Earned September 2017 – August 2018)

The Denver Preschool Program recognizes the time and effort it takes to build early childhood professional knowledge and skills. The Director Achievement Awards detail the achievements critical to meeting DPP's core values of intentional teaching, highly effective teachers, and positive teacher-child interactions as well as the awards a lead director or assistant director of a DPP Program can earn for completing each one.

**Eligibility Requirements:** Director must work at a DPP Program located in Denver County.

Achievement	Award	Verification	Frequency Director Can Earn
<b>Coaching in Classrooms:</b> Director's program participates in an average of six DPP coaching sessions per DPP classroom	\$75	DPP will verify from coaching logs	Once per school year
<b>Coaching in Classrooms:</b> Director's program participates in an average of six additional DPP coaching sessions per DPP classroom	\$75	DPP will verify from coaching logs	Once per school year
<b>CLASS® PLC or DPP Forum Trainings:</b> Director attends at least three sessions in a DPP-funded Good to Great (Pre-K CLASS®) module training series, four DPP Professional Learning Community (PLC) trainings, or four DPP Forum trainings during the school year	\$100	DPP will verify from the training logs	Once per school year
<b>Colorado Coaching Credential:</b> Director earns Colorado EC Coaching Credential: <a href="http://cocoaches.net/CoachingCredential.html">http://cocoaches.net/CoachingCredential.html</a>	\$200	DPP will verify from the copy of the coaching credential	Once per school year
<b>CLASS®:</b> Program achieves average Pre-K CLASS® Observation scores of at least 6.0 in Emotional Support, 6.0 in Classroom Organization and 3.0 in Instructional Support during the school year (measured by scores received during Classroom's official DPP Pre-K CLASS® Observation)	\$125	DPP will verify scores directly from the DPP Pre-K CLASS® Observation report.	Once per school year
<b>Total Maximum Director Award per Calendar Year</b>	<b>\$575</b>		<b>To be provided via a personal check**</b>

**Timeline for receiving your check:** DPP will recognize your achievement as quickly as possible once we receive the completed Payment Form and verify the achievement. DPP will review data and mail checks on a monthly basis, but it could take up to 60 days after the month when you completed your achievement to receive your check.

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## 2017-2018 DPP Program Achievement Awards – Child Care Centers (Effective for Achievements Earned September 2017 – August 2018)

The Achievement Awards detail the achievements critical to meeting DPP’s core values of intentional teaching, highly effective teachers, and positive teacher-child interactions as well as the awards a DPP Preschool/Child Care Center can earn for completing each one.

**Eligibility Requirements:** Preschool must be a DPP Program located in Denver County.

Achievement	Award	Verification	Frequency Program Can Earn
<b><u>Coaching in Classrooms:</u></b> Program participates in an average of six DPP coaching sessions per preschool classroom	\$250	DPP will verify from coaching logs	Once per school year
<b><u>Coaching in Classrooms:</u></b> Program participates in an average of six additional DPP coaching sessions per preschool classroom	\$250	DPP will verify from coaching logs	Once per school year
<b><u>Director Earns Colorado Coaching Credential:</u></b> <a href="http://cocoaches.net/CoachingCredential.html">http://cocoaches.net/CoachingCredential.html</a>	\$250	Copy of credential	Maximum of one award per program per school year
<b><u>DPP Classroom Teacher Earns Colorado Coaching Credential:</u></b> <a href="http://cocoaches.net/CoachingCredential.html">http://cocoaches.net/CoachingCredential.html</a>	\$250	Copy of credential and verification that teacher works in classroom with DPP children	Maximum of one award per program per school year
<b><u>Training Participation:</u></b> DPP classroom teacher or director attends <u>three</u> sessions in a DPP-funded Good to Great (Pre-K CLASS®) module training series, <u>four</u> Professional Learning Community trainings <b>or</b> four DPP Forum trainings during the school year	\$200	DPP will verify from training logs	Maximum of one award per program per school year
<b><u>CLASS®:</u></b> Program achieves average Pre-K CLASS® Observation scores of at least 6.0 in Emotional Support, 6.0 in Classroom Organization and 3.0 in Instructional Support in your DPP classroom(s) (measured by scores received during Program’s official DPP Pre-K CLASS® Observations)	\$1,000	DPP will verify directly from the DPP Pre-K CLASS® Observation report	Once per school year
<b>Total Maximum Program Achievement Award per Calendar Year</b>	<b>\$2,200</b>		<b>Paid via check</b>