



Turn THE PAGE...

2019 Report to the Community

Dear Friends of the Denver Preschool Program,

As we near the end of our 13th school year, we believe more than ever in the power and importance of early childhood education. Research has proven time and again that high-quality early childhood education lays the foundation for a lifetime of success for our youngest learners, and we've had the honor of building on this principle. The Denver Preschool Program has supported more than 55,000 children who have completed preschool and moved on to elementary school and beyond. In fact, our first group of students will soon be seniors in high school! We are so excited to see the bright futures that await them.

The success of those students is thanks to you — the residents of the City and County of Denver who prioritize and value early childhood education in our communities. Thank you for your continued support.

Though we're grateful for the opportunity this annual report provides to share with you our past successes, we must also acknowledge that it is being published as our city, state, nation and world grapple with the uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic. One thing we have already learned with certainty is that, while we have passionately and diligently worked to ensure the access and affordability of high-quality preschool to Denver's youngest learners, there is still much work to be done to bolster the health and strength of the early childhood education ecosystem. We are working valiantly with many partners, both locally and statewide, to support our families and preschool providers during these trying times.

Having acknowledged the realities of today, we are proud of the fact that 2019 was a monumental year for the Denver Preschool Program — a year for turning many pages in the life of our organization. Not only did we have the privilege of making quality preschool more affordable for over 4,400 Denver children and their families with more than \$15 million in tuition support, we also welcomed our new president and CEO, Elsa Holguín, in July. In acknowledgment of Denver's high cost of living and to extend even more support to families, we increased the monthly tuition support we offer to Denver families by 3.5% beginning in January of 2019. This built upon the 10.7% increase we instituted the year prior for the 2018–2019 school year. In thinking deeply about how to further support Denver families, we also created and launched a pilot scholarship program to benefit our families with the greatest financial need. And because the best predictor for school readiness is a strong relationship between students and their teachers, we invested nearly \$3 million in preschool quality improvement to support our providers and their programs.

Our promise to our community is to continue to push boundaries wherever possible in order to deepen our overall impact in the community so that, together, we can fulfill our vision of every Denver child entering kindergarten ready to reach their full potential. We're proud of our accomplishments thus far and are looking enthusiastically toward the future. We invite you to join us as we turn to a new page in the history of the Denver Preschool Program.



Elsa S. Holguín

Elsa Holguín
President & CEO



Zach Hochstadt

Zach Hochstadt
Chair, Board of Directors



DPP staff, from top left: Chris Miller, Tricia Nelson, Marina Mendoza, Michelle Blubaugh, Ellen Braun, Elsa Holguín

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

With Elsa Holguín at the Helm

Following a robust, national search led by the Denver Preschool Program Board of Directors, Elsa Holguín became our President and CEO in July 2019. Elsa had the unanimous support of both the search committee and the Board, and our team is thrilled to begin this new chapter in the life of the Denver Preschool Program under Elsa's leadership.

Elsa is a pillar of our state's early childhood education community, and her early childhood experience runs deep. She came to the Denver Preschool Program from Rose Community Foundation, where she served as the senior program officer for Child & Family Development for 21 years. During that time, she oversaw more than \$50 million in early childhood development grants, positioning the foundation as a leader in this area. She even played a pivotal role in the initiative that eventually became the Denver Preschool Program during her time there.

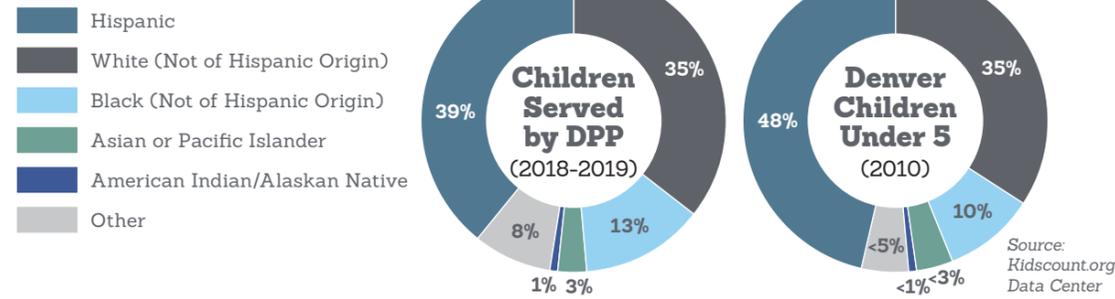
Elsa is also a founding member and the current co-chair of Colorado's Early Childhood Leadership Commission. She played an instrumental role in the creation of Colorado's Office of Early Childhood, the Denver Opportunity Youth Investment Initiative, the Latino Community Foundation of Colorado and the Skills to Compete Coalition, and she was a founding member of Early Milestones Colorado. She is a member of The Children's Funding Project Policy Advisory Group and serves on the boards of Borealis Philanthropy and Tools of the Mind.

Elsa has already made a strong impact on the work of the Denver Preschool Program, and the organization looks forward to seeing that impact shape the city and state's early childhood landscape in the years to come.

Who We Serve

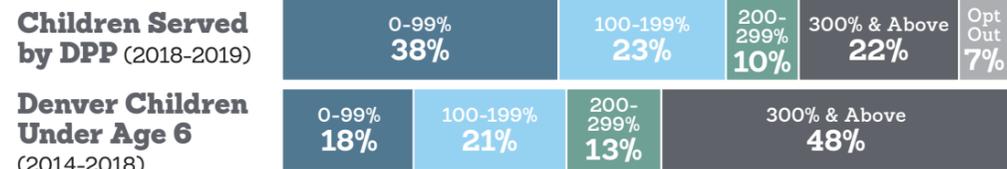
The Denver Preschool Program is a truly universal program — created to make high-quality preschool accessible to Denver children of all income levels and from every corner of the city. See below to learn more about the breadth and depth of our reach during the 2018-2019 school year.

By Demographic

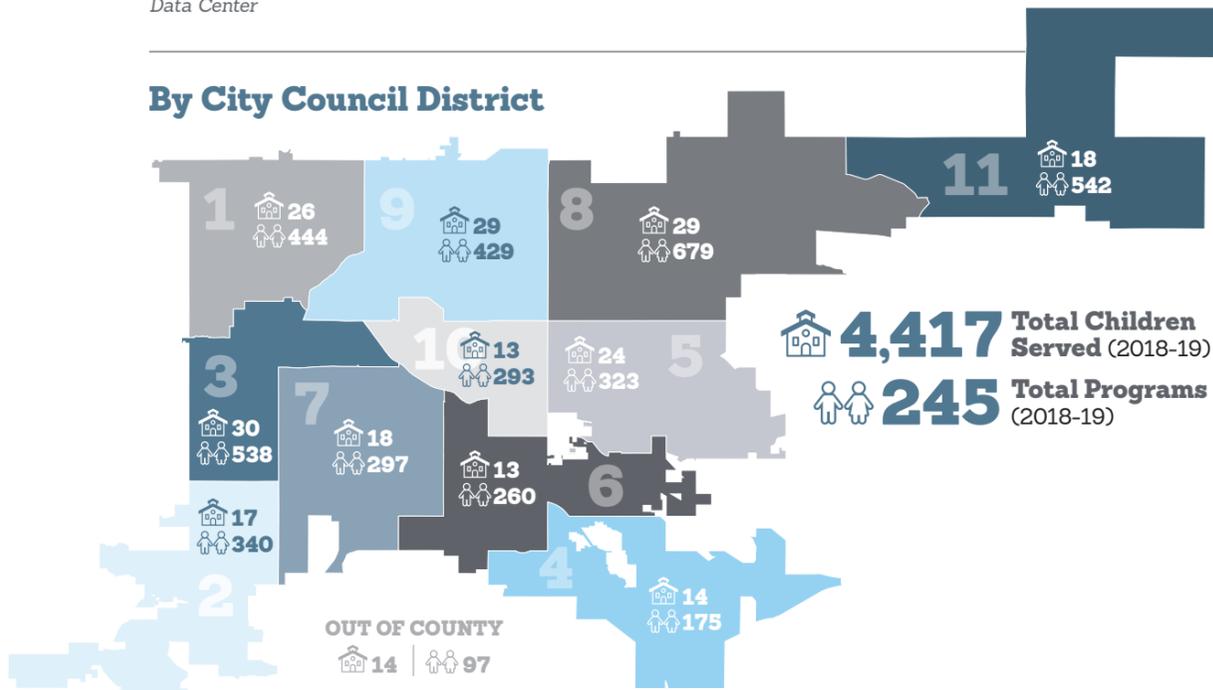


By Income Tier Based on Federal Poverty Level (FPL) Percentages

In 2017, a family of four at 100% of the FPL earned less than \$24,420 per year.



By City Council District



Making New Pages Possible in the Lives of the Families We Serve



Each school year, the Denver Preschool Program is honored to be able to serve thousands of families across the City and County of Denver. Each of these family's stories is unique, and we are helping all of them turn new pages in their lives and the lives of their children. They are all establishing a solid educational foundation for their children, one that will help them to build bright, vibrant futures. This collective impact is of great importance to us, and we also love knowing the individual families that make up that big picture, families like the Ridleys.

Mason Ridley, Jr. attended preschool at First Steps at Monarch Montessori, one of the Denver Preschool Program's participating providers. Like many children, Mason had spent the first four years of his life at home with his mom, Whitney. And while Whitney cherished that time, she was also running a business from home and knew that Mason could greatly benefit from both the academic and social aspects of preschool before starting kindergarten.

The Ridleys looked at eight to 10 different preschool options and determined that Monarch Montessori best fit the needs of their son and their family. However, the high cost of preschool was a real hurdle for them, even with two incomes, and between Whitney's business and her husband's full-time job, their family didn't qualify for need-based tuition support programs.

Then, Whitney learned about the Denver Preschool Program from a neighbor. Because the Denver Preschool Program offers tuition support to all Denver families regardless of income, the Ridley family was able to apply for — and receive — the tuition support that allowed them to send their son to the preschool of their choice.

"Mason truly blossomed in preschool," said Whitney. "His siblings are all much older, so he is, in effect, an only child. We were thrilled to see him overcome his initial separation anxiety and witness his amazing growth in terms of interacting with other children, sharing, following directions and more. I always sing the praises of the Denver Preschool Program to any parent I meet with a young child. The program's universal tuition support is what allowed us to give this gift of preschool to our son."

DPP WRITES NEW PAGES ON BEST PRACTICES

Thanks to Recommendations from City Audit

The Denver Preschool Program is committed to continuous improvement, which benefits both our preschool providers and our young learners. An important step in our continuous improvement path took place in 2019 when we had the opportunity to participate in an audit undertaken by the Audit Services Division of the City and County of Denver. The goal of the Audit Services Division is to strengthen governance, improve performance, enhance efficiency, increase revenues, reduce costs and risks, and improve the quality of services for Denver residents and businesses.

While meeting and exceeding the vast majority of the measures reviewed by the audit, the Denver Preschool Program also received constructive feedback from the Audit Services Division on best practices among nonprofit organizations that helped us improve how the staff and board of directors function – from formalizing already established operating reserve and investment policies to instituting new board policies.

The Denver Preschool Program's reserves were a subject of discussion with the Audit Services Division, who questioned whether a program like ours should carry a reserve. With the economic instability brought on by COVID-19, the wisdom of earlier decisions has borne out. Denver Preschool Program is in a strong position today – despite the economic impacts of COVID-19 – to carry forth our mission because we are able to lean on our financial reserves. We are proud to be in a position to ensure that market volatility does not undermine our ability to serve the Denver community and fulfill future commitments.

We are grateful to have had the opportunity to work with the city auditor's team. We value the lessons we took away from the experience, and we deeply appreciate the Auditor's closing comments: "You certainly were a pleasure to work with, you participated and cooperated. I want to wish you continued success with the program. It's an important program for Denver."





**Gaining New Insights as
We Turn the Page on How We
EVALUATE
AND SHARE OUR
OUTCOMES**

Ten years of data continuously demonstrates that the Denver Preschool Program has a positive and measurable impact on kindergarten readiness. When a child participates in one of our programs, they are far more likely to succeed in kindergarten. When it comes to providing Denver's children with the best possible early childhood education, we adapt, learn and innovate. When we study the short- and long-term impacts of our programs, we can leverage what we learn to make changes that strengthen those programs and make them more impactful. This philosophy of grounding our organizational goals in data holds true for how we approach our research and evaluation processes as well.

Last year, we focused on improving our approach to our evaluation process. We built in additional layers of evaluation and updated our child outcomes research design so that we could better demonstrate cause and effect between high-quality preschool and kindergarten readiness. We still utilized our existing study design to measure our preschoolers' progress from the beginning to the end of their pre-kindergarten year, but also added a new layer to compare academic and social-emotional growth of newly enrolled Denver Preschool Program children with our children who have completed preschool and are moving on to kindergarten.

In the 2018-2019 program year, 234 new Denver Preschool Program students participated in our child outcomes study.

We are excited to report that our research validates that the Denver Preschool Program makes a difference.

- On average, preschool students enrolled in a Denver Preschool Program preschool developed at or above expectations over the course of the 2018-2019 school year.
- Denver Preschool Program students showed statistically significant increases from fall to spring in their standard scores on vocabulary assessments administered in English and math assessments administered in Spanish, meaning students improved at a faster rate in these areas than we'd generally expect with typical development.
- They also demonstrated statistically significant improvements in teacher ratings of social-emotional development (including self-regulation, initiative and attachment) over the course of the year.

When comparing the two groups of students involved in our new layer of research, we were also thrilled to find that the impact of attending a Denver Preschool Program preschool was statistically significant, with the largest benefits seen in early literacy and math.

Better Teaching Leads to BETTER OUTCOMES

We know without a doubt that high-quality preschool helps set children on the path to a lifetime of success. It lays the critical groundwork for kindergarten readiness, and children who attend preschool are less likely to need special education services or be held back a grade level. They are more likely to graduate high school and enjoy successful careers. We also know that one of the keys that unlocks all of these benefits is a strong relationship between students and their teachers. Our goal, therefore, is to make sure our children have the very best possible teachers as they begin their educational journeys.

Our Quality Improvement Core Values

HIGHLY-EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

We believe in attracting and retaining highly-effective teachers and directors by offering professional development and training opportunities to advance their skills, experience and careers in early childhood education

INTENTIONAL TEACHING

We believe curriculum and instruction are essential for children's growth and learning which is informed by the use of ongoing authentic child assessments and observations

POSITIVE TEACHER-CHILD INTERACTIONS

We believe that promoting positive teacher-child interactions increases child outcomes and school readiness

This is one reason the Denver Preschool Program invests so heavily in quality improvement initiatives for our partner providers — and why so much of our quality improvement funding (close to \$3 million in the 2018-2019 program year) goes toward investments in professional development, including targeted coaching for directors and teachers and scholarships for completing early childhood education college coursework.

Embodying these values, the Denver Preschool Program hosts an annual Preschool Forum to provide a unique learning opportunity for our teachers and directors. We hosted our 4th Preschool Forum in 2018-2019; however, this time we added a twist. For the first time in the Forum's history, we offered a college coursework component for participants seeking either undergraduate or graduate degree credits. Life is busy for our preschool providers, and this was one more way we could help them reach their goals of being the best possible teachers for their students in a way that fit within their demanding schedules.

We partnered with the University of Colorado at Denver to design the curriculum and corresponding assignments, and we worked with our existing team of coaches to help participants meet the additional requirements. Of the approximately 100 Forum participants, 20 of them took advantage of this unique opportunity and completed the assignments and coaching necessary to earn credits toward their degrees.

The program was so well-received that our team presented our learnings at the BUILD Initiative's annual Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) National Meeting in New Orleans in June 2019.



“THE NEW FORMAT OF DPP’S FORUM SERIES PROVIDED AN AMAZING GROWTH OPPORTUNITY. The series offered not only professional development but also [optional] college coursework with assignments specific to the needs of early childhood today. I was able to attend the professional development sessions and then work with a coach to help construct, implement and reflect upon lesson designs and delivery practices.”

SAVANNAH VALDEZ
St. Rose of Lima Catholic Academy

In 2019, we also built on the foundational success of many of our other quality initiatives and revised and/or expanded them to make an even greater impact.

We recognize that teaching our city’s youngest learners can be challenging work. As referenced at left, our teachers and directors are busy professionals with limited time, and the added burden of pursuing professional coaching or training can often feel overwhelming.

To support their participation in these professional development activities, we increased the incentives offered to them to participate and excel in these opportunities:

DURING THE 2018-2019 SCHOOL YEAR

Nearly **500** different teachers & directors collectively earned
\$245,500
in individual achievement awards paid by the Denver Preschool Program

Participating preschools collectively earned more than
\$170,000
in program achievement awards

We significantly increased the number of coaching hours we funded (**more than 5,400 during the year**), so that more of our early childhood education professionals were able to benefit.

At the end of the day, our city’s youngest learners thrive the most educationally when they are nurtured by highly qualified, passionate teachers. **We are honored to be able to work with and support our dedicated teachers and professionals who pour so much of themselves into caring for Denver’s children.**

Turning a Page in the History of Our Preschool Showcase:

SHOWCASING PRESCHOOLS AT THE ZOO



The Preschool Showcase

We hosted our 7th Preschool Showcase in 2019 at a new location, the Denver Zoo. It was a hit with both families and schools alike, and we saw our highest Showcase turnout in recent years with more than 50 preschools participating and 500 attendees. The strong attendance demonstrated that the zoo was an ideal partner and venue for this event — prioritizing family time with the convenient opportunity to learn more about our programs and enrollment.

This annual event provides families of preschoolers with a fun and free way to explore the preschool options and tuition support available to them through the Denver Preschool Program. Because we met our families in a location that appeals to their children, the new venue provided an entertaining backdrop for everyone involved. Families were able to meet and ask questions of preschool staff and directors from dozens of local preschools and find out how they could lower their monthly tuition payments.

The Showcase gave our preschool providers the opportunity to highlight their preschools for prospective families, while networking with other early childhood programs.

Gap Scholarship Pilot Launch Means a New Page in **HOW DPP MEETS THE NEEDS OF OUR COMMUNITY**

Though our existing tuition credit model has proven effective over the years, DPP took an innovative step in 2019 to help make preschool even more affordable. In 2019, an internal taskforce developed a gap scholarship program that reaches families living at or below 300% of the federal poverty line.

The scholarship funds are intended to ensure that these families spend no more than 12% of their income on preschool tuition. (That level has since been dropped to 7%.) Given the fact that the cost of living in Denver is higher than many other places in our state and many of the families we serve face significant financial challenges, Denver Preschool Program families with the greatest financial need in community-based preschools at times spend upwards of 40% of their income on preschool tuition.

The Gap Scholarship pilot program was approved for up to three years so that we can accurately gauge both the long-term feasibility of such a program and how such funding can bolster our targeted families' ability to afford and attend a quality preschool.

"The Denver Preschool Program is committed to supporting affordable education for preschoolers in the City and County of Denver. Following a 10-month exploration process, we found that even with Denver Preschool Program tuition credits, preschool can still be financially out of reach for many families," said Ellen Braun, COO of the Denver Preschool Program. "Our vision with this pilot program is to try to find a new way to close that gap and make sure every single one of Denver's youngest learners is able to reap the countless benefits of preschool."



How Millions of Dollars Supported THOUSANDS OF DENVER'S CHILDREN

As diligent stewards of your taxpayer dollars, we strive to make sure that we allocate funds in the most thoughtful way possible, to the greatest benefit of Denver's children and families. See below for a breakdown of how we are putting your tax dollars to work to ensure our city's children enter kindergarten ready to reach their highest potential.

Provided
\$15.1 MILLION
in tuition credits in Sept. 2018-Aug. 2019

Typical Monthly Credit:
\$691*
*Tier 1, full-day, quality 4 preschool

Provided
\$2.95 MILLION
in quality improvement funds in Sept. 2018-Aug. 2019

4,417
Children
received tuition credits

Approximately
250 quality-rated
preschool providers in Denver



Our Expenditures

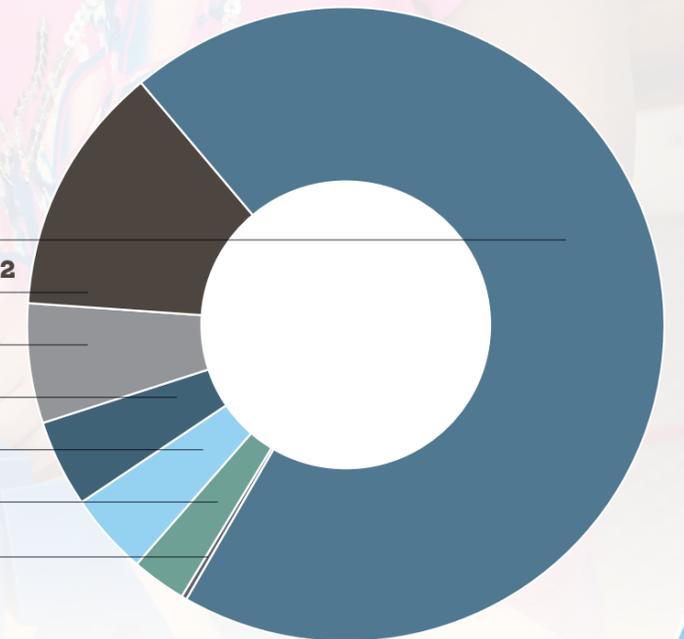
Tuition credits from DPP are available to every Denver family—regardless of income or neighborhood—who has a child enrolled in a participating program in their last year of preschool before kindergarten.

2019 Audited Financials

The following illustrates how we allocated tax dollars during the 2019 calendar year to expand access to high-quality preschool programs in Denver.

- 69.6% TUITION: \$17,797,770**
- 12.9% QUALITY IMPROVEMENT: \$3,303,352**
- 6.0% OUTREACH: \$1,538,417**
- 4.4% EVALUATION: \$1,117,780**
- 4.2% ADMINISTRATIVE: \$1,072,831**
- 2.7% PARENT ELIGIBILITY: \$701,391**
- 0.2% CONTRACT SERVICES: \$49,667**

Totals: \$25,581,208





LOOKING FORWARD

A New Chapter in the History of Early Childhood Education



We ended the 2018-2019 program year with a clear understanding that change was on the horizon for early childhood education — due in large part to factors like the ever-changing demographics and rising birth rates in Denver, and the exciting prospect of expanded state funding for preschool throughout Colorado. As we transitioned into a new program year, we envisioned four key priority focus areas for the Denver Preschool Program in 2020: early childhood workforce development, early childhood mental health, extending tuition support to three-year-olds, and widening the reach of our new Gap Scholarship.

This annual report is being published during an unprecedented time in our history, and this pandemic has disrupted almost every aspect of life as we know it. People fear for their health, the health of their loved ones, their job security and our global economy as we work remotely and practice social distancing while trying to homeschool our children and lend a hand to those in need. One clear learning that is already apparent is how crucial early childhood education is to the fabric of our economy. It is important to today's economy because parents and caregivers need a safe place for their children to learn and play while they go to work each day. It is important to tomorrow's economy because we know education is key to break the cycle of multigenerational poverty, and research has proven that children who attend high-quality preschool programs are more likely to graduate high school, attend college and have successful careers, and research has proven that children who attend high-quality preschool programs are more likely to graduate high school, attend college and have successful careers.

So, while we are unwavering in our ultimate purpose of helping Denver families find and pay for quality preschool, we are also looking closely at our long- and short-term goals to determine if and how they need to shift.

We're proud to have served so many Denver children and providers during our 2018-2019 program year, and we thank our board, staff and partners for the hard work that allowed us to achieve the accomplishments noted in this report together. We're hopeful that an increased understanding of the critical role of early childhood education will be one of the "silver linings" from this moment in history. We're grateful to our board for having the thoughtful foresight to maintain healthy financial reserves that will allow us to weather the ongoing challenges presented by COVID-19 in 2020 and beyond. While the specifics of some of our plans may change, our core purpose will not. Denver families can rest assured that we will be here, continuing to strive to ensure that Denver's youngest learners receive the best possible educational foundation.

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