

12/6/2016



# STRATEGIC PLAN

2017-2021

**This plan details Denver Preschool Program's strategic direction for 2017-2021**, including strategic orientation, implementation principles, priority goals, and primary methods for meeting those goals. In addition, this narrative report captures critical issues and trends that impact Denver Preschool Program's future, shares details about the extensive planning process in which DPP stakeholders engaged, and provides useful tracking and implementation tools to support putting the plan into action.



**APPROVED BY:** Denver Preschool Program Board of Directors  
**ON DATE:** December 14, 2016

**UPDATE STATUS (AMENDMENT #):**  
**ON DATE:**

**FUNDING  
QUALITY  
PRESCHOOL  
FOR DENVER**

## **Acknowledgements**

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Denver Preschool Program Board and Staff would like to recognize the many contributions of our Denver community and national peers to the formation of this five- year strategic plan. More than 40 community leaders, funders, founders, peer program directors, contractors, providers and partners contributed their expertise and insights regarding DPP's strategic direction via in-depth interviews, along with many others via survey methods. We are grateful for the ongoing support we receive from tax payers in this community and are committed to making high quality preschool possible for all of Denver's children.

We would also like to acknowledge the efforts of our strategic planning partner, Mission Spark, for their guidance, facilitation, project management and process development over the duration of this effort.

VISION

EVERY CHILD IN DENVER ENTERS KINDERGARTEN  
READY TO REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL



STRATEGIC  
PRIORITIES

FAMILIES

Reach and engage families of young children through innovation and partnership, to promote early learning.

PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS

Improve the quality of early childhood education programs in Denver.

4-YEAR-OLDS

Increase the number of Denver 4-year-olds participating in preschool.

DPP BOARD AND STAFF

Strengthen and enhance DPP's internal operations and governance to improve delivery of services and sustain operational needs.

POLICY/STRATEGY LEADERS

Champion, advocate, and partner to advance early childhood education policies and strategies, and respond to community needs that help our youngest learners succeed.

PRESCHOOL TEACHERS

Support early childhood education professionals to ensure they are well-qualified, effective, and valued in supporting and teaching our youngest learners.

MISSION

Denver Preschool Program helps Denver fulfill its commitment to its youngest learners. We champion, fund and increase access to quality preschool across our community.

VALUES

ACCESS FOR ALL

Every Denver 4-year-old has access to the benefits of quality preschool.

INFORMED CHOICE

Parents and caregivers are well-informed about ECE options and can make the best choice for their child.

HIGH QUALITY

Pursuing excellence in all aspects of DPP's work increases positive outcomes for Denver's children

INTENTIONAL INCLUSIVITY

DPP overcomes barriers to ensure equitable opportunity for all children to participate in ECE.

LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

DPP champions early childhood education, ensuring the community realizes the benefits of its investment in young children.

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# Introduction

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## *Overview*

The Denver Preschool Program (DPP) is pleased to share our strategic plan for 2017-2021. This plan represents over seven months of engagement with members of our community, and a concerted planning effort by our Board and Staff to best serve Denver in realizing the promise of our youngest learners. Within this narrative, we share our newly-revised organizational mission, vision and values, our strategic direction and priorities, the planning process in which we engaged. Also included are highlights of the stakeholder feedback supporting analysis, and insight that helped inform our next steps for the coming years.

## *About Denver Preschool Program*

Denver Preschool Program supports Denver families by offering universal tuition credits to subsidize the cost of attending high quality preschool. DPP also works to improve the quality of preschool in Denver, conducts outreach and engagement with families and providers, evaluates student progress during



their preschool year and throughout their academic career at Denver Public Schools, and serves as a leader and advocate for early childhood education. A 0.15 percent sales tax currently funds DPP through 2026. Since its initial authorization in 2006, DPP has provided more than \$80 million in tuition support to more than 41,000 children.

## ***Why the Denver Preschool Program Matters***

The first five years of life are a critical period in brain development. The human brain is in its most adaptable state during early childhood. A young child's relationships, interactions and learning experiences build the foundation for the social and emotional competencies, cognitive abilities and other essential skills needed throughout life.<sup>1</sup> All children need positive learning experiences to develop these skills, but not all children have access to these opportunities.

High quality preschool is associated with both short- and long-term benefits, and these benefits are particularly pronounced for disadvantaged students. Studies show that 3- and 4-year-olds who attended at least a year of developmentally appropriate preschool improve in early language, literacy and math skills when measured at the end of the program or shortly after.<sup>2</sup> High quality preschool programs also increase readiness for school success by improving attendance and test scores, and reducing grade-level retention.<sup>3,4</sup> Long-term benefits include greater rates of high school graduation, years of education completed, lifetime earnings, and the likelihood of attending college.<sup>5</sup>

Although high quality preschool helps all children who participate, the benefits are particularly great for children who come from low-income families.<sup>6,7</sup> These findings are significant because children living in poverty are more likely to enter school with fewer skills deemed important for school readiness, which can be compounded throughout elementary school.<sup>8,9, 10</sup>

1 <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-science-of-eecd/>

2 Camilli, G., Vargas, S., Ryan, S., & Barnett, W. S. (2010).

3 Karoly, L. A., & Bigelow, J. H. (2005).

4 Reynolds, A. J., Temple, J. A., & Ou, S. (2007).

5 Reynolds, A. J., & Ou, S. (2011).

6 Gormley, W., Gayer, T., & Phillips, D.A. (2008).

7 Weiland, C., & Yoshikawa, H. (2013).

8 Lee, V. E., & Burkham, D. T. (2002).

9 Mulligan, G. M., Hastedt, S., & McCarroll, J. C. (2012).

In addition to helping reduce income-based inequalities in school readiness, preschool has been shown to benefit dual-language learners, children of immigrants and children with special needs. Dual-language learners or children of immigrants gain as much or more from high quality preschool programs than their monolingual English-speaking counterparts; the impacts were particularly strong among children from homes where Spanish was the primary language.<sup>11</sup> Although more research is needed about the effect preschool programs have on children with special needs, two initial studies have shown children with special needs have made significant gains in social-emotional development, as well as in reading, writing and math skills.<sup>12</sup> These findings imply that high quality preschool programs are beneficial in making education systems more equitable and in supporting better outcomes for all children.

Lastly, one of the most important arguments for high quality preschool programs is the return on investment, where the economic benefits of preschool outweigh the costs of providing these services.<sup>13</sup> First, benefits come from reduced spending on grade retention and special education, as well as lower involvement in the criminal justice, welfare and child protection systems.<sup>14</sup> Second, benefits come from greater economic productivity, especially greater earnings as adults.<sup>15</sup> Longitudinal studies of model programs that targeted disadvantaged students, like the Perry Preschool Program and the Chicago Child-Parent Centers, show these programs saved taxpayers between \$11 and \$17 per dollar invested.<sup>16,17, 18</sup> Similar programs available to all 4-year-olds saved

<sup>10</sup> Reardon, S. F. (2011).

<sup>11</sup> Magnuson, K., Lahaie, C., & Waldfogel, J. (2006).

<sup>12</sup> Phillips, D., & Meloy, E. (2012).

<sup>13</sup> Yoshikawa, H. et al. (2013).

<sup>14</sup> Yoshikawa, H. et al. (2013).

<sup>15</sup> Yoshikawa, H. et al. (2013).

<sup>16</sup> Reynolds, A. J. et al. (2011).

<sup>17</sup> Reynolds, A. J. et al. (2011).

<sup>18</sup> Schweinhart, L. J. et al. (2005)

\$2-\$4 per dollar invested.<sup>19,20</sup> Preschools are an effective mechanism to close the opportunity gap and among the most cost-effective educational interventions for governments to employ.

### ***Shared Strategic Planning Language***

To help support readers of this plan, here is the shared lexicon that was used by DPP Staff and Board members to organize the components of DPP’s strategic plan:

#### **Definitions**

**Values:** Moral compass that drives our organizational culture and decision-making.  
“What you stand for.”

**Vision:** Guiding image of success formed in terms of a contribution to those we represent or serve.

**Mission:** A succinct statement of DPP’s reason for being that communicates who we are, what we hope to achieve for whom, and through what means.

**Strategic Orientation:** This statements guide organizational development and serve to unify and align organizational effort.

**Priorities/Goals:** Broad statements that describe the intended result or direction for specific organizational activities.

**Objective:** A measurable step toward achieving a goal.

**Action Steps/Activities:** Specific activities that must take place to achieve objectives.

<sup>19</sup> Karoly, L., & Auger, A. (2016).

<sup>20</sup> Karoly, L. A., & Bigelow, J. H. (2005).

# Denver Preschool Program's Strategic Principles and Direction

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Strategic principles are the core statements providing focus and guidance for an organization and include vision, mission and core values. Denver Preschool Program strengthened its vision and mission as part of this planning process, and established a unifying set of core organizational values.

## ***Vision Statement***

Every child in Denver enters kindergarten ready to reach their full potential.

## ***Mission Statement***

Denver Preschool Program helps Denver fulfill its commitment to its youngest learners. We champion, fund and increase access to quality preschool across our community.

## ***Values Statements***

To make a deep and sustainable positive impact in the lives of Denver's youngest learners, DPP believes in:

- (1) ***Access for All***, where every Denver 4-year-old has access to the benefits of quality preschool.
- (2) ***Informed Choice***, where parents and caregivers are well informed about early childhood education options and can make the best choice for their child.
- (3) ***Leadership in Action***, where DPP champions early childhood education, ensuring the community realizes the benefits of its investment in young children.
- (4) ***Intentional Inclusivity***, where DPP overcomes barriers to ensure equitable opportunity for all children to participate in early childhood education.
- (5) ***High Quality***, where pursuing excellence in all aspects of DPP's work increases positive outcomes for Denver's children.

## ***Strategic Orientation***

DPP's strategic orientation for the next five years is to build upon our successes in providing quality preschool to Denver's 4-year-olds while achieving measurable gains in quality, access and choice.

We will achieve these gains by enrolling more children, increasing quality and availability of preschool options, supporting early childhood education (ECE) professionals, partnering to improve school readiness for all Denver children, pursuing policies and strategies that support our youngest learners, and strengthening our governance and operations.

## ***Strategic Priorities, Visions of Success & Objectives***

Over the next five years, Denver Preschool Program will focus on six strategic priorities. Each priority is accompanied by a vision of what success looks like if the goal is achieved, as well as supporting objectives for implementing the priority.

### ***(1) Increase the number of Denver 4-year-olds participating in preschool.***

#### Vision of success

By 2021, in partnership with the Denver ECE community, DPP will contribute to ensuring 80 percent of Denver's 4-year-olds are attending preschool.

DPP will strive to achieve a DPP enrollment increase of 10 percent (or 500 more students), with at least 50 percent of those students representing new participants .<sup>21</sup>

21 Denver's total population in 2014 was 663,862, of which 138,027 are under the age of 18, and in 2015 there were an estimated 9,726 4-year olds, and 9,287 3-year-olds. The average of 3 and 4-year-olds is 9,500. Using this average, the goal of ensuring 80 percent of Denver 4-year-olds in preschool means that 7,605 would be in preschool.

DPP's enrollment for the 2015-2016 program year was 5,070 students, and a 10 percent increase in DPP enrollment would be an increase of 507 students. To meet the goal of 50 percent of the desired enrollment increase coming from students not otherwise attending preschool, DPP would need to enroll 254 new students.

Sources: Status of Denver's Children, a Community Resource 2016 (Denver Office of Children's Affairs); Denver Great Kids Head Start Community Assessment Update 2015 (Denver Office of Children's Affairs).

Objectives:

- 1) Improve and sustain our tuition credit scale for greatest impact and affordability for families.
- 2) Evaluate our outreach and engagement methods and identify best practice to optimize our ways of engaging families.
- 3) Provide improved support and customer service to help families understand early childhood education, choose the best program for their child, and enroll in DPP to receive tuition support.
- 4) Increase the number of preschool programs participating in DPP.

***(2) Improve the quality of early childhood education programs in Denver.***

Vision of success:

At least 85 percent of DPP providers will be Level 3 or higher in Colorado Shines by the end of 2021 (this represents an approximate 10 percent increase to current numbers). In addition, the percentage of DPP-enrolled students in preschools with ratings of 3 or higher will increase by at least 5 percent.<sup>22</sup> By 2021, DPP will contribute, through its evaluation efforts, to identifying what drives quality in programs and what indicators of quality predict positive outcomes for participating children.

Objectives:

- a) Identify what quality factors matter the most to achieving improved learner outcomes.
- b) Assess where programs most need to improve and barriers they face in achieving high quality.
- c) Ensure DPP programs continue to move up the quality ladder and sustain gains in quality.

<sup>22</sup> At the conclusion of the 2015-2016 school year, 76 percent of DPP providers were rated Level 3 or higher and 89 percent of DPP children attended preschools rated Level 3 or higher.

- d) Continue to evaluate and track areas of strength and weakness related to early childhood education best practices.

***(3) Champion, advocate, and partner to advance early childhood education policies and strategies, and respond to community needs that help our youngest learners succeed.***

Vision of Success:

DPP's actions and approaches are informing and inspiring other communities across Colorado and nationally regarding the development of successful universal preschool programs, ultimately benefitting more young children and families. In addition, Staff and Board members are contributing at more leadership and planning tables; DPP is engaging in more strategic and mutually beneficial partnerships; and DPP is aggregating and sharing our knowledge to better engage and inform the ECE community.

Objectives:

- a) Identify and prioritize a DPP policy and community agenda.
- b) Ensure DPP Staff and Board engage in visible leadership roles locally, statewide and nationally to further the success of young learners.
- c) Maintain flexibility to respond to community needs and emergent partnership opportunities.
- d) Pursue a proactive strategy of serving as a knowledge collector and distributor of effective early childhood education strategies that support access, choice, quality and funding.

***(4) Support early childhood education professionals to ensure they are well-qualified, effective, and valued in supporting and teaching our youngest learners.***

Vision of Success:

By 2021, DPP will contribute to improvements in ECE workforce development by working with others in the field to support systems-level work that helps professionalize the field of ECE.

Objectives:

- a) Define what it means to be an effective ECE teachers and professionals.
- b) Identify DPP's role in addressing this goal in alignment with our mission.
- c) Align and maximize our teacher support strategies.
- d) Partner with programs and other thought leadership entities to identify barriers to attracting, developing, and retaining a diverse and effective community of ECE teachers and professionals.

***(5) Reach and engage families of young children through innovation and partnership to promote early learning.***

Vision of Success:

By 2021, in collaboration with others, more children arrive at kindergarten having engaged in positive early learning experiences, as demonstrated by developmental progress made during the preschool year. These children will be ready to succeed in kindergarten, as measured in partnership with Denver Public Schools. In addition, Denver families have more early learning opportunities to choose from that best suit their needs and priorities.

Objectives:

- a) Consistently assess outreach strategies to best reach all eligible families.
- b) Assess where Denver's lowest-income children and families live and how and if they are currently engaged in early learning environments.

- c) Identify most effective strategies and approaches to reaching and engaging these families and their children.
- d) Lead and /or support targeted pilot approaches with measurable results to engage children historically missing from preschool.

***(6) Strengthen DPP’s internal operations and governance to improve delivery of services and sustain operational needs.***

Vision of Success:

DPP has the ability and support to achieve the goals and vision of this strategic plan through the sufficient capacity, skills, and engagement of Staff and Board.

Objectives:

- a) Review DPP staffing model to achieve strategic priorities and make adjustments as needed.
- b) Ensure all needed management and operations policies, procedures and systems are in place.
- c) Strengthen and build the Board of Directors to best meet the strategic goals of DPP.
- d) Develop succession plans for both Board and Staff to ensure a strong pipeline of leadership.
- e) Identify the best funding model and path forward to sustain and grow the impact of DPP.

## ***Strategic Plan Implementation Principles***

DPP developed six strategic implementation principles to help guide decision-making and implementation approaches to achieve the six strategic priorities just described:

- Screening our priorities and actions to ensure alignment with our values and the requirements of our guiding ordinance.
- Using research and data to guide our investments, our internal operations, and to adapt to changing community needs.
- Evaluate and share the impact of our work to demonstrate and promote progress.
- Prioritizing our learners with the highest needs in the delivery of our services, while maintaining the universal nature of our program.
- Anticipating unintended consequences and impacts to stakeholders as a result of how DPP programs are implemented.
- Considering the return on our investments in terms of social and financial impact.

# About Denver Preschool Program's 2017-2021 Strategic Plan

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## *Background*

In April of 2016, the Denver Preschool Program (DPP) engaged Mission Spark, LLC, a third-party consultancy specializing in nonprofit management, strategy and stakeholder engagement to collaborate with Board and Staff in the development of a five-year strategic plan.

Strategic planning is a process through which an organization agrees and builds commitment to a set of priorities and strategies essential to fulfilling its mission. These priorities then guide actions that will make progress on the mission over a defined period of time.

From May through December 2016, Board and Staff members of DPP participated in a strategic planning process to refine the mission, vision and values of DPP, assess the current state of the organization and to identify and prioritize strategic goals, objectives, activities and progress measures to guide the organization from 2017-2021.

Through this process, six priorities emerged: (1) Increase the number of Denver 4-year-olds participating in preschool; (2) Improve the quality of early childhood education programs in Denver; (3) Champion, advocate and partner to advance early childhood education policies and strategies, and respond to community needs that help our youngest learners succeed; (4) Support early childhood education professionals to ensure they are well-qualified, effective and valued in supporting and teaching our youngest learners; (5) Reach and engage families of young children through innovation and partnership to promote early learning; and (6) Strengthen DPP's internal operations and governance to improve delivery of services and sustain operational needs.

The purpose of this section is to detail the planning process, share key results, and provide some of the supporting documentation which guided Staff and Board in their decision-making. This document can be used for both internal and external purposes—

to guide work planning, financial and human capital investments, strategic decision making and community and partner communication. The document is designed to both be a polished presentation of strategic planning process results, as well as a living, breathing, changeable document, which reflects the needs of the organization over time and in changing conditions.

### ***Planning Process***

The planning process was designed and approved by DPP's Strategic Planning Committee (SPC), consisting of four Staff members and four Board members, including DPP's President/CEO and Board Chair. The SPC met every 4-6 weeks throughout the process. In addition, all Staff and Board participated in a high-level strategic retreat in July 2016 along with five additional facilitated sessions, which took place as part of standing Board meetings. The development and completion of the plan was guided by two detailed work plans and a stakeholder engagement plan.

From May to June, to lay the foundations for strategic decision making, Mission Spark consultants engaged an organizational assessment, conducted secondary research on ECE trends and practices, developed a comparative matrix of peer programs, completed a comprehensive environmental scan, and gathered input from diverse stakeholders on strategic priorities for the organization. The resulting situational analysis report summarizes these efforts, providing national, state and local context, organizational benchmarks and vital stakeholder opinions to help inform leadership decisions regarding DPP's future.

The planning process was facilitated by Kara Penn, Principal Consultant for and Owner of Mission Spark, LLC. In addition to Kara, the Mission Spark team consisted of Joanna Marks, Mission Spark Consultant, and Chris Klene, Mission Spark Fellow. Mission Spark is a social enterprise that partners with philanthropy, nonprofit and social enterprise leaders to achieve transformative social change and to strengthen the social sector. More about Mission Spark can be found at [www.missionspark.org](http://www.missionspark.org).

## ***Community Engagement Approach and Supporting Research***

Mission Spark worked with DPP’s Strategic Planning Committee to develop a stakeholder engagement plan, identifying both internal and external individuals and entities that have a vested interest in the strategies DPP takes to fulfill its purpose of making high quality preschool possible for all Denver families, regardless of income, to pay for their children to attend a high quality preschool of their choice. Stakeholders that were engaged through this process brought a great deal of value and perspective to DPP’s resulting strategy and services:



Mission Spark engaged community members using the following approaches:

- Forty in-depth interviews with Staff, Board members, ECE leaders, funders, contractors and community leaders.
- Six interviews with peer programs in other cities, and
- Three surveys of key stakeholder groups (Staff and Board, community stakeholders, and Denver commissioners).

In addition, Mission Spark reviewed DPP organizational documents, policies, past community engagement efforts and tools, existing primary research and data on DPP’s programs, and more than 70 publications from trusted secondary sources. Insights from all information collected were woven into an extensive situational analysis.

## ***Planning Participants***

### DPP Board of Directors

The Board of Directors makes all financial and business decisions that guide the Denver Preschool Program. The Board of Directors consists of mayoral appointees and one current member of Denver City Council.

#### ***Mike Yankovich | Chair\****

Children's Museum of Denver at  
Marsico Campus

#### ***Amber Münck | Vice Chair***

Greenberg Traurig

#### ***Susan Steele | Secretary / Treasurer***

Temple Hoyne Buell Foundation

#### ***Dr. Rosemarie Allen***

Metropolitan State University of Denver  
and the Institute for Racial Equity &  
Excellence

#### ***Michael Baker***

Gold Crown Management

#### ***Councilwoman Stacie Gilmore***

Denver City Council District 11

#### ***Judy Ham***

Ability Connections Colorado

#### ***Anna Jo Haynes\****

Mile High Early Learning

#### ***Zach Hochstadt***

Mission Minded, Inc.

#### ***Dr. Rebecca Kantor***

University of Colorado Denver, School  
of Education & Human Development

#### ***Janice Sinden\****

Denver Center for the Performing Arts

#### ***Chris Watney\****

People and Possibilities

DPP Staff

**Jennifer Landrum | President and  
CEO\***

***David Collins | Director of  
Operations\****

***Ellen Braun | Director of  
Communications\****

***Chris Miller | Director of Quality  
Initiatives\****

***Tricia Nelson | Executive  
Assistant***

\* Indicates individual served as a member of the Strategic Planning Committee, which coordinated and informed the strategic planning process.

## **Denver Preschool Program Strategic Issues**

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A detailed situational analysis report is available as a supporting document of this strategic plan, and provides detail and data about opportunities, stakeholder perceptions and critical issues facing DPP. This section provides a snapshot of the analysis provided in that comprehensive report. Please refer to the full report (as detailed in the appendix) for greater detail, methodology and limitations of the assessment provided.

### ***Strategic Issues and Trends***

The critical issues currently faced by DPP include the implications of Denver's shifting demographics; preschool accessibility and affordability for all of Denver's children; the impact of informal child care arrangements; preschool workforce challenges and their impact on cost and quality; and holding a birth-to-8 focus, especially in reaching children ages birth to 3 while prioritizing and serving 4-year-olds.

In terms of Denver's shifting demographics, children younger than age 5 represent approximately seven percent of the city's population, and the child population is projected to grow less quickly from 2015 to 2025 than it did from 2000 to 2010. The fastest growing portion of the child population is white, non-Hispanic children.

Child poverty is prevalent, with more than one in five Denver children living in poverty. However, poverty is unequally distributed in Denver, varying drastically according to neighborhood and racial/ethnic group. For many of Denver's highest need children, preschool is not accessible or affordable. For example, a recent study found availability of slots and lack of convenient locations to be prominent barriers to preschool in southwest Denver.

Because of this lack of accessibility and affordability, a certain percentage of children spend their days in informal care, also known as family, friend and neighbor care. These children often enter kindergarten as the least prepared and have the poorest outcomes.

Lastly, although children ages 0-3 years old are outside of DPP's mandate, evidence suggests this is the most critical age to intervene. It is important for DPP to consider its role in the birth-to-eight continuum of early childhood, and how they can be a voice to help reach our most vulnerable children at an early of an age as possible, including how we can increase community understanding and value of these critical years in a child's life.

### ***Community Insights***

Feedback from stakeholders helped DPP learn how others view the organization:

- DPP is seen in a positive light as an organization that has driven real impact in getting more kids into preschool and driving the quality of preschool.
- DPP is seen as stable and mature—there was a lot to figure out in the beginning stages of the organization and it was done in a thoughtful way; now programming and operations seem well-established.
- Several stakeholders note DPP seemed innovative five years ago, but now has settled into a path that is not as much on the cutting edge anymore. DPP needs to explore its next frontier of contributions to the conversation, practice and evidence of what can work to improve preschool access and child outcomes.
- DPP plays an important and necessary role that is core to Denver's ECE system. DPP needs to continue to do what it is doing and do it well or better, and within that role continue to have an eye on the entire ECE system.
- Stakeholders see opportunities for DPP to maintain its core activities while helping to drive innovations on critical ECE issues.

## ***Strategy Considerations***

The voices and data collected to inform Denver Preschool Program's strategic direction pointed to seven potential strategy considerations:

### ***1) Find and serve the children missing from DPP today.***

- Explore and partner on flexible delivery methods to reach kids where there are not currently enough preschool spots and/or infrastructure, including partnering with the City to leverage underutilized public buildings like recreation centers, exploring mobile preschools, and encouraging onsite preschool delivery in partnership with nonprofits and local community centers.
- Develop more targeted approaches for low-income communities, which often have the lowest access to licensed preschool spots and the highest need, leveraging outreach and education dollars.
- Reach out to family, friend, and neighbor providers—consider best practice ways of engaging informal care providers in better supporting children in their care with a home provider curricula.
- Serve 3-year-olds in areas of highest need.
- Consider summer-before-preschool programs for targeted students.
- Explore affordability issues—potentially supplement tuition in highest need areas.

### ***2) Consider how to support attracting, retaining and compensating the ECE workforce, as a critical step in supporting quality***

- Retention, advancement, and pay are major issues in the early childhood workforce.<sup>23,24</sup> One DPP stakeholder said the program offers "great supports" but needs "more attention to the overall context" they are

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/2015-44AESBirthThru8Research2015FINAL.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.clasp.org/issues/child-care-and-early-education/in-focus/federal-report-child-care-workers-in-32-states-earn-wages-below-poverty-leveland-significantly-less-than-head-start-preschool-and-kindergarten-teachers>

offered in. Constraints like teacher turnover make it difficult to take advantage of certain strengths. Attrition lessens the impact of even the best professional development.

- Personnel costs drive the price of child care, and yet early childhood teachers make near-poverty wages.<sup>25</sup> Stakeholders emphasized the tremendous influence of these obstacles on efforts to increase quality. Professional development and peer networks can offset these challenges, such as Philadelphia’s Success by 6 offering leadership development for teachers and administrators. Cohort models for providers striving for certain quality ratings and affinity groups for teachers could also strengthen the early childhood workforce.
- Finances are complex and challenging for providers, but DPP can help strengthen providers’ financial understanding, capacity and practices: One community stakeholder interviewed said the top challenge facing early childhood education today is the need to “get our hands around the cost of quality,” noting it is critical to “understand the blending and braiding challenges providers are facing”.
- Offer capital to help providers to weather periods of fluctuating revenue, so they do not need to compromise quality.
- Offer professional development to providers on budgeting, financials, and building reserves. Research shows providers want this education: in greater Philadelphia, providers requested technical assistance consultants with more experience in areas such as business practices and management.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.clasp.org/issues/child-care-and-early-education/in-focus/federal-report-child-care-workers-in-32-states-earn-wages-below-poverty-level-and-significantly-less-than-head-start-preschool-and-kindergarten-teachers>;  
<http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/fact-sheet-troubling-pay-gap-early-childhood-teachers>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2016-07SuccessBySixReport.pdf>

**3) *Align with Birth-to-Eight Roadmap where possible and in support of DPP's strategic priorities***

- While it is not yet clear what funding or leadership will be in place to support implementation, the Roadmap does represent a collaborative effort to define shared goals and to bring together multiple priorities.
- The Board and Staff will need to decide in which of the primary objectives DPP is best suited to play a leadership role.

**4) *Demonstrate DPP leadership around priorities by investing more in partnerships, relationships, and strategic alliances.***

- DPP needs to pull key players together with a compelling case and vision, increasing awareness and building buy-in. This will require ongoing communications efforts and greater Staff capacity to plan and implement.
- Keep taxpayers informed through targeted outreach and messaging shared by trusted community leaders. This outreach should help make the case for targeted strategies to serve the highest need populations, including return on investment of early childhood education.
- Influence early childhood education around the state and nation, sharing lessons learned and asking questions of other city-based programs.

**5) *Diversify DPP funding resources.***

- To be successful in the future, DPP needs to maintain fiscal sustainability. This may mean securing more funding through non-taxpayer sources, to meet DPP's mission. Private funders are interested in supporting DPP at the systems level.
- One-time funding should likely be put into one-time programming. DPP should develop a pipeline of projects ready to implement as opportunities arise.

- Consider investing DPP’s reserve dollars conservatively to earn low levels of interest that can be further invested into programming.

**6) *Connect quality investments to student outcomes.***

- DPP is an established program in the mature stage of development. The next frontier is to understand more about shaping outcomes through quality and what aspects of quality best support positive child outcomes.

**7) *Reflect on / modify the tuition scale and maximize the model in line with DPP’s values and guiding intent.***

- Re-examine the interplay between parent choice in preschool provider and the level of tuition subsidy.
- Explore ways for affluent families to donate tuition back to others if desired.

The Denver Preschool Program is an established organization with proven impact in shaping the preschool landscape in Denver, with real results for Denver's children. The findings of this analysis point to the next frontier for DPP as addressing critical gaps in meeting the preschool needs of all of Denver's children, through innovative partnership and leadership. At the same time, DPP will continue to maintain the quality of service and programs provided to educate families, drive and link quality to outcomes and meet the charge of the ordinance to make preschool universally accessible to Denver's 4-year-olds.

## **Plan Implementation**

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### ***Strategy Screen***

To ensure future opportunities, partnerships and critical organizational decisions remain in line with DPP’s strategic plan, the Strategic Planning Committee is developing a strategy screen—a tool that will support and enable key decisions to be systematically reviewed with the context and priorities laid out in this plan. This strategy screen is built off strategic plan implementation principles and is being developed as part of early plan implementation, and so is not yet included here.

### ***Strategic Plan Implementation Grid***

DPP operates with a small Staff and a set of supporting contractors to implement programming. To assist Board and Staff in moving the plan forward and completing identified activities, a strategic planning grid has been developed that tracks progress on key activities and assigns a status that lets decision makers know if a task is on track, stalled a bit or at risk for derailment. This plan grid will be reviewed regularly by Staff in committee and full Board meetings to guide activities of the organization, and will be updated to accurately reflect progress.

## Summary

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Denver Preschool Program's Strategic Plan reflects a newly refined mission and vision, and is built on a powerful set of core organizational values. It strategically orients the organization to build on past successes while driving the organization forward to increase and strengthen the impact of core levers of change, including the tuition credit scale, quality improvement, outreach and engagement and leadership and collaboration. It offers a carefully conceived, balanced strategy to strengthen core programming, innovate and collaborate to better meet community needs and grow the organization's impact within the charge of its guiding ordinance. The plan is informed through thoughtful analysis, stakeholder input and ideas and past research and assessment of programs. In addition, implementation processes and tools have been developed or are under development to assist with plan monitoring to ensure goals are continually re-assessed and met over the next five years.

This plan should not remain a stagnant document or be blindly executed, but used as a critical tool to assess DPP's alignment with strategic goals and to make adjustments as needed. Reviewing progress on the plan with Board and Staff on a quarterly basis, and engaging in a more in-depth strategic plan tune-up each year is recommended to ensure the plan is responsive to changing organizational and community needs and environmental factors.

DPP's strategic direction is of interest to many different stakeholders who contributed their ideas, expertise and feedback to the development of priorities, and also to a national landscape of organizations aiming to support early childhood education in a sustainable and impactful way. Sharing appropriate levels of this plan with stakeholders can serve as a critical way to communicate DPP's priorities, signal opportunities for alignment and collaboration and to illustrate DPP's strong capability to deliver on its mission to help Denver fulfill its commitment to the community's youngest learners.

## Supporting Materials\*

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- Denver Preschool Program Strategic Plan Grid 2017-2021
- Denver Preschool Program Situational Analysis Report
- Peer Program Interview Transcripts
- Board and Staff Survey Summary
- Community Stakeholder Survey Summary
- Denver Commissioner Survey Summary
- Secondary Research Reports
- Strategic Planning Work Plans
- Stakeholder Engagement Plan

\*All supporting materials are available through the Denver Preschool Program central offices. Please contact **720.287.5055** to obtain copies.