



Think Differently. Lead Confidently.

Denver Preschool Program **Annual Report**

A Holistic Approach to Early Education

Denver Preschool Program is a nonprofit organization committed to improving the early childhood education system by championing, funding, and increasing access to quality education for all of Denver's young learners.

Denver Preschool Program (DPP) began in 2006 as a voter-approved sales tax so every child in Denver has the opportunity to access a quality early education of their family's choice.

Children who attend an early childhood education program are more prepared for kindergarten, leading to stronger early language, literacy and math skills, and a higher likelihood of graduating high school, attending college, and succeeding in their careers.

To ensure every Denver child can experience the power of preschool, Denver Preschool Program offers tuition credits to every Denver family. Furthermore, Denver Preschool Program empowers early childhood educators and preschools with professional development and coaching, college scholarships and quality improvement resources. We also engage in extensive community outreach, and advocacy at the city, state and national level to re-imagine the early childhood education system as a whole.

After 15 years, Denver Preschool Program knows our **holistic approach** is critical to achieving the change Denver children and families deserve and the successes we have achieved thus far. And during the 2020-2021 school year, that meant doing what we do best: **thinking differently and leading confidently**. This year's Annual Report highlights the projects and initiatives that we were proud to provide as well as the challenges ahead and how DPP is positioned to address them.

Thank You From Our CEO and Board Chair

Denver Preschool Programs's purpose has been, and always will be, to make sure every child in Denver enters kindergarten ready to reach their full potential. Even during the unprecedented times that the COVID-19 pandemic has created, DPP adapted how and where 4-year-olds were able to access high-quality early learning opportunities. We provided our core programming, kept preschools' doors open and ensured our teachers felt supported. DPP's ability to be nimble through this time, adjusting programming as needed and repurposing funds to address the needs of our families, resulted in a higher rate of continued learning for our preschoolers than compared to the national average. We are proud of these efforts, and thank our providers and families for their commitment to learning through this difficult time. Below are our core programs, the statistics showing sustained success throughout the year as well as the pivots needed within each to keep our families and providers supported.

ELSA HOLGUÍN

President and CEO, Denver Preschool Program

MICHAEL BAKER

Board Chair, Denver Preschool Program



CELEBRATING ONE OF OUR OWN

Ellen Braun

A highlight of our year was our incredible Chief Operating Officer (COO), Ellen Braun, who was named a recipient of the Denver Business Journal's C-Suite Awards for her leadership at DPP.

"Ellen Braun embodies the qualities of leadership and accomplishment, and she represents everything we should value in a leader. We ask Ellen to handle the most challenging issues facing DPP because we know she has the focus, drive and intellectual capacity to achieve results. She has been the catalyst behind a number of our most impactful innovations and advancements over the past decade." - Elsa Holguín



Who We Serve



Supporting our core programs and responding to meet changing needs

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Tuition Credits

Denver Preschool Program makes preschool accessible and affordable for all Denver families by offering tuition credits paid directly to the school on the family's behalf.

Tuition credits are offered to families who enroll in any licensed, participating early childhood education program across Denver, including Denver Public Schools classrooms, community-based providers, and family child care homes. This gives families a choice in provider, curriculum, location, and more. **putting the power of preschool in their hands.**

The tuition credits are based on household income, household size, hours of attendance and quality of the preschool program. The largest credits go to families with the lowest incomes who are attending a high-quality preschool.

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4,019 tuition credit beneficiaries

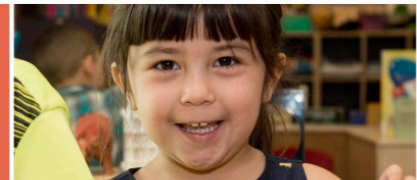


DPP Delivered \$15.1 Million in Tuition Credits

directly to providers on behalf of Denver families



2020-2021 Programs - By the Numbers



DPS Providers Received \$9.264 Million

61% of the total tuition credits allocated



Community Sites Received \$5.9 Million

39% of the total tuition credits allocated

The difference tuition credits make in the lives of families

Denver Preschool Program makes preschool accessible and affordable for all Denver families by offering tuition credits paid directly to the school on the family's behalf. Denver Preschool Program has partnered with the Butler Institute of Families to engage in an operations evaluation. The results from the 2020-2021 school year are based on interviews with 319 families, 12 follow-up interviews, and administrative data

Preschool access. In the survey, almost all families in income tiers 1 and 2 reported that DPP tuition credits made it possible to afford preschool (94%) and enroll in their preschool of choice (97%).

Many also agreed that they were able to send their child to a high-quality preschool (89%) and enroll for more days per week (88%) and about half (58%) reported increasing the hours their child is in preschool.

Basic needs. For more than two-thirds of families in income tiers 1 and 2, the largest population we serve, DPP tuition credits made it possible to afford basic needs, such as food, housing, medical care and clothing.



"I don't know how to express my gratitude. It is absolutely helping us function as a family, and our preschool is like an additional family—people who know and love our child."

DPP FAMILY

"We would have to make more sacrifices as a family if we wanted our kids in school without any tuition assistance. It's just given us more opportunity in every way but most importantly created the opportunity for us to have a car, and we probably wouldn't be able to have our business if we didn't have a car. It has changed everything."

DPP FAMILY



Quality Improvement

Research shows that attending an early childhood education program isn't enough: the quality of the program matters. The quality of an early childhood education program can include the amount of positive interactions between students and early childhood education educators, strong family partnerships, professional training and staff qualifications, classroom learning environment, group size and adult/child ratios, cultural responsiveness, providing connections for health, dental and vision screenings, and access to support services.

For DPP, investing in the quality of Denver preschool providers is an essential part of improving the experience and future outcomes for Denver's students.

At a foundational level, that includes:

Professional development and training on intentional teaching, authentic child assessments, and positive teacher-child interactions among others.

More than \$20.6 million invested in quality improvement and development of early childhood educators to date, including \$3.37 million in 2020-2021.

Scholarships and incentive awards for preschool teachers and directors to participate in professional development opportunities.

Supporting family access to a mixed-delivery system of preschool settings: 34% of which are Denver Public Schools (DPS) providers, 61% community-based preschool center-based providers, 5% in family child care home providers.

Thinking Differently About Supporting Providers: During the 2020-2021 school year, the world around us changed and many teachers faced new challenges and burn out. DPP significantly shifted our quality improvement investments and strategies in order to help providers continue navigating the pandemic.

The results proved to be very successful in helping our providers to keep their doors open, including:

DPP funded approximately 5,200 hours of virtual coaching and 100 virtual professional development training with early childhood experts to help provide quality early learning experiences via new platforms.

Funded nearly \$380,000 in Quality Improvement Grants that providers could use on a range of new expenses including preschool staff bonuses/wages, rent/general operating and non-permanent building items related to COVID-19 operations.

DPP provided \$785,350 in Strengthening Grants to help providers offset significant pandemic-related financial losses due to decreased enrollment and increased operating expenses for items such as health and safety supplies.

Granted approximately \$294,000 in teacher/director achievement awards and approximately \$62,000 in program achievement awards, providing key financial supports for completion of quality improvement activities such as training, coaching or earning Colorado's Early Childhood Coaching Credential.



Community Outreach

Denver Preschool Program's community outreach is focused on hard-to-reach families via partnerships with targeted organizations, places of worship, bookmobiles and food distribution sites.

To better support all of Denver's families, we have translated our materials into 10 languages so far and will continue to add more. Prior to the pandemic, Denver Preschool Program also contracted with a Preschool Navigator specialist to provide families with deeper support in finding and enrolling in a preschool. Additional efforts also include the following successes from the past year:

- Our Community Outreach teams doubled down on personal support by reaching out to more than 1,000 families to communicate their eligibility to use tuition credits for summer programming.
- In addition to the current translations, DPP engaged with fluent language speakers as ambassadors to support hard-to-reach communities in Denver.
- Successfully communicated and launched Preschool for 3s to providers and families.

Advocacy and Legislation

Early childhood education is a critical yet small part of the larger community effort to create a more equitable landscape for the future of Colorado. Denver Preschool Program is proud to serve as an important voice in local and state conversations to help ensure the value of early childhood education is realized as a critical factor in the long-term wellbeing of Colorado's children.

2020-2021 Advocacy Wins:

- DPP was a critical player in the approval of Universal Preschool in Colorado and the creation of the Colorado Department of Early Childhood. We will continue to support the state's effort both as a community resource and as a leading voice in the implementation of universal preschool.
- DPP's board and staff is also represented at the leadership level of the Early Childhood Leadership Commission that was instrumental in creating the new Department of Early Education.



Pilot Programs



Out Ahead: Spearheading New Programs



Denver Preschool Program's ability to lead confidently requires supporting providers with what they need in real-time.

Since inception, DPP has been fiscally responsible and, as such, created a reserve to support pilot initiatives. The reserves coupled with our ability to be agile and adaptable are the reasons our providers were able to navigate through a difficult, unpredictable pandemic. The pilot programs continue to address foundational needs across Denver families while allowing DPP to be a leader in addressing new opportunities to ensure every child in Denver has a jumpstart on a quality education.

DPP Scholarship

This 3-year pilot program addresses affordability, a barrier of preschool tuition that some families at or below 300% of the federal poverty level face. Through this pilot, DPP offers full scholarships to families with the highest financial need. The DPP Scholarship is now in its second year and we are proud to be bridging the equity gaps in education for Denver families.

The outcome: Beginning in the 2020-2021 program year, instead of using the published tuition rate to calculate the scholarship amount, scholarships are calculated using either a DPP defined monthly cost of care, \$1,385 a month, or published tuition rate, whichever of the two is higher.

Average monthly family income: \$2,600	Average DPP tuition credit (\$796) combined with average scholarship (\$700): \$1,497	Highest scholarship: \$1,770
	2020-2021 Scholarship Stats	
Out of pocket for families: \$0	Scholarship recipients: 214 students	Total scholarship amount distributed \$983,531

Distance Learning

Alongside Denver Public Schools and other local ECE partners, DPP launched the Distance Learning Task Force to ensure preschools offering distance learning could customize it to their needs and those of their families.

In the fall of 2020, DPP launched a Distance Learning Pilot with the following goals:

- Provide support to DPP-participating preschool providers so they can continue to engage and interact with families through distance learning during the pandemic.
- Provide learning opportunities for DPP teachers, directors and administrators to support continued high-quality early childhood learning experiences when in-person learning is not available.
- Increase available resources to children, families and providers during distance learning.
- Provide funding directly to providers who meet funding eligibility criteria, with optional supplemental funding available as described.



Pilots Launching in 2021-2022

Bonus Year

The conditions of the ongoing pandemic have shown that the effects of the learning loss are significant. Many families have asked providers if they can hold back their students so that the young learners can have extra time in preschool. The "bonus" year will help students be more prepared for kindergarten, setting them up for success in and out of the classroom.

Preschool for 3s

DPP is thrilled to equitably expand access to high-quality preschool for a limited number of 3-year-olds in the Denver area beginning in the 2021-2022 program year! In addition to our traditional tuition credits for 4-year-olds, this new program puts preschool within reach for children who turn three by October 1. Preschool for 3s creates a continuum of support for families and is also an exciting step in a larger early childhood education plan for Denver.

Pilot Parameters and Eligibility Criteria | Who's eligible?

- Families in Tier 1 and Tier 2 of household income are given priority.
- Child must turn three by October 1 and be enrolled in a DPP-approved community preschool program.

What's the benefit? | While the program is just in its first year, the intention is to:

- Support a greater number of families through and after the pandemic.
- Increase DPP's reach of preschool-aged children and support of preschool providers.
- Support the programmatic shifts and expansions in preparation for Universal Preschool in 2023.
- Provide access to children who may not otherwise attend preschool at 3-years-old to help us better achieve our vision that every child in Denver enters kindergarten ready to reach their full potential.

CLOSE ✕

Workforce Stipends

DPP and Denver's Office of Children's Affairs (OCA) collaborated to offer every staff member at eligible DPP-participating community sites (i.e. non-Denver Public Schools sites) a financial stipend. The project's primary goal was to support the financial wellbeing of educators so they could afford to remain working in early childhood education. The stipends are also intended to show appreciation to staff and teachers for their amazing work.



Thinking Creatively to Keep Doors Open and Support Providers with Stipends

DPP is continuously in awe of our preschool providers. They are constantly evolving to ensure DPP families are supported and children are receiving the highest quality education. We are honored to partner with them and provide support to these incredible educators.

"From hugs to tears of joy, you all know how to bring out the best in us. The [COVID] variant and the economy have challenged the very way we do business and navigate. We all know that our valued teachers are underpaid and overworked in many instances, so I am truly thankful for our partnership with DPP."

"You do such a beautiful job of managing things here in Denver. We feel successful and well-supported by DPP and love the relationship that you've built with providers and the collaborative way that you improve quality through trusting relationships, collaboration and coaching."

"I would like to thank DPP for all of your hard work and ongoing support that your team has supported our program with in the past years. The financial support as well as Professional Development, monetary incentives, and community support DPP has provided to our preschool has been a blessing to us in so many ways."

"We are very thankful to be a part of a wonderful program that truly understands the needs of providers, children and families. The support from DPP will never be forgotten as these past two years 2020 and 2021 has been very difficult but DPP has done nothing but ease the difficulties for us. Other programs, organizations should truly take notes on DPP on how to aid providers. Without this wonderful program we would not be able to keep on operating and push on during these difficult times."

DPP PROVIDERS



Family Spotlight: Giving Families a Choice

When it comes to preschool, many families must choose between an education that fits their values and one that fits their budget. For Shimshon and Shoshana Rubin and their family, there was no room for compromise. Shimshon reached out to Elka Popack, head of the Ganeinu School. Popack introduced Shimshon to the Denver Preschool Program. Shimshon applied to DPP right away and received tuition credits, but it was still going to be difficult for the family to afford tuition costs.

“When we received notice that both of our kids at Ganeinu received full scholarships, it took a tremendous amount of stress off of our family,” Shimshon said. “Without that financial support, one child would likely be home an extra year to avoid the stress of living month-to-month to cover our costs.”

The DPP Scholarship provides families with additional funding (on top of the DPP tuition credit) to cover 100% of preschool tuition costs. The Rubins can now consider buying the house they currently live in, and Shimshon's wife is hoping to open up a bakery outside of their home.

“I honestly don't know where the money would have come from before DPP came into our lives,” Shimshon said. “A tremendous amount of stress has been lifted and with DPP's support, we can now prioritize giving back to our community.”

Ganeinu is a small, loving bilingual program focused on creating a consistent educational experience that aligns with families' Jewish heritage and values. “We really aim to create a seamless experience from home to school so children gain an appreciation and love for their heritage at a young age,” said Elka Popack, head of Ganeinu.

Ganeinu can enroll up to 18 children and relies on tuition to pay educators and staff and keep the school operational. The school provides its own scholarships whenever possible and is looking to eventually expand and offer more slots, which means more tuition, but their budget is tight.

When families like the Rubins receive additional funding from DPP through the form of scholarships, it supports more than just their children, it helps the entire school community by covering the full cost of care for schools.

In addition to providing tuition credits and scholarships for eligible families, DPP's support has allowed Popack to give out cost-of-living raises to staff and teachers. Ganeinu teachers have also received coaching around improving quality and obtained their child development associate (CDA) credentials thanks to DPP. The CDA credential improves educators' knowledge of quality early childhood care and education through 120 hours of coursework and up to 15 hours of coaching.

“All in all, DPP helps us to raise the professionalism of our school, while ensuring families have a choice in where their children go to preschool,” Popack said. “DPP has helped us keep our doors open, especially during these past few years with the pandemic. We truly see them as a partner.”

ELKA POPACK
Ganeinu, DPP Provider

Provider Spotlight: Helping Families Succeed

Financials



2021 Calendar Year Audited Financials

Tuition Credits	\$19,947,762
Quality Improvements	\$3,372,158
Family Eligibility	\$612,400
Evaluation	\$442,733
Outreach	\$685,150
Contract Services	\$41,118
Administrative	\$1,142,834
TOTAL	\$26,244,155

Equity and Access



Beyond the Basics: Ensuring Equity and Access

Quality early childhood education plays a critical role in early development, school readiness, and, therefore, long-term success for every child, helping to end the cycle of generational poverty and benefitting our community as a whole.

Alongside our partners, DPP will continue to make efforts toward equity and inclusion, address the preschool deserts in our communities, support early childhood workforce development, streamline early childhood education enrollment processes, and rethink policies that may be creating barriers for families. Addressing early childhood education in Colorado is an issue that affects all of us, and it is certainly a collaborative effort that we are proud to play a part in.

DPP's Equity Statement

Every child deserves equitable access to quality early childhood education and the opportunity to benefit from its promise: a strong foundation for a successful future. Denver Preschool Program commits to bold action to help eliminate differences in educational outcomes as a result of systemic racism, generational poverty and discrimination through our role in early childhood education.

DPP's Equity Commitments

In support of our equity statement, and in service of the creation of a more equitable early childhood landscape and a more just world, we commit to awareness, access, advocacy and action.

- 1. Grow our knowledge and awareness of inequities and their root cause.**
Continually grow our awareness and understanding of inequities that historically and continue to exist in ECE.
- 2. Drive access, choice and quality in early childhood education.**
Reduce barriers to early childhood education access, choice and quality.
 - a. Invest resources and implement policies that promote the well-being and positive experiences of Black, Indigenous and children of color and families in early childhood education experiences.
 - b. Support high-quality preschool programs that build on each child's unique individual and family strengths, cultural background, language(s), abilities, and experiences.
- 3. Advocate for systems-level policy changes that address harm.**
Recognize our role as part of a larger ecosystem that we are capable of influencing and act upon our obligation to remedy harm by that system.
 - a. Promote policies within and outside of DPP that eliminate differences in educational outcomes as a result of who children are, where they live, and what resources their families have. Take bold action.
- 4. Start with DPP and center who we are and what we do in equity and inclusivity.**
 - a. Take action through our leadership, programs, and services to reduce the harm caused by poverty, racism and discrimination.
 - b. Lead by example and support our providers and partners on their equity journeys with the tools and resources they need to be successful.

Advance social justice for our youngest children to achieve equal treatment and experience equal rights by reducing implicit bias, exploring context, and helping children see themselves in their teachers and their classroom communities

The Future of Education



Committed and Engaged: At the Forefront of Early Childhood Education

Universal Preschool: A Great Opportunity to Expand Preschool in Denver

Early childhood education has never been more top of mind than it is today, particularly with universal preschool. This naturally puts the spotlight on Denver Preschool Program. We are a national leader in supporting young children and families, and we are committed to staying there. **When it comes to universal preschool, here's how Denver Preschool Program is staying nimble, and leading, all while remaining steadfast to our mission.**

- As universal preschool in Colorado currently stands, it will cover a minimum of 10 hours of preschool per week for 4-year-olds. Most families—and children—need at least double that time. Universal preschool is just one piece of the overall equation to ensure our young children are prepared for kindergarten. The good news is that with DPP as a complement to statewide universal preschool, many Denver families will be able to have their preschool needs met fully. It's really a win-win as there will be more resources for Denver families and young children.
- Thanks to UPK in Colorado, DPP is able to expand our tuition credits to 3-year-olds at the highest levels of needs to increase our commitment to our vision that every child enters kindergarten ready to reach their full potential. This means three years of support for our youngest learners.
- DPP is uncompromising in our commitment to our value of leadership in action, which entails "championing early childhood education, ensuring the community realizes the benefits of its investments in young children." Just as we've done with early childhood education expertise and leadership from the start, we will also ensure our learnings and insights impact the entire state. We will continue to advocate for additional funding for early childhood education in our community, support policies and funding that impact the workforce of educators and their livelihood, and welcome the opportunity to share our leadership and learnings.

Colorado will be launching a universal preschool program for all 4-year-olds to access support for at least 10 hours of education a week. This is being funded through Proposition EE, a voter-approved nicotine tax measure that was approved in November 2020 for implementation starting in the fall of 2023.



What we know about Universal Preschool:

Children will begin to receive support in September 2023

Available funding will cover care for at least 10 hours a week, with some children being eligible for more support based on need (and other funding available).

The state is requiring a universal application so that families and providers do not have to blend and braid the various local and state funding available to them

DPP will play a pivotal role in helping to more deeply support the Denver community to complement the UPK offerings.

We also know that the state will be seeking proposals for lead entities to oversee the implementation in their community. DPP is and will continue to partner with all Denver early childhood agencies to ensure Denver children and families have a lead organization that is equipped to enhance the systems already in place.

Looking Ahead: Addressing the early education system

Denver Preschool Program continues to adapt and evolve to meet the changing needs of families and young children. We're committed to continuing to serve as both a thought leader and an innovation engine, piloting and implementing programs to solve the challenges that Denver families are facing. We know that Denver families need a wide range of flexible education offerings for their children. We also know that preschool is part of a continuum of education that starts at birth.

The momentum and interest around early childhood education are unprecedented, which gives DPP the perfect opportunity to continue our steadfast leadership and commitment to ensuring high-quality preschool is available to all Denver families. The reality is that the ever-evolving needs of families and children were only exacerbated by the pandemic. Meanwhile, workforce shortages in the early care and education field have never been greater. Low pay, lack of benefits, and burnout are just a few of the issues plaguing the sector. Solving these challenges will be integral to ensuring all families can access quality early childhood education. DPP has our work cut out for us, but we're ready, and able, to lead the way in piloting programs and devising innovative solutions.

We have our eyes—and aim—on the complete picture. While the original pillars of our taxpayer-funded initiative are still grounding to our work, we know they aren't enough for Denver families. We've evolved and will continue to proactively adapt to what young children and their families need. We owe it to our young children—and to taxpayers—to do so. This is why even with universal preschool, DPP is more important than ever. Just like 10 hours of preschool a week isn't enough for most families, one piece of the early childhood education puzzle won't ensure our children are set up for success. Let us keep improving on over a decade of knowledge, learning, and proven leadership. Let's keep a good thing going.

While our focus remains on Denver, we also have a passion for ensuring early childhood education across our state and nationally benefits from our learnings and insights from the past 15 years. That means:

- Playing an integral role in the development of Colorado's Department of Early Childhood
- Supporting the rollout of universal preschool at the state and the national level
- Ensuring all Denver families are able to maximize their benefits to support a high-quality early childhood experience
- Continuing to support our preschool providers to ensure choice and quality remain at the forefront for Denver
- Understanding that the early childhood workforce are the platform in which a high-quality preschool experience and we must support the field
- Reminding Denver residents the value DPP adds for not just our youngest learners, but for our entire community, and how DPP complements universal preschool in the continuum of education that starts at birth



2022

**Join Us!
Let's
Keep the
Momentum
Going**

For 15 years, DPP has been at the forefront of early childhood education and we fully intend to continue to do so. You can play an important role in ensuring that we continue the momentum. Here are two things you can do today:

Sign up for our News Bites newsletter to stay up-do-date (go to dpp.org and scroll down to the bottom of the page to sign up).

Contact DPP

DPP.ORG

 facebook.com/DenverPreschoolProgram

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In Memoriam
Dr. Rebecca Kantor

With very heavy hearts, Denver Preschool Program board and staff mourned the loss of Dr. Rebecca Kantor last year, a beloved colleague and long-time board member of DPP. Dr. Kantor passed away on April 22, 2021 after a brave battle with leukemia.

Dr. Kantor was the dean of the School of Education & Human Development at the University of Colorado Denver and was a tremendous champion for the early childhood education community throughout her robust and impactful career.

Dr. Kantor so generously gave her time to DPP since 2015 as a deeply engaged board member, thought partner, and, most of all, dear friend.

We will forever be grateful to Dr. Kantor for her passionate support of DPP and will continue to honor her in our work. May she rest in peace.

DPP Staff

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