

General

Q: What is the Universal Preschool Program (UPK)?

A: UPK launches in the 2023-24 school year, offering at least 10 hours of high-quality, voluntary preschool to every Colorado child in the year before they are eligible to enter kindergarten. Some children will qualify for additional state-funded hours based on family circumstances or qualifying factors for kindergarten readiness. Information on eligibility for additional hours of care will be published as it becomes available.

Q: Who is responsible for delivering UPK?

A: UPK is housed within the new Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC), along with other early childhood and family support programs. In order to ensure that the program is responsive to the varying needs of communities across Colorado, CDEC has appointed Local Coordinating Organizations (LCOs) to support the program at a local level.

Q: Will the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) continue in its current form?

A: No. Services that are currently provided under CPP will be replaced by equivalent provisions under the UPK program from 2023-24 with the aim of unifying state-funding under one funding source. CPP will run as normal for 2022-23.

Q: What if I need more than ten hours of care for my child?

A: Some children will qualify for additional hours of preschool under the UPK program. Information on eligibility will be published as it becomes available. Families may also qualify for CCCAP, Head Start, or other state, federal, or locally funded child care programs. Families may also utilize a “private pay” option in coordination with their provider, to supplement Universal Preschool and other funded programs for which they might be eligible.

Q: Which preschools are participating in Universal Preschool?

A: The Colorado Universal Preschool Program (UPK) will be delivered through a mixed delivery model, meaning that families can choose to send their child to any licensed preschool, whether school-based, community-based, or home-based, that is participating in UPK. When applying for UPK, families will be able to see participating preschools in their community and indicate their preference.

Local Coordinating Organizations

Q: What is a local coordinating organization (LCO)?

A: A local coordinating organization (LCO) is a community agency or organization that is responsible for supporting access to and equitable delivery of early childhood and family support programs in the community. The LCO's role is to foster partnerships and create alignment to ensure the equitable provision of early childhood and family support programs. The LCO will establish and implement a comprehensive, locally driven plan to achieve these goals.

Q: Who is eligible to be an LCO?

A: Organizations that are eligible to serve as LCOs include but are not limited to: county or municipal government agencies, school districts, BOCES, early childhood councils, family resource centers, special taxing districts, Head Start grantees, local nonprofit organizations, and charter school networks.

Q: Why is Universal Preschool (UPK) being run through LCOs?

A: Throughout the process of developing recommendations and drafting the legislation that established the UPK program, stakeholders raised concerns that early childhood programs were operating in silos, and that local communities were best situated to address local needs. The LCO structure will ensure that there is a local center of gravity for early childhood programs that is responsible for coordinating resources, assisting families, strengthening community choice, and meeting accountability standards. Local leadership is particularly important to engage and support providers so that families have access to a wide range of choices within the mixed delivery framework.

Q: What is the LCO's "catchment area"?

A: LCO catchment areas range in size from one to six counties, depending on the needs of the communities they serve. Catchment boundaries were arranged to avoid splitting school districts across more than one LCO catchment area. If a community does not have a designated LCO, CDEC will step in to take on this role until there is a viable LCO selected.

Q: How were LCOs selected?

A: Eligible entities submitted applications to CDEC that included evidence of their capacity to support families, providers, and the broader early childhood community. Applicants also submitted letters of support from community members and partners. These applications were reviewed by a panel of early childhood experts and 32 LCOs were selected.

Q: Where can I find my LCO?

A: The names and contact information for the approved LCOs can be found [here](#).

Q: What is CDEC's role when it comes to LCOs?

A: CDEC is responsible for selecting and supporting LCOs to work effectively in their communities. Each LCO will sign a three-year agreement with CDEC and will be responsible

for renewing or replacing these agreements every three to five years. The agreement includes expectations, targets, and benchmarks for the LCO's work. CDEC will also work closely with LCOs in devising their community plans and supporting their implementation. The administrative funding model is flexible to local needs and CDEC will work with LCOs to ensure that they have the necessary resources to support early childhood education in their communities.

Q: How are LCOs funded for their administrative costs?

A: Each LCO will receive a baseline administrative funding allocation based on the cost of hiring staff in the region and the number of eligible children expected to enroll. This baseline funding is designed to fund a half time employee in catchments with the smallest number of children up to two full time employees for the most populated catchments. In addition, LCOs can apply for additional resources to support their work via the community plan; these resources might include funding for translation services, technology, additional staffing, mileage, or professional development costs.

Q: What happens if the LCO is not meeting the requirements of its contract?

A: If at any time CDEC determines the LCO is not meeting the requirements of the contract, CDEC may terminate the agreement and select a new LCO from the community.

Q: What is the LCO responsible for when it comes to early childhood services beyond preschool?

A: The LCO is responsible for devising and implementing a community plan that fosters equitable access by families and robust participation by providers in early childhood and family support programs. All LCOs must submit a community plan that details how they will:

- Assist families in applying for early childhood and family support programs
- Recruit and work with providers
- Ensure a mixed delivery system
- Assist in increasing recruitment, retention, and compensation for the early care and education workforce
- Coordinate various programs and funding streams
- Ensure equitable distribution of funding
- Identify, solicit, and secure, as feasible, additional local resources and funding
- Ensure transparency for early childhood funding

Q: What are LCOs responsible for when it comes to UPK specifically?

A: LCOs are responsible for assisting families in applying for UPK slots, matching families with appropriate providers, supporting a variety of providers to participate in UPK and equitably distributing the UPK resources available in their community.

Q: Which entities must the LCO coordinate with?

A: Entities that the LCO must coordinate with include, but are not limited to, school district administrative units, early childhood councils, Head Start agencies, and county departments of human services, particularly in the administration of CCCAP.

Q: What is the role of LCO in the allocation of preschool funding?

A: There are two options for how the LCO can support the distribution of preschool funds: 1) The LCO will designate which preschool providers should receive funding from the state, and CDEC will distribute funds directly to providers in accordance with the approved community plan; or 2) The LCO can request the authority to receive funding directly to implement the community plan and distribute such funds to preschool providers. To be approved for this model, the LCO must demonstrate that the fiscal infrastructure and internal controls are in place to manage that process.

Q: What happens if a community does not have a viable LCO?

A: If the community does not have a designated LCO and an approved community plan, CDEC will step in and take on the duties of the LCO until the community has a viable LCO. This includes assisting families with applying, ensuring a mixed delivery system, and equitably distributing funds. CDEC will also provide technical assistance in this community to ensure the LCO is prepared and selected as soon as possible.

Q. What resources are available to support the start-up of LCOs and local ramp up of preschool?

A: The Joint Budget Committee approved the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) Office of Early Childhood Supplemental Request S4 (see page 25 [here](#)) which will allocate resources to support local capacity and implementation of preschool ramp-up. CDHS requested \$6.6 million (\$3.0 million per year) to fund regional local capacity building partners and to oversee the partnerships for FY 22-23, FY 23-24, and the first quarter of FY 24-25. The regional partners would survey local capacity and develop regional strategies to build capacity to implement universal preschool. CDHS also proposed spending \$39.3 million over FY 22-23 and FY 23-24 for purchasing furniture and equipment for new preschool classrooms (with a priority for energy efficiency considerations), providing curriculum and training to new preschool providers, and establishing local child care management information systems.

Eligibility and Application

Q: Who is eligible for the UPK program?

A: Children are eligible for UPK in the year before they become eligible for kindergarten. CDEC uses a cutoff of October 1, meaning that a child who turns 4 before this date in the year they wish to enroll in preschool will be eligible for UPK. Children who are three years of age, or younger in districts that have a waiver to serve children under three, will also be eligible for UPK hours if they meet at least one qualifying factor. Information about eligibility for younger children will be made available once criteria are finalized.

Q: What are qualifying factors?

A: Qualifying factors are child or family circumstances identified by CDEC as having the potential to negatively impact a child's learning. These have not yet been decided and will be identified by CDEC Rule.

Q: How many state funded hours are available?

A: All children are eligible for 10 hours of state funded preschool in the year before they are eligible for kindergarten. Some children will be eligible for additional UPK hours depending on qualifying factors, which are yet to be determined by CDEC. Information about eligibility for additional hours will be provided once the criteria are finalized. UPK eligibility is independent of a child's eligibility for CCCAP, Head Start, or local preschool program funding, so families may layer these hours on top of their UPK allocation. LCOs can help families to navigate the combination of different funding sources for a child's care. Families are also welcome to work with providers to arrange additional self-funded hours as required.

Q: Are UPK slots guaranteed for all eligible 4-year-olds?

A: While LCOs will strive to ensure that every family is served, enrollment will depend on the availability of a suitable provider to meet the child's needs, therefore slots are not guaranteed.

Q: How do I apply for UPK for my child?

A: CDEC is developing a family application portal that will allow you to express your preferences for provider type, hours, and location. Families will also be able to supply the information required to check eligibility for additional hours through this portal. This information will be used to match families with an appropriate provider as well as to determine your child's eligibility for additional state-funded preschool hours.

Q: Can a family receive Child Care Assistance (CCCAP), Head Start or other local funding as well as UPK?

A: Yes. UPK is designed to be layered with CCCAP, Head Start and local programs; LCOs are expected to support families in the process of blending and braiding state funding to augment provision for eligible children.

Providers

Q: Who can provide UPK?

A: UPK is open to all licensed providers that meet CDEC's quality standards. This includes school-based, community-based, and family child care home providers. Providers will need to utilize a curriculum that meets the standards set by CDEC. A resource bank will be made available to help providers with curriculum planning and delivery.

Q: What is mixed delivery?

A: CDEC is committed to supporting families in choosing the most appropriate preschool setting for their children. This could be a public preschool classroom, a childcare center in the community or a home-based care provider.

Q: How do providers sign up to participate in UPK?

A: Providers who are interested in participating in the UPK program should contact their LCO. The LCO will provide more information on licensing requirements and how to declare your capacity to accommodate preschool children. Our [Find my LCO](#) page contains contact information for all LCOs.

Q: Do I need a special license to participate in UPK?

A: Providers who are licensed to serve children of preschool age under the existing licensing framework can participate in UPK.

Q: Is there any support for providers who participate in UPK?

A: Yes. LCOs are responsible for supporting providers to deliver high quality early childhood care and education through the UPK program. Visit our [Find my LCO](#) page to find out how to contact your LCO for support. CDEC will also provide a resource bank to help providers with curriculum planning and delivery.

Finance

Q: What were the recommendations in the [Universal Preschool Recommendations Report](#), as unanimously approved by the ECLC, and HB22-1295 regarding funding in the Colorado Universal Preschool Program?

A: In order to address the unique aspects of a mixed delivery universal preschool program, and avoid reinforcing the current challenges of the state's school finance formula, the report and subsequent legislation recommended several changes to the calculation and approach to funding universal preschool. The report recommended a funding model that:

- Removes preschool funding calculations from the School Finance Act to ensure that per child rates reflect differences in the cost of delivering care depending on risk factors, regional needs, and special education services.
- Establishes a base rate for 10 hours of universal preschool, and additional adjustments including weights for underserved populations and regional considerations, such as economies of scale in rural areas, as well as any other additional incentives for a variety of needs.
- Preserves all current state funding for the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP), as the program moves to an integrated single state preschool program with Proposition EE outside of school finance.
- Preserves funding for children 3 years and younger at current total funding levels and ensures that students who are currently eligible for additional services do not lose out.
- Strikes a balance between base funding for universal preschool and the targeted access for additional programming for those with greatest need.
- Complies with state and federal law, including the requirements in the State Constitution.

Q: What does Amendment 23 of the State Constitution require for preschool and how does the law ensure that UPK funding is in compliance?

A: Amendment 23 (Title IX, Art. 17 of the state constitution) requires statewide base per pupil funding to grow annually by the rate of inflation. Since the UPK per pupil funding rates will be set separately from the School Finance Act, HB 22-1295 ensures compliance with the constitutional requirement for inflation-indexed growth of base per pupil funding by stipulating that:

- In a mixed delivery state preschool system, the unique characteristics that drive costs in preschool settings require more flexibility in rate-setting than is provided by the process under the School Finance Act. Therefore, UPK per child rates will be set separately from the School Finance Act.
- The constitutional requirement will be met by establishing a per-child constitutional compliance rate for the 2023-24 fiscal year and then increasing this rate annually in line with inflation. The rate equals the portion of the statewide base per pupil funding amount for 2023-24 that applies to the number of hours of universal preschool services (10 hours per week, which is 40% of the required number of kindergarten hours in state statute, 22-32-109) and requires that amount to increase annually by inflation.

- Before finalizing the rates for preschool programming in any given year, the department must ensure the per child rates meet or exceed the constitutional compliance rate, defined as 40% of the statewide base per pupil rate in the School Finance Act for the 2023-24 fiscal year, increased in line with inflation for subsequent years.

Q: Is the constitutional compliance rate the same as the expected UPK per pupil rate?

A: No. The constitutional compliance amount is a minimum bar that the Department must meet, but the actual rates may exceed this in order to account for the cost of providing high quality care as well as geographic and child characteristics that could drive a need for higher rates of reimbursement.

Q: What is required of the preschool formula and how is that distinct from the school finance formula?

In a mixed delivery state preschool system, the unique characteristics that drive costs in preschool settings require more flexibility in rate-setting than is provided by the process under the School Finance Act. Therefore, UPK per child rates will be set separately from the School Finance Act. CDEC will set rates using a formula that accounts for:

- The cost of providing preschool services that meet the required quality standards.
- Variations in the cost of providing preschool resulting from regional differences and circumstances, including difficulties of achieving economies of scale in rural areas and in recruiting and retaining educators.
- Variations in the cost of providing preschool resulting from child characteristics, which must include if a child is low-income and may include other factors such as dual language learner status.
- The impact of UPK rates on provision for infants and toddlers.

HB 22-1295 also allows funding for specified purposes which may include funding for administrative units to provide special education services and increasing compensation for preschool educators. The department must compare the amount of funding going to universal preschool services with the amount of funding for additional preschool services and prepare a public analysis of the efficacy of the balance between the two.

Q: What are the allowed special purpose funding elements?

A: Community input that shaped the Universal Preschool Program Recommendations identified the importance of supporting the implementation of special education services for children with identified needs and the importance of recruiting and retaining preschool teachers. Funding may be used to address these specific issues outside of utilizing the per child rate approach.

Q: How will providers be paid for the UPK services they offer?

A: In most cases, providers will be paid directly by the Colorado Department of Early Childhood, according to a funding formula which will be developed by late 2022. In certain rare situations, funds may be delivered through Local Coordinating Organizations to providers.

Q: How will preschool services for 3-year-olds be funded?

A: The amount of funding currently allocated for 3-year-old preschool for children with risk factors will stay constant and will continue to be administered through school districts. In order to support the provision of inclusive 3-year-old preschool special education services, and given the IDEA requirements that fall to administrative units, state preschool funding for this baseline number of 3-year-olds will be distributed for the 2023-24 school year to school districts and school districts may decide to contract with community-based providers for such slots. Local community plans, however, should look across funding streams (including Head Start, CCCAP, and local funds) and identify gaps and opportunities to support access for all children, including 3-year-olds.

Q: How will funding be allocated and distributed throughout the year?

A: Beginning in the 2023-24 school year, CDEC will base the amounts distributed on the per child rates and special purposes funding. At the start of each fiscal year, CDEC (or the LCO, where they are responsible for receiving and distributing UPK funds) will distribute a portion of the funding to providers based on the numbers and types of children expected to enroll as estimated in the community plan. The remaining funding will be distributed throughout the year, adjusting the amounts based on actual enrollment. This allows for adjustments during the year should enrollment not match the anticipated planned enrollment.

For 3-year-old funding, districts and charter schools will receive an annual allotment based on 2022-23 CPP funding, which will be distributed throughout the year based on the number of children enrolled and the per child rate.

Q: What are the revenue sources that fund UPK?

A: UPK is funded by revenues from Proposition EE and funding transferred annually to the Preschool Programs Cash Fund that represents the Colorado Preschool Program funding amount in the 2022-23 budget year. That transfer amount is taken from the General Fund or the State Education Fund and is calculated as the amount of state share of the Total Program that was attributable to students enrolled in CPP and 3- or 4-year-olds with disabilities for the 2022-23 budget year. Starting in 2024-25 the amount shall increase annually by inflation. Funding will not be impacted by other School Finance provisions going forward. CDEC may seek or accept other funding to implement preschool and braid funding from other sources.

Q: What are the funding priorities for children the year prior to kindergarten entry, for children with disabilities, for 3-year-olds (and under in waiver districts), and for additional preschool services? How is current funding for these priority populations preserved?

A: The statute (26.5-4-204) is clear that the purposes of the Colorado Universal Preschool Program are to provide access to:

- 10 hours of preschool per week at no charge, for children the year prior to kindergarten eligibility
- Services for all 3- and 4-year-old children with disabilities
- Preschool services for 3-year-olds (and for the 2 waiver communities that can serve children under age 3 with CPP slots) who are low income or have qualifying factors (child or family circumstances identified by CDEC as negatively impacting a child's development)
- Additional preschool services in addition to the 10 hours, for low-income children and those with qualifying factors the year prior to kindergarten entry

Where there is insufficient funding to cover all purposes, it should be prioritized in the following order (26.5-4-209):

- 1) 10 hours per week for children the year prior to kindergarten; provision for 3- and 4-year-old children with disabilities; low income 3-year-olds (and younger in waiver districts) or those with qualifying factors at the level under CPP in 2022-23
 - a) If there is inadequate funding to serve all low-income 3-year-olds (and younger in waiver districts), the department must first prioritize children with disabilities and low-income children with at least one qualifying factor. Any remaining funding may then be allocated to low-income children without qualifying factors.
- 2) Additional preschool services for eligible children the year prior to kindergarten
- 3) Special purposes

Q: What are the priorities for specific children to access these programs and why are they different from CPP?

A: If there is inadequate funding to serve all low-income 3-year-olds (and younger in waiver districts), the department must first prioritize children with disabilities and low-income children with at least one qualifying factor. This is different from CPP, which requires children 3-years-old (and younger) to have multiple risk factors. The intent of the UPK approach is to make all low-income children and children with qualifying factors eligible for additional preschool programming, but should there be inadequate funding to serve the fully eligible population, target resources using the specified priorities. This is different from denying eligibility to children and instead noting that it is adequate funding, not eligibility, that results in a prioritization of who has access to services.

Q: How is funding calculated for UPK and how is revenue generated for an Administrative Unit to be able to provide Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for children with Individuals Education Plans (IEPs) due to a disability?

A: Due to the unique features of preschool classrooms, the requirement to offer a mixed delivery pre-k program, and the disconnect that currently exists between the School Finance Act and what a calculation of serving a preschooler should look like, the calculation of per child rates under UPK will be conducted via a separate rate-setting process from the School

Finance Act (see above for requirements regarding the rate setting process). This change will include the rate setting process for the general education portion of all 4-year-olds; all 3- and 4-year-old children with disabilities; eligible 3-year-olds (and younger in waiver districts); and the occasional student who is 5 years old but not yet eligible for kindergarten.

The general education portion of children with IEPs is included in this calculation. As such, while a preschool child will not be part of the pupil count for the K-12 School Finance Act, school districts are required to certify to CDE the number of 3- and 4-year-old pupils with disabilities receiving an educational program from the district so that they can receive funding pursuant to Title 22, Part 1, Article 20 governing the Education of Exceptional Children. In this case, for example, all 4-year-olds will receive full general education funding for the part-day, universal preschool program as funded by UPK regardless of disability status, and will then also be able to access additional revenue which may be needed pursuant to their IEP. Three-year-olds will be funded up to the 2022-2023 CPP allocation subject to the established rate and enrollment. Funding is required to be distributed to school districts and charter schools, and three-year-olds with IEPs will be reported to CDE for the purpose of receiving funding pursuant to the child's IEP.

Q: Is there a hold harmless funding provision for school districts and charter schools?

A: Yes, there is a one year hold harmless funding provision for school districts and charter schools such that if total funding for children enrolled in the 2023-24 fiscal year under the new Colorado Universal Preschool Program is less than funding received in the CPP program for enrolled children in 2022-2023, the department will make up the difference. The department shall also hold contracted community providers harmless in 2023-2024 based on 2022- 2023 contracts districts had with community providers.

Q: What is the impact on the calculation of Total Program for the purposes of district Mill Levy Overrides?

A: The law redefines the mill levy override cap as a percentage of Total Program plus the revenue attributable to children enrolled via DEC under the Colorado Universal Preschool Program. This ensures that when preschoolers are funded through the Colorado Universal Preschool Program instead of the school finance formula, school districts do not see a drop in the amount of tax revenue districts may collect under the mill levy override cap.