



DPP: Understanding and Advancing DEI for Preschool Families and Workforce

The Denver Preschool Program (DPP) helps families find and pay for preschool and provides funding and support for participating preschools. DPP is committed to integrating principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) into its services so that all families and preschool educators have a sense of belonging and receive support regardless of their race, ethnicity, economic status, or other factors. This brief highlights successes and areas for growth related to DPP’s DEI work and is based on results from the 2021–2022 DPP evaluation, conducted by the Butler Institute for Families at the University of Denver.

Innovative Programming to Support Equitable Preschool Access for Families

Recently, DPP established a scholarship program that fully covers preschool tuition for families with incomes below 300% of the federal poverty level. This program has made a powerful impact on preschool access by addressing the barrier of affordability, particularly considering gentrification and high housing costs. Most families who received a DPP Scholarship were impacted by economic hardships and/or systemic racism (see figure below).

DPP Scholarship Family Characteristics

Incomes at or below 185% of the federal poverty level

76%

Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC)

71%

Experienced food insecurity in the past year

61%

Families have consistently reported that receiving free preschool tuition makes it easier to enroll in their preschool of choice and send their child to preschool for the hours and days they need. The DPP Scholarship also supports a family's ability to pay bills, afford housing, and continue living in the city and county of Denver.



I just think [the DPP Scholarship] is a great program and opportunity, especially with times like now where the cost of living is just getting higher and higher. It is just extremely hard to make ends meet, so I just don't know what I would do if that wasn't an option."

-DPP Scholarship Parent/Guardian

Understanding Families' and Educators' Lived Experiences with DEI in Preschool

In 2022, families and educators who participated in the evaluation shared their experiences with DEI at their preschools.

Family Perspectives. Many families reported positive experiences related to DEI and generally appreciated the diversity of staff and students. Typically, families reported equitable treatment in an inclusive preschool environment.

However, some families rated their preschool's commitment to DEI unfavorably, all of whom identified as BIPOC. In addition, some families indicated that their preschool lacked diversity, and a small number of respondents observed inequitable treatment of families who received child care subsidies, suggesting stigma toward families who receive public assistance.



I've always told them... 'I love it here. I can't seem to have my kids be anywhere else but here with you guys. It's really personal relationships.' I tell them it's like a family. They know my family personally. ... I felt that in the time of need, God really heard me and was like, 'I'm going to answer your prayers.'"

-BIPOC Parent/Guardian

Educator Perspectives. In interviews, educators shared mixed feedback about their preschool's current DEI supports. Some did not perceive DEI supports in their preschool or classrooms, while others identified several supports (e.g., implementing models of inclusion, classroom materials, cultural celebrations, and DEI training).

Educators' most common suggestions for how DPP could best support preschools with DEI focused on providing:

- Multilingual trainings and resources
- More classroom materials that promote DEI

In addition, annual DPP workforce surveys have consistently revealed a disparity in educator pay that is rooted in systemic racism. For example, during the 2021–2022 program year, **educators who identified as Black or African American earned \$5.57 less per hour** compared with White

educators with similar job roles and qualifications, and who worked in similar preschool settings. This finding indicates that more attention must be paid to the realities faced by BIPOC educators who work within the current system, highlighting the need for increased action.

Conclusions and Recommendation

As part of its journey to eliminate systemic racism and other inequities in early care and education, DPP has several opportunities to increase its supports to families and providers.

1. Continuously improve the DPP Scholarship to promote equitable family access to quality preschool.

Minimize administrative barriers at all levels to ensure families with the greatest need have access to DPP's full-tuition scholarships. For example, allow families to qualify for the scholarship based on their DPP application and enroll automatically without additional paperwork.

2. Support DEI practices and policies in DPP preschools.

DPP can promote DEI at the preschool level by supporting providers with:

- Creating equitable policies and practices around hiring, promotion, and billing
- Providing DEI materials, resources, and trainings and financial assistance with DEI-focused family events

3. Address workforce pay disparities.

Through its role as the Local Coordinating Organization for Colorado's Universal Preschool program, DPP has an important role to play in ending racial pay disparities at a systemic level. This could include:

- Supporting policies that promote pay parity for preschool educators in mixed-delivery settings and ensuring that these policies have a racial-equity focus
- Incorporating pay equity into DPP's QI supports (e.g., support providers in conducting equity audits of educator pay)
- Supplementing BIPOC educators' pay directly via stipends, based on a model such as the [North Carolina's Child Care WAGES® program](#)
- Promoting recruitment, retention, and advancement of BIPOC educators through scholarships, leadership programs, and other support programs

4. Create DPP family and educator advisory boards.

These boards can give those most impacted by DPP's services more voice and decision-making power.