

EXPANDING FAMILY ACCESS TO QUALITY CHILD CARE: DPP'S SCHOLARSHIP AND PRESCHOOL FOR 3'S PROGRAMS¹

Since 2007, the Denver Preschool Program (DPP) has provided tuition credits on a sliding scale to help families with a 4-year-old pay for preschool. Recently, DPP has increased its depth and breadth of support by fully covering preschool tuition costs for families with limited or no access to economic resources through its DPP Scholarship and offering tuition credits to families with a 3-year-old through its Preschool for 3's program. This brief provides results from the evaluation of the DPP Scholarship and Preschool for 3's programs, conducted by the Butler Institute for Families at the University of Denver in 2021-2022. For the DPP Scholarship evaluation, data sources include program records, surveys of 37 families, and follow-up interviews with 5 families. The Preschool for 3's evaluation used program records, surveys of 56 families, and follow-up interviews with 4 families.²

DPP SCHOLARSHIP

DPP launched the DPP Scholarship as a 3-year pilot program in 2019 to provide a greater depth of support related to preschool access and affordability. Families are eligible for free preschool through the DPP Scholarship if they are enrolled in a DPP preschool, have a 3- or 4-year-old, and meet criteria around income, preschool cost, hours enrolled, and other funding.³ During the 2021-2022 program year, 252 families received the DPP Scholarship.

Who Received 100% Free Preschool Tuition Through the DPP Scholarship?

The DPP Scholarship reached families impacted by economic hardships and/or systemic racism. For example, many participating families:

- Had incomes below 185% of the federal poverty level (76%),
- Identified as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC) (71%), and/or
- Experienced food insecurity in the past year (61%).

1 Recommended citation: Wacker, A., Roberts, A. (2022). *Expanding family access to quality child care: DPP's Scholarship and Preschool for 3's programs*. Butler Institute for Families, Graduate School of Social Work, University of Denver.

2 Survey results were weighted to represent the population of DPP Scholarship families by race and ethnicity.

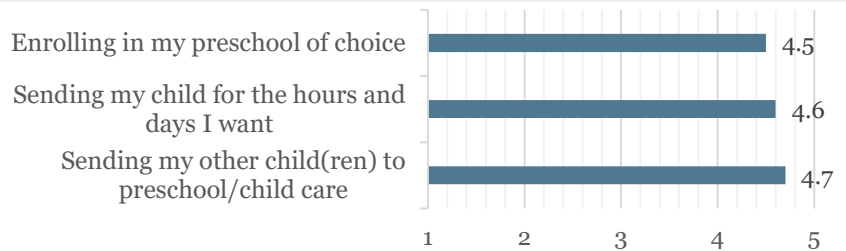
3 Families eligible for the DPP Scholarship include those: 1) living at or below 300% of the federal poverty line, 2) spending more than 7% of their income on preschool tuition, 3) attending 5 or more hours a day (25 hours per week) at preschool, and 4) not receiving other public funding sources (e.g., Head Start, CPP, CCCAP, ECARE, or Mill Levy).

How Does Fully Funded Preschool Make a Difference for Families?

PRESCHOOL ACCESS

According to families, receiving fully covered preschool tuition made it easier to enroll in their preschool of choice, send their child to preschool for the hours and days they preferred, and send their other child(ren) to preschool or child care, if applicable (see Figure 1).

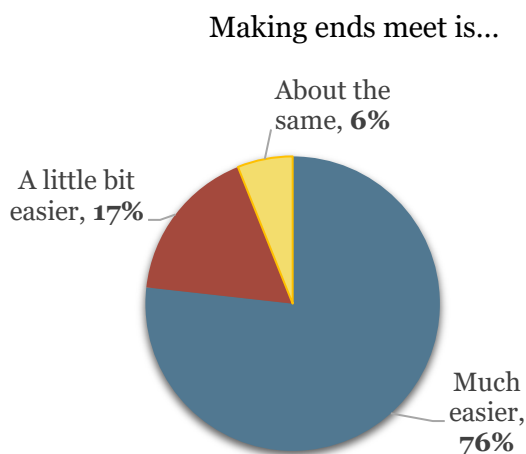
Figure 1: How Does Receiving Fully Covered Preschool Tuition Impact Your Family?



Supporting Denver Families

On average, families reported that receiving fully covered preschool tuition made it “much easier” to continue living in the city and county of Denver.

Figure 2: How Does Receiving Fully Covered Preschool Tuition Impact Your Family?



Families have also reported that receiving free preschool made it easier for them to work and/or attend school, if applicable. After they lost their job, one parent/guardian shared that the DPP Scholarship “afforded me the ability to look in a different direction rather than just taking any job desperately.”

DPP Scholarship Summary and Recommendations

The DPP Scholarship has a profound impact on families' ability to send their children to preschool and their overall financial well-being. In addition, as most participants are impacted by systemic racism and/or have little to no access to economic resources, it aligns with DPP's equity commitments.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DPP

SCHOLARSHIP INCLUDE:

1. Ensure families with the greatest need have access to the scholarship by:
 - a. Expanding grassroots efforts to help families find a preschool and obtain the DPP Scholarship. To center equitable access, prioritize families who identify as BIPOC and those who live in child care deserts.
 - b. Streamlining paperwork for participating families wherever possible (e.g., integrate the scholarship application within the general DPP family application).
2. Continue to adjust the scholarship policies and procedures based upon the current policy context (e.g., the launch of universal preschool).

PRESCHOOL FOR 3'S

In 2021, DPP began offering tuition credit support to Denver families with a 3-year-old who attended a participating preschool and lived at or below 185% of the federal poverty level. During the 2021-2022 program year, 385 families participated in Preschool for 3's, most of whom identified as BIPOC (85%).

"I love how easily accessible and quick DPP is to respond."

—Preschool for 3's Parent/Guardian

HOW ACCESSIBLE IS PRESCHOOL FOR 3'S FOR FAMILIES?

Preschool for 3's families "agreed" or "strongly agreed" on average, that the DPP application made sense and that it was easy to gather the required documents and submit the application. They also knew how to get help with the application, if needed.

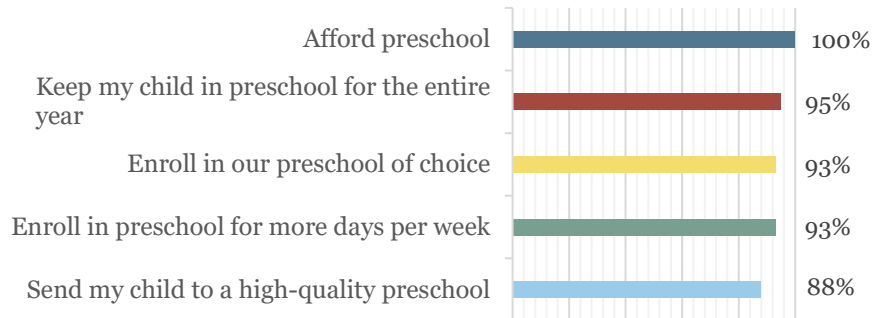
How Does Preschool for 3's Make a Difference for Families?

Families had very positive views of the program's impact on their ability to access preschool. For example, 100% "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that DPP made it possible to afford preschool, while 93% felt that tuition credits allowed them to enroll in their preschool of choice and enroll in preschool for more days per week than they otherwise would have been able to afford (see Figure 3).

"DPP has helped my twins and I tremendously, especially during a hardship in our lives. Without DPP, I would have not been able to go back to work and eventually save enough money to go back to school to finish my degree and make my children proud. We are so thankful for all the kind staff and the support given; we can't thank you enough!"

—Preschool for 3's Parent/Guardian

Figure 3: DPP Tuition Credits Make it Possible for my Family to...



Parents/guardians also observed a variety of positive effects on their child's development due to having their child in preschool as a 3-year-old, with the highest ratings pertaining to their children's social-emotional development (e.g., getting along with other children, trying new things, and behaving in a classroom). Families also felt that preschool helped their child develop physical skills, academic skills, and a love of learning.

Preschool for 3's Summary and Recommendations

The first year of the Preschool for 3's program yielded overwhelmingly positive feedback from families in terms of the administration of the application process/tuition credits, perceived impact on preschool access and affordability, and support of children's development. However, program reach, to date, is relatively small. It is recommended that DPP continue—and expand—Preschool for 3's as funding allows to ensure that this support is accessible to a significant number of families, while prioritizing families who have the greatest need (e.g., families who live in under-resourced neighborhoods, those who live below or close to the federal poverty level).

“Thank you allowing us to see our child grow so much and in so many different ways; she has benefited so much thanks to this assistance program!”

—Preschool for 3's Parent/Guardian

“Muchas gracias por el apoyo para el preescolar es mucha la ayuda ya que nos permite trabajar y saber que los niños están seguros.”



“Thank you for all the support for preschool. It's very helpful that it permits us to work and know that the kids are safe.”

—Preschool for 3's Parent/Guardian

CONCLUSION

The DPP Scholarship and Preschool for 3's are innovative programs that have made a difference for Denver families, making it possible to send their child to preschool and supporting their overall financial well-being. Therefore, particularly in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic and historic inflation, these strategies to expand equitable preschool access are critical.