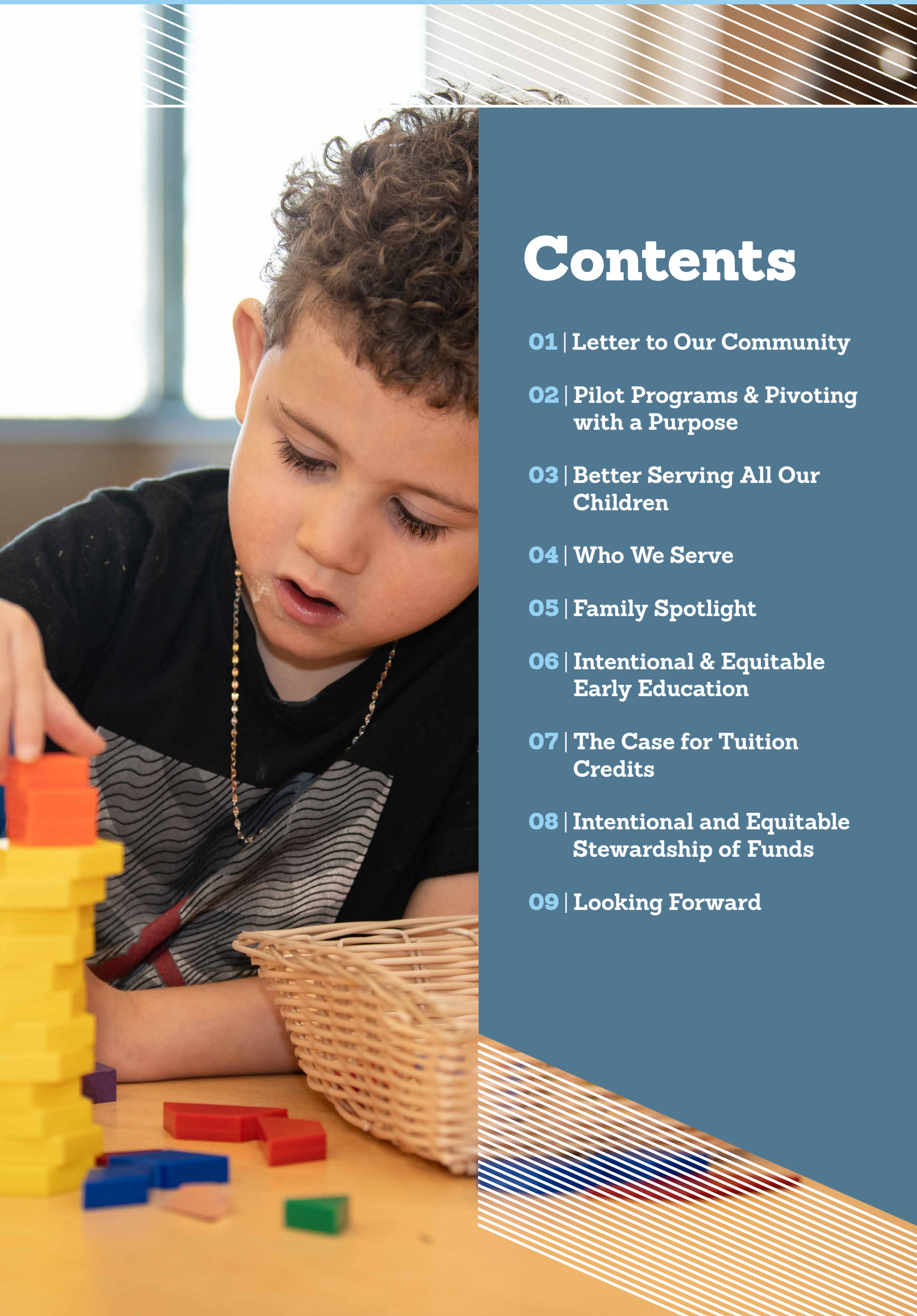


# 2020

## LEARNING FROM AN UNPRECEDENTED YEAR

### DENVER PRESCHOOL PROGRAM 2020 ANNUAL REPORT



## Contents

- 01 | Letter to Our Community
- 02 | Pilot Programs & Pivoting with a Purpose
- 03 | Better Serving All Our Children
- 04 | Who We Serve
- 05 | Family Spotlight
- 06 | Intentional & Equitable Early Education
- 07 | The Case for Tuition Credits
- 08 | Intentional and Equitable Stewardship of Funds
- 09 | Looking Forward

### Dear Friends of the Denver Preschool Program,

We achieved more than we could have imagined during the 2019-2020 school year. Despite its challenges, we believe the best is yet to come.

I remain honored and humbled to lead a team that is focused on providing relevant support to Denver's early childhood ecosystem. Nothing — not an unprecedented global health crisis, national political and social unrest, nor a sharp decrease in local sales tax revenue on which our program relies — could stop the DPP team from giving their all.

Our team is more than DPP board members and employees; it's you: a community of parents and guardians, preschool providers and allies in the community and in public office. Because of your tenacity, we were able to launch several pilot programs aimed at ensuring our schools can persevere in times of crisis and recovery. Because of their resourcefulness, we also had the funds to safely keep 4,877 Denver 4-year-olds in preschool whether online or in-person during the 2019-2020 school year. And because of a willingness to be innovative, we have the experience needed to help inform the expansion of equitable early childhood education beyond this pandemic and into the future. But to achieve our next chapter, we must ensure our teachers have what they need to sustain their chosen careers. The people who have made their vocation educating our children during a critical development period should be able to afford to live in the communities they serve.

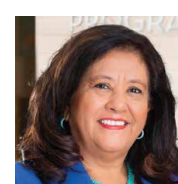
The enduring disruption of our daily rituals due to the pandemic has reinforced a truth that we have always known: early childhood educators are essential workers. The success of our economy — and our Zoom meetings — depends on families having reliable child care. Yet, there was a child care deficit long before COVID-19 came to Colorado.

The number of children under age four in Colorado is expected to increase 22% by 2026<sup>1</sup>. To meet the growing demand for excellent early childhood educators, we are working closely with the entire early childhood education ecosystem to rethink, reinvent and reimagine in real-time, how early childhood education can be even more rewarding for all involved.

These unprecedented times have given us the opportunity to develop solutions that will positively shape the futures of our children; enhance diversity, equity and inclusion within our city; and inspire other communities in our country to echo our ethos — preschool matters.

We are excited to share what we've accomplished together against all odds and as always, thank you for your support.

Sincerely,



*Elsa Holguín*  
**Elsa Holguín**  
President & CEO



*Zach Hochstadt*  
**Zach Hochstadt**  
Chair, Board of Directors

#### CITATIONS

1 <https://www.cpr.org/2021/01/05/the-workforce-behind-the-workforce-confronting-colorados-critical-child-care-shortage>



## Pilot Programs & Pivoting with a Purpose

DPP responds to the critical needs of Denver's essential workers, working families and early childhood educators

### Helping the Pandemic's Hidden Heroes Stay Afloat

**SITUATION** Child care centers and family child care homes became even more indispensable during the 2019-2020 school year. At a time when many early childhood education programs — including those within Denver Public Schools — closed their doors, and there wasn't a vaccination in sight, many community-based operations took on the risk of offering in-person care to families who still needed it. But the programs themselves also had needs that, if unmet, could have led to more long-term closures.

In April 2020, nearly half of DPP providers expressed concern about their long-term stability and faced the possibility of having to close permanently.

**ACTION** Child care centers and family child care homes are largely small businesses or nonprofits that rely on consistent enrollment numbers to keep their doors open. Firmly owning its obligation to help these independent operators survive new adversities, DPP provided resources toward staying open, retaining staff and offsetting expenses. Additionally, DPP launched a pilot program that intends to support family child care homes' general liability insurance costs.

**OUTCOME** Preschool providers who did not receive federal, state or local funding during the crisis were 16 times more likely to close<sup>2</sup>. DPP distributed nearly \$100,000 in emergency grants to child care centers and family child care homes to cover their immediate needs like payroll and personal protective equipment thereby sustaining operations without sacrificing quality. As of September 2020, only 5% of DPP providers closed.

**CITATIONS**

2 Delap, Suzanne et al. *Measuring The Impact Of COVID-19 On Colorado's Early Care And Learning Sector*. Early Milestones Colorado, Denver, 2021. <https://earlymilestones.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/COVID-Wave-1-Report-Web.pdf>. Accessed 6 Apr 2021.

### Administering State Funds for Essential Workers' Families

**SITUATION** Finding reliable and affordable child care is an ongoing challenge for many working families. But when COVID-19 brought Colorado to a standstill in the spring of 2020, it escalated into a public crisis. Essential workers needed safe spaces for their children to learn and grow while they risked their lives to keep our community running — and fast.

**ACTION** Within days of Colorado Governor Jared Polis issuing the first shelter-in-place order on March 18, 2020, a network of public and private entities including the Denver Preschool Program launched the Colorado Emergency Child Care Collaborative<sup>3</sup>, a system of emergency child care centers and tuition credits for essential workers.

**OUTCOME** As an established steward of public early childhood education dollars, DPP was pleased to serve as the Collaborative's fiscal agent. In less than two months, DPP helped transfer approximately \$11 million dollars to 498 preschools so that 5,086 children of essential workers could receive child care at no cost.

**CITATIONS**

3 Colorado's Emergency Child Care Program concluded May 24, 2020. Families currently in need may qualify for other subsidies such as the Denver Preschool Program tuition credits. Visit [www.dpp.org](http://www.dpp.org) for more resources.



### Adapting Attendance Policies to Public Health Needs

**SITUATION** One of the conditions of receiving tuition credits from DPP is regular classroom attendance. Under normal circumstances, DPP allows children seven absences from preschool per month before making adjustments. But absences and program closures necessitated by the COVID-19 outbreak often exceeded the allowed absences based on guidance from health and safety officials.

**ACTION** DPP recognized its policies and the support they give the Denver early childhood community must take into account extenuating circumstances in order to be relevant or risk further burdening them. On that account, DPP waived its attendance policy from March to August 2020, as well as in December of 2020 during a statewide spike in COVID-19 cases.

**OUTCOME** DPP's adjusted attendance policy infused more than \$1 million into community-based preschool programs that provided mainly in-person care during the pandemic. As long as students stay enrolled, both families and preschool providers were able to follow health and safety recommendations without impacting their tuition support.

### Exploring Distance Early Education

**SITUATION** The COVID-19 pandemic added another consideration to the discussion: in-person or online? In June of 2020, nearly one-third of parents and guardians in the U.S. with school-aged children said they would probably or definitely choose distance learning over in-person instruction (JAMA Pediatrics<sup>4</sup>). But, in-person child-teacher interactions are crucial to early learning, there are limitations to what technology 4-year-olds can manage and preschool providers were not prepared to offer distance learning yet. Hence, shifting from in-person to distance learning classrooms would take more than just a few clicks.

**ACTION** To increase the availability and quality of virtual preschool options, DPP partnered with Denver Public Schools and other local ECE partners to launch the Distance Learning Task Force. Members of the task force developed a distance learning plan based on best practices in early childhood education that each preschool provider in the pilot could customize. DPP also committed \$700,000 to support providers in their efforts to build and sustain distance learning programming.

**OUTCOME** More Denver families across socio-economic groups were able to balance work, child care and self-care with the aid of flexible and family-centered distance learning plans. While not ideal, many families discovered distance learning has its perks, like unique opportunities to co-create more effective learning environments with their teachers for their children.

**CITATIONS**

4 <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2769634>



## READ MORE

Read more about Denver's distance learning pilot: [tinyurl.com/r5k2cc5z](https://tinyurl.com/r5k2cc5z)

Read more about the Colorado Emergency Child Care Collaborative: [tinyurl.com/25v87zye](https://tinyurl.com/25v87zye)





## Adjusting Tuition Credits for Preschoolers in Foster Care

**SITUATION** Children in foster care show a high need for a high-quality preschool provider and support for early learning and school readiness<sup>5</sup>. But because tuition credits are calculated based on household income and size, which do not always reflect the child's unique socio-economic background, 4-year-olds in foster care could receive less than what they actually need.

**ACTION** DPP determined all 4-year-olds in foster care who are enrolled in a DPP-participating preschool program in the year before kindergarten are categorically eligible for the highest level of tuition support at Household Income Tier 1.

**OUTCOME** Automatically assigning DPP-eligible foster children to the tier indicating the highest need for support guarantees more 4-year-olds within a vulnerable demographic have increased access to quality early childhood education at a critical time in their development.

**CITATIONS**  
5 Zetlin, A. (2013). Placed at Risk by the System. The Educational Vulnerability of Children and Youth in Foster Care. Nova Science Publishers, Inc.

## Actual Cost of Care

**SITUATION** Preschool providers frequently charge tuition rates that are lower than the actual cost of child care to make early education more affordable to families. To help reduce the difference between what it costs for them to provide high-quality early childhood education and what families in their area can afford to pay, providers often rely on financial aid. DPP tuition credits are one type of financial resource for providers that can be layered with other financial resources, such as state and federal funds. But how these resources interact with each other and the order in which they are applied could be better aligned to maximize funding.

**ACTION** DPP increased the impact of its DPP Scholarship, a three-year pilot in its second year that pays for 100% of preschool tuition costs for families with lower incomes who do not have access to other ECE funding sources (such as the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program or the Colorado Preschool Program). DPP revised its approach toward bridging the gap between what preschool programs request and can collect from Scholarship families by considering annual cost of care instead of published tuition rates for families that are Scholarship-eligible.

**OUTCOME** Under the new policy, DPP community-based sites with Scholarship students receive more tuition credits to improve and maintain their quality. Additionally, 151 families were able to receive an increased level of support through the Scholarship to better help their child attend a quality preschool (the Scholarship's positive impact on one family is included below).



# Better Serving All Our Children

Serving Denver's diverse population through linguistic inclusivity

Every word counts in preschool classrooms and in the homes in which those students live. Because while families across Denver share similar values about early childhood education and its importance, they do not all speak the same language — especially in urban hubs.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the Mile High City was home to 727,211 people in 2019 and 25.5% of them spoke a language other than English at home.<sup>6</sup> Of the 12 most commonly spoken languages in the world, you will frequently hear many of them around town such as Arabic, Somali, Spanish and Vietnamese.

In southwest Denver, the audio is partly Austroasiatic, a large language family of Mainland Southeast Asia, according to Linda Capaldo-Smith. Capaldo-Smith is the director of Notre Dame Parish School's Early Learning Center, which serves a small Vietnamese enclave off of Federal Boulevard.

There, the language barrier that has always existed between staff and families has only grown since the pandemic began and communication moved to virtual platforms. However, Capaldo-Smith is resolute about encouraging language accommodation versus assimilation.

"I have a little boy in my class right now and he tells me 'my parents don't speak English,' but I always tell [families], keep speaking your native language in the home so your kids grow up bilingual," she said. Capaldo-Smith wishes she did, but her Filipino parents discouraged her from speaking Tagalog, though she understands it fluently. "I just think it can only expand the brain to be able to speak both languages and to still be able to communicate with the older generations because their grandparents may never learn to speak English."

Even if families are somewhat proficient in written and spoken English, navigating the early childhood education landscape can be a challenge — for instance, filling out DPP's tuition credit application. "Sometimes the children speak English well, but at this age, they can't really help with that," Capaldo-Smith added, nodding to the fact that children often interpret for migrant parents.

In early 2020, DPP developed its highly-anticipated online application. It is currently available in Arabic, Somali, Spanish and Vietnamese with plans to translate it into six more languages by the fall of 2021. Families can also receive phone support and read key pages of DPP's website in all five languages.

**Multilingual application assistance is one outcome of DPP's deepened commitment to its core value of Intentional Inclusivity.** Since families must apply to access taxpayer-funded preschool tuition credits, any information lost in translation could mean dollars left on the table. DPP is thrilled its embrace of language diversity is helping to move Denver's early childhood education ecosystem closer to linguistic equity in access.

**CITATIONS**  
6 <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/denvercountycolorado/AGE135219#AGE135219>

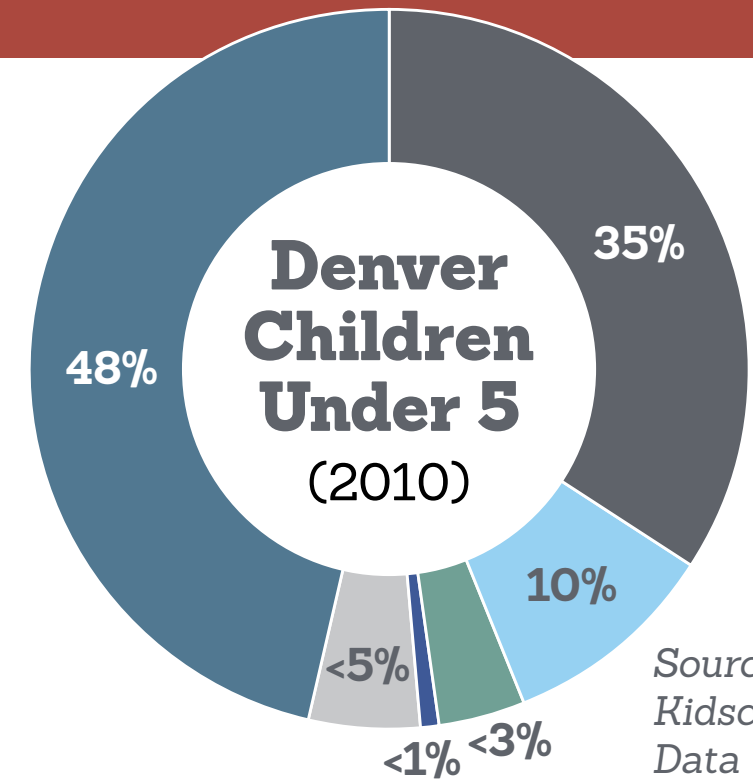
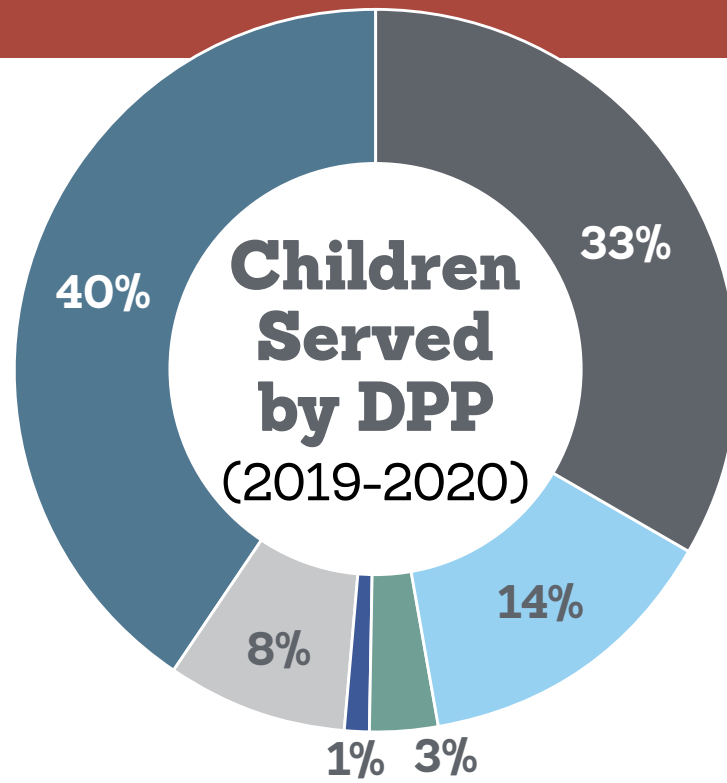
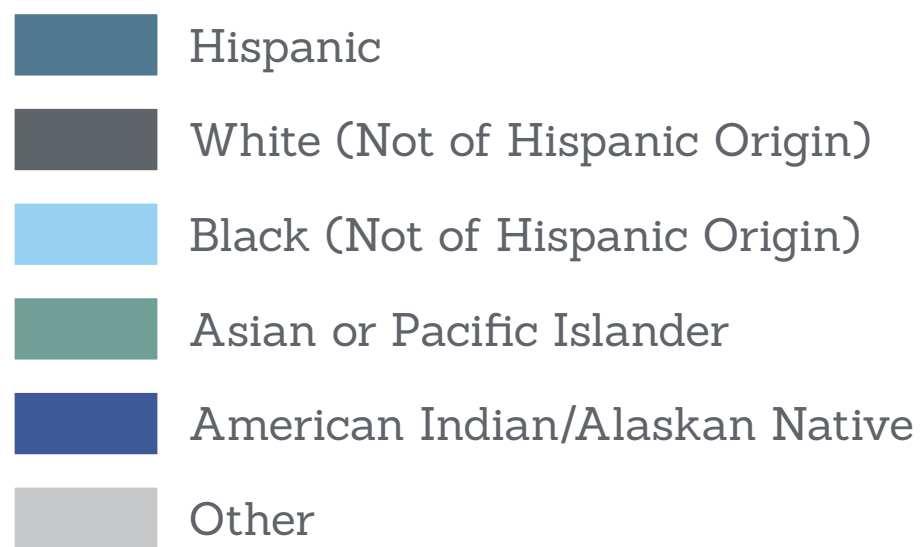




## Who We Serve

The Denver Preschool Program is a truly universal program — created to make high-quality preschool accessible to Denver children of all income levels and from every corner of the city. See below to learn more about the breadth and depth of our reach during the 2019-2020 school year.

### By Demographic

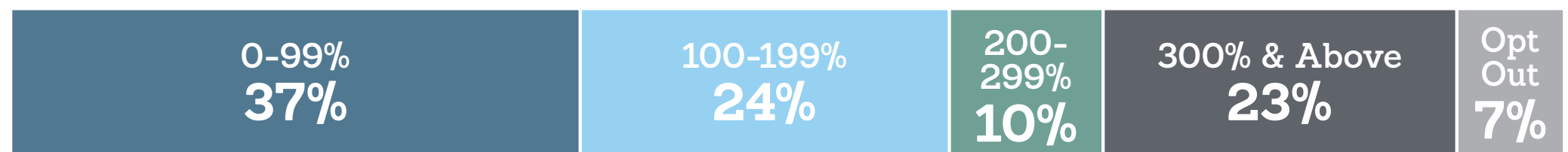


Source: Kidscount.org Data Center

### By Income Tier Based on Federal Poverty Level (FPL) Percentages

In 2017, the minimum sufficient income for a family of four was \$25,100 according to federal governmental standards.

#### Children Served by DPP (2019-2020)

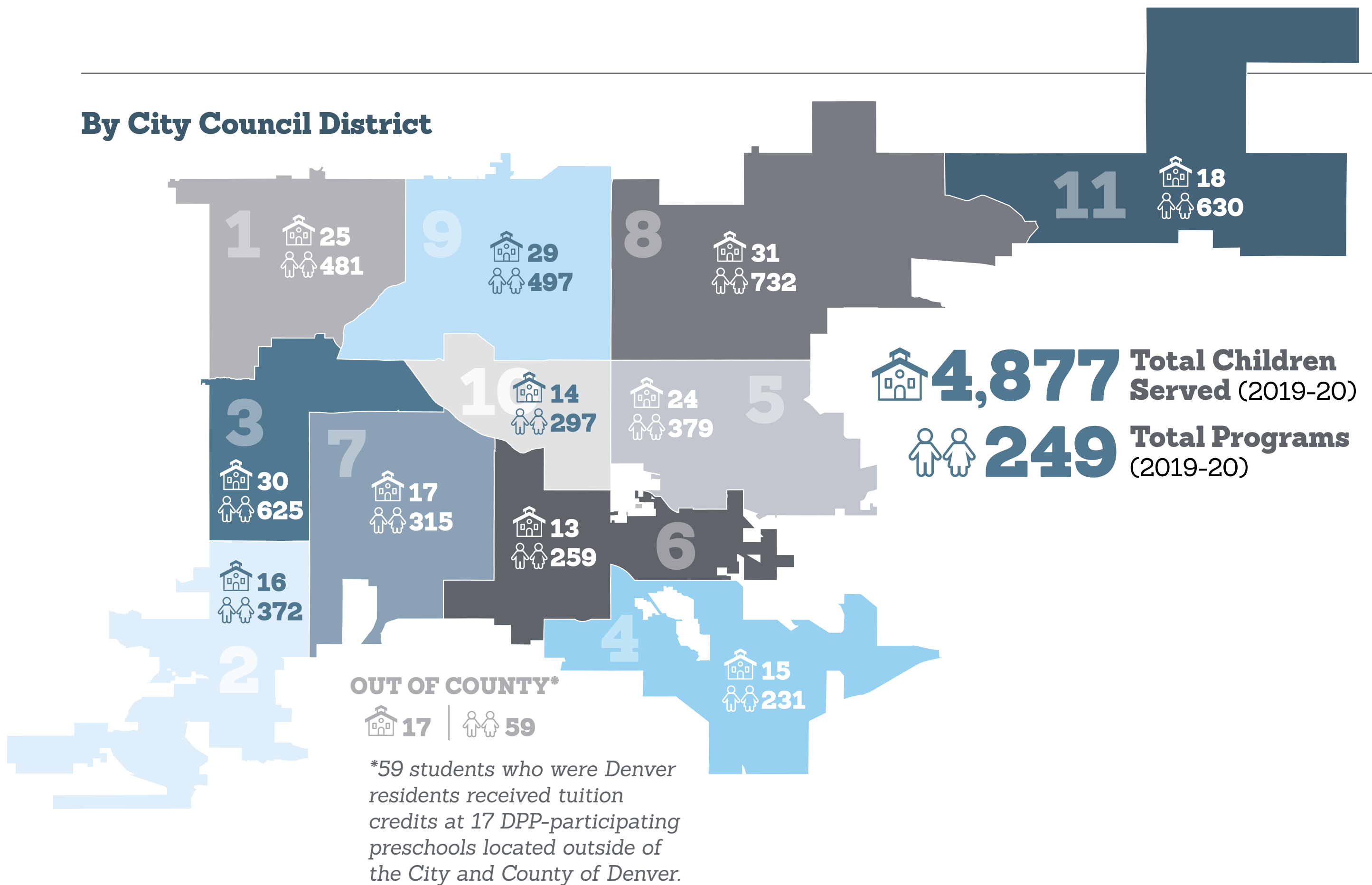


#### Denver Children Under Age 6 (2014-2018)



Source: Kidscount.org Data Center

### By City Council District





# Family Spotlight

## Amid Adversity, a Mom's Determination Advances her Career

Switching careers, co-parenting and comforting a small child through travel-required COVID-19 tests is not as easy as Silvia's smile makes it seem. Nevertheless, her grin is detectable even behind today's ubiquitous face coverings. The secret to her optimism? Gratitude, self-determination and a knack for finding resources.

Silvia is one of thousands of Coloradans who lost their job directly due to the pandemic. "I used to be a manager for a production company that does large-scale events at places like Red Rocks and the Convention Center," she said. "We do not know when things will go back to normal, so I decided to apply for the police academy." The schedule is grueling — training hours are typically from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. — and neither she, nor her daughter Gala's father have family in Colorado, so she looked to her community.

Picking a program was the easy part: First Steps at Monarch Montessori in Denver's Montbello neighborhood. It is where Gala also receives speech therapy in English and has the option of resuming classes in her Colombian family's native language, Spanish. Paying tuition was the challenge. Yet, Silvia was resolute on finding a way for her "great, independent, awesome girl" to stay in the program in which she thrives the most.

"I'm a really resourceful person so I got into it," she recalled. "I found out about [the Denver Preschool Program] just doing my research...and they helped me right away."

Silvia received the tuition credits she is entitled to as a Denver resident with a 4-year-old enrolled at a DPP-participating preschool provider. And she also took advantage of the newly created DPP Scholarship, which covered 100% of her preschool tuition costs.

"Thanks to DPP and Monarch, I've been able to do so much more than I would've been able to. I was just going to pull her out of school. [The scholarship] has been our saving grace."

See if your family is eligible for the Scholarship at <https://dpp.org/dpp-scholarship>.



# Intentional & Equitable Early Education

## Realizing Universal Preschool by 2023



After years of organizing, the state of Colorado will begin offering free, part-time universal preschool in the fall of 2023. Last November, two-thirds of Centennial State voters said "yes" to Proposition EE, a statewide ballot initiative designed to create a dedicated revenue stream to fund preschool for more than 67,000 4-year-olds. Currently, only 25% of 4-year-olds in Colorado have access to state-funded preschool programs like Head Start and the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program.<sup>7</sup>

"Denver and Colorado as a whole have been vocal and in the trenches around the value of preschool," said Erin Brown, deputy chief of staff for the office of Denver Mayor Michael B. Hancock and DPP board member. "Those [learning] gaps are very real and it's still incumbent upon us to be the advocate on why universal preschool matters, why it's important and how to implement it to produce more academically-ready kids."

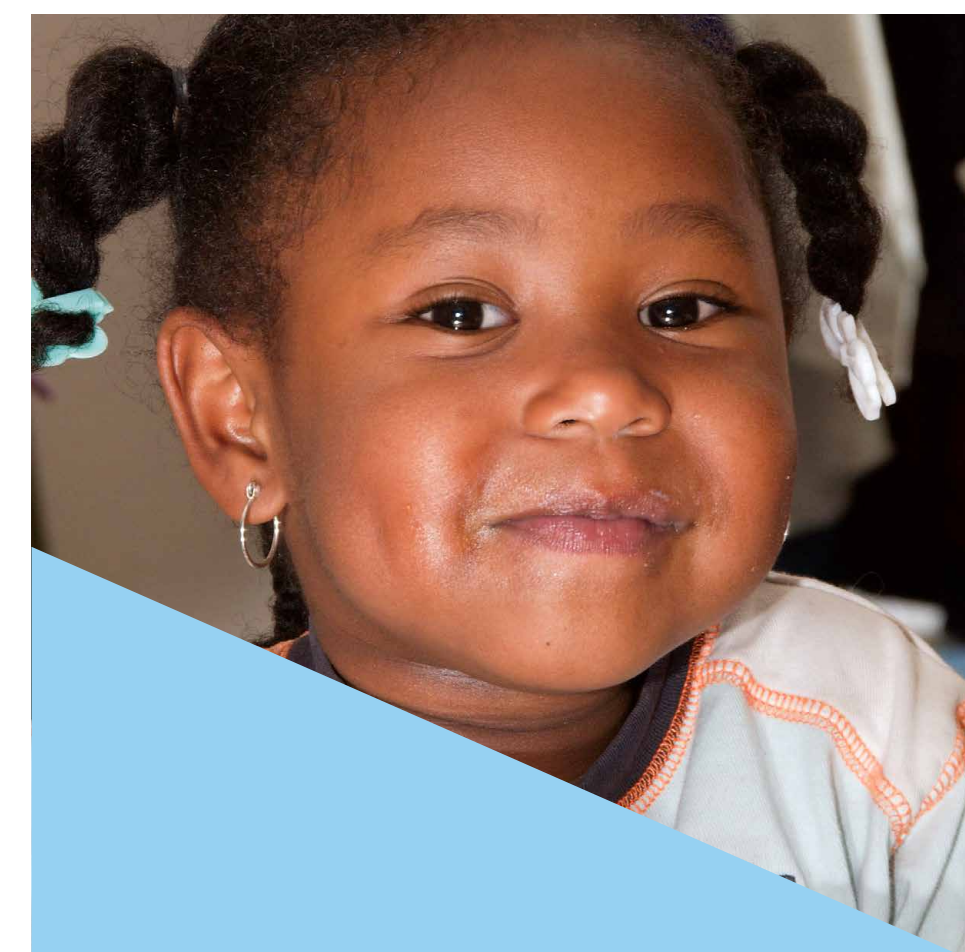
Fortunately, Colorado doesn't have to start from scratch. The Denver Preschool Program model is a shining example of how local initiative and government response can create an accessible preschool marketplace that fulfills a community's child care needs.

This hard-won victory at the polls is a significant milestone toward expanding preschool access and quality for all families in Colorado, regardless of income or location. **But, Brown asserts, it is also an opportunity to put equity in action at each child's unique starting line in life.** "We're recognizing that families' needs are different. They're starting at different entry points, both in understanding what's available to them and how to access it, and also how it fits them culturally."

Entry points to early childhood education not only impact a child's future economic mobility, but also their families' immediate financial needs. For instance, access to preschool can allow a parent or guardian to work full-time instead of part-time, while ensuring their child's safety outside of the home.

As Governor Jared Polis' office continues gathering feedback from Colorado's early childhood advocates, Brown hopes DPP can bring a social justice lens to universal preschool's formal planning stage. "I think DPP has been a model for our state and the surrounding municipalities. We're really shining the spotlight on the social injustice that people experience and how that's affected our families and children of color. I'm really excited to see how that shapes our future initiatives."

CITATIONS  
7 <https://www.edsurge.com/news/2020-11-11-among-the-winners-of-the-2020-election-universal-preschool>





## 07

**Using our data to inform national ECE policy**

A nationwide debate about publicly-funded early childhood education programs is emerging among policymakers. It is not if they promote kindergarten readiness (they do<sup>8</sup>). Nor is it if governments should invest in their expansion (44 states and 33 of the nation's 40 largest cities already have<sup>9</sup>). It is this: Which model is the most effective at increasing equitable access to high-quality preschool across a variety of settings?

In 2020, researchers including the Denver Preschool Program's Director of Enrollment & Evaluation, Dr. Marina Mendoza, published a study in *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*<sup>10</sup> to bring stakeholders closer to the answer.

The study examined DPP's tuition credit model and how it relates to children's academic, retention and attendance outcomes at kindergarten: specifically, how approximately 39,000 children who participated in DPP over 10 academic years (2009-2010 to 2018-2019) fared in kindergarten as compared to 34,000 children who did not participate in DPP.

"Our study is unique in that it is one of the first studies of a tuition credit model that examines outcomes at kindergarten," said Dr. Mendoza. Policymakers want to know, "do we implement a program with a prescribed curriculum and standards or is a tuition credit model like DPP, where the family gets to choose a high-quality preschool that best fits their needs, the best way to invest public dollars?"

The findings were encouraging. "Our study suggests promising benefits associated with receipt of a tuition credit. We found DPP participants were more likely to read at grade level and less likely to be retained or to be chronically absent than students who did not receive a DPP tuition credit." That means that in general, DPP participants met reading standards, missed fewer school days and progressed to higher grade levels without having to repeat a year.

Yet there are more opportunities for greater understanding of and success within the tuition credit model. "We recommend additional evaluations of tuition credit models in other locales. This will help policymakers understand the feasibility of a tuition credit model as a means of improving academic and attendance outcomes at kindergarten and will help identify the circumstances under which the strongest benefits of preschool are manifested," Dr. Mendoza continued.

DPP is proud that its 10 years of data-driven success is being used to shape the adoption and improvement of government-funded early childhood education programs in the state and across the nation.

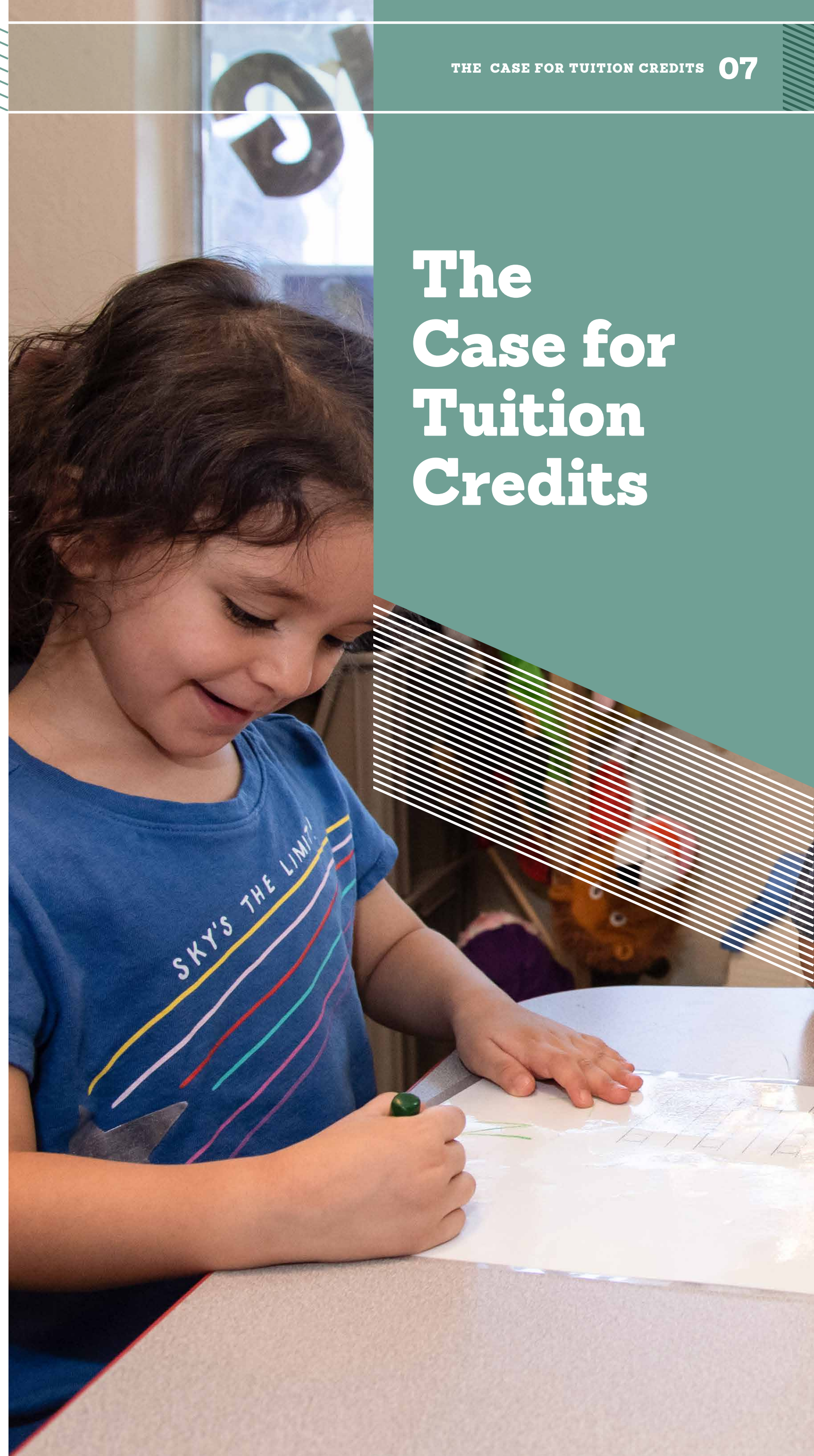
Read more about DPP's research and results at <https://dpp.org/research-and-results>

**CITATIONS**

8 Duncan G. J. & Magnuson, K.K. (2013). Investing in preschool programs. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 27 (2), 109-132

9 Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Weisenfeld, G. G., Kasmin, R., DiCrecchio, N., & Horowitz, M. (2019). *The state of preschool 2018: State preschool yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research

10 Le, V. N., Schaack, D., Mendoza, M., Stout-Oswald, S., & Rauerz, K. (2021). *Examining the Denver Preschool Program tuition credit in relation to children's academic and attendance outcomes at kindergarten*. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 55, 24-34.



# The Case for Tuition Credits

## 08

## Intentional and Equitable Stewardship of Funds

### 2020 Audited Financials

As a taxpayer-funded 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, the Denver Preschool Program is publicly accountable for how we use our resources to support kindergarten readiness.

More diverse investments than ever before in 2020 meant that 4,877 students who attended preschool during the 2019-2020 school year and 3,750 additional students who began preschool in the 2020-2021 school year received \$15.31 million in tuition credits from DPP.





## 2020 Calendar Year Audited Financials

Tuition Credits  
**\$15,309,758**

Quality Improvement  
**\$2,782,462**

Family Eligibility  
**\$693,000**

Evaluation  
**\$624,694**

Outreach  
**\$554,602**

Administrative  
**\$1,085,309**

Contract Services  
**\$82,713**

## Cost-Effective Strategies for COVID-19 Child Care Relief

In these unusual times, it is even more important that we are fully transparent in how we redistributed expenditures so that families and preschool providers experiencing new challenges were given relevant support at the start of the pandemic.

### What We Reduced

- Administrative expenses
- Communications fees
- Evaluation fees

### What We Prioritized

- Direct support to families
- Grants and direct quality improvement supports to preschool providers
- Pilot programs designed to test the effectiveness of new early childhood education resources



# Looking Forward

Preparing our  
children for a more  
complex world

The COVID-19 pandemic changed where, when and how we offer high-quality early learning opportunities to all 4-year-olds in Denver. Yet, it did not change why. Our purpose has been, and always will be, to make sure every child in Denver enters kindergarten ready to reach their full potential.

So while 2019-2020 was the year we explored distance learning and dipped into our financial reserves to “show up” in new ways for our children’s educational foundation, we will remember it for more. It was a year that stretched what it means for us to be a leader.

As we shifted to socially distanced day-to-day lives, the Denver Preschool Program also shifted toward doing more for local families. We do more than subsidize the true costs of early childhood education. We take the initiative to pursue potential solutions to community challenges that impact children. And we can do it thanks to you!

We would not have been able to drive positive change during this uniquely challenging time in history without the talents of the DPP staff and board of directors, our preschool provider directors, teachers and staff, government liasons and even preschoolers who got an unexpected lesson in flexibility. And we will continue to drive positive change so that more young children will have the strong start in life that they deserve.

Nevertheless, we won’t be satisfied until we also ensure preschool classrooms are equitable, too. **Whether online, or in-person, families are coming back to school anticipating diversity, equity and inclusion to be part of the curriculum and that we will do the work with our preschool providers to meet their expectations. We already are.** At this moment, DPP is several months into an 18-month process toward making the organization a better support system for Black, Brown and Indigenous families. It can not — and should not — wait. Studies show families who have been displaced, are migrants or have low incomes can face specific barriers to preschool access such as cost, language, provider hours and locations, transportation and the political environment.

Concurrently, we are also reassessing our preschool providers’ needs; updating how providers can receive and can use quality improvement resources; awarding more scholarships to strengthen the early childhood education profession; engaging in personalized and culturally-affirming family outreach; expanding our eligibility criteria to a limited group of 3-year-olds and sharing our insights with more than 25 organizations that influence early childhood education at a local, regional, state and national level.

The world may never look the same again for our children, but when it comes to early childhood education, we commit to making it even better.





## Current Board of Directors

**Michael Baker, Chair**

President, Gold Crown Management Company

**Dr. Lydia Prado, Vice Chair**

Executive Director, Lifespan Local

**Chris Daues, Treasurer**

Manager, RubinBrown Assurance Services Group & Transaction Services Group

**Amber Münck Secretary**

Founder & Chief Guide at Cosmic Wilderness Adventures

**Erin Brown**

Deputy Chief of Staff to Mayor Michael B. Hancock

**Anna Jo Haynes**

President Emeritus of Mile High Early Learning Centers

**Zach Hochstadt**

Principal and Founding Partner of Mission Minded, Inc.

**Samantha Jacobson**

Vice President of Strategic Partnerships at The Trade Desk

**Dr. Rebecca Kantor**

Dean of the School of Education & Human Development at the University of Colorado Denver

**Anne Rowe**

Co-Owner & Principal, La Vie and Company

**Councilwoman Amanda Sandoval**

Denver City Council, District 1

**Janice Sinden**

President & CEO of the Denver Center for the Performing Arts

**Susan Steele**

President & CEO, Temple Hoyne Buell Foundation

## Staff

**Elsa Holguín**

President and CEO

**Ellen Braun**

Chief Operating Officer

**Michelle Blubaugh**

Office Manager

**Marina M. Mendoza, PhD**

Director of Enrollment and Evaluation

**Chris Miller**

Director of Quality Initiatives

**Tricia Nelson**

Director of Communications

Thank you for reading.

2020