



COLORADO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

by Todd Herreid

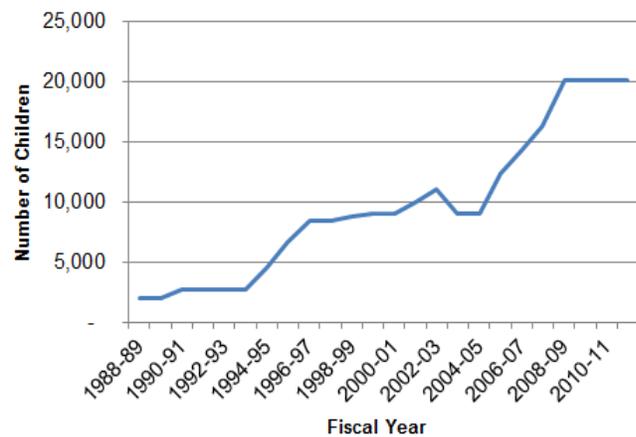
This *issue brief* describes two programs providing early childhood education in the state: the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) and the full-day kindergarten program. A brief history of each is provided, followed by an overview of any eligibility requirements, number of students served, funding sources, and the estimated cost to expand services.

Colorado Preschool Program

The CPP was established in 1988 to provide early childhood education for children who are either four or five years old and at risk of academic failure. Initially, the legislature authorized a pilot program to pay for 2,000 preschool children. Over time, the number of students served has grown to a maximum of 20,160, including some three-year-olds under certain conditions, as shown in Figure 1. In FY 2012-13, 170 out of 178 school districts and the Charter School Institute participated in the program.

To be eligible to participate in the CPP, a child must lack overall learning readiness due to significant family risk factors, require language development skills, or receive child welfare services from the Department of Human Services as a neglected or dependent child. Some family risk factors include conditions such as eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch, homelessness, drug or alcohol abuse in the family, or a parent who has not completed a high school education or its equivalent. About 80 percent of children in the CPP are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

Figure 1
Maximum Number of CPP Participants



Source: Colorado Department of Education

The provision of CPP services is managed locally through district advisory councils, which are appointed by the district superintendent and comprised of parents and representatives of business groups, government agencies, early childhood education providers, and charter schools with preschool programs. The councils determine which providers will deliver CPP services, such as preschools in public schools, Head Start programs, or other for-profit or non-profit community programs.

Funding for the CPP is currently contained within the school finance act, which sets a maximum number of children to be funded. Each preschool student is funded at 50 percent of a full-time equivalent student. Because school districts receive different amounts of per-pupil revenue, preschool

funding varies across districts. Like the school finance act, the money to pay for the CPP comes from a combination of state and local revenue, which also differs across school districts.

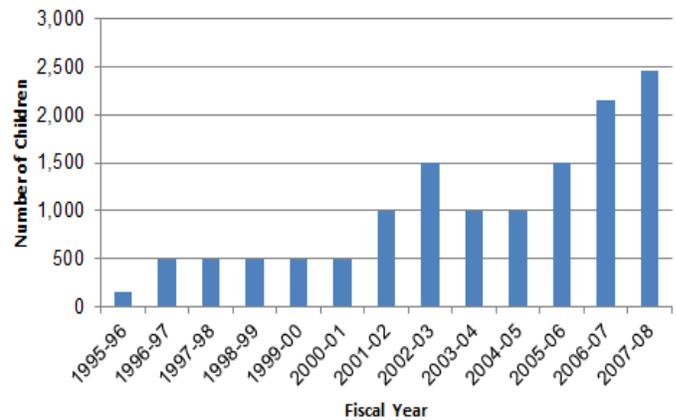
Because of budget limitations, it has been estimated that not all eligible preschool children are being served by the CPP. These estimates range from about 3,400 to 14,000 children. Based on the most recent school finance bill (House Bill 12-1345) it would cost between \$10 million and \$41 million to pay for these additional children in a half-day program, assuming this program expansion is subject to the same negative factor. Similarly, the cost for a full-day preschool program for current participants would be about \$59 million, assuming the same negative factor is applied.

Colorado Full-Day Kindergarten

Local boards of education were first authorized to offer kindergarten instruction in 1964, although attendance in school was not required until a child reached six years of age. In 1995, the legislature established a pilot program to allow school districts to implement a full-day kindergarten program as part of a district's preschool program. Initially, no more than 150 children could participate, but this amount was increased over time, reaching a maximum of 15 percent of the total number of CPP participants. Figure 2 illustrates the number of full-day kindergarten students authorized for funding through the CPP.

In FY 2008-09, funding for full-day kindergarten through the CPP ended. At the time, just under 2,500 children were receiving full-day kindergarten service through CPP. However, the legislature provided hold-harmless funding for districts that were providing this service, equal to the number of full-day kindergarten students served in FY 2007-08 multiplied by the district's per-pupil revenue as set under the school finance act. In FY 2012-13, this amount totaled \$6.9 million.

Figure 2
Full-Day Kindergarten Students
Funded Through CPP



Source: Colorado Department of Education

Under the school finance act, all kindergarten students are counted and funded as half-day students, like CPP students; but in 2008, the legislature authorized additional supplemental kindergarten funding, equal to 0.58 of a full-time student, which could be used to support full-day kindergarten programs. In FY 2012-13, the cost of providing the additional 0.08 supplemental kindergarten funding was \$32 million, after the negative factor. Similarly, the cost to pay for full-day kindergarten for all students would be about \$162 million, assuming the same negative factor is applied.

Because state funding for full-day kindergarten has not occurred, school districts may provide the service through other funding options, such as a dedicated property tax mill levy, private tuition, other local sources, or grants. In FY 2011-12, an estimated 37,000 students were enrolled in full-day kindergarten programs that were funded through these options, instead of the CPP.