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COLORADO DEPARTMENT *of* EDUCATION

Colorado Preschool Program Legislative Report 2014

Submitted to:

The Colorado General Assembly

By:

Colorado Preschool Program Staff

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Teaching and Learning Unit/Office of Early Learning and School Readiness

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Greetings!

Each year, the Colorado Department of Education reports to the General Assembly on the effectiveness of the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP). We are pleased to present you with the 2014 report which provides highlights of how CPP was implemented in the 2012-2013 school year by 171 school districts including the Charter School Institute. Our report includes valuable information about the 19,538 children who benefitted from the high quality preschool experiences that CPP funding affords. We have also included information about how quality is defined and supported in school district and community partner programs.

We wish to thank you for your continued support of the Colorado Preschool Program. This important initiative continues to make long-lasting change possible for children who are at risk for academic challenges.

Respectfully,

Robert K. Hammond

Commissioner of Education

2013 CPP Expansion—Early Childhood At-Risk Enhancement (ECARE)

In 1988, the Colorado General Assembly created the Colorado Preschool program (CPP) to serve young children in Colorado who were most at risk for starting elementary school unprepared. Since the 2008-2009 school year, CPP enrollment has been capped at 20,160 half-day preschool slots. In 2013, the General Assembly approved an additional 3,200 half-day ECARE slots that can be used flexibly to serve eligible children through half-day or full-day preschool or full-day kindergarten. In the 2013-2014 school year, districts are using ECARE slots to serve an additional:

1,133	Half-Day Preschoolers
279	Full-Day Preschoolers
1,509	Full-Day Kindergarteners

The expansion now makes it possible to provide a high quality early childhood education experience for as many as 23,360 eligible children each year.

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CPP in 2012-2013—*By the Numbers*

Slots Authorized by the Legislature—20,160

Total Enrollment— 19,538*

4-year-olds—14,830

3-year-olds—4,481

Children under 3—227

Half-Day Enrollment— 18,916

Full-Day Enrollment—622

*Number of children enrolled lower than authorized slot total because some children are served in a full-day program using two slots

School Districts Participating in CPP— 96%

Including the Charter School Institute

Total Program Funding— $67,236,788

Compared to $5.229 billion total funding in K-12

Colorado Average Funding per Slot— $3,335

Compared to $4,596—national average of state preschool spending of per slot (*The State of Preschool 2012*, National Institute of Early Education Research)

Districts Giving Vision/Hearing Screening— 97%

166 of 171 participating school districts

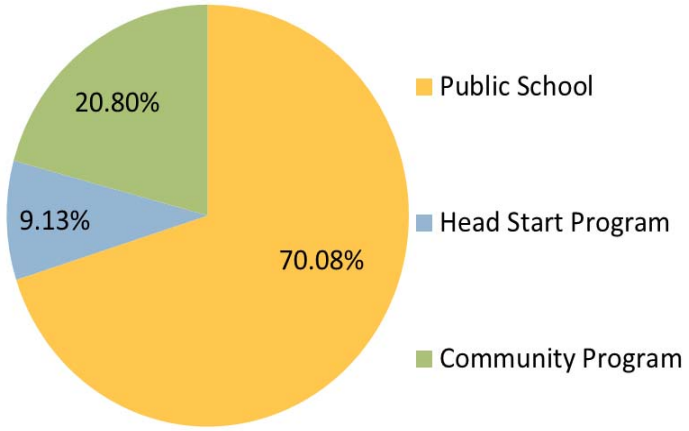
Children on Local CPP Waiting Lists— 6,184

Self-reported by school districts. Exact level of need estimated to be significantly higher.

Estimated Unmet Need for CPP

Using data from the State Demography Office and state pupil counts, CDE estimates that as many as **16,588** at-risk four-year-olds had no preschool available to them through either CPP or Head Start in the 2013-2014 school year, up from **12,010** in 2012-2013. This calculation factors in the average number of families with children in first through eighth grade who are eligible for free or reduced price meals as a percentage of the total first through eighth grade student population. The percentage rose to 53% in 2012-2013 from 45% in 2011-2012.

Figure 1 **Where CPP Children Were Served**



Charter School Participation

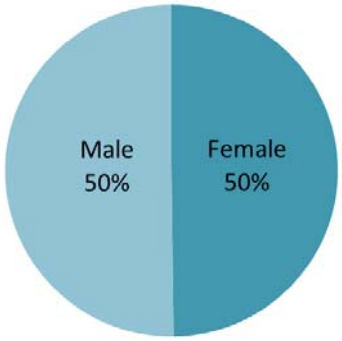
Last year, 96 children with CPP funding were served in charter schools including High Point Academy, Community Leadership Academy and schools in Denver, St. Vrain, Clear Creek, West End, Canon City and Park County School Districts.

Availability of Early Childhood Centers in Communities

In the 2012-2013 school year, more than one-third of districts participating in CPP served children only in district preschool settings because there were no other licensed early childhood centers to partner with in their communities.

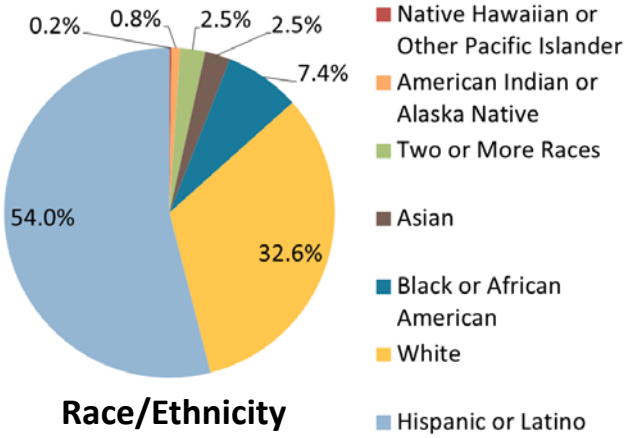
CPP in 2012-2013—*By the Numbers*

Figure 2



Gender

Figure 3



Race/Ethnicity

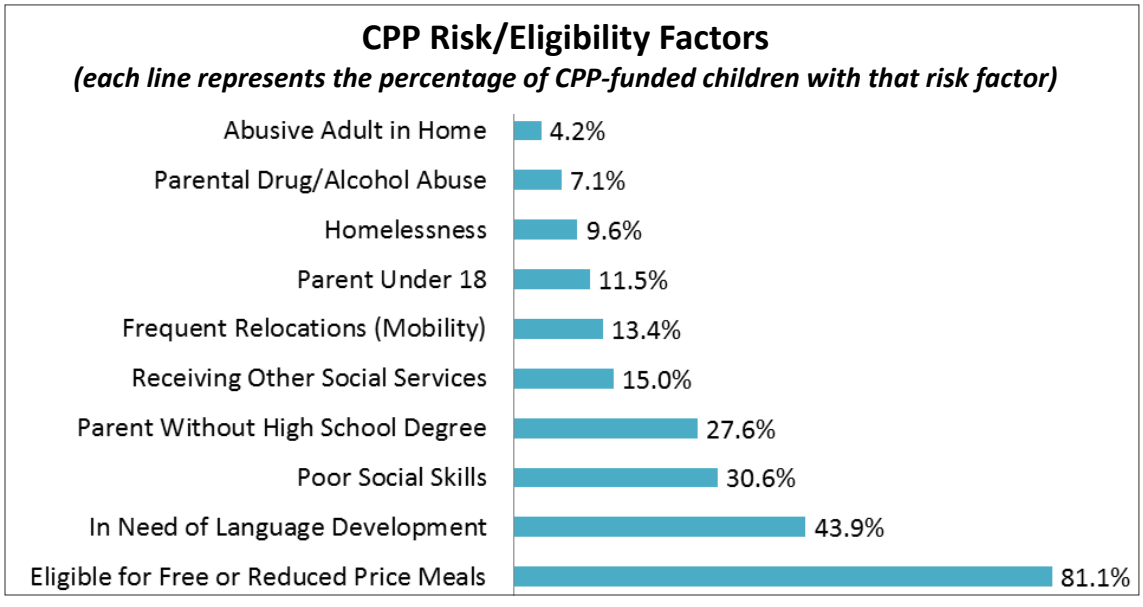
81% of Children Served in CPP are Eligible for Free or Reduced Price Meals

Why is the opportunity for high quality preschool so important for these children?

"Poverty creates and widens achievement gaps. Children growing up in poverty, when compared with their economically more secure peers, fall behind early. Starting in infancy, gaps are evident in key aspects of learning, knowledge, and social-emotional development. When left unaddressed, these early gaps become progressively wider. Early optimal development tends to open doors to further optimal development, while impoverished development tends to close those doors. So, poor children lag behind their peers at entry to kindergarten, in reading ability at the end of third grade, in the important self-monitoring skills often called "executive functioning," and in school attendance in eighth grade. Poor children are more likely to drop out of school, or fail to obtain post-secondary education."

Excerpt from *Five Ways Poverty Harms Children*—Child Trends, January, 2012

Figure 4



Colorado's Commitment to High Quality Preschool

There is impressive research that demonstrates the long-lasting and meaningful benefits of investing in preschool. Moreover, research has shown that the children who are most at risk, particularly those affected by poverty, stand to gain the most. In order to realize these gains, however, preschool programs must be of high quality.

From the beginning, Colorado lawmakers and education leaders advocated for CPP requirements that would support high quality programming. Requirements for class size limits, low child to adult ratios, individual child planning, parent involvement and program evaluation are established in statute. The statute also calls for CDE to develop program quality standards. The Colorado Quality Standards for Early Childhood Care and Education Services were developed by CDE. And, the State Board of Education established in rule the requirement that participating programs follow these comprehensive program expectations.

The Quality Standards address elements such as curriculum, staffing, and interaction among staff and children, as well as elements that address children's broader needs like health and safety, nutrition and family/staff partnerships. In the next pages, highlighted elements of quality are described in more detail.

Quality Ratings in 2012-2013

Program Sites Serving CPP Eligible Children

Qualistar Ratings: 204 sites had a Qualistar Rating from Qualistar Colorado and, of these, 196 were rated with 3 or 4 stars on the 4-star scale. Note: Additional sites may have a rating, but did not authorize release of this information.

Accreditation: 22 sites were accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Fostering Quality in Local CPP Programs

Many partners in the Colorado Preschool Program work together to continuously improve program quality.

- District preschool advisory councils are charged with monitoring all classrooms where children funded by CPP attend. Representatives are required to visit each classroom two times a year.
- Each year, local district preschool advisory council representatives make two onsite visits to each classroom in participating programs to monitor compliance with CPP requirements.
- Local preschool programs use the results of family satisfaction surveys to help inform quality improvement work.
- State level CPP staff support quality through ongoing technical assistance and professional development activities. In the 2012-2013 school year, state staff provided 141 technical assistance visits, 28 official site review visits and 62 teacher training workshops for local CPP staff.

Elements of Quality: *Thoughtfully Planned Classroom Environments*

When thoughtfully planned and arranged, early learning environments contribute to greater child outcomes by supporting rich opportunities to explore, experiment and engage in learning activities. Preschoolers need classroom environments that are safe and stimulating and that support ever-increasing independence.

High quality learning environments:

- Are warm and inviting with soft elements and home-like features.
- Are well-organized and easily accessible to children with low shelving and appropriately sized tables and chairs.
- Have well-defined interest areas that are provisioned with abundant sensory materials, building blocks, music and art supplies, dramatic play props, writing supplies, math manipulatives, science materials, toys, games and books.
- Have materials and equipment that support developmental domains such as fine and gross motor development as well as academic domains such as literacy and mathematics.
- Have a balance of spaces for quiet and active work, for individual, small and large group time and for floor activities.
- Have well-provisioned outdoor play and learning spaces.
- Include a balance of purchased and natural or found materials.
- Provide toys and materials suitable for multiple ages and developmental levels.
- Have tasteful displays of children's work, fine art prints and a variety of photos including photos of the children and their families.
- Have defined personal spaces where children can store belongings.
- Are rich with examples of print and opportunities to explore quality literature and reference books.

Elements of Quality: *Balanced and Predictable Daily Routines*

A well-planned, balanced and predictable daily schedule is a key component of a quality preschool classroom. Predictable routines help children feel secure because they know what to expect next. As children gain experience with classroom routines, they begin to predict what comes next, helping them develop a sense of time and manage transitions between activities effectively and more independently.

The preschool day should consist of a balance of both teacher-directed and child-directed activities and should be planned so that time blocks are appropriate for very young children's developing attention spans. Young children have a limited ability to sit still and focus their attention for long periods of time, thus many parts of the daily routine are limited to short blocks of time. For example, 15 minutes is appropriate for a science experiment and discussion or a morning greeting circle, while longer blocks of time are reserved for more active opportunities such as outdoor play or child-directed use of the classroom learning centers.

Transitions between activities are seamless and children are not made to wait for long periods of time. Teachers plan transition time strategies such as singing songs, leading finger plays or other activities.

Elements of Quality: *Trained and Responsive Teaching Staff*

In a position paper on professional preparation standards for early childhood staff describing what teachers should know and be able to do, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) states that adults must "understand that teaching and learning with young children is a complex enterprise, and its details vary depending on children's ages, characteristics, and the settings within which teaching and learning occur."

To be an effective teacher in this "complex enterprise" of an early childhood program, there are many things an adult must know and do to optimize learning for each young child in their care. They need to have an extensive knowledge of early childhood development in the social-emotional, physical, cognitive, and language areas as well as a thorough knowledge of literacy, math, and science content appropriate for young children.

This knowledge base of early childhood development is an important part of what is needed to be effective when working with young children, as well as the ability to put that knowledge to use on a daily basis is essential to creating a warm, encouraging and appropriately challenging learning environment.

A strong early childhood teacher will utilize his/her knowledge to:

- Understand the importance of and establish a genuine relationship with children and adults to set the stage for a safe and caring environment in which learning will take place.
- Accept every child who enters the classroom, showing respect and inclusion for children and their diverse family traditions.
- Use each child's strengths to continually facilitate the learning of new knowledge and skills.
- Be a lifelong learner who actively seeks current best practices to improve the learning outcomes for each child.
- Model the love of learning in fun ways to motivate children by demonstrating an inquisitive mind and actively participate with children in learning activities.
- Value children's participation, respecting their level of ability and skill acquisition and fostering growth for each child with their unique abilities.
- Foster independence in all young children to the best of their ability.
- Implement instructional strategies that allow all children to grow, knowing that children think and learn in different ways.
- Lead the teaching team and assure that families are involved and valued in the learning with their child.
- Continually share information about early childhood best practice and how it differs from the education of older students.
- Celebrate successes with young children and their families.

Reference: Coker, L. (2008). *Twelve Characteristics of Effective Early Childhood Teachers*. Beyond the Journal. Retrieved from http://www.naeyc.org/files/yc/file/200803/BTJ_Colker.pdf.

Elements of Quality: *High Quality Curriculum*

Recently, there has been a keener focus on high quality preschool curricula. At its simplest level, curriculum is what you teach and how you teach it.

The Colorado Early Learning and Development Guidelines for Birth to Third Grade provide the framework for what is taught in preschool classrooms. These guidelines include the Colorado Academic Standards along with expanded developmental expectations for very young children.

Guidance for implementing curriculum is found in program standards like the Colorado Quality Standards and other program standards, such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Teaching and Curriculum Accreditation Standards, Qualistar ratings, and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) also provide information about how to high quality curriculum implementation in early childhood programs.

When designing or selecting a curriculum, decision makers should reflect on whether the curriculum fits the needs of the children in the program. Is there enough differentiation to guide teachers in meeting the needs of all learners? Does it focus on using a balance of structured and play-based learning? Is there a balance between academic and developmental focus? Does it foster physical development and the ability of children to problem solve, think creatively, and develop self-regulation skills? These elements are crucial for children's success.

National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) Policy Brief

Preschool Curriculum Decision-Making: Dimensions to Consider

Recommendations for Decision Makers:

- To help discern which curricula are more appropriate, the roles of the teacher and the child in the learning process and the areas of learning to be addressed should be considered.
- Curricular decisions should take into account children's ages, behavior or learning needs, linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and economic status, as well as teachers' prior training and experience and need for ongoing professional development.
- For parent involvement, curricula should help build program-family partnerships and establish ongoing meaningful communication with families.
- Decision-makers should look for research evidence of a model's effectiveness and attempt to see the model in action in multiple settings.

Retrieved from: http://nieer.org/resources/policybriefs/12.pdf

Elements of Quality: *Partnerships with Families*

In quality early childhood programs, families and providers work together as partners in supporting positive outcomes for young children. Family involvement is a requirement in CPP, and the Colorado Quality Standards describe the crucial underpinnings for this important aspect of high quality programming:

> **GOAL:** Families are well informed about the program and are welcomed as important contributors as well as observers. Families and staff interact on an ongoing basis to ensure a strong quality program.
>
> **RATIONALE :** Young children are integrally connected to their families. Programs can best meet the needs of children when they also recognize the importance of the child's family and develop strategies to work effectively with families. All communication between programs and families should be based on the concept that parents are the principal influence in their children's lives.

Informing—Involving—Engaging

As early childhood programs plan their work with families, they often start with a basic level of making sure families are *informed* about the program and about how their children are progressing. They share information about the program's philosophy, policies and routines. They talk with families at arrival and departure time, share child progress information at family conferences and send home class newsletters.

In addition to making sure that families have the information they need, high quality programs work on finding ways to *involve* families. One way they do this is by having an open-door policy where family members are always welcome to join in classroom activities or function as a classroom helper. Families may be invited to volunteer for classroom projects and to attend special events such as field trips. Teachers may send home activities that are related to topics the children are studying so that families can work with their children to strengthen the learning experience.

Family involvement usually applies to strategies or activities identified by the teacher or program. Family *engagement* takes family involvement to a whole new level where families are seen as true partners in the program. In addition to receiving information about their child's progress, families contribute observations and work samples to their child's assessment portfolio and are active contributors in deciding what individual learning goals to focus on. They suggest program projects of interest to them and volunteer to take the lead. They may join or even play a lead role on the program advisory council. Families are asked for their ideas about how to strengthen the quality of the program or ways to address unmet needs of the classroom community.

Early childhood providers should include aspects of all three levels when planning how their program will work with families. When partnerships with families are strong, the overall quality of the program improves and outcomes for children are strengthened.

Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) Coming in July 2014

Enhancing Quality in Early Education and Care Settings

Colorado's Next Generation Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) is a method to assess, enhance and communicate the level of quality in early education and care for all licensed providers in Colorado, including programs and sites serving children funded through the Colorado Preschool Program. QRIS provides standardized criteria for all early childhood providers in Colorado to be rated for quality, and provides incentives and supports to providers that wish to raise the level of quality care available at their facility.

Colorado is committed to improving the quality of early learning and school-age programs for families and children. For the past 20 years, early childhood experts, community stakeholders and Department of Human Services' staff have been developing QRIS strategies in Colorado which support and strengthen early learning programs. Colorado's QRIS builds upon these best practices and connects the state with committees such as the Early Childhood Leadership Commission and the Early Childhood Councils.

The Next Generation QRIS system **WILL**:

- Embed quality ratings in the licensing process, providing a method to assess, enhance and communicate quality as a critical component of licensed childcare.
- Incentivize providers to strive for higher quality ratings.
- Improve outcomes for all Colorado children by increasing access to quality education and care.

The Next Generation QRIS system **WILL NOT**:

- Threaten the licensing of those facilities already licensed.
- Require providers to adjust their educational philosophy.

Information provided by the Office of Early Childhood at the Colorado Department of Human Services

http://www.coloradoofficeofearlychildhood.com/#!qris/c5ch

OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

cdhs Colorado Department of Human Services *people who help people*

Ongoing Assessment—*A Standard of Practice in High Quality Programs*

What should assessment look like for young children? Traditional assessment methods such as the paper and pencil tests administered to older students are not appropriate for young children and do not provide an accurate picture of a child's learning and development. High quality early childhood assessment is observation-based and takes place in the context of everyday routines, activities and places. It is strengths-based and considers how children are progressing over time.

What areas are assessed? The assessments used in CPP measure a child's progress in the *developmental domains* of language, cognitive, social-emotional and physical development and the *academic domains* of literacy, mathematics, science, social studies and the arts.

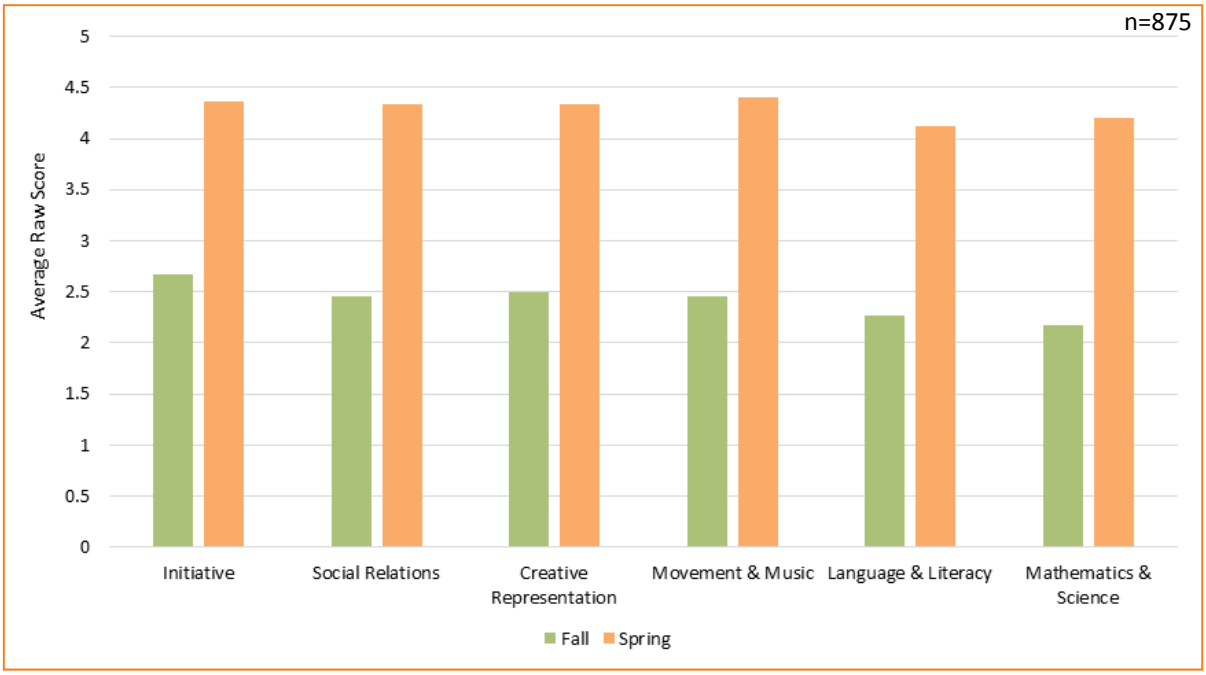
Why is it important to measure developmental progress in young children? Academic success is only possible when crucial developmental foundations are firmly in place. For example, it is not possible to make good progress in reading and writing unless a child's oral language skills as well as his/her ability to understand spoken language are developing at an age appropriate rate.

Colorado Preschool Program—*Measuring Growth in the Preschool Years*

All programs utilize an assessment system, either the HighScope Child Observation Record (COR) or Teaching Strategies GOLD. Figure 5 uses HighScope COR information to illustrate the significant progress children made in the course of one year. Children exhibit strong developmental progress, on average more than one full point in each domain measured by the HighScope COR scale. Note: The scale for HighScope COR goes from zero to five.

Figure 5

HighScope COR | 2012-2013 CPP Growth



Colorado Preschool Program—*Measuring Growth in the Preschool Years*

Many programs serving children in the Colorado Preschool Program use an assessment system called Teaching Strategies GOLD®. During the school year, teachers use Teaching Strategies GOLD® to make three ratings that measure children's progress. Like those from the HighScope COR, these results can also be used to illustrate the significant growth made by children in the course of one year.

Figure 6 uses scale scores to illustrate child progress in the year before kindergarten. Scale scores are scores that have been transformed so that you can look at outcomes consistently across populations. This scale goes from 200 to 800. In this chart, a score of 200 would be typical of newborns, while a score of 800 would be typical of kindergarteners. This type of score is very sensitive to actual growth within an area or domain.

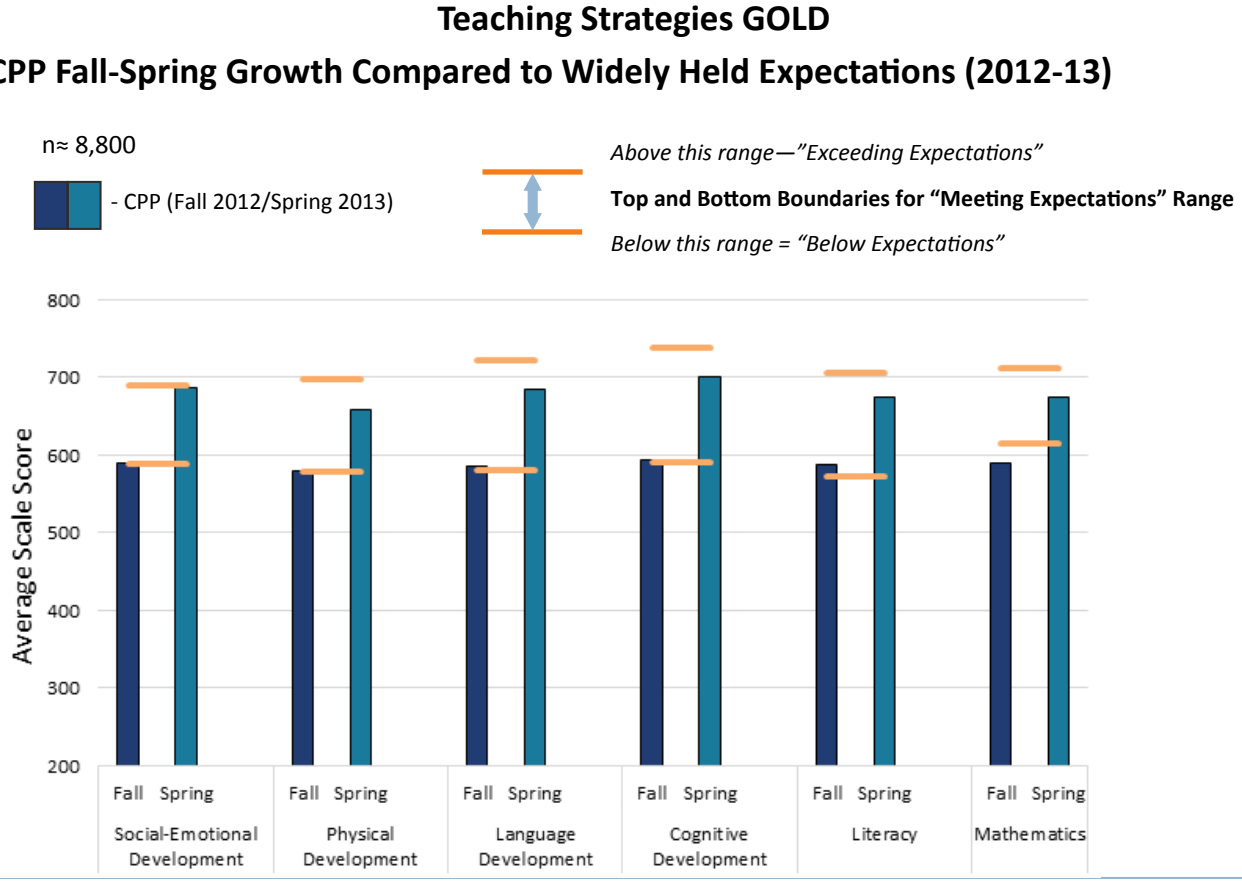
Using Assessment Findings:

We know from past results that mathematics is a consistent area of challenge for preschool children and these trends continue through K-12. In response, CPP staff are beginning to provide teacher development workshops focused on strengthening mathematical learning and development in the early years.

The horizontal orange bars represent boundaries for *below*, *meeting* or *exceeding* widely held expectations for the age group. Anything in between these bars would be considered *meeting* expectations.

In all domains except math, children participating in CPP start out the year at the very low end of "meeting expectations." In all domains, children have grown toward the higher end of this boundary. We know that in every area except mathematics, more than 90% of children in the program end the year meeting or exceeding widely-held expectations.

Figure 6



Colorado Preschool Program—*Long-term Impact on Student Achievement*

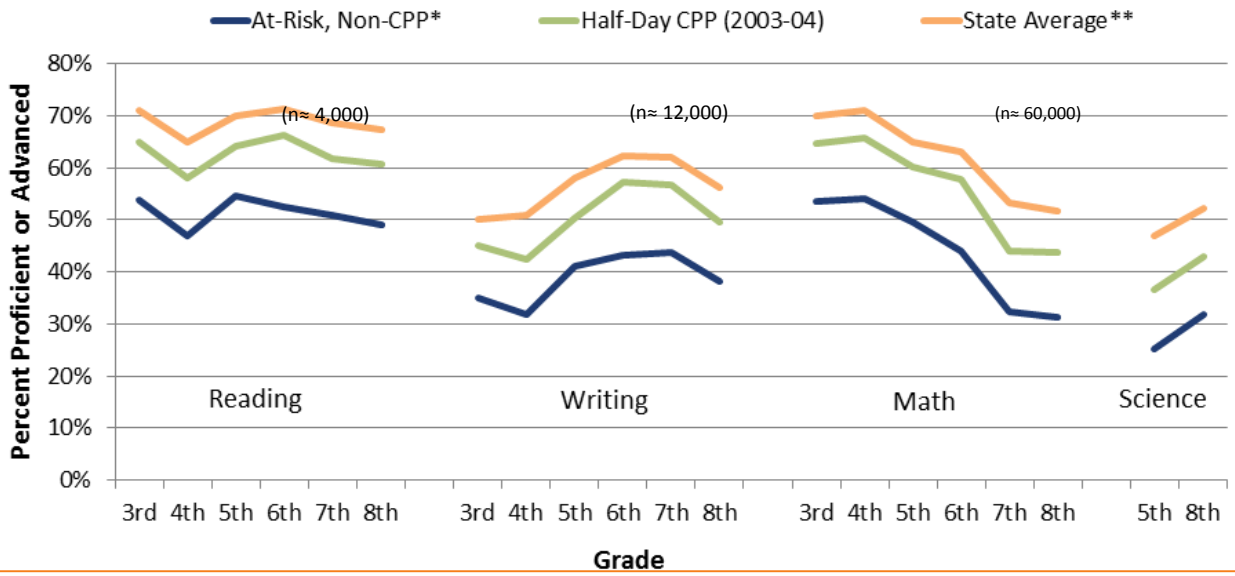
CDE charts the longitudinal academic growth of children in CPP to track the long-term impact based on CSAP/TCAP results. It is clear that graduates of CPP have a lasting benefit from the program compared to a matched cohort of at-risk children who did not participate in CPP or any other public preschool programs.

In the analysis illustrated in Figure 7, we examined results through eighth grade—the latest data available for the CPP cohort followed. New to this year's analysis is the addition of the Science content area.

As demonstrated in the past, we see that on average, CPP graduates outperform other at-risk children who did not participate in CPP, even as far out as eighth grade. **In other words, academic improvements relative to similar peers do *not* fade out.**

Figure 7

CSAP/TCAP Grades 3-8 Outcomes



*_At-Risk, Non-CPP_ is defined as children eligible for free or reduced price meals in first grade with no history of preschool in CDE collections.

**_State Average_ includes everyone assessed in the year corresponding with the expected grade/year of assessment for the 2003-04 CPP

In order to align with Colorado's new academic standards, CDE introduced the Transitional Colorado Assessment Program (TCAP) in 2012—seventh grade in this particular chart. Results from CSAP and TCAP are comparable across years.

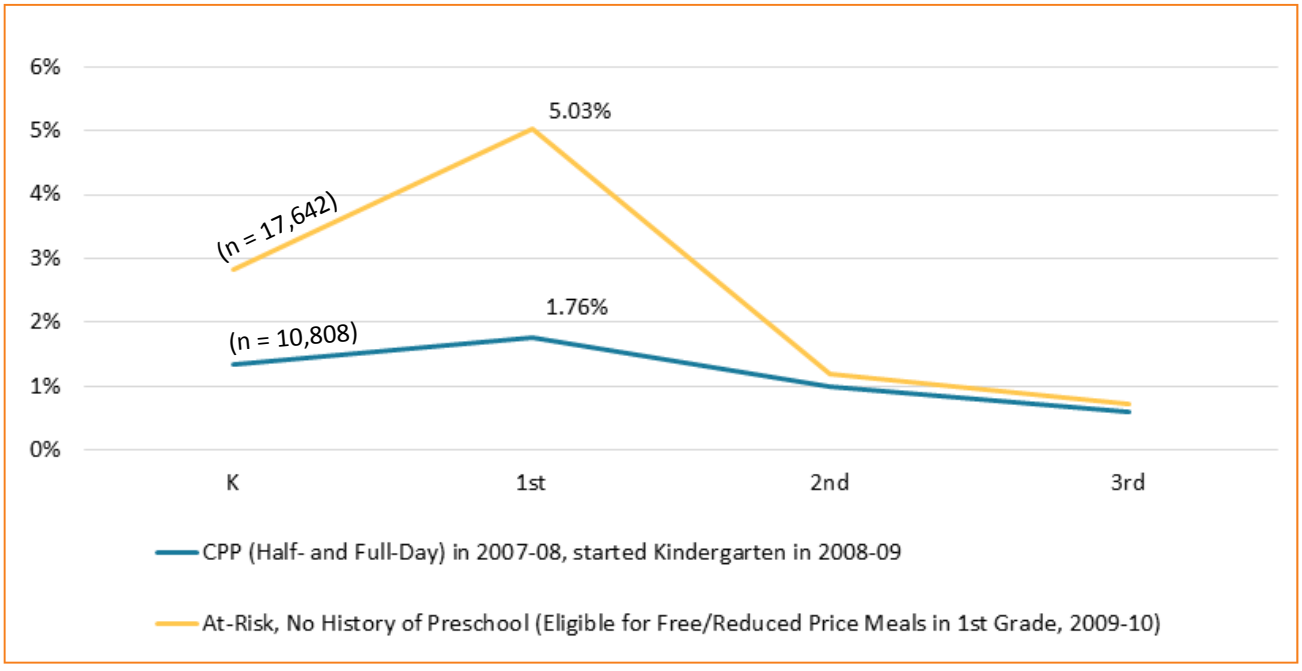
Colorado Preschool Program—*Long-term Impact on Grade Retention*

One of the added benefits of CPP is that it is associated with a reduced rate of retention—in other words, children who have a CPP experience are held back in a grade less often. Figure 8 shows the proportion of children from one particular cohort who were held back at any point during kindergarten through third grade. Compared to a similar group of at-risk children who did not attend publicly funded preschool, CPP is associated with a reduced need for retention by as much as one-third in first grade and a lower rate in subsequent years.

Grade retention is just one mechanism in a school's toolbox of intervention strategies. Implementing strategies to support children who have fallen behind puts pressure on school resources and requires additional expenditures. Retention effectively costs Colorado taxpayers an extra year's worth of per-pupil spending. Not only does the educational system pay the cost of later remediation, but the child does as well, in the form of lost opportunities and lower self-confidence in their own learning. And while high-quality preschool itself costs money, the return on investment is evident in the positive effects on social-emotional and physical development, early literacy and future academic success, as evidenced throughout this report and the wider research base.

Figure 8

Grade Retention (What Proportion of Children Repeated Each of These Grades?)



Colorado Preschool program—*Long-term Impact on Literacy Outcomes*

Figure 9

K-3 Literacy Outcomes - Single Cohort

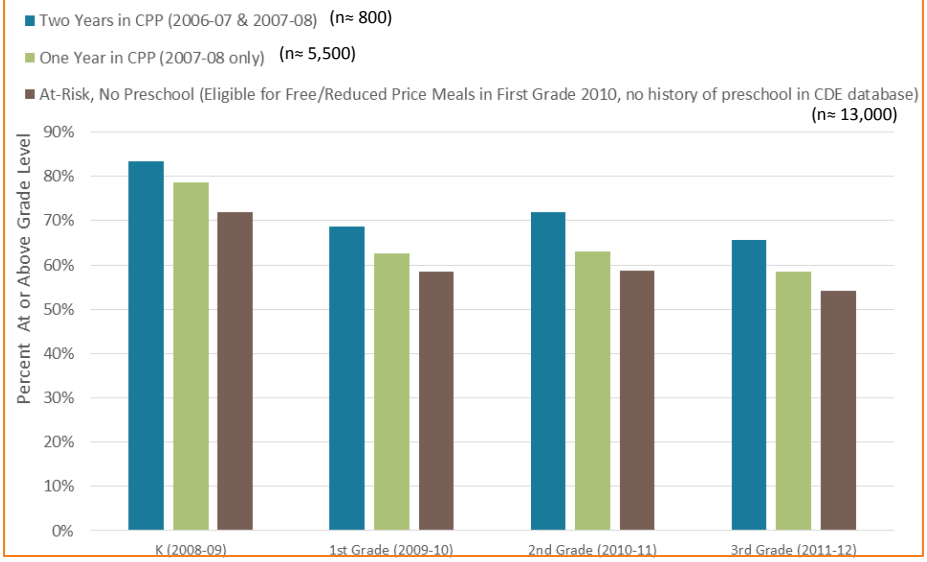
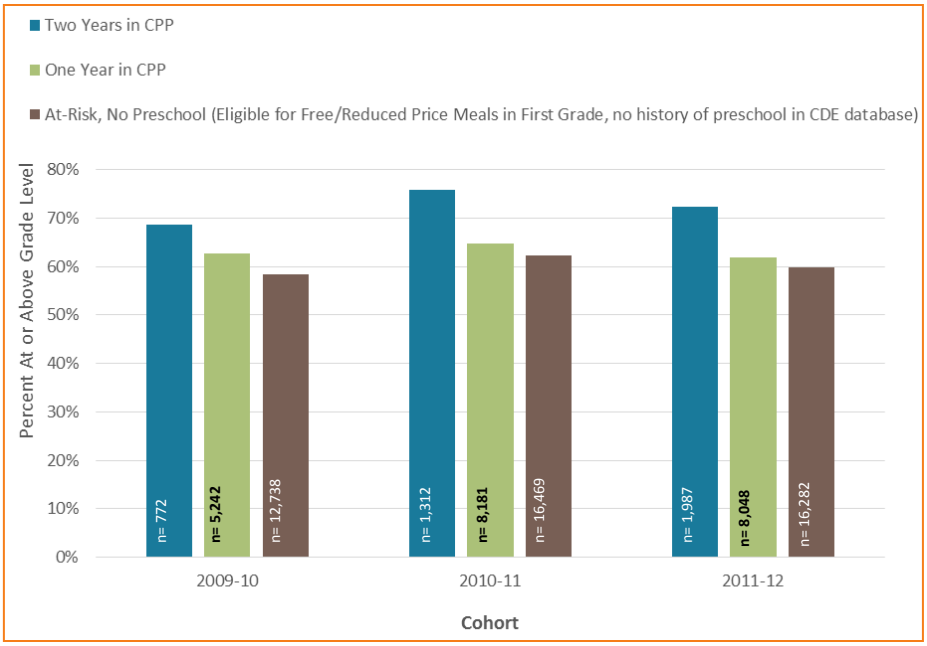


Figure 10

First Grade Literacy Outcomes - Multiple Cohorts



Outcomes in early-grade literacy further confirm the positive impact of CPP. Through school year 2012-2013, kindergarten through third grade teachers identified whether children were at grade level, below grade level, or above grade level in literacy skills. This identification was made based on a body of evidence including children's work samples and scores from early literacy assessments like the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA2), Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS), and Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS).

CPP graduates had a better chance of being at or above grade level in literacy than a matched cohort of at-risk peers who did not attend a publicly funded preschool. The results also confirm a wide body of research demonstrating the added benefit of multiple years of quality early intervention versus a single year.

Figure 9 shows literacy outcomes in kindergarten through third grade for one particular cohort. On average, those children who participated in CPP for two years clearly outperformed those who participated for only year. Figure 10 shows literacy outcomes in first grade for three different cohorts of CPP-funded children, demonstrating that the effect occurs within not just one but across many groups.

Again, the message rings true: more sustained quality preschool tends to benefit children who are at risk for later problems with literacy.

The Colorado Reading To Ensure Academic Development Act (Colorado READ Act) was passed by the Colorado Legislature during the 2012 legislative session. The READ Act repeals the Colorado Basic Literacy Act (CBLA) as of July 1, 2013, keeping many of the elements of CBLA such as a focus on K-3 literacy, assessment and individual plans for students reading below grade level. The READ Act differs from CBLA by focusing on students identified as having a significant reading deficiency, delineating requirements for parent communication and providing funding to support intervention.

In Appreciation

Thank you to each of the CPP District Advisory Council members, teachers and coordinators for their efforts in collecting and reporting data on the effectiveness of CPP.

Special thanks to the children, teachers and families whose pictures are featured throughout the report and to Larry Edelman for capturing photos of children flourishing in CPP participating programs.

Finally, our sincere gratitude to the General Assembly and the citizens of Colorado for continued support of the Colorado Preschool Program.

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