

Bill Jaeger Testimony to Senate Local Government

HB 19-1052: Early Childhood Development Special District

March 11, 2019

Thank you, Madame Chair and members of the committee, for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 19-1052. My name is Bill Jaeger and I am the Vice President for Early Childhood and Policy Initiatives at the Colorado Children's Campaign, a nonpartisan, non-profit research, policy, and advocacy organization committed to supporting every chance for every child. We would like to thank the sponsors for bringing forward this innovative approach to supporting local communities in helping families give their children a strong start in life.

Ensuring families with young children have the support they need to thrive has, and will always, require a balance of state and local approaches. We are excited about the prospect of adding early childhood developmental services to the tools that local communities can deploy to address locally-identified needs. While there will always be an important role for state policy and public investments to address our shared Colorado priorities, special districts offer an added approach for communities to tailor solutions to local needs. We know supporting families with young children is one of our best ways help advance opportunity and when we do so there is a substantial return on those investments.

- The early childhood period is a time of rapid brain development, with one million new connections forming every second. Early experiences play a large role in determining how brain connections are formed and in the “wiring” that becomes the foundation upon which all later learning is built.ⁱ Despite what we know about the importance of these early years, we do remarkably little to support families with young children.
- Fewer than half of low-income kindergarteners begin elementary school ready to learn, and some are up to two years behind their peers despite being so young.ⁱⁱ Research shows that developmental gaps between higher- and lower-income children emerge long before children start school. Gaps have been observed among children as young as nine months old.ⁱⁱⁱ By 18 months, toddlers from low-income families are usually already several months behind their more advantaged peers in language development.^{iv} Waiting until enter school can miss this key developmental window and many children who enter school behind never catch up, and are at an increased risk of dropping out of high school.^v Sadly, those who arrive behind tend to stay behind.^{vi} [Communities are beginning to come together to come up with solutions that support this vital period of development, saving taxpayers money in the long run.]

And when they do so, the return to the taxpayer for an investment in a child's early years is substantial:

- According to a recent economic analysis, for every dollar spent in the Colorado early care and education sector, \$2.25 is contributed to the state's economy. For every job created in the Colorado early care and education sector, 1.5 jobs are created in the state's economy.^{vii}
- National findings mirror year after year of annual analyses of Colorado's own state-funded pre-K program (the Colorado Preschool Program) which improves student performance on standards-based assessments, reduces the probability of being identified with a Significant Reading Deficiency under the READ Act, reduces early elementary grade retention, and results in higher graduation rates.^{viii}
- In fact, a recently published analysis of the most comprehensive, high quality experimental and quasi-experimental studies of the impact of early childhood education conducted between 1960 and 2016 found that, on average, participation in quality early childhood education leads to statistically significant reductions in **special education placement** (-8.1 percentage points), **grade retention** (-8.3 percentage points), and increases in high school **graduation rates** (+11.4 percentage points).^{ix}

We believe that state policy should facilitate collaboration across local communities to better serve the needs of children and families. We encourage you to remove a barrier to community-level problem solving and support HB 19-1052. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

ⁱ Center on the Developing Child Harvard University (n.d.). Brain architecture <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/brain-architecture/>

ⁱⁱ https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/0319_school_disadvantage_isaacs.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/2009-52DisparitiesELExecSumm.pdf>

^{iv} <http://news.stanford.edu/news/2013/september/toddler-language-gap-091213.html>

^v Barnett, W.S., Tarr, J.E., Lamy, C., & Frede, E.C. 2001. Fragile lives, shattered dreams: A report on implementation of preschool education in New Jersey's Abbott Districts. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

^{vi} <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nickmorrison/2016/11/30/by-the-time-they-start-school-for-some-children-its-already-too-late/#55a70864a21e>

^{vii} http://earlymilestones.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/full_report_bearing_the_cost_2017.pdf

^{viii} <https://www.cde.state.co.us/cpp/legreports>, <https://www.cde.state.co.us/cpp/2018legreport>

^{ix} <http://journals.sagepub.com/stoken/default+domain/ycdsVk2Xu4vSV8gxECVS/full>