Colorado Children’s Campaign Early Childhood Recommendations for Candidates
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Colorado’s governor and state legislators have a tremendous opportunity to make Colorado the best state to live, work, and play. Central to that goal is making sure that children have a great start in life and families have an equal opportunity to thrive. Candidates and elected officials are asking themselves key questions:

- How do we make sure that every child born in Colorado has an equal opportunity to succeed?
- How do we make sure Colorado remains the best place in the country to do business?
- How do we make sure all Coloradans who want to go to work can do so and earn a meaningful living?
- How do we ensure families have all they need to be the first and most important influence on children?

While there are many strategies to achieve these goals, one common approach centers on supporting families with young children. When young children have (1) access to safe, stimulating early learning experiences and (2) their parents can work, children, families, businesses and communities benefit. Unfortunately, access to quality early care and education, especially for infants and toddlers, is limited. By supporting access to parenting and home visiting programs and quality early care and education, with a particular focus on families with very young children, we can help families succeed economically and support young children’s healthy development.

Key Components of an Agenda to Support Child, Family, and Economic Development

1. Prioritize early care and education as the foundation of any new vision of an education system that promotes third grade reading, supports families in pursuit of economic opportunity, and ensures our businesses have the workforce they need to succeed.
   a. Recognize that cognitive and other developmental gaps between subgroups of children appear in the first year of life and, by and large, schools do not close those gaps. Rather than investing in remedial and expensive approaches to academic performance, prioritize early learning and development as a cost-effective, preventative approach.
   b. Retain the key values currently central to the success of early care and education programs that emphasize 1) parental choice, 2) a diverse system of providers delivering services (school district-based, charter school, and community-based providers), and 3) focusing on research-based, proven early interventions that provide the greatest return on investment.
   c. Avoid arguing for and assuming there are “silver bullet” approaches that imply that just one element of the early learning and development continuum will result in the outcomes we all care about. Exclusively investing in parenting programs, or just in child care, or just PreK or full-day K will not
result in sustainable outcomes for children and families we are all hoping to achieve. Rather, early learning is a continuum that begins with, and always relies on, parents’ capacity and is supported by access to quality early learning from a young age through 3rd grade.

2. **Invest in research- and evidence-based approaches to giving children in the earliest years of life the strong foundation they need to begin school ready to learn and to be reading on grade level in the early elementary years. These strategies include:**
   a. Expanding access to voluntary parenting and home visitation programs that support parents and caregivers as children’s first and best teachers and that have an evidence-base to support improved academic and health outcomes.
   b. Investing in child care as the early learning program it is intended to be based on what we have learned from neuroscience in the past decade. This includes helping improve access to and the quality of child care as an effective strategy for reducing the need for more costly downstream interventions.
   c. Expanding access to quality preschool and full-day kindergarten, beginning with targeted investments in historically underserved groups and those who meet at least one of the eleven indicators that the Colorado Preschool Program uses to define being “at-risk of not being school ready.” A quality preschool experience, however, must be coupled with ongoing, effective early elementary experiences to sustain the gains children make in early education settings.

3. **Measure outcomes, evaluate impact, and adapt to emerging learnings.**
   a. Ensure we have robust and valid measures of children’s school readiness and early literacy skills by implementing valid assessments that inform educators and policymakers on what is working and what is not.
   b. Develop a common definition of quality in early care and education programs based on current best practices and rigorous research. Ensure that any expansion of access is accompanied by improving the quality of services.

**Why prioritize early care and education as the foundation of a new vision for education?**

1. **Brain plasticity is highest at a young age and current gaps in performance are largely a function of different childhood experiences prior to school entry.**
   - Like the foundation of a house, early brain development is the base upon which a child’s long-term academic success and health is built.¹ A large and growing base of academic and education research tells us that effective interventions like high quality early learning programs and parent-focused programs, such as home visiting services, can change the life trajectory of children. Despite the body of evidence supporting the brain science of the early years and the demonstrated impact of various early learning interventions, many children enter the school house doors at 5 or 6 years old unprepared for success. And those who arrive behind tend to stay behind.²
2. **Gaps in children’s performance are well-established prior to school entry and schools are not closing these gaps quickly enough.**

- Fewer than half of low-income kindergarteners enter school ready to learn, and some are up to two years behind their peers (even though they have only been alive for five years).iii 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.iv By 18 months, toddlers from low-income families are usually already several months behind their more advantaged peers in language development.v One widely-cited study found that by age three, children with college-educated parents had vocabularies as much as three times larger than those of children whose parents did not complete high school — a gap so big, researchers concluded, that even the best intervention programs could, at most, keep the less-advantaged children from falling still further behind.vi

- In addition, families increasingly rely on child care so they can participate in the workforce. Almost two-thirds of mothers with children under 6 are working outside the home, compared with fewer than one in 10 in 1940—a sevenfold increase. Nearly three in 10 mothers now return to work within two months of their baby’s birth, and almost 40% with an infant under a year old are employed full time.vii In Colorado, nearly 2/3rds of children under 6 have both parents in the workforce. Recognizing the reality today’s working families face requires us to ensure that child care

3. **The long-term impacts of quality early care and education programs represent one of the best strategies to reduce several of the core cost drivers in Colorado’s education and health systems.**

- 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 ECE 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).viii

- These findings mirror year after year of annual analyses of Colorado’s own state-funded pre-K program (the Colorado Preschool Program; see figures below) which improves student performance on standards-based assessments, reduces the probability of being identified with a Significant Reading Deficiency under the READ Act, and reduces early elementary grade retention.ix

- Participants in quality early learning programs show substantial improvements on test scores early in life.x In adulthood, these same students are more likely to complete high school, attend college, and even have better health outcomes. xi They are less likely to have been charged with a crime or become a teenage parent.xii The returns from quality early care and education have been estimated to be 7 percent to 13 percent per year.xiii Study after study highlights the long-term cost savings of investing in high quality early learning programs (see The Abecedarian Project,xiv the High/Scope Perry Preschool study, etc.).xv

- For example, a recent analysis of the Chicago Child-Parent Center study estimated $48,000 in benefits to the public per child from a half-day public preschool for at-
risk children. Participants at age 20 were estimated to be more likely to have finished high school—and were less likely to have been held back, need remedial help or have been arrested. The estimated return on investment was $7 for every dollar invested (National Institute for Early Education Research). In addition, a recent research brief from Ready Nation summarizes the abundance of research illustrating both the short and long-term benefits investments in early childhood. In short, high quality early care and education is a key component to addressing the challenges our schools face in preparing tomorrow's workforce for success.
Figure 13: Percentage of Students with a Significant Reading Deficiency in 2016

Figure 16: 2017 CMAS Results
Figure 14: Cumulative Retention Rates Kindergarten through Third Grade

Source: Colorado Department of Education, Colorado Preschool Program, 2018 Legislative Report

Figure 15: Percentage of Students Who Were Retained, by Grade
What are specific strategies that can support early care and learning?

1. Colorado should expand access to voluntary, evidence-based home visiting and parenting programs.

Increased access to evidence-based, voluntary, parenting and home visiting programs can support the capacity of parents to be children’s first and best teachers. Any approach to improving children’s school readiness and early development should meet the needs of children in both licensed early care and education settings as well as those with primary caregivers or in informal situations. With the majority of children under age 6 being cared for at home and in some sort of informal care arrangement (see figure below), a strategy to promote children’s school readiness must address both licensed early care and learning as well as enhance parents’ and caregivers’ ability to support children’s early development. One of the best approaches we have to supporting parents and caregivers as children’s first and best teachers is voluntary home visitation programs. When implemented with fidelity, these programs have a strong evidence-base that support children’s healthy development and early academic success.

- Colorado is fortunate to be home to several high-quality, evidence-based home visitation programs that promote children’s early development by empowering parents and caregivers to support children’s academic preparedness. Colorado families who have participated in evidence-based home visiting have shown a nearly 50 percent reduction in domestic violence; a 21 percent reduction in women who smoked during pregnancy; and a 32 percent reduction in alcohol use during pregnancy.\(^{xviii}\) All of these positive health outcomes translate into positive early childhood development and, in turn, improvements in school readiness.

- Studies that followed up with program participants 15 years later showed reduced criminal activity among mothers and their children, improved school readiness, fewer months spent on welfare, and reductions in child abuse and neglect.\(^{xix}\)

- Despite the strong evidence these programs have, few families can benefit from them due to limited access. Expanding access to evidence-based, voluntary home visiting programs can support children’s early learning and development.\(^{xx}\)
Where Are Children Under 6 Spending Their Days?

- Children Under 6-Years-Old in Colorado: 408,000
- Children Under 6 with at least one parent NOT in the workforce: 162,000
- Children Under 6 with ALL parents in the workforce: 246,000
- Licensed Capacity for Children Under 6: 150,000
- Children Under 6 with ALL Parents in the Workforce & NO Access to Licensed Care: 96,000

Source: Colorado Department of Human Services, American Community Survey, Internal Calculations
2. Colorado should expand access to high quality child care.
Colorado should increase access to child care scholarships and use tax credit strategies to help families afford quality child care. Specifically, expanding child care scholarship programs and increasing the scope of tax credits available to promote access to quality early learning increases helps reduce downstream health and academic needs.

- As Katharine Stevens at the American Enterprise Institute recently observed, “For most of history, that essential foundation [of early brain development] was laid largely in the home. But today, an unprecedented number of American parents are in the workforce, and millions of young children are in paid childcare for a substantial portion of their early years. And while childcare is a necessary support for working parents, it also has a critical impact on children during the most consequential phase of human development. We now know that starting at birth, young children are continuously and rapidly learning — wherever they are and from whomever they’re with. Indeed, the commonly made distinction between “care” and “education” in early childhood is a false one. Childcare is early education, regardless of the building it occurs in or what we call it. The question is only whether it’s advancing or impeding children’s learning.”

- This observation resonates in Colorado where nearly two-thirds of all children under the age of 6 have all available parents in the workforce (see figure above). As such, child care – whether informal or licensed, high or low quality – is simply a reality for Colorado families. Ensuring that these early experiences promotes children’s learning and development requires strategies to support both the affordability as well as the quality of child care arrangements.

- Two approaches to improving access to quality child care have been the use of tax credits and child care scholarships. In 2016-17, however, only 16,000 Colorado children used child care subsidies in a given month through the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP), which is our state’s child care scholarship program. That is just a fraction of the children in eligible families in the state. On average, only about one in seven families who is income eligible currently receives the CCCAP subsidy. This is unfortunate because of the research base that has highlighted the value of these investments for improving child and family well-being:
  - Specifically, access to support for child care helps accelerate the movement of families from public assistance to self-sufficiency. Multiple studies have found child care scholarships to be positively associated with families’ annual earnings. Specifically, parents who receive assistance with child care have a higher probability of being employed and a shorter transition from welfare to work than those who do not receive a subsidy.
  - Child care scholarships are linked to improved employment outcomes for parents. A research study of single mothers found that women were more likely to be employed when receiving child care assistance and that their employment was more likely to be full time. The study also found that single mothers with child care assistance worked an average of 9.4 hours more per weeks than single mothers who did not get help. Another study showed that families receiving child care subsidies are not only more likely to be employed in general, but also are likely to have more stable employment. Parents with access to affordable and dependable child care are less likely to
face child care interruptions that can result in absences or other schedule disruptions in the workplace.xxv

- When parents do better economically, their children do better as well. Parental employment not only improves the economic circumstance of a family, but also has been shown to improve a child’s social and emotional well-being. Decades of research show that access to high-quality child care and early education experiences benefits all children, particularly low-income children. And child care subsidies make higher-quality child care programs more affordable for low-income families.xxvi

- Workers with children may have to miss work if they lack access to stable, affordable, high-quality child care. This has a tremendous impact on the success of our businesses. In a 2011 national survey of families with at least one employed parent, 21 percent of families reported child-care related absences.3 A 2017 report found that 40 percent of parents surveyed in Louisiana had missed work due to child care issues in the previous three months.xxvii

- It is important to note, however, that child care be of a high enough level of quality that it advances children’s healthy development. Low quality child care is detrimental to children’s academic growth. Notably, the key element of quality in any early care and education setting is the quality of interactions between teacher and child. To promote this quality, we need to ensure that we can recruit, retain, and compensate our workforce appropriately. Current wages for child care educators, however, are on par with doggy daycare and parking lot attendants (see figure below). Ensuring the availability of quality care requires a concerted focus on the recruiting, retaining, and compensating an early care and education workforce.

- Child care is a two-generation approach that supports children’s school readiness while also ensuring families with young children can work and provide for their own economic security. Ensuring that we have a workforce ready to promote children’s school readiness and that care is accessible and affordable is a necessary step toward a strong foundation for school readiness. Access to quality child care can help mitigate some of the obstacles that families face in participating in the workforce while at the same time promoting the school readiness of children at a sensitive point in their lives.
Source: Colorado Department of Labor and Employment
3. Colorado should provide expanded access to high quality preschool, effectively implemented locally and coupled with a focus on improving early elementary school quality that sustain the gains children make in preschool.

To promote early literacy, Colorado should expand access to more of the roughly 50 percent of 3- and 4-year-old children who have no access to preschool.

- Of the 2.5 million U.S. students who dropped out of high school in 2015, 1.6 million were firmly set on that trajectory when they were just 8 years old.xxviii What did those 8-year-old students have in common? They received the lowest reading scores on their third-grade literacy exams. A student’s ability to meet grade-level expectations in third grade plays a significant role in the likelihood of them graduating high school. A third-grade student who reads proficiently is four times more likely to graduate from high school than a third grader reading below grade level.

- As noted above, our state-created and designed program, the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP), has a strong track record of reducing early literacy gaps and promoting young children’s path to early success. The program provides limited funding to school districts to serve children who meet one of 11 risk factors for not being school-ready. The program is a voluntary preschool investment that promotes “mixed delivery” (the practice of delivering preschool in a diversity of settings – traditional school settings, charter schools, and community-based providers all participate). Started in 1988, the program has a strong track record of success in improving child outcomes and reducing taxpayer costs.

- More broadly, studies have also demonstrated that children in high-quality early childhood programs were 30 percent to 40 percent more likely to graduate from high school.xxix As such, early childhood education can increase earnings in adulthood by 1.3 percent to 3.5 percent. These earnings gains alone are bigger than the costs of such programs.xxx If all families were able to enroll their children in preschool at the same rate as high-income families, enrollment would increase nationwide by about 13 percentage points and yield net present value of $4.8 billion to $16.1 billion per cohort from earnings gains alone after accounting for the cost of the program.xxxi

- Despite what we know about the value of early care and education just half of Colorado 3- and 4-year old children were enrolled in. In 2016-17, the Colorado Preschool 8 (CPP) only had capacity to serve 23 percent of 4-year-old children and eight percent of 3-year-old children in the state. The Colorado Department of Education estimates that in 2016-17, more than 8,000 4-year-old children qualified for CPP but had no program available to them.xxxii.xxxiii

- Nationwide, at age 4, enrollment in pre-K is about 65 percent for the lowest 40 percent of families by income and 90 percent for the highest income quintile. At age 3, when state pre-K is rarely provide, enrollment is only about 40 percent for low-income and moderate-income families while it is 80 percent for the top income quintile. Overall, the US ranks 32nd of 39 OECD countries for ECE enrollment (70 percent of Organization for Economic Cooperation (OECD) countries vs 30 percent in US).xxxiv

- At the local level, the Denver Preschool Program recently released independent research findings that show third-graders who had gone through DPP outperformed those who had not on Colorado’s assessment test of reading proficiency. Similar
results were seen on reading assessments administered in kindergarten, first and second grades. Furthermore, English Language Learners and students living in poverty showed evidence of closing gaps to their peers.\textsuperscript{xxxv}

- As with child care, ensuring that access is coupled both improvements in quality and preserving parental choices over settings are key to the success of the program. Currently, Colorado only meets 5 of the 10 National Institute for Early Education Research quality benchmarks.\textsuperscript{xxxvi} We are leading in the areas of quality early learning and development standards, support for quality curriculum, some teacher training expectations, and ratios and group sizes in early learning classrooms. We have more work to do to elevate quality in the areas of teacher qualifications, screening policies, and ongoing classroom support and quality improvement. As we work to center early care and learning at the heart of an updated vision for education in our state, the goals of access and quality must move together if we are to get the returns we know we can when investing in young children.

- In sum, expanding access to preschool in Colorado would go a long way to closing gaps in performance and ensuring that children have access to the quality experiences that put them on a path to early literacy success.

Sustaining the Long-term Impacts of Pre-K

- Colorado is fortunate to have robust data on the long-term, positive impacts of our state-funded preschool program. That said, studies of other state PreK programs can inform program improvements in our state.

- In considering how to improve child outcomes, we know that there is compelling, high quality research on the value of preschool locally and nationally. Specifically, these studies include:
  - At the local level, the Denver Preschool Program recently released independent research findings that show third-graders who had gone through DPP outperformed those who had not on Colorado’s assessment test of reading proficiency. Similar results were seen on reading assessments administered in kindergarten, first and second grades. Furthermore, English Language Learners and students living in poverty showed evidence of closing gaps to their peers.xxxvii
  - In the Colorado Preschool Program:
    - Across the domains of social-emotional, physical, language, cognitive, literacy, and mathematics children make significant overall gains in learning and development.xxxxviii
    - Significant Reading Deficiency rates (as identified under the READ Act) for CPP graduates are on average 5 percent lower compared to other at-risk children with no history of publicly funded preschool.xxxix
    - Consistently over time, CPP graduates are 33% less likely to be retained in the early grades.
    - On the state Colorado Measures of Academic Success, the percentage of CPP graduates who meet or exceed expectations in any one subject area is typically higher than those who are at-risk and with no history of publicly funded preschool. These trends are seen as far out as 11th grade and statistically significant in nearly all subject areas.xl
  - 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 ECE 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).xli

- In other states, however, studies point to the importance of thinking about (1) investing in a continuum of strategies to support early learning and that PreK is not a “silver bullet” for improving child outcomes and (2) program quality and implementation of effective, evidence-based practices is a necessary consideration to realize the promise of preschool for improving child outcomes. Quality preschool is not an “inoculation” against future educational experiences: It is unrealistic to expect the benefits gained in any one year of schooling to be maintained in a future low-quality setting.xlii Investments in PreK must be accompanied with supports to ensure implementation of quality, evidence-based, effective strategies locally. In addition, promoting school readiness for children entering kindergarten, but failing to ensure that K-3rd grade and subsequent educational experiences sustain those
gains, will limit the long-term effectiveness of PreK. Finally, waiting to think about supporting school readiness when a child is 4 or 5-years-old misses both the developmental window when we can have the greatest impact on brain architecture (birth through 3 years-old) and when children and families have the most limited access. PreK needs to be seen as one piece of an early learning puzzle that begins, and always relies on, families and parents, and is supported with access to affordable, quality child care and schooling through 3rd grade.

- A PreK expansion strategy must also account for the impact of expanding access to public school preschool for community-based providers. Efforts to expand access to quality early care and education for three- and four-year olds must be designed to not diminish or jeopardize access for infants and toddlers. Many community-based preschool providers rely on a business model that supports enrollment of infants and toddlers by offering preschool. Any expansion of preschool must be done in a way that does not: 1) create a disincentive to offer infant and toddler care, 2) squeeze out infant and toddler capacity, or 3) undermine a business model that creates access to infant and toddler care by enrolling preschool-age children.

- A statewide system to support access to high-quality early care and education must include a “mixed-delivery” (supporting school district, charter school, and community-based options) system, to meet the needs of families, and also be combined with workforce capacity-building efforts to ensure that Colorado has an adequate number of qualified professionals who can provide developmentally appropriate learning and care for young children.

Additional Specific Policy Strategies to Promote Early Childhood Development

Policy Strategies to Promote Voluntary Parenting and Home Visiting Services

- Include resources for parenting programs in a comprehensive statewide identification, referral, and follow-up navigation system, such as the Help Me Grow model so parents can make informed choices about what they want for their children.

- Ensure availability for Medicaid funding for evidence-based group parenting programs, such as those offered by Head Start, including for children or parents who meet “at risk” criteria to help parents of young children promote healthy physical development, including oral health, social-emotional development, and to help parents address children’s mental health needs.

- Establish an integrated, cross-agency model to provide services and supports to families including home visiting, education, community supports, and workforce services through a pilot grant program that can be scaled up statewide.¹

- Provide access to child welfare and maltreatment prevention programs and services in a variety of trusted settings, including medical and dental provider offices and public libraries.

- Expand implementation of the Colorado Child Maltreatment Prevention Framework for Action to more communities.

- Engage with Colorado Department of Education to incentivize school districts to offer parenting programs and incentivize parents to attend.

¹ https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BxVE8p2dzVf3O81NWtuU25DdTg/view?usp=sharing.
• Begin by implementing gradual funding increases at the state level over a defined time period to expand access to all families with children prenatal to age five living below 200 percent of the federal poverty level to the evidence-based home visiting program(s) that best meet their needs.
• Increase access to professional development and technical assistance opportunities for home visitors to address complex family needs (such as behavioral health needs, preventing child maltreatment, screenings for autism spectrum disorders, etc.).
• Implement funding increases at the state level over a defined time period to support increased administrative capacity across home visiting programs as access to these programs is expanded.
• Create funding stream or use Medicaid reimbursement to implement Moving Beyond Depression or Enhanced Home Visiting Pilot to treat parents suffering from mental health issues in their home.
• Ensure that communities have multiple home visiting models represented, to be able to better serve families that could benefit from services but do not meet the eligibility criteria of specific models.
• Create a pilot providing home visiting services during preschool / child care pickup, making the services more accessible to working parents.
• Develop a shared philosophy that ensures funding decisions for home visiting programs in the state are based upon in the evidence base of programs and the outcomes desired.
• Develop a comprehensive, statewide home visiting system that allows for a continuum of home visiting models that meet specific needs and have proven outcomes to access/maintain the financial support needed to meet unique family and community needs.
• Embed Infant Early Childhood Mental Health professionals in home visiting programs to support home visiting staff.
• Promote strategies that would allow counties as well as the state to use their allocated TANF funds to support evidence-based home visiting programs.
• Finance home visiting services across funding streams. Advocate for federal and state changes to Medicaid policy that would make it possible to include Medicaid as a funding stream for home visiting programs.
• Provide outreach to informal, family, friend, and neighbor providers who could also benefit from home visiting services to encourage and increase enrollment in this population.
• Bolster the support for individual home visits by creating neighborhood or community-based groups for families enrolled in programs in order to get additional support.
Policy Strategies to Promote Access to Quality, Affordable Child Care

- Conduct a study to find out the number of care providers a child experiences prior to turning age three and implement policies that promote continuity of care.
- Change child care licensing regulations to allow mixed age grouping in order to provide continuity of care and reduce transitions for young children.
- Initially, allocate funding for the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) to serve all eligible families.
- Allocate funding over a defined time period to provide access to sliding scale child care funding to all children in families living below 200 percent FPL.
- Allocate state funding for early care and education to align with national estimates of the cost of high-quality programs, or to result in public funding for early care and education equal to at least the national average of 38 percent of the total amount of funding in Colorado (currently at 27 percent).
- Support the Expanding Quality in Infant Toddler Care Initiative, while working to increase the Early Childhood Mental Health unit to help support providers in meeting the behavioral and mental health needs of the children in their care.
- Allocate state investments to supplement federal Early Head Start funding in order to serve additional eligible infants and toddlers and their families in the program.
- Require CCCAP reimbursement rates for providers at levels 4 and 5 in Colorado Shines to be set at or above the 75th percentile of the market rate.
- Address lead in water supplies and paint in various settings by promoting testing, remediation, and funding to address these issues in child care settings and schools with a particular focus on removing lead from service lines to early care and education programs.
- Increase incentives for CCCAP providers to offer care during non-traditional, non-standard hours and days.
- Provide supports to Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) providers who are interested in becoming licensed learn strategies to eventually become licensed.
- Adopt state policies that ensure local zoning regulations do not unintentionally limit home-based family child care centers’ ability to successfully run their businesses from their homes.

Policy Strategies to Promote Access to Full-day Kindergarten:

- At minimum, gradually increase per pupil funding for kindergarten by .08 each year until full-day kindergarten is fully funded.
- Ultimately, fully fund a full-day program for all kindergarten students.
- Ensure that the length of day and year for full-day kindergarten aligns with subsequent grades.

Policy Strategies to Improve Alignment Across Full-day Kindergarten through 3rd Grade

- Utilize Title II, as well as other federal and state funds, designated professional development dollars to build principal skills and knowledge on an ongoing basis.
about what is age and developmentally appropriate in K-3, such as providing collaborative opportunities for principals, teachers and early childhood center directors and educators.

- Within the realm of privacy and confidentiality, ensure data systems that effectively incorporate data specifically needed by K-3 teachers and leaders, such as student performance on assessments (especially kindergarten entry assessments), chronic absenteeism and quality of a student's pre-K experience.
- Ensure teacher and leader preparation programs provide instruction in early childhood education and child development including embedded practical experiences and culturally relevant training.
- Encourage use of curricula that emphasizes student-centered learning through developmentally appropriate play and exploration that is sensitive to students’ age, individuality, culture and home language.
- Identify a K-3 specific fifth indicator as defined in ESSA.
- Include K-3 data in state report cards.
- Employ K-3 strategies for school improvement.

Conclusion

Many children enter school unprepared to succeed, and those initial gaps are difficult for schools to close. Fewer than half of low-income 5-year-old children enter school ready to learn, and some are up to two years behind their peers.\textsuperscript{xlv} When schools fail to close gaps in performance as they progress through school, the results are poor academic performance, grade repetition, expensive remedial services, and high rates of school dropout.\textsuperscript{xlv} An analysis produced last year by Stanford’s Sean Reardon shows that a district that can produce 1.1 years of growth in one year – or 5.5 years of growth in five years, the time period Reardon looks at -- will rank among the best in the country.\textsuperscript{xlvi} Extrapolate that out and a superstar district might produce 11 years of growth in 10 years – an optimistic assumption given the difficulty of sustaining that level of performance. What that means is that in any district other than these superstar districts, a cohort of children that is more than a year behind \textit{at the end of second grade} will not be caught up by the end of high school. It is much cheaper, and much more effective, to prevent those gaps from developing the first place. A vision for Colorado’s education system should place quality early care and education at the center of strategies that prepare children for future success.

\textsuperscript{i} https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2807801/
\textsuperscript{iii} https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/0319_school_disadvantage_isaacs.pdf
\textsuperscript{v} http://news.stanford.edu/news/2013/september/toddler-language-gap-091213.html
\textsuperscript{vi} https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/periodicals/TheEarlyCatastrophe.pdf
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Personal Communication from Invest in Kids.
Michelle Webster and Andrew Ball, Child Care Funding in Colorado Has Fallen Behind by $54 Million (Colorado Center on Law & Policy, March 26, 2014).
"Population 16 to 24 years old and number of 16- to 24-year-old high school dropouts (status dropouts), by sex and race/ethnicity:

Ibid.