



# Colorado Preschool Program

*Working Together*

2011 Legislative Report

## Colorado State Board of Education

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## Colorado Preschool Program Legislative Declaration:

The general assembly hereby finds, determines, and declares that there are substantial numbers of children in this state entering kindergarten and the primary grades who are not adequately prepared to learn. The general assembly further finds that early school failure may ultimately contribute to such children dropping out of school at an early age, failing to achieve their full potential, becoming dependent upon public assistance, or becoming involved in criminal activities. By enacting this article, the general assembly acknowledges the need to adequately prepare all children to learn through preschool programs. (22-28-102 (1) C.R.S.)

**Dwight D. Jones**, Commissioner of Education

**Robert K. Hammond**, Interim Commissioner of Education (effective Dec. 14, 2010)

**Vody Herrmann**, Assistant Commissioner Public School Finance

# Introduction to the Colorado Preschool Program

The Colorado General Assembly established the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) in 1988 to provide a high quality early childhood education program and family support services to at-risk preschool-age children in Colorado. Each year the Department of Education is charged with the responsibility of submitting a report to the General Assembly on the effectiveness of the program. This report highlights several findings that demonstrate the investment in the Colorado Preschool Program benefits young children who are already behind, even before school starts. CPP participation improves school readiness, raises school achievement levels and reduces the cost of remedial education strategies in later grades.

## Who are the children and families served by CPP?

The Legislature targets the children most in need by setting certain eligibility factors for the program in statute. In the 2009-2010 school year, school districts reported the following challenges facing the 20,160 children and their families supported by this program:

- 83.0 percent were eligible to receive free/reduced-cost lunch
- 46.2 percent were in need of language development
- 32.5 percent were identified as needing social skills
- 29.0 percent had a parent or guardian who had not successfully completed high school education or its equivalent
- 14.5 percent were receiving assistance as neglected or dependent children
- 12.4 percent were experiencing frequent relocation
- 10.6 percent had an unmarried teenage parent
- 8.6 percent of the families were homeless
- 6.1 percent had drug or alcohol abuse in their family
- 3.8 percent had an abusive adult residing in their home



Most CPP children are served as four-year-olds in the year before attending kindergarten. CPP District Advisory Councils have the flexibility to serve younger children if those children have three or more risk factors present in their lives. Figure 1 identifies the estimated percentage of three- and four-year-old children funded in the Colorado Preschool Program, Head Start and special education as a percentage of the total three- and four-year-olds in Colorado, respectively.<sup>1</sup>

All of the CPP children and the preschool students receiving special education services on an IEP are mandated to participate in Results Matter, Colorado's early childhood assessment system. These state-funded children have unique identification numbers, which allow the department to study their educational progress longitudinally. Most Head Start programs and many private programs also choose to participate in Results Matter. Discussions continue regarding how unique identification numbers can be extended to these children.



Figure 1

# Colorado Preschool Program At-a-Glance

**How many children does CPP serve?** CPP is authorized to serve 20,160 children. A limited number of “slots” (five percent statewide) may be used to fund a child to participate in a full-day program.

**How many districts participate in CPP?** School district participation in the program is voluntary and 169 out of 178 (95 percent) school districts and the Charter School Institute have CPP slot allocations.

**Where are children served?** The CPP Act gives communities the responsibility to decide locally the programs best qualified to deliver CPP services. The intent of the law is to provide children and their families with the highest quality services available. As a result, Colorado Preschool Program children are served throughout the state in a variety of settings, including for-profit and non-profit community programs (see Fig. 2).

**How is quality measured in programs serving CPP children?** CPP programs must demonstrate the capacity to deliver high quality developmentally appropriate services as defined by the *Colorado Quality Standards for Early Childhood Care and Education Services*. Local CPP District Advisory Councils are responsible for monitoring and helping to sustain the quality of the programs they oversee. Figure 3 identifies how quality is measured in the 823 programs serving CPP children.

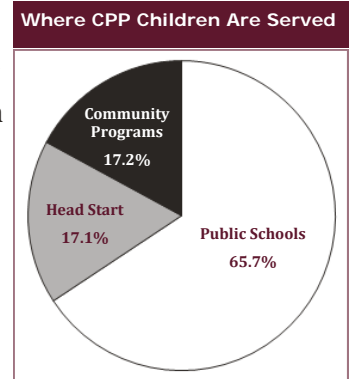


Figure 2

## Quality Rating Methods in CPP

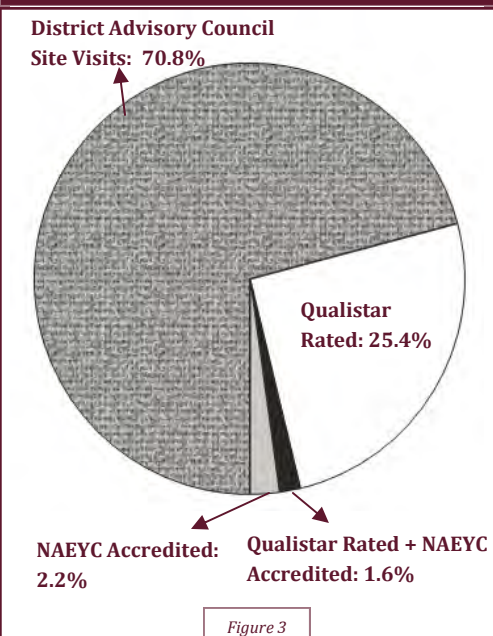


Figure 3

- **District Advisory Council Site Visits:** Council members must make at least two on-site visits per year to programs serving CPP children in order to ensure their compliance with the Quality Standards.
- **ECERS-R Ratings:** The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised consists of 47 items divided into seven subscales including: Space and Furnishings, Personal Care Routines, Language & Reasoning, Activities, Interaction, Program Structure and Parents and Staff. The established reliability and validity of the ECERS-R make it particularly useful for research and program evaluation. A few District Advisory Councils use the ECERS-R in an informal way or contract with a certified or reliable ECERS-R Rater to rate their classrooms.
- **Qualistar Ratings:** The Qualistar Rating process is an objective rating process which measures five different quality components including: Learning Environment, Family Partnerships, Adult to Child Ratios and Group size, Training and Education and Accreditation. As a part of the Qualistar Rating process, programs are observed by a reliable ECERS rater. Programs receive points in each of the components up to a total of

42 points; the points are translated into a 4-star rating scale.

- **National Association for the Education of Young Children Accreditation (NAEYC):** NAEYC is a nationally recognized mark of quality for early childhood care and education programs. There are 10 standards which programs must meet in order to achieve NAEYC Accreditation. The categories of standards include: Children, Teaching Staff, Family and Community Partnerships and Program Administration.

**Did you know?** In 2010 the Colorado Preschool Program documented a match that enabled Colorado to “draw down” an additional \$23.6 million in federal revenue. These additional federal funds supported Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) and the Early Childhood Leadership Commission.

# The New Academic Standards and Preschool

In 2009, the Colorado State Board of Education adopted new academic standards that articulate the concepts and skills students need to master in pre-kindergarten through high school. These academic standards align with the current Results Matter early childhood assessment systems. Observers see the academic standards in action when they enter high quality, developmentally appropriate preschool classrooms. Results Matter assessment data shows the growth of CPP children as compared to their tuition-paying peers in the major domains of preschool learning and development. In this report, we feature data from two of assessment systems approved by Results Matter: the Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum and HighScope COR.

## The New Academic Standards & Physical Development in Preschool

### What is an example of a physical development academic standard for preschool?

Standard 1: Movement Competence and Understanding in Physical Education  
Concepts and skills preschool students master: 2. Demonstrate balance

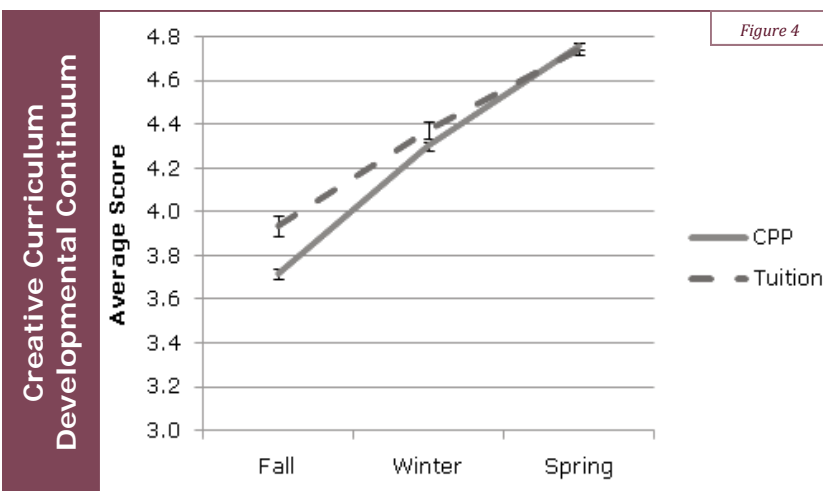
**How do parents and teachers support the development of this understanding?** Parents support their children’s physical development by providing a variety of opportunities for children to experience movement in their everyday lives such as playing on climbing structures at local parks, going on bike rides, taking walks and letting children balance on logs, curbs or stones.

High quality preschool classrooms provide opportunities for children to play in supervised indoor and outdoor environments as well. Teachers provide access to a variety of equipment such as slides and swings, tricycles, balls and jump ropes which encourage children to become more involved in physical movement as they play. Teachers set up obstacle courses with equipment that invites balancing and introduce music and movement activities, such as dancing with scarves, to provide children with movement opportunities.

### How do teachers and classroom staff assess children in this standard with Results Matter?

As teachers complete their Results Matter assessments they observe children moving through their indoor and outdoor classroom environments. They document, through written observations and pictures, the balancing skills children demonstrate as they play. Teachers ask parents questions about things they observe at home as their children engage in play involving balance and physical movement.

**What do we know about how these opportunities support the physical growth of children in the Colorado Preschool Program?** Because of lack of learning opportunities, CPP children enter preschool already behind their peers in physical skills and abilities. But as Figure 4 demonstrates, by the end of the year these preschoolers quickly catch up to their more advantaged (i.e. tuition-paying) peers when they are provided experiences to practice large and small motor movement activities.



## What is an example of a language and literacy content standard for preschool?

Standard 3: Writing and Composition

Concepts and skills preschool students master: 1. Pictures express ideas

**How do parents and teachers support growth?** In homes with rich environments, parents provide paper, crayons, markers and pencils for children's regular use. They ask questions about pictures children draw and write down what children tell them about their pictures. They encourage children to share their pictures and messages with other family members.

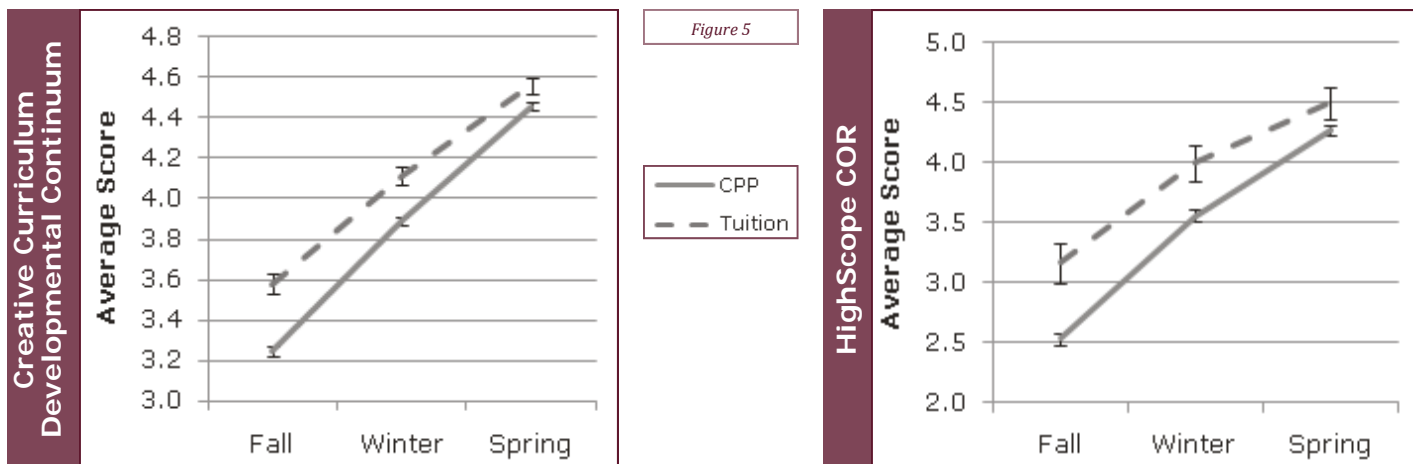
In a high quality preschool classroom, a writing center is always open and stocked with different kinds of markers, stationary, envelopes, etc. Writing utensils and paper are available in all learning centers in order for children to create signs, maps, grocery lists and other types of messages. There are multiple opportunities to paint pictures and represent ideas and experiences with art media. In this way, teachers and classroom staff help engage the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills of invention and information literacy.

Classroom teams demonstrate the relationship between written and spoken words daily by taking children's dictation and writing out children's ideas, thus relating the spoken word to the written word. Teachers point out to children how the pictures in books help to tell the story. They label objects in the room and relate phrases composed by children.



**How do teachers and classroom staff assess children in this standard with Results Matter?** As teachers complete their Results Matter authentic assessment, they watch for children exhibiting behaviors that relate to drawing pictures to generate, represent and express ideas or share information. They write observations about how children think symbolically, plan and then use drawings to represent their ideas. They also observe children listening to book readings and take note of when children refer to pictures to help them understand the story or decode words.

**What do we know about how these opportunities support the language and literacy growth of children in the Colorado Preschool Program?** Concern about a child's language development is one of the primary eligibility factors for CPP. As Figure 5 illustrates, CPP children are assessed in the fall as being significantly lower in their language and literacy skills when compared to more advantaged peers whose families pay to have them attend preschool. With the support of preschool, every child experiences growth by the end of the year, but CPP children make faster progress and the amount they are behind narrows before they enter kindergarten.



## What is an example of an academic standard for preschool related to Social and Emotional Development?

Content Area: Social Studies

Standard 4: Civics

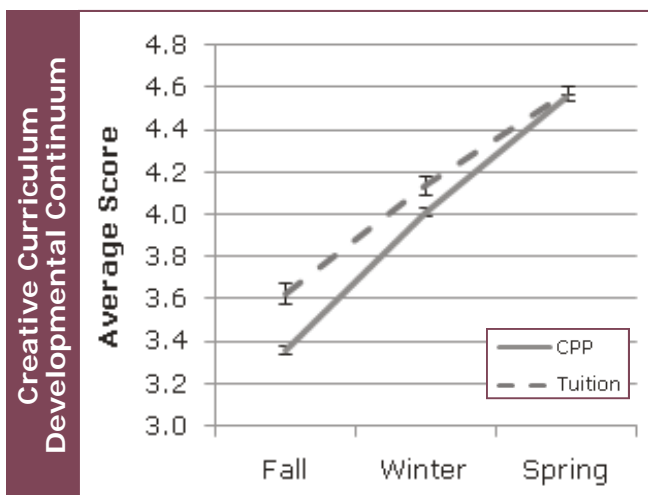
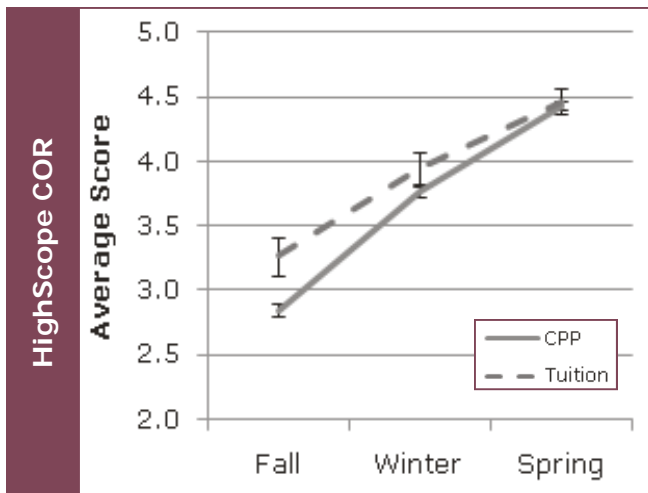
Concepts and skills preschool students master: 2. Rules and their purpose in allowing groups to work effectively

**How do parents and teachers support the development of this understanding?** Most parents establish rules at home so that they can clearly communicate expectations and be consistent in their parenting. Rules are stated in positive ways, referred to often and kept to a minimum so that children can easily remember them.

Teachers and classroom staff create a similar framework in a high quality preschool classroom. During group discussions children are involved in establishing classroom rules and respectful practices. This discussion encourages children to gain a shared understanding of how the rules assist the classroom community in operating smoothly and children learn to respect the needs of others.

Preschool teachers make classroom rules simple and meaningful to children (e.g. We take care of ourselves, we take care of others and we take care of our classroom). Rules are posted on the wall at a child's eye level accompanied with illustrations. Teachers use the rules and the technique of redirection to manage behavior: "John, I am worried that someone may fall if you don't put the truck back on the shelf. In our classroom we take care of others and want others to be safe." Teachers also arrange and equip classrooms for social play in order for children to practice their skills of working and playing effectively together.

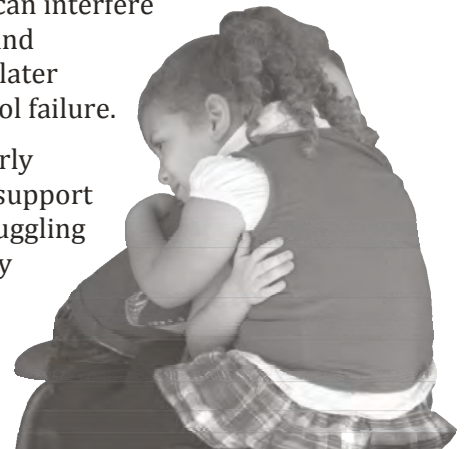
Figure 6



**How do teachers and classroom staff assess children in this standard with Results Matter?** As teachers complete their Results Matter authentic assessment, they watch for children exhibiting behaviors that demonstrate the use of classroom rules and an understanding of group membership. Teachers write anecdotes or use digital cameras to capture how children care for materials, care for friends and demonstrate self-control and independent self-care tasks (e.g. washing hands, wiping nose, handing a friend a tissue, group transitions).

**What do we know about how these opportunities support the social-emotional growth of children in the Colorado Preschool Program?** The third most frequently identified eligibility factor for CPP children is a concern with social development, i.e. an ability to follow directions, pay attention, get along with others and control negative emotions. This can interfere with children's learning and development and lead to later social problems and school failure.

As Figure 6 illustrates, early childhood programs can support CPP children who are struggling in this area and effectively close the gap between them and their more advantaged peers.



## What is an example of a math content standard for preschool?

Standard 1: Number Sense, Properties, and Operations  
 Concepts and skills preschool students master: 2. Counting is a means for solving problems

## How do parents and teachers support growth to meet these academic standards?

To be effective, parents and teachers make math engaging to children. They find natural opportunities to count and involve children in conversations about quantity. For instance, when setting the table, they may ask, “Do we have more forks or plates on the table now?” Adults provide an environment with a variety of materials including those that work together in a one-to-one relationship, like cups and saucers, jars and lids, and nuts and bolts, so children can visually determine equality in sets. Effective teachers talk with children about their problem solving strategies and encourage them to take risks and search for solutions to problems they pose.

## How do teachers and classroom staff assess children in this standard with Results Matter?

As teachers complete their Results Matter authentic assessment, they listen for children to use comparative words related to numbers in their play. They record examples of children solving problems about the quantities of sets. They take pictures of children putting objects in one-to-one correspondence and using that relationship as a way to compare two sets.



## What is an example of a science content standard for preschool?

Standard 1: Physical Science  
 Concepts and skills preschool students master: 1. Objects have properties and characteristics

## How do parents and teachers support growth to meet these academic standards?

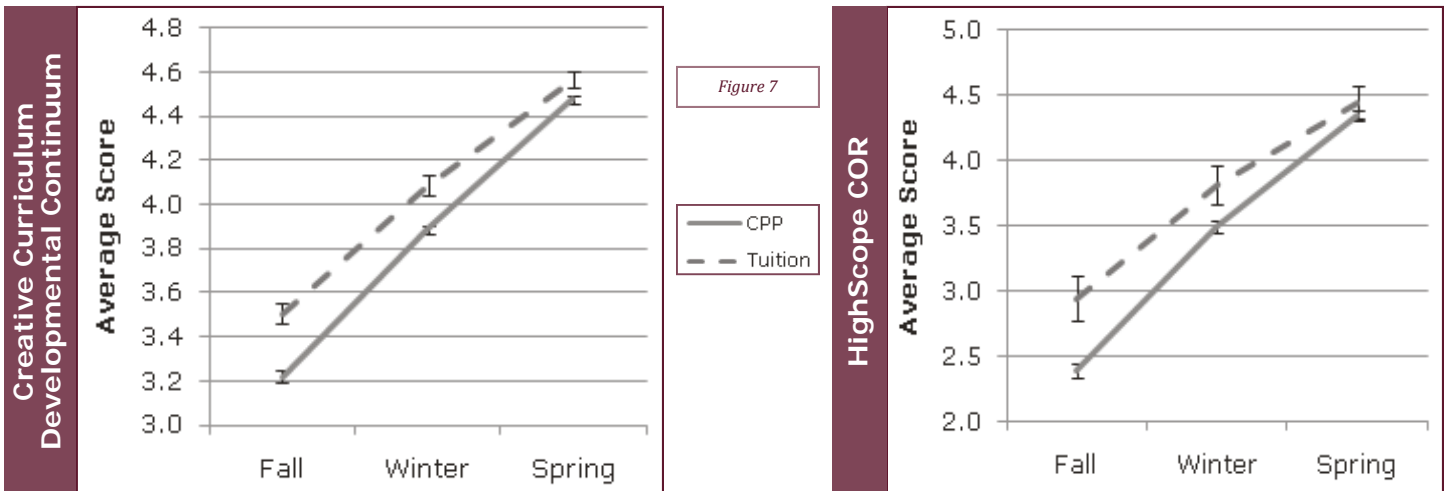
Effective science instruction provides children with opportunities to construct their own understanding. Both teachers and parents will build on children’s curiosity and encourage them to ask questions, analyze and reflect on their work. Adults also provide carefully selected materials children can explore and use in a variety of ways, like pulleys, ramps, and balls, and scientific tools like magnifiers, scales, magnets, rulers, and cameras.

## How do teachers and classroom staff assess children in this standard with Results Matter?

As teachers complete their Results Matter authentic assessment, they observe and record examples of children exploring materials in the environment, and noticing their similarities and differences. They document when children notice and comment on cause and effect relationships and guess the reason for what just occurred.

## What do we know about how these opportunities support the cognitive growth of children in the Colorado Preschool Program?

We see in Figure 7 that children who are behind can make better than expected progress when given these types of learning opportunities.





# Colorado Basic Literacy Act Outcomes



One of the ways the department can study how well prepared Colorado Preschool Program children are for success in the primary grades is by analyzing the data from the Colorado Basic Literacy Act (CBLA) assessments (see Fig. 8).

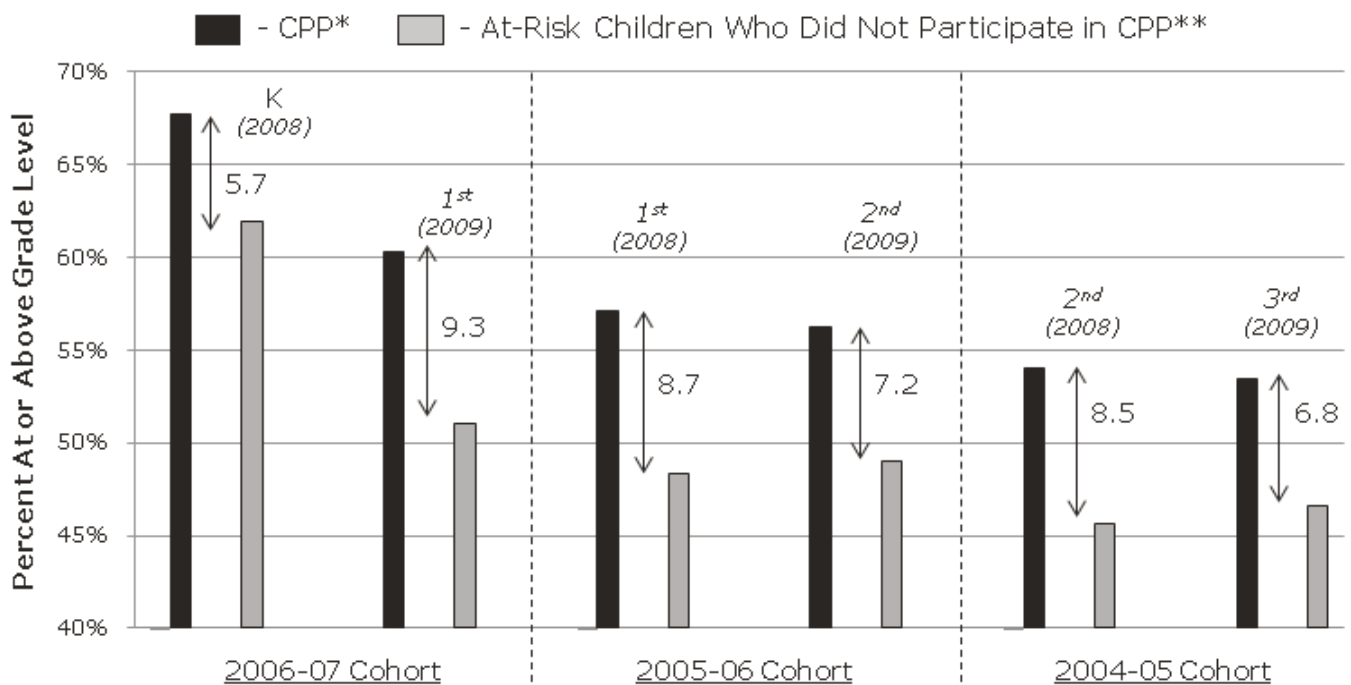
Three assessments are currently used in CBLA reporting: Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy (DIBELS), Developmental Reading Assessment-2 (DRA-2) and Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS). Each school district in the state uses one of these assessments as part of the measurement of literacy gains in grades K-3. The kindergarten assessments focus on phonological awareness and pre-reading skills. In grades one

through three, children move to subtests in which they read passages or words of text. It is important to note that by second grade, there is less of an emphasis on letter naming and phonological awareness in literacy instruction and more on reading and comprehending text.

The difference in achievement between CPP graduates and children who are at-risk but did not receive high quality CPP experiences is telling. As a result of the high quality early childhood experiences that CPP classrooms provide, school districts report that former CPP students, despite the presence of risk factors that might limit their academic achievement, are entering kindergarten well prepared and experiencing success throughout the primary grades. *\*Note: Statewide CBLA data were not available for analysis before the 2007-2008 school year, so only two years of data are available for each cohort of children.*

Figure 8

## 2008-09 K-3 CBLA Outcomes



= Percentage Point Difference

\*Children who participated in CPP using one slot  
 \*\*Defined as eligible for Free/Reduced Price Lunch in 1<sup>st</sup> grade with no history of involvement in CPP

## CSAP Grade 3-5 Outcomes, 2003-04 Cohort

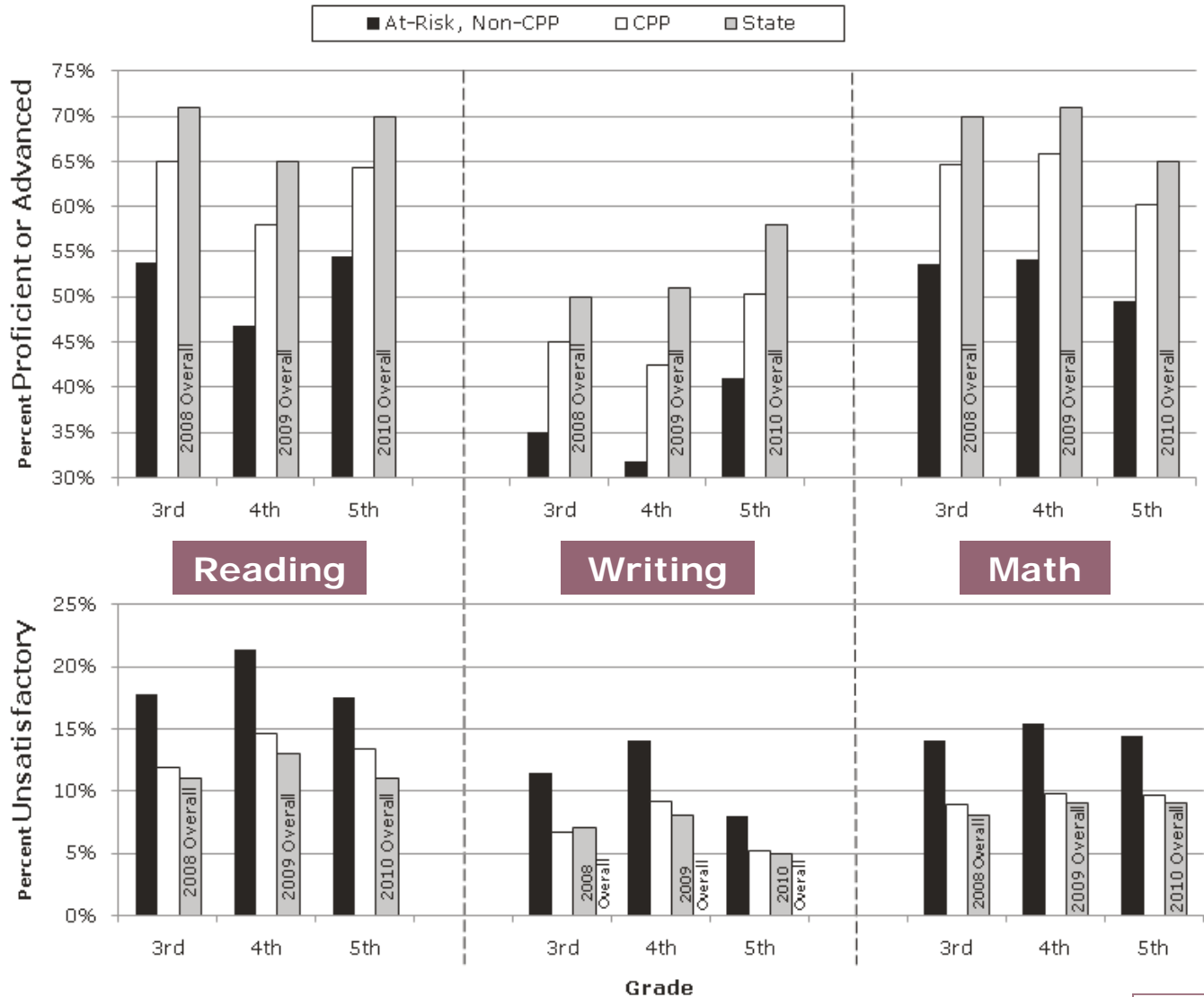


Figure 9

Previous reports have illustrated the positive outcomes for CPP graduates on the statewide Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP). This year is no different. We now have results into fifth grade for the earliest cohort of children who received statewide unique identifying numbers. We can also analyze overall numbers based on established levels of proficiency. Across all available grades and all three subject areas, more CPP children were proficient or advanced than other at-risk children who did not attend CPP, approaching levels comparable to the statewide average (see Fig. 9). Moreover, the number of CPP graduates rated “unsatisfactory” was much lower than other at-risk children, in some cases meeting or beating the statewide average of children who had an unsatisfactory score.

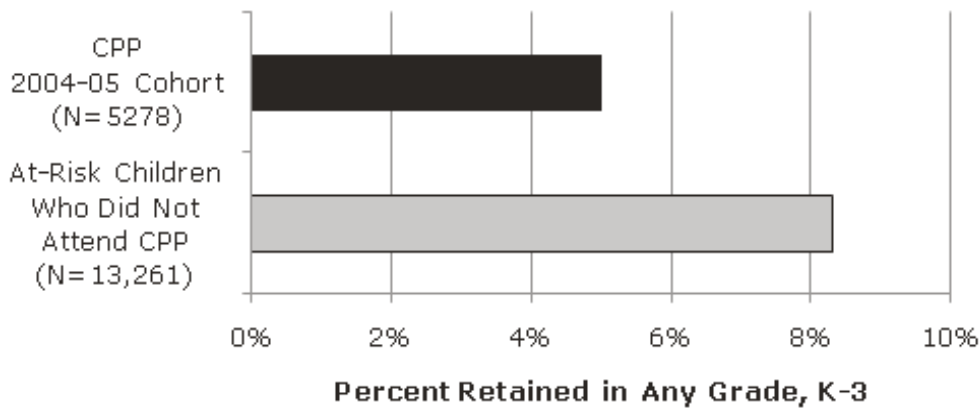
These results are promising for a few reasons. They support the notion that the positive effects on academics of high-quality preschool in Colorado do not fade as children approach middle school. The results also indicate that the portion of children who need the most significant intervention in grade school is smaller in part due to past preschool experience.

*\*Note: Science is not assessed until eighth grade.*

# Preschool Opportunities Can Reduce Future Costs

Figure 10

## 2005-09 K-3 Cumulative Retention History



One of the added benefits of the Colorado Preschool Program is that it is associated with a reduced rate of retention (i.e. children are held back in a grade less often). Figure 10 demonstrates *cumulative retention* - that is, whether a child was ever retained in early grade school. Figure 11 breaks it down further, comparing retention rates within each grade. CPP reduces the need for retention by as much as one-half (in kindergarten-

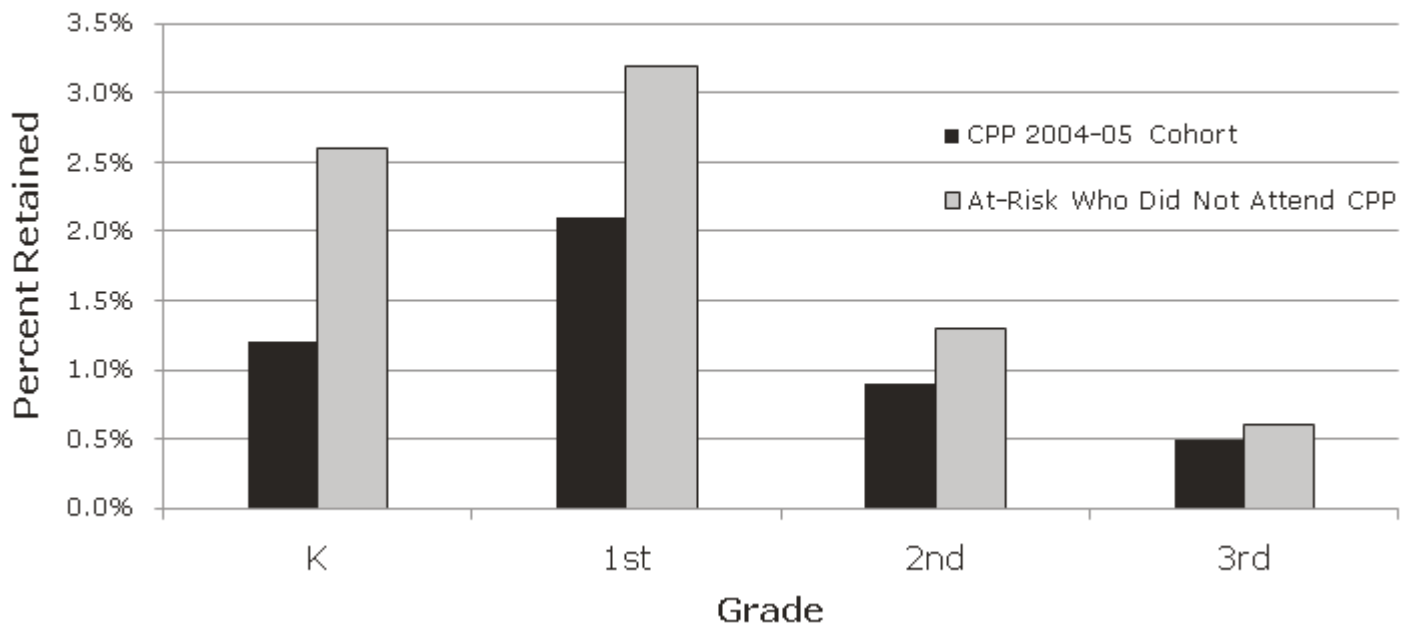
ten). *\*Note: Due to the limited number of years available with statewide student identifiers, we only have enough data to examine up to third grade this year.*

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 education funding. Not only does the educational system pay the cost of later remediation but the child does as well, in the loss of opportunities and self-confidence as a learner. And while high quality preschool itself costs money, its implementation has myriad positive effects on social-emotional and physical development, early literacy, and future academic success, as evidenced in this report and the greater research literature.



Figure 11

## Were children ever retained in...

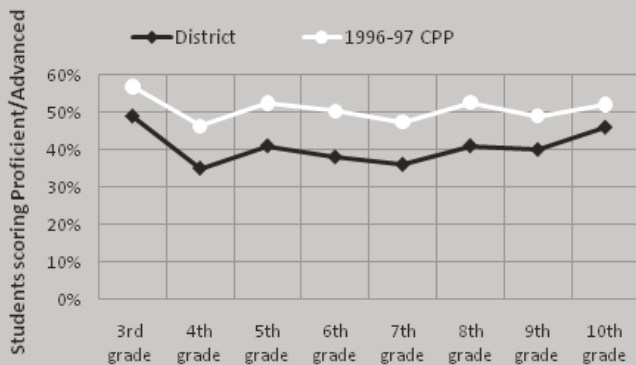


# Evidence of CPP Benefits through Eleventh Grade

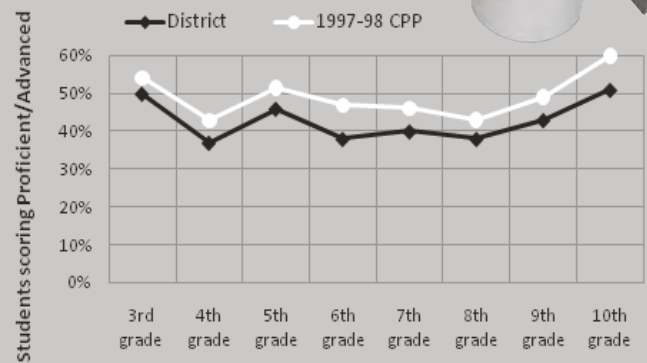
Children in CPP demonstrate immediate gains and lasting benefits as a result of their participation in an early childhood program. Strong evidence of this is provided by Denver Public Schools (DPS). DPS has participated in the Colorado Preschool Program since its inception in 1988. While state-assigned student identification numbers (SASIDs) were not fully implemented by the state until the 2003-04 school year, Denver Public Schools began assigning unique identification numbers in 1996. These unique numbers enabled the district to research academic outcomes for former CPP graduates in grades three through ten as measured by the CSAP. Over eight grades, CPP students consistently outperformed the district average. This trend is consistent for both cohorts they have been able to track thus far—those attending preschool in 1996-97 and in 1997-98 (see Fig. 12).



Figure 12



**% of CPP Children Scoring Proficient or Above on the Third Grade Reading CSAP 2001-2008**



**% of CPP Children Scoring Proficient or Above on the Third Grade Reading CSAP 2002-2009**

What is even more impressive is that CPP graduates continued to score at the same level or above the rest of the district when they took the ACT college entrance exam in eleventh grade (see Fig. 13). In 1996, Denver Public Schools had the ability to serve 1,908 preschool children. Because the availability for early childhood funding was so limited, the district tested all children before being accepted into preschool and placed the children with the lowest developmental scores in CPP classrooms.

**Combined Average Scores of CPP Children on 2009 & 2010 ACT**

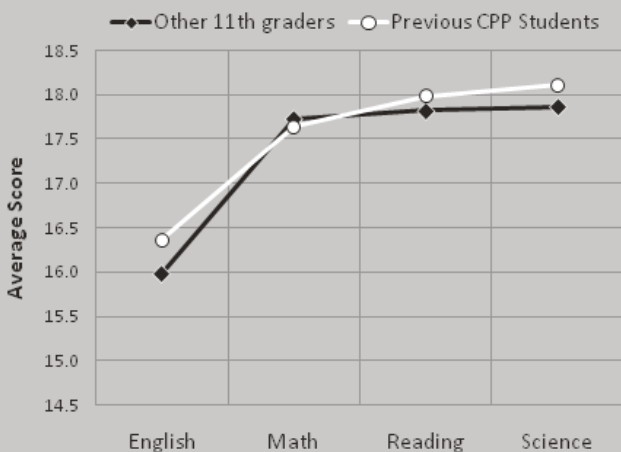


Figure 13

As a result, the children with the toughest educational challenges were provided a preschool experience and family support. Not only did their school readiness improve, but their long-term academic outcomes were positively impacted as well. As reflected by multiple measures of academic outcomes—Results Matter, CBLA (Colorado Basic Literacy Assessment), CSAP (Colorado Student Assessment Program), retention rates and the ACT, it is clear that early childhood education experiences are a wise investment and become the foundation for workforce readiness and postsecondary success.

# Preschool and Family Partnerships Matter

Preschool is the first social and learning experience outside of the family for many children. Families share their most treasured possession, their child, with the school community. In the CPP classroom, staff not only support young learners, but also help families connect to needed community services and provide family supports that seek to maximize early learning and a sense of belonging in the school community. When families are welcomed and empowered to help their children reach their full potential, as they make positive contributions to the school community and continue to be involved in their children's learning process in preschool and beyond.

## **What does family partnership look like in the CPP classroom and school community?**

In Colorado Preschool Program classrooms, educators intentionally implement a parent-as-partner philosophy. They create a welcoming environment, participate in positive interactions, and convey the message that every family member is a valued and welcomed partner.

You may see:

- Staff encouraging a family member to observe or share an interest in the classroom
- Comfortable seating for adults in the classroom environment
- A communication and family resource board to post current news and community resources
- Family pictures in the classroom environment
- Staff speaking with family members during drop-off and pick-up
- Events scheduled to bring families together for decision making or provide information about early development
- Staff planning home visits to establish or continue a positive, caring relationship with family members



"The Colorado Preschool Program encourages you to be a part of your child's learning. The program also teaches you how to help your child grow academically, socially and emotionally, inside as well as outside the classroom. This to me is what I like most about the CPP Program."

Parent, Widefield School District

## **Acknowledgements:**

The Colorado Preschool Program would like to thank each of the CPP District Advisory Council members, teachers and coordinators for their efforts in collecting and reporting data on the effectiveness of CPP.

We also want to extend a special thank you to the children, teachers and families whose pictures are featured throughout the report.

## **Footnotes:**

1. W. Steve Barnett, Dale J. Epstein, Allison H. Friedman, Rachel Sansanelli, and Jason T. Hustedt. "The State of Preschool 2009." National Institute for Early Education Research, 2009.

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