

Colorado Preschool Program

Legislative Report 2023

Submitted to: Colorado General Assembly
By the Colorado Department of Education



COLORADO
Department of Education



**Preschool through
Third Grade (P-3) Office**

Teaching and Learning Unit

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Welcome

I am incredibly proud of Colorado's long-time commitment to early learning through the Colorado Preschool Program. The investments we have made over the last 34 years have supported our children who need our help the most, helping our youngest learners prepare for success in school and beyond.

The impact of the Colorado Preschool Program is very clear – children funded through CPP consistently have higher outcomes when compared with children with similar factors that put them at risk of educational challenges. The vast majority of children funded through CPP meet or exceed age expectations across six developmental domains by the end of each school year. And over time, children funded by CPP have lower rates of significant reading deficiencies in kindergarten through third grade, lower retention rates, and ultimately, higher graduation rates.



This year we welcomed our partners at the new Department of Early Childhood who are planning for the implementation of universal preschool for all Colorado children beginning in the 2023-24 school year. I'm tremendously excited about this new initiative to provide preschool for all of Colorado's children, and I believe it will prove to be another wise investment in the future of our state.

We look forward to a strong partnership with the new department as CDE continues with our commitment to supporting high-quality early learning opportunities for students with special needs. We will also continue our work to support early childhood educators, with a special emphasis on recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce of high quality educators for our state.

The Colorado Preschool Program will cease to exist after the 2022-23 school year when the new Department of Early Childhood begins implementation of universal preschool, so this will be CDE's last full report on the outcomes of CPP. We look forward to supporting our partners at the new department to ensure a smooth transition and a successful launch of the Universal Preschool Program.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katy Anthes". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Katy Anthes, Ph.D.
Commissioner of Education

A Brief History of CPP

In its 34th year, CPP provides funding for up to 29,360 children annually for preschool education, having served more than 460,000 children since its inception.

The Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) is a state-funded preschool program administered by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE). The program serves children with certain risk factors associated with later challenges in school. Children who are eligible for CPP attend high-quality early childhood programs. These may be located in school district settings, local child care centers, community preschools or Head Start programs.

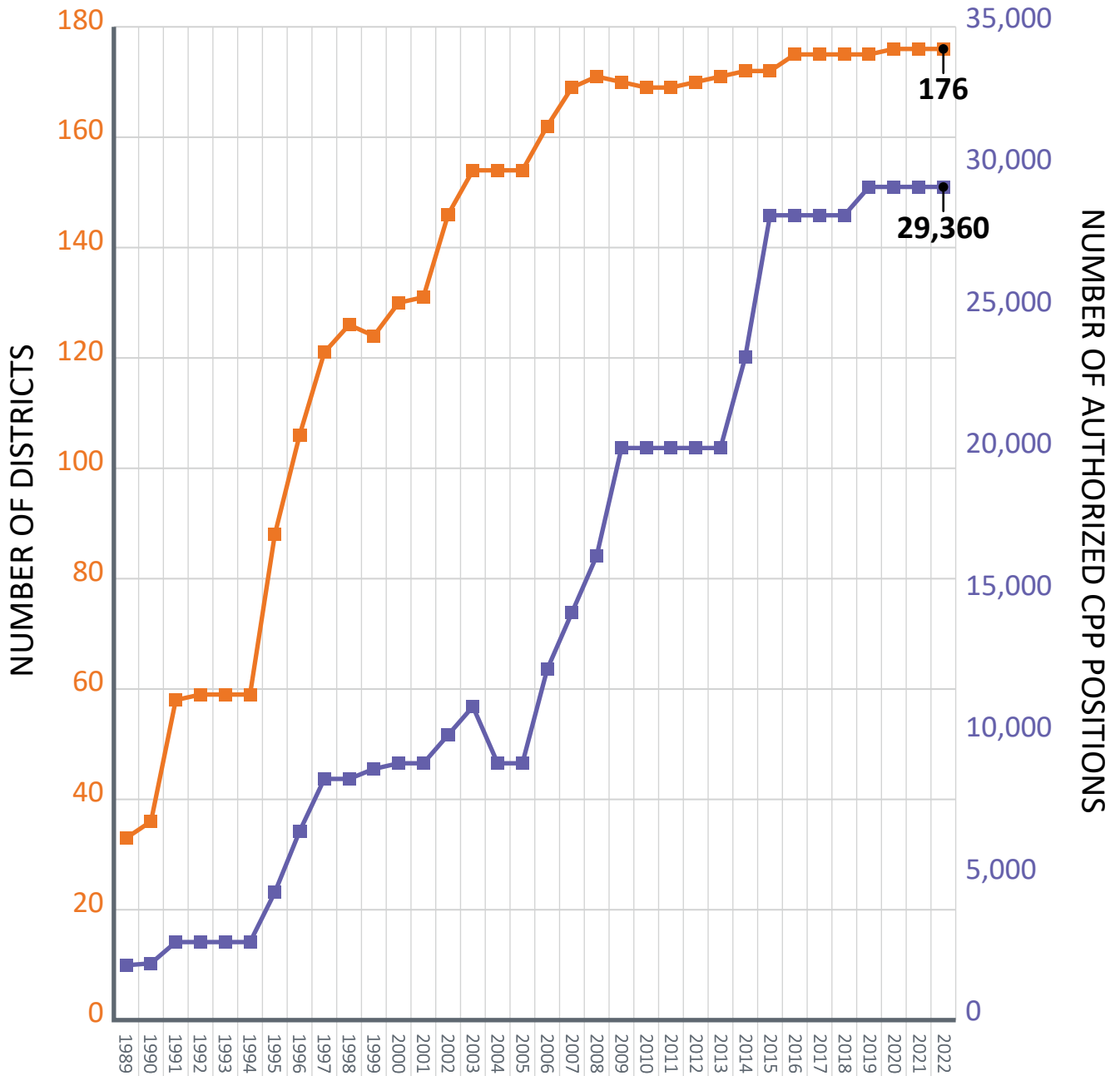
Authorized by the Colorado General Assembly in 1988, CPP began by allocating funding to serve approximately 2,000 children for half-day preschool annually to 33 districts. Districts may combine a limited number of half-day positions to create full-day positions. The General Assembly has expanded CPP multiple times by adding positions through the Early Childhood At-Risk Enhancement (ECARE) program. As of the 2021-22 school year, CPP provides funding for up to 29,360 positions in 176 districts across the state (Figure 1).

In 2022, the Colorado Legislature passed House Bill 22-1295, which laid the foundation for the state's new Universal Preschool Program, and initiated a new state Department of Early Childhood. The implementation of a universal program for 4-year-olds in the year prior to kindergarten will usher in a new era for early childhood education in the state of Colorado in the fall of 2023.





Figure 1: Growth in CPP Authorized Positions and Participating School Districts, 1989 - 2022



CPP by the Numbers

Quick Reference Statistics
(2021-22)

176

Districts Participating
in CPP

20,928

Total Children
Served in CPP

Average
Funding
Per Child

\$6,102

29,360

Total Authorized
CPP Positions



\$4,674

Average
Funding
Per Position
Utilized*

\$127,710,729

Total CPP Program Funding

6,396

Total Children
Served with
Two Positions
for Full-Day¹
Services

30.6%

Percent of
CPP Children
Served with
Two Positions for
Full-Day Services



46.8%

Percent of
Positions
utilized
for Full-Day
Services

*Funding reported here is the average for one half-day position. However, districts may use two half-day positions to create full-day positions for some children.

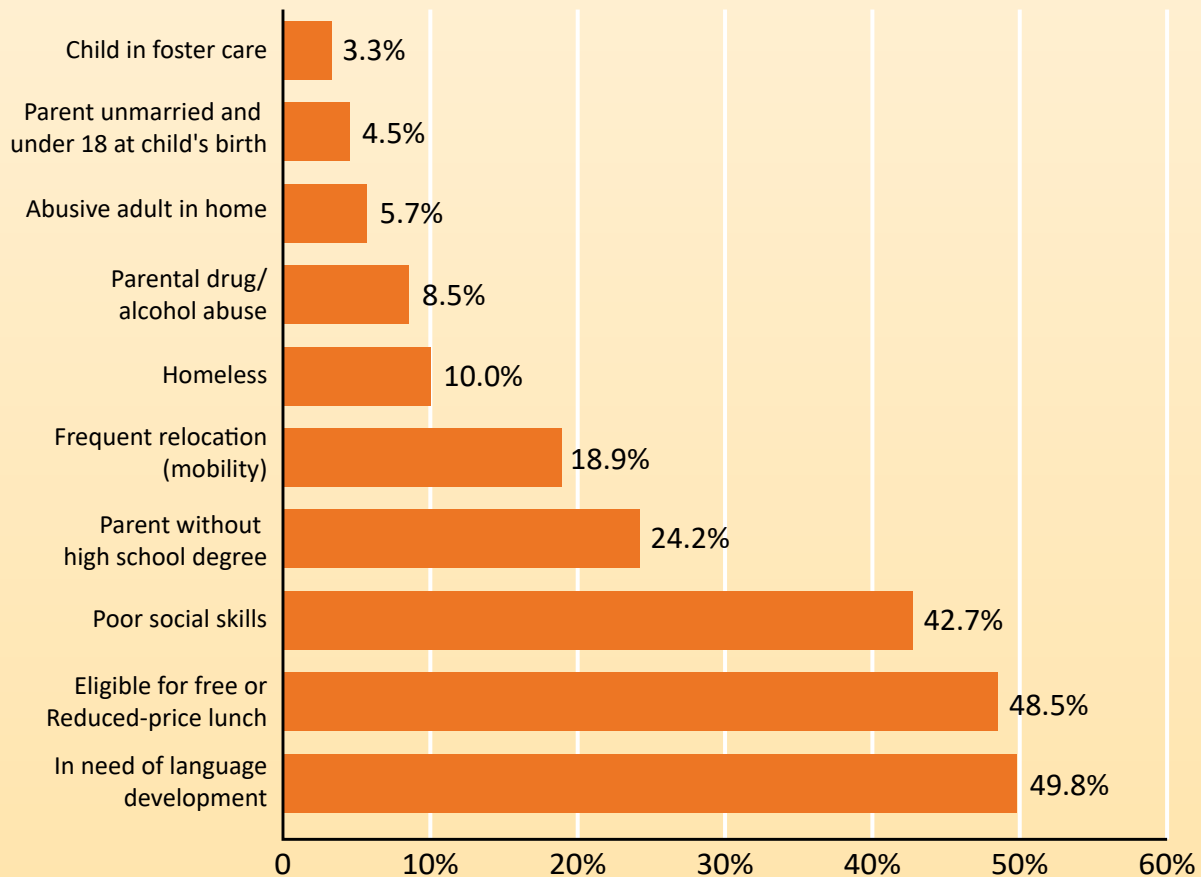
¹ A full-day position funded through the Colorado Preschool Program requires a minimum of 720 preschool contact hours must be provided over the course of a school year. This averages to 20 contact hours per week for a full-day position and 10 contact hours per week for a half-day position.

CPP Eligibility

The Colorado Preschool Program serves 3- and 4-year-old children who are identified with certain eligibility risk factors. The CPP statute directs the programs to serve those children with the greatest need, and so designates 10 qualifying eligibility factors which may impact a child's future academic achievement. To qualify for participation, 4-year-old children must be identified with at least one eligibility factor, while 3-year-old children must be identified with at least three factors. School districts are responsible for screening children and determining their eligibility for the program. Figure 2 details the percentage of children funded through CPP qualifying for each eligibility factor. Children may qualify for more than one factor; therefore, the percentages total more than 100 percent. Eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch (FRL), language development, and poor social skills were the most common qualifying risk factors for children in 2021-22. This has been a long-standing trend.

Figure 2: Percentage of Children Qualifying for CPP by the Eligibility Risk Factors 2021-22

Each line represents the percentage of children served in CPP with that risk factor in 2020-2021

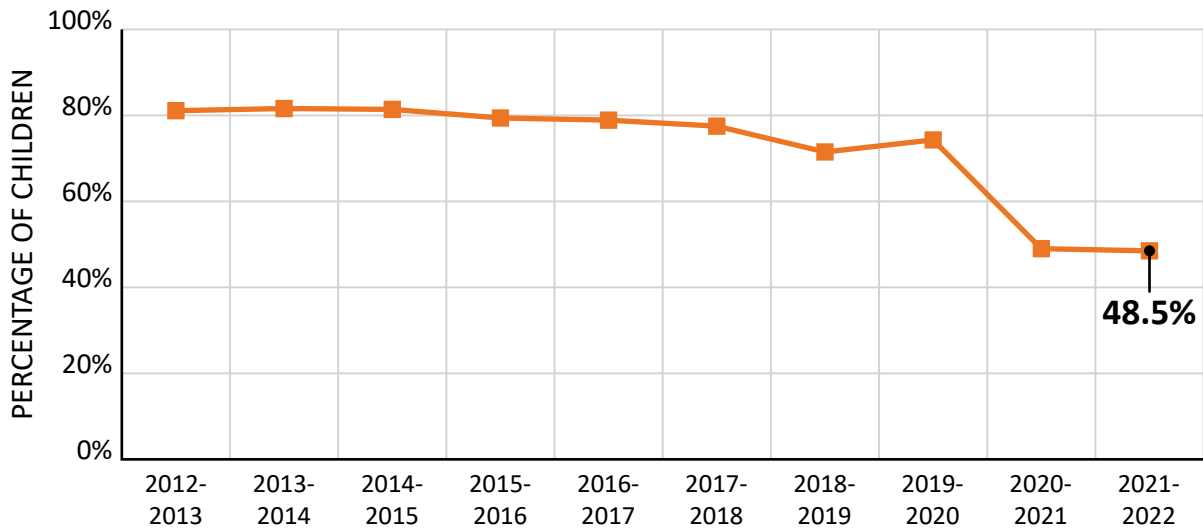




The CPP Act allows school districts to identify additional eligibility factors for CPP eligibility. Additional factors must be specific to the community, and their impact on academic success must be supported by research.² In the 2021-22 school year, seven districts (4% percent of districts participating in CPP) reported using eligibility factors not explicitly identified in statute, such as family income levels that are higher than the criteria for free or reduced-price lunch but lower than the community’s self-sufficiency standard.

The percentage of children enrolled in CPP based on eligibility for free and reduced-priced meals experienced a decline from over 70 percent in 2019-20, to just under 50 percent in the last two years. This decline is attributed to the fact that all students received access to free meals from March 2020 through June 2022 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Only districts that continued to report eligible students for free and reduced-priced meals during this time (which was not required for access to free meals) are included in the 2020-21 and 2021-22 years in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Trend in CPP Children Qualifying for CPP Based on FRL Eligibility

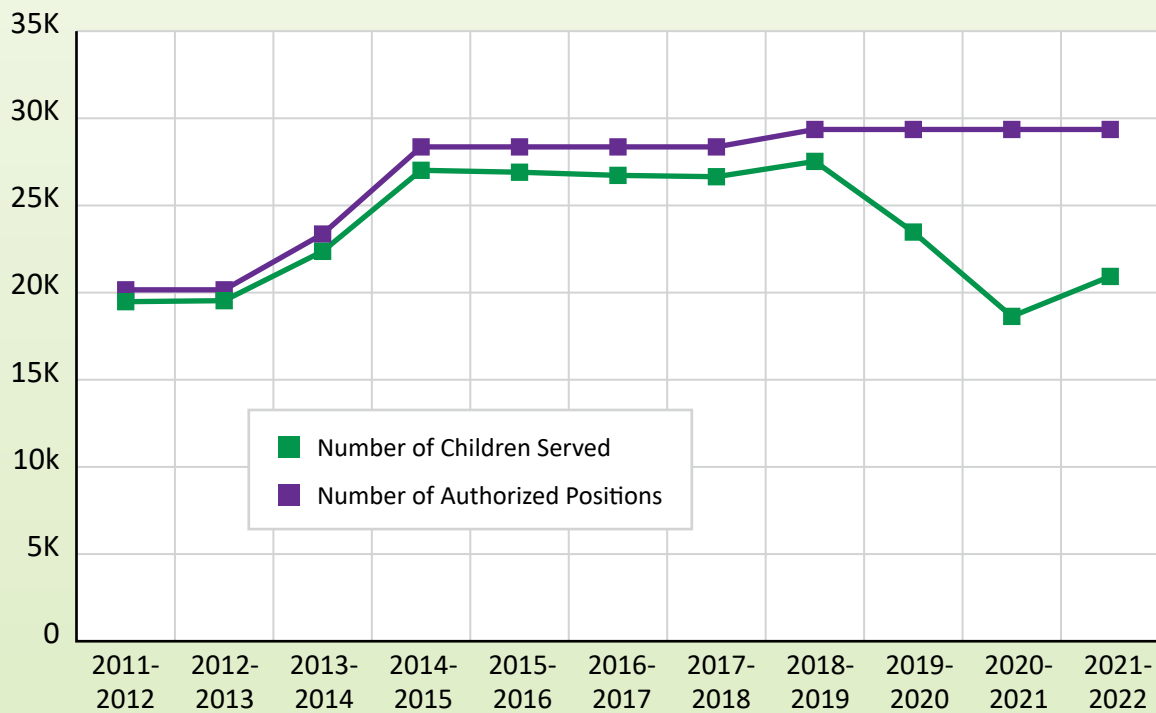


² C.R.S. § 22-28-105(2)(i)

CPP Enrollment

Enrollment in CPP has fluctuated over the years, as the number of positions available has shifted due to policy initiatives such as the implementation of ECARE positions. In 2019-20, CDE’s implementation of universal full-day kindergarten allowed districts greater flexibility to combine two positions for full-day preschool. While the total number of available positions remained at 29,360, the greater flexibility resulted in a growing proportion of children served with full-day programming. Total CPP enrollment dipped in the 2020-21 school year during the COVID-19 pandemic, which also impacted enrollment from kindergarten through 12th grade throughout the state. In 2021-22, enrollment was 20,928, trending toward pre-pandemic levels.

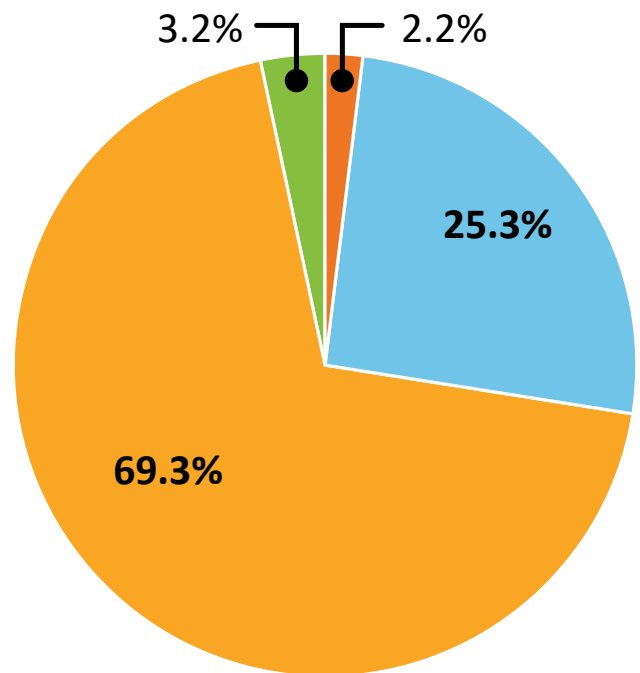
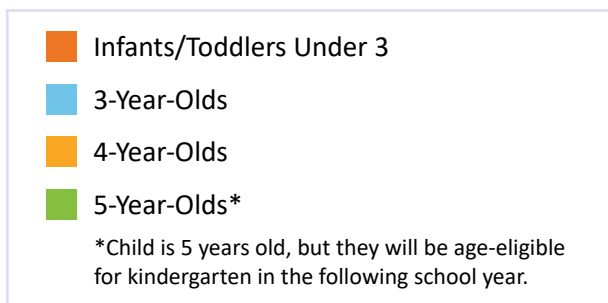
Figure 4: Trend in CPP Enrollment, 2011-12 through 2021-22





Since the implementation of universal kindergarten in 2019-20, the age distribution of children served in CPP has remained stable. In 2021-22, 4-year-olds comprised the largest proportion of children (69.3 percent), followed by 3-year-olds (25.3 percent) (Figure 5).

Figure 5: CPP Enrollment by Age in 2021-22 ^{3 4 5}



CPP has maintained an even gender distribution over the years. In 2021-22, 50.6 percent of children served by were female, and 49.4 percent were male.

Figure 6: CPP Enrollment by Gender in 2021-22



³ Some districts (school districts within Fremont and Denver counties) are able to serve younger children through a waiver granted that is no longer statutorily available to other districts.

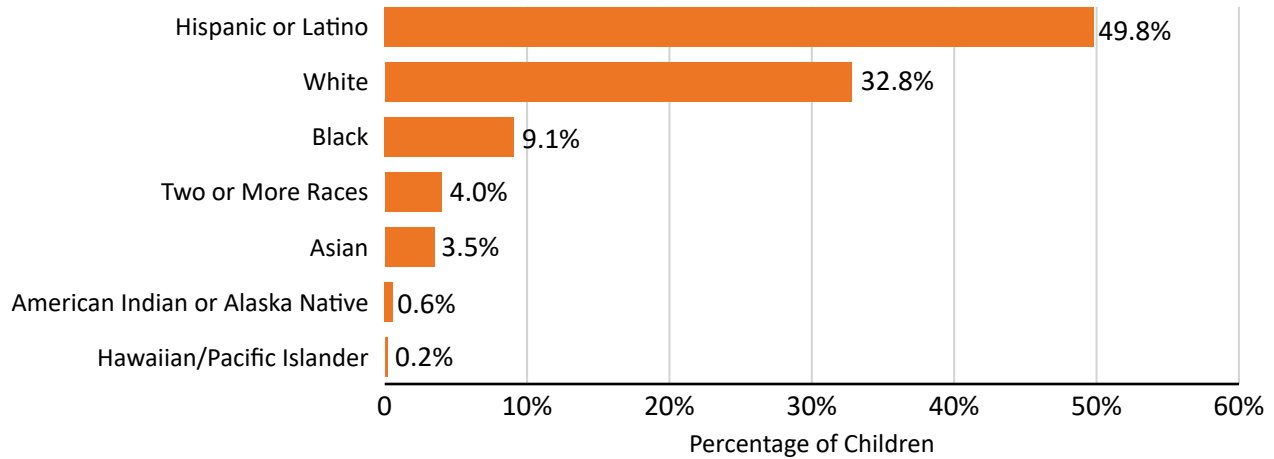
⁴ Eligible 3-year-old children must reach the age of 3 on or before the school district's kindergarten age cutoff date, which can be no later than October 1. Eligible 4-year-old children must be age-eligible for kindergarten the following year and reach 4 on or before October 1. Eligible 5-year-old children must be age-eligible for kindergarten the following year.

⁵ 5-year-old children who are not age-eligible for kindergarten and are participating as a preschooler in CPP.



Similar to recent years, nearly half (49.8 percent) of all children served by CPP in 2021-22 were Hispanic or Latino. Almost a third of the children (32.8 percent) were White. The remaining races accounted for 17.5 percent of CPP funded children. The distribution of racial and ethnic groups served by CPP has remained fairly consistent over time (Figure 7).

Figure 7: CPP Enrollment by Race and Ethnicity in 2021-22



The racial distribution of children in CPP is similar to the distribution of K-12 students eligible for free and reduced lunch. As is shown in Table 1, White students are slightly overrepresented in CPP compared to their population in K-12, while Hispanic students are underrepresented. Children can qualify for CPP using any of the 10 risk factors, including free and reduced lunch.

Table 1: Percentage of Enrollment, by Race and Ethnicity in 2021-22

Race/Ethnicity	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black	Hispanic or Latino	White
Percentage of CPP Enrollment, by Race/Ethnicity	0.6%	3.5%	9.1%	49.8%	32.8%
Percentage of Kindergarten through 12th Grade Enrollment, by Race/Ethnicity, Statewide, Limited to Students Eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch	1.0%	2.3%	7.9%	56.5%	27.7%

⁴ <https://www.coloradokids.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2020-Kids-Count-final-low-res-4.15.20.pdf>

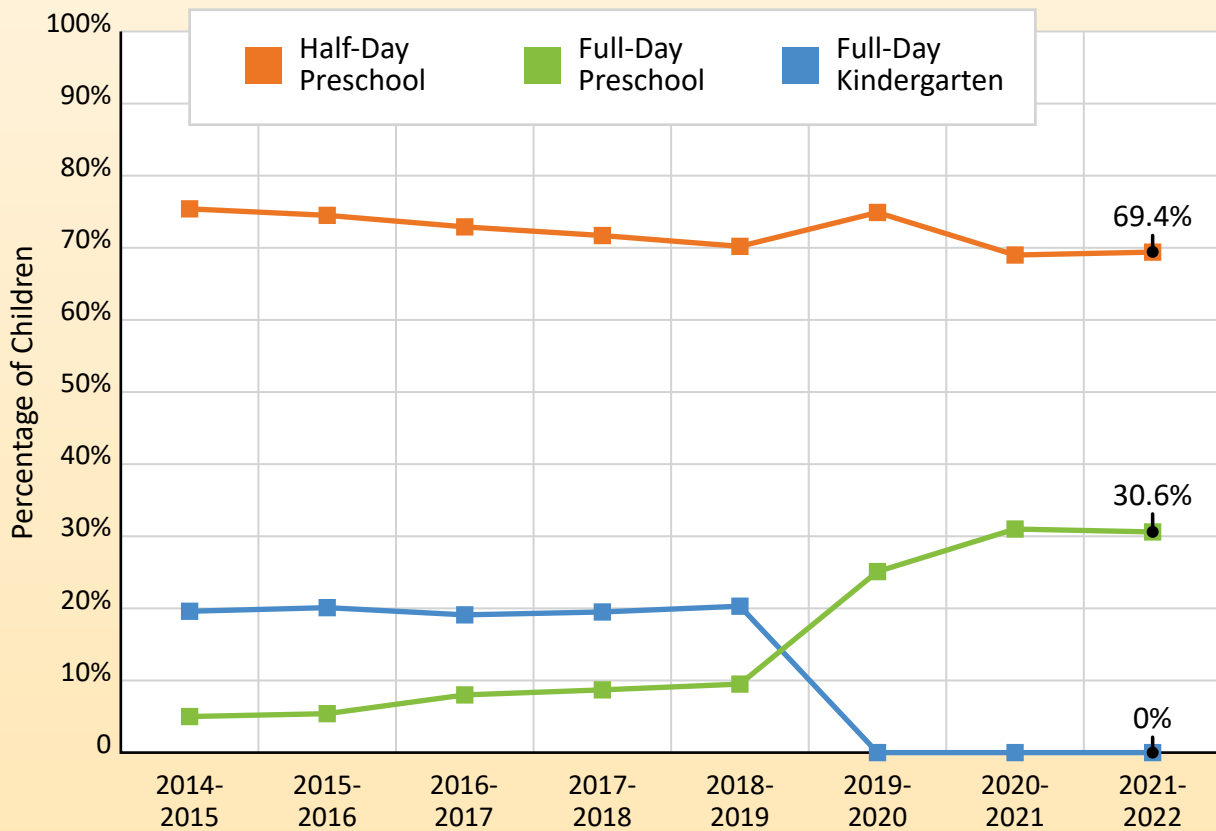
⁵ <https://childandfamilysuccess.asu.edu/sites/default/files/2020-07/CEP-DLLEL-pullout-070620-FINAL.pdf>



Enrollment by Length of Day

Children currently enrolled in CPP receive funding for either a half-day or a full-day of preschool. Half-day preschool is required to provide at least 360 hours over the school year, which equates to about 10 hours each week. Full-day preschool provides 720 hours over the school year, or about 20 hours a week. The implementation of funding for full-day kindergarten in 2019-20 allowed greater flexibility for combining funding from two positions to serve children for a full day. Since then the percentage of children served in full-day preschool grew until leveling off in 2021-22 at 30.6 percent (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Enrollment by Length of Day



This rise in the utilization of full-day positions reiterates the importance of full-day programming options for families. The full-day option benefits families and children as it increases continuity of care and access to service and instructional time for children who may benefit most from preschool experiences.

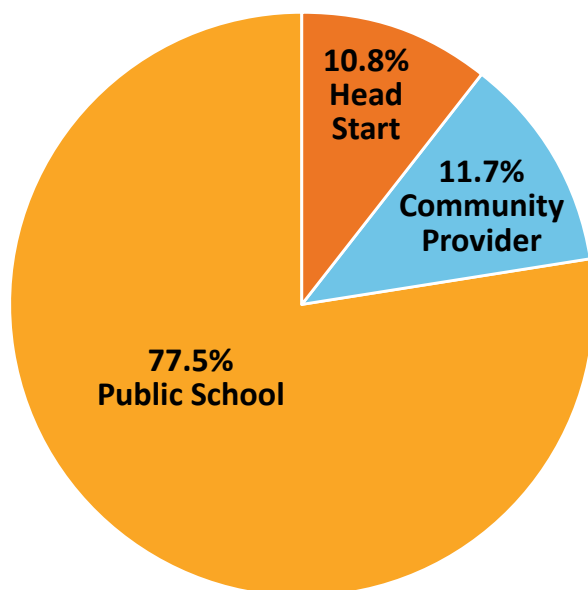


Enrollment by Setting

The Colorado Preschool Program serves children across the state through local school districts and their partnerships with community providers. CPP statute encourages school districts to contract services to community preschool programs, as possible, to create a mixed delivery system. The CPP statute requires districts to identify and consider options for contracting positions out to community providers within their geographic boundaries. Districts must administer a Request for Proposal process in order to determine whether community providers are interested in providing preschool services under a contract with the district and how they will meet the requirements of the program. As an outcome of the RFP process, districts choose to contract out some or all programming to community providers, such as Head Start or private child care facilities, with proper support and monitoring. Districts may provide all services within school district operated preschools (e.g. typically district early childhood centers, or existing elementary schools) when there are no or insufficient community provider options, or when community providers have not met requirements of the RFP process administered by the district.

In 2021-22 public schools remained the largest provider, serving 77.5 percent of children in CPP, followed by 11.7 percent of children served by community providers, and 10.8 percent served in Head Start programs (Figure 9).

Figure 9: CPP/ECARE Enrollment by Setting in 2021-22

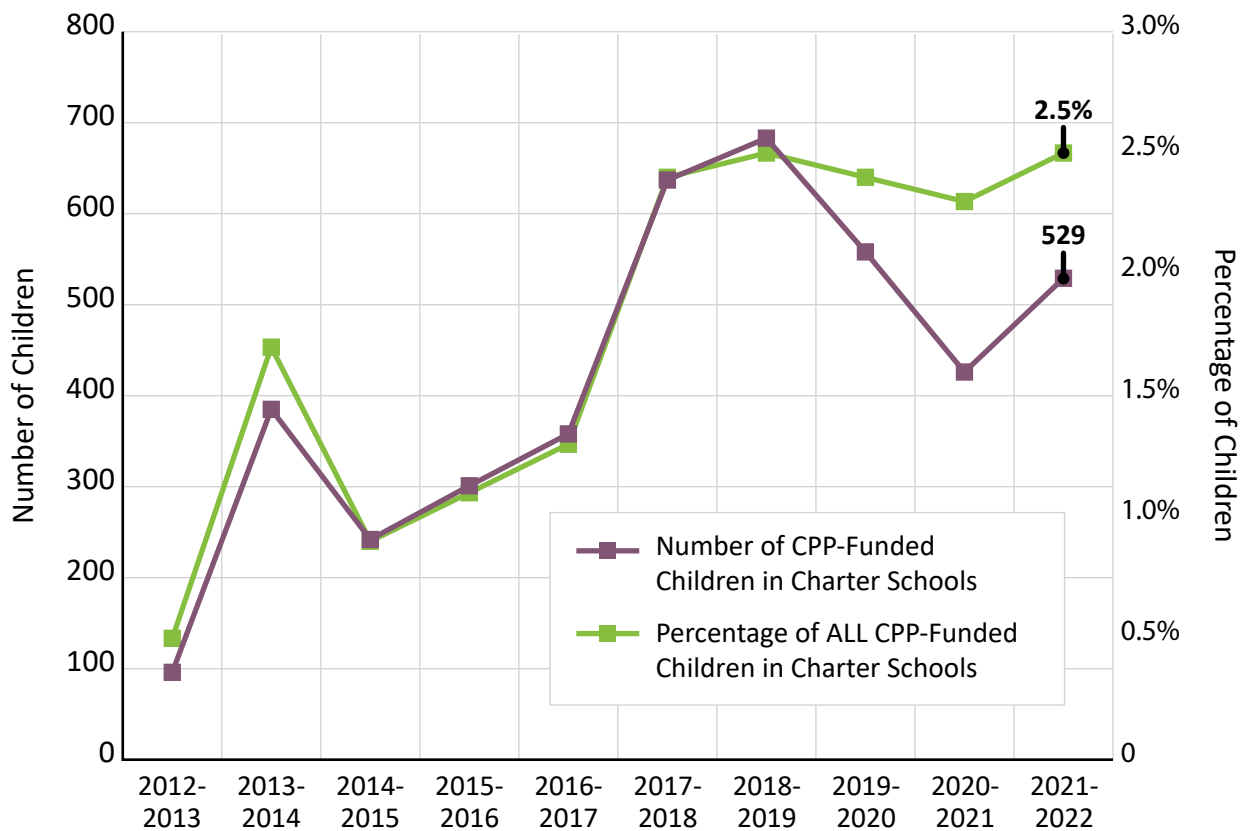




Charter School Participation in CPP

Public charter schools have served less than 3 percent of children funded through CPP since the 2012-13 school year. While the total enrollment has fluctuated over the years, the percentage of CPP children enrolled in a charter school has remained fairly consistent since the 2017-18 school year. In 2021-22, 2.5 percent of CPP children were enrolled in a charter school, with a total charter school enrollment of 529.

Figure 10: Growth in Charter School Participation in CPP from 2012-13 to 2021-22





Enrollment by Position Types

ECARE Positions

Districts participating in the Colorado Preschool Program may use CPP and ECARE positions to fund half-day positions for preschool. As mentioned earlier, ECARE positions are a more flexible type of position and may be combined with another CPP or ECARE position to fund a full day of preschool programming. Prior to the 2019-20 school year, the majority of the ECARE positions were utilized to fund full-day kindergarten. Since the implementation of full-day kindergarten, ECARE positions were diverted to preschool.⁹ Figure 11 highlights this diversion and the effect on full-day programming. The 2021-22 school year saw some increase in enrollment again after declines due to COVID-19 in 2020-21.

Figure 11: Traditional CPP versus ECARE Position Utilization 2018-19 to 2021-22

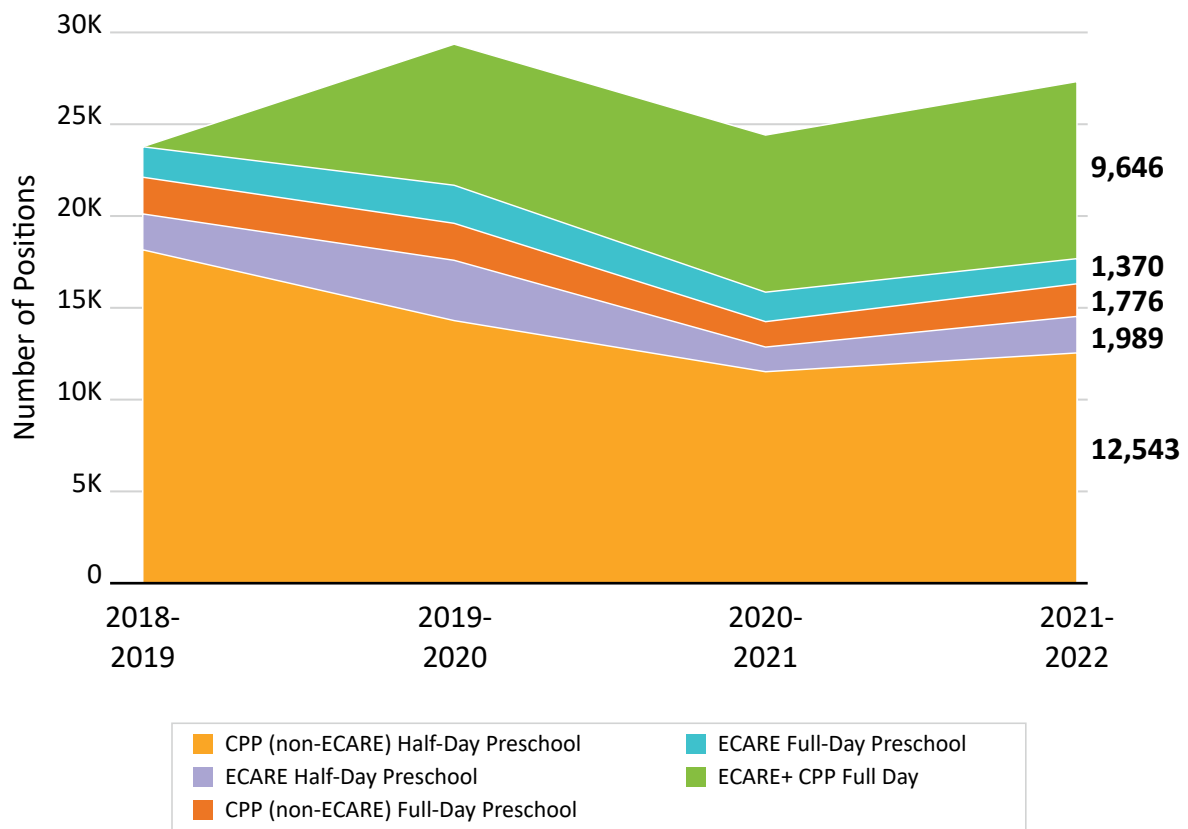
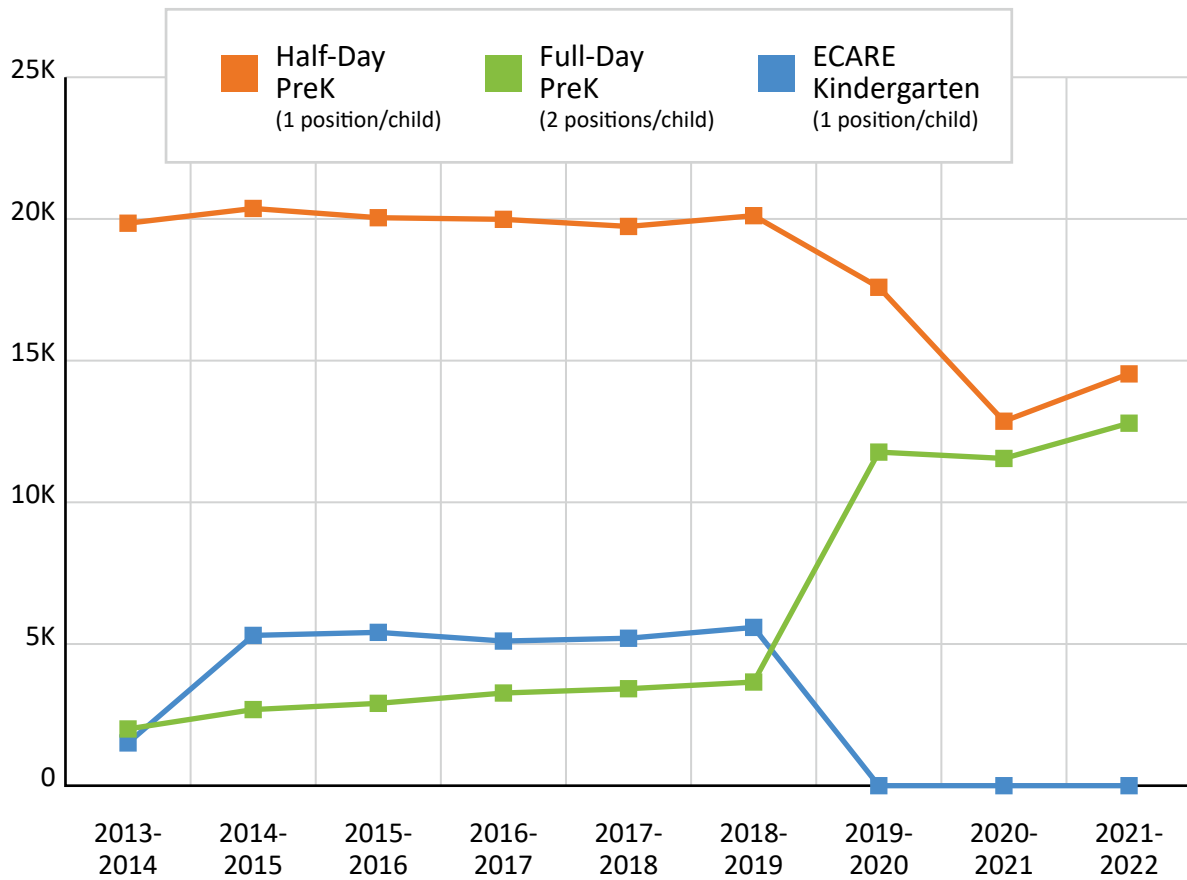




Figure 12 shows changes in half- and full-day programming over time. The number of positions used for full-day programming has increased annually, with only a small dip in 2020-21 when the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted overall enrollment.

Figure 12: Half-Day, Full-Day, and Kindergarten ECARE Position Use



Colorado Shines and CPP

High Quality Preschool and the Colorado Shines Quality Rating and Improvement System

While all children benefit from participation in a high-quality preschool program, this is especially important for the at-risk children in the Colorado Preschool Program. To reach this end, school districts partner with the Colorado Department of Early Childhood to obtain child care licenses and quality ratings.



**COLORADO
SHINES**
START EARLY
START STRONG
QUALITY EARLY LEARNING

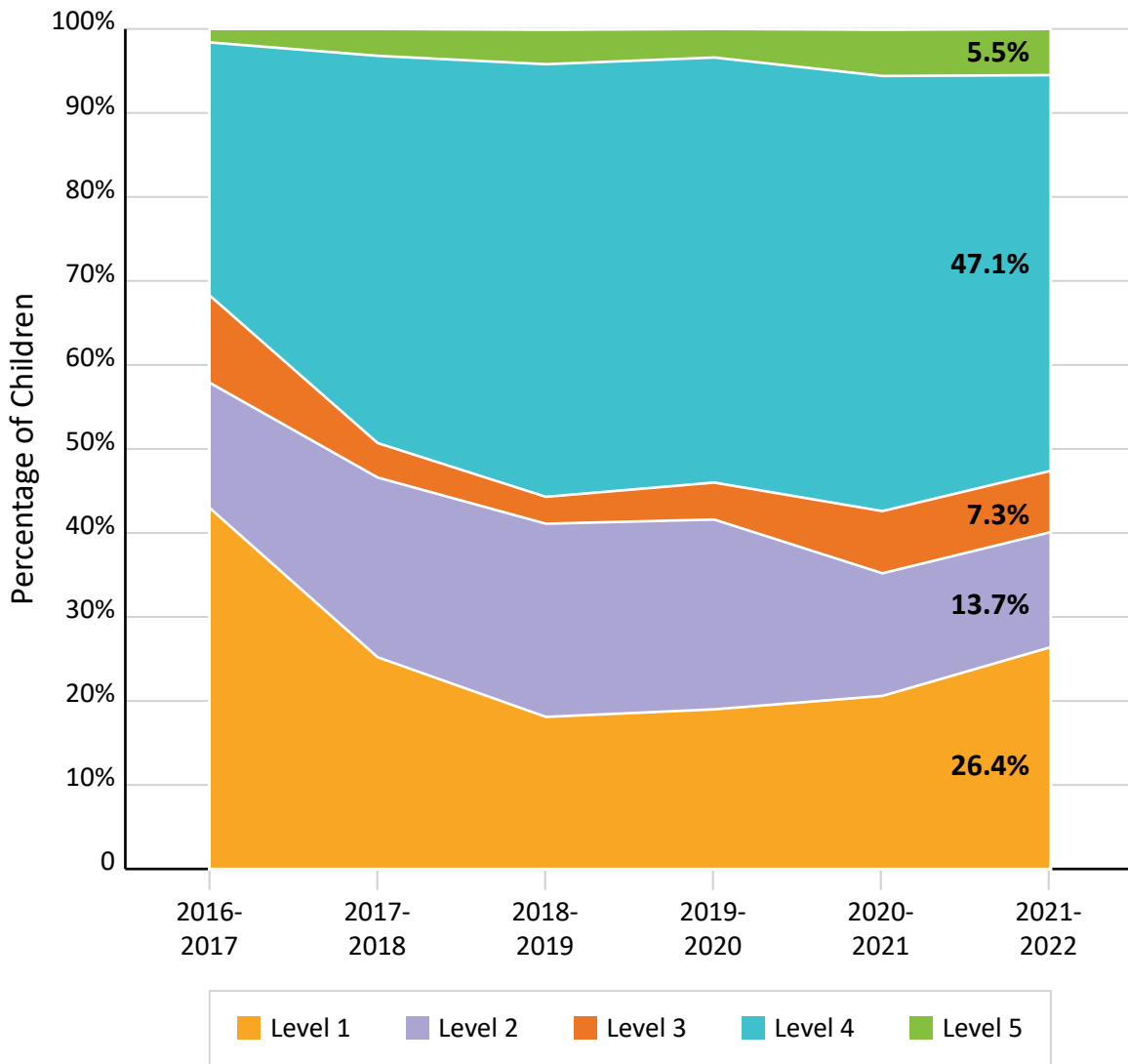
All state-funded preschool programs in Colorado must be licensed through the Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC). Licensing requirements and quality ratings answer two separate questions but their systems of implementation are intertwined. The licensure process blends a compliance system with a more robust quality rating system called Colorado Shines. Colorado Shines consists of five levels, ranging from a Level 1 rating to the highest quality rating of a Level 5. At minimum, a Level 1 rating is required for programs serving children funded through CPP, as this demonstrates that a program is currently licensed with the state of Colorado and meets basic health and safety regulations.





Colorado Shines considers programs rated Levels 3 through 5 to be high quality. The number of children funded by CPP who were served in high-quality programs fell from 64.8 percent in 2020-21 to 59.9 percent in 2021-22. Over the last six years as a whole, programs rated as high quality increased from 42.1 percent in 2016-17 to 59.9 percent in 2021-22.

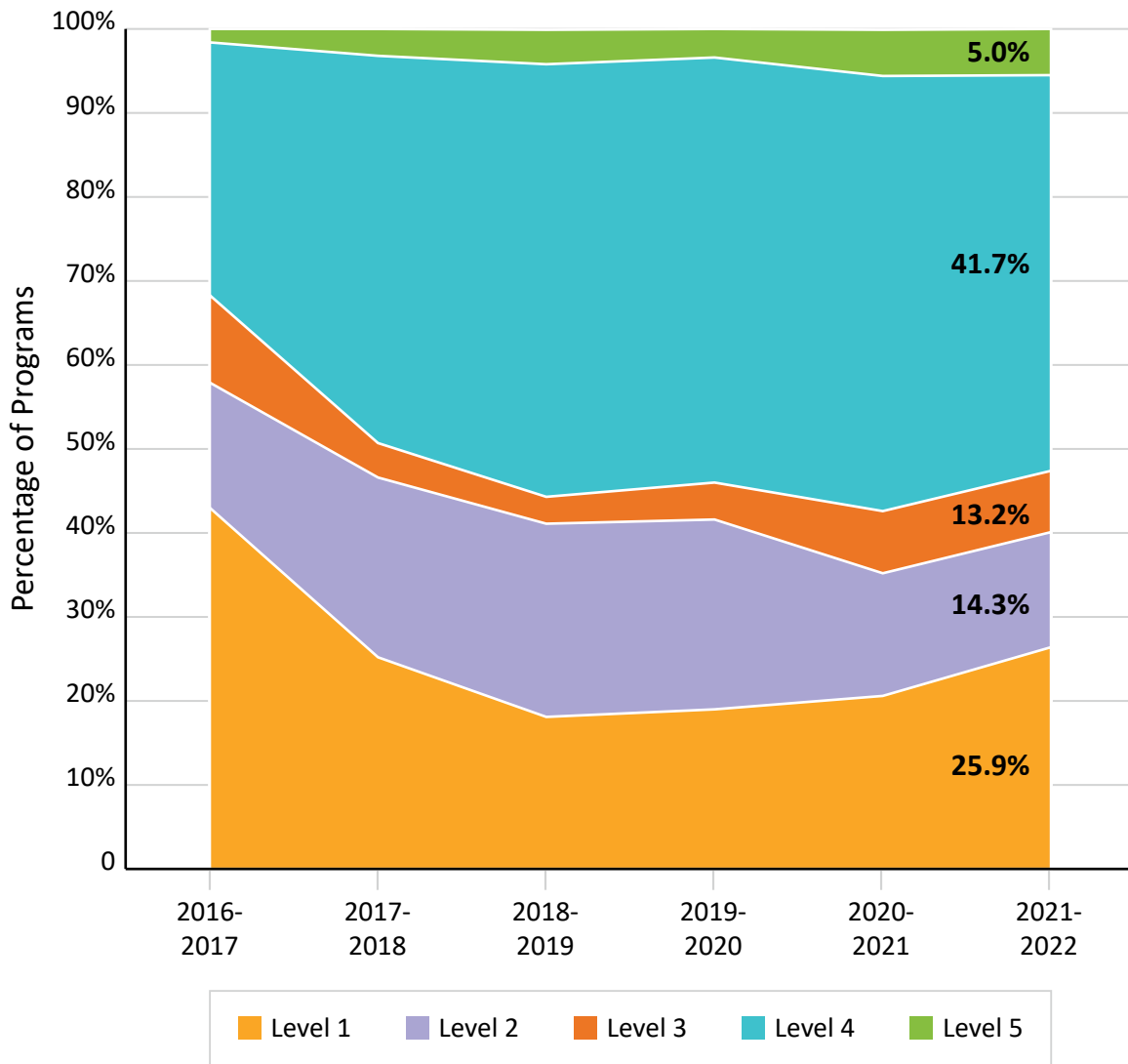
Figure 13: Percentage of Children in CPP among Colorado Shines-rated Programs





The proportion of programs participating in CPP with a Level 3 rating or higher has also increased over the years. In 2016-17, 37.4 percent of programs serving CPP children received a Shines rating of Level 3 or greater. That percentage has increased to 59.9 percent in 2021-22 (Figure 14).

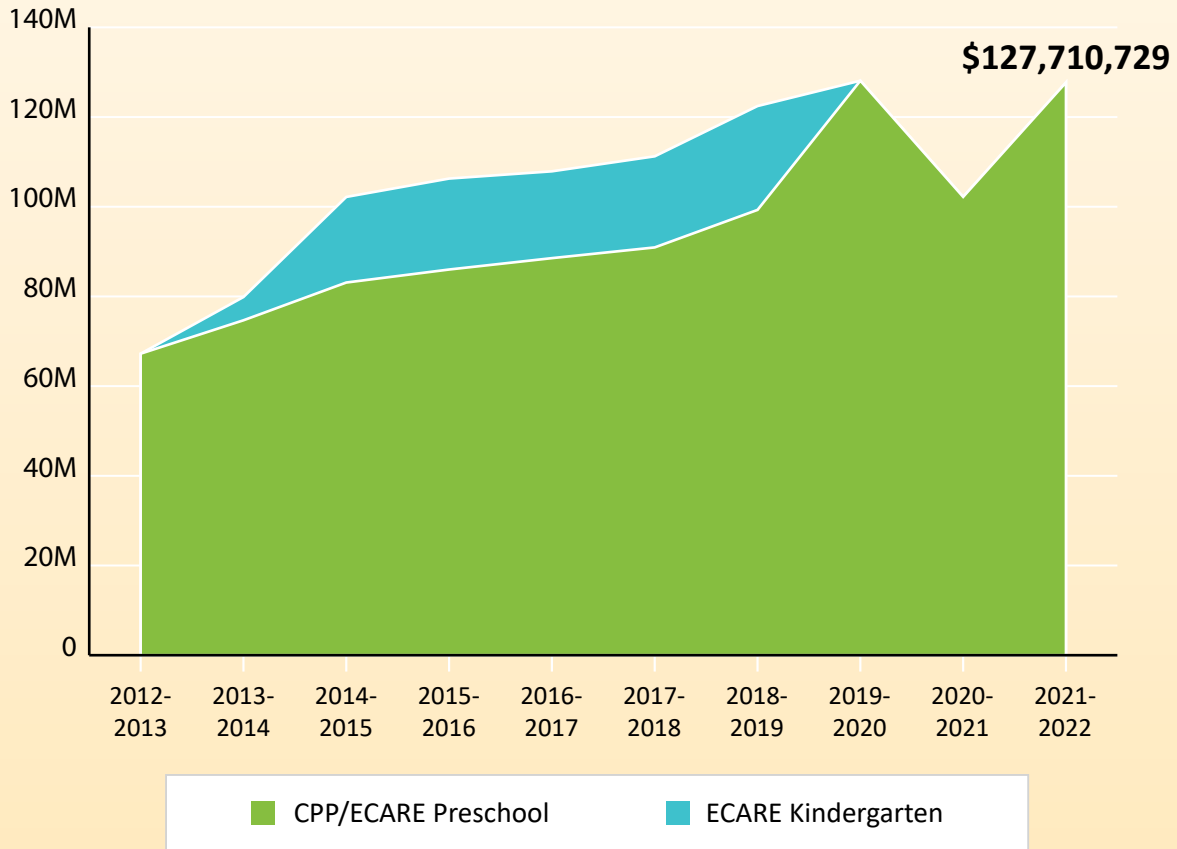
Figure 14: Percentage of CPP Programs among Colorado Shines Ratings from 2016 to 2021



Funding for CPP

Total funding for CPP in the 2021-22 school year reached \$127,710,729, which is nearly back to pre-pandemic levels of \$128,107,396 in 2019-20 after seeing a decrease in funding last year. Figure 15 illustrates these trends.

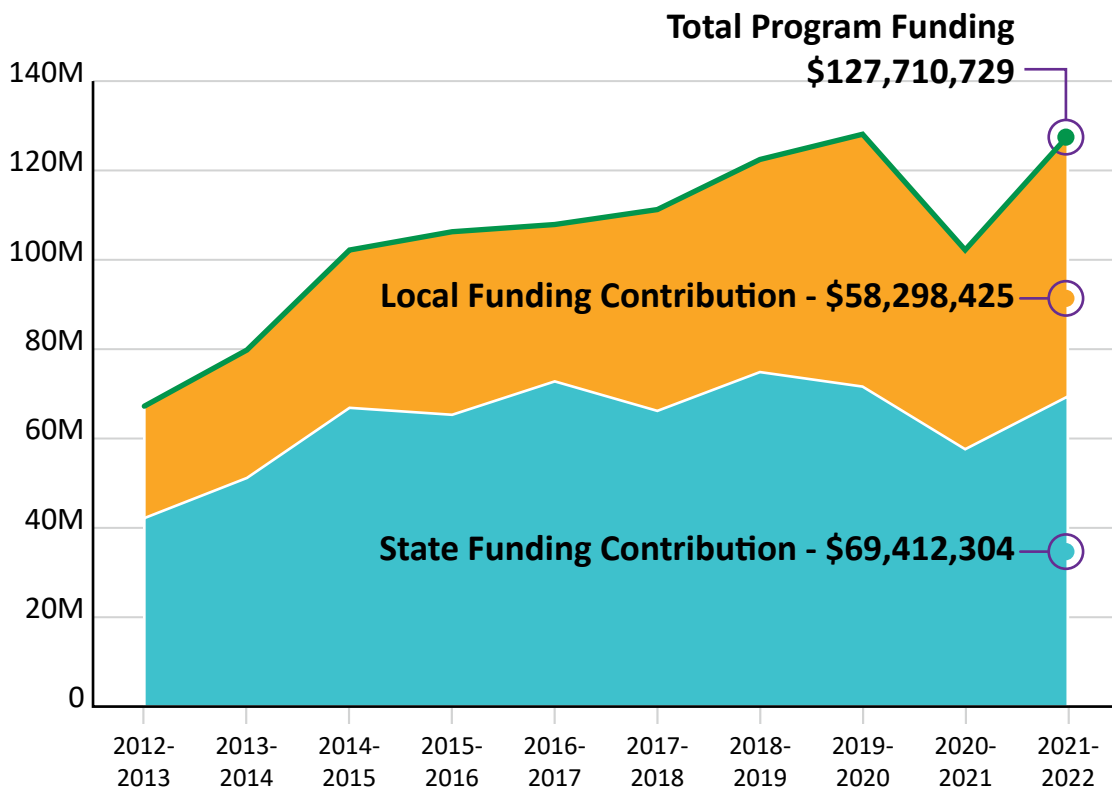
Figure 15: Total CPP Program Funding





Both the state and local school districts contribute funding to CPP. In the 2021-22 school year, the state contributed \$69,412,304 to CPP, which comprised 54.4 percent of total funding. Local sources of school district funds contributed \$58,298,425 to the program, which comprised 45.6 percent of total funding. Examples of local sources of funding in the school finance formula are property taxes and specific ownership taxes, such as vehicle registration. Figure 16 displays these data.

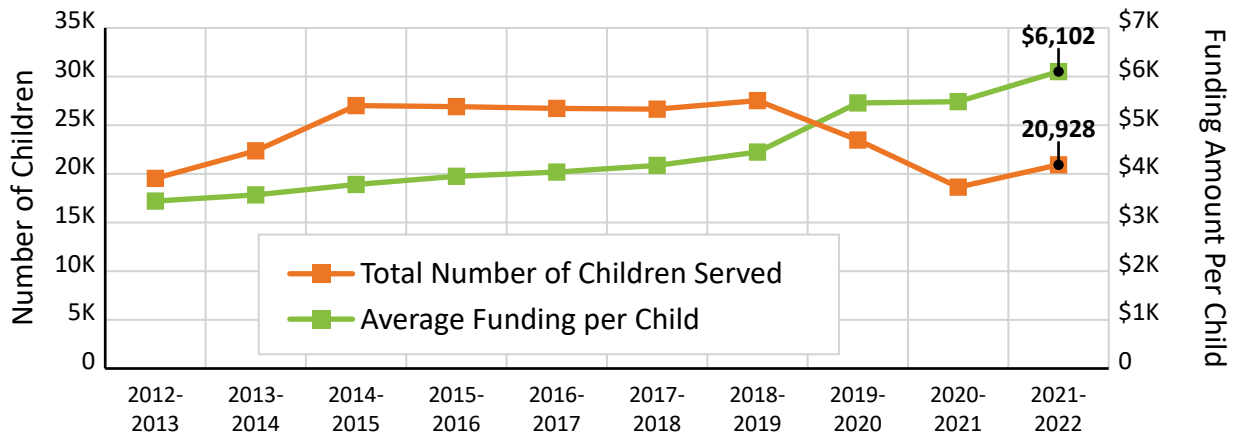
Figure 16: State and Local Contributions to Total Program Funding for CPP from 2012 to 2021





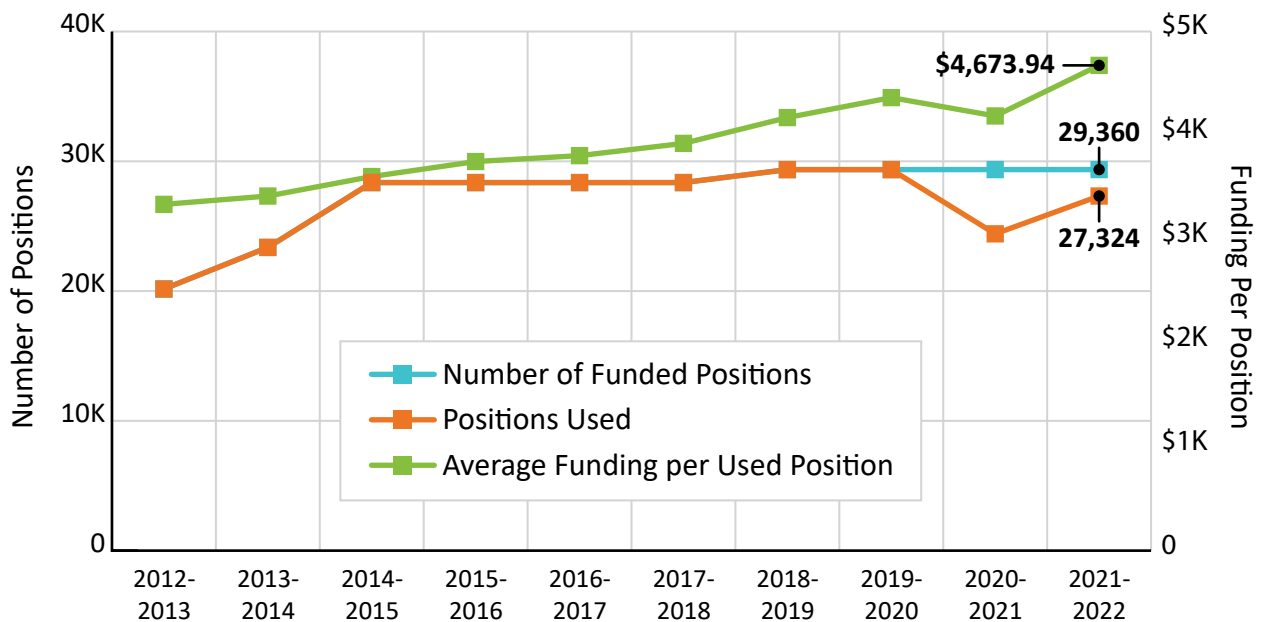
Funding per child grew from \$5,484 in 2020-21 to \$6,102.39 in 2021-22. This is due partly to an increasing proportion of children being served for full-day preschool.

Figure 17: Number of Children in CPP and Funding per Child from 2012 to 2021



The annual number of funded positions, positions used, and the average funding per position used grew steadily from 2012-13 through 2019-20. The number of positions used is trending toward pre-pandemic levels after a drop in the year 2020-21. As noted in Figure 18, the funding per position continues to increase.

Figure 18: Number of Funded Positions, Positions Used and Average Funding Per Used Position from 2012 to 2021



Preschool Funding Sources in Colorado

In order to meet families' needs, districts typically must consider all available preschool funding sources, access them, and blend or braid them together, as possible, to fund their programs. Funding sources include public funds from state and federal sources as well as family-paid tuition. A chart with more information on the various funding sources used in programs can be found at: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cpp/ecefundinginco>.

Combining multiple early childhood funding sources allows programs to:

- Increase parental choice by adding full-day, extended-day, and year round options to meet family needs
- Increase quality by employing early childhood educators who hold CDE teacher licenses and paying them on parity with K-12 educators
- Provide increased professional development and coursework opportunities for early childhood staff

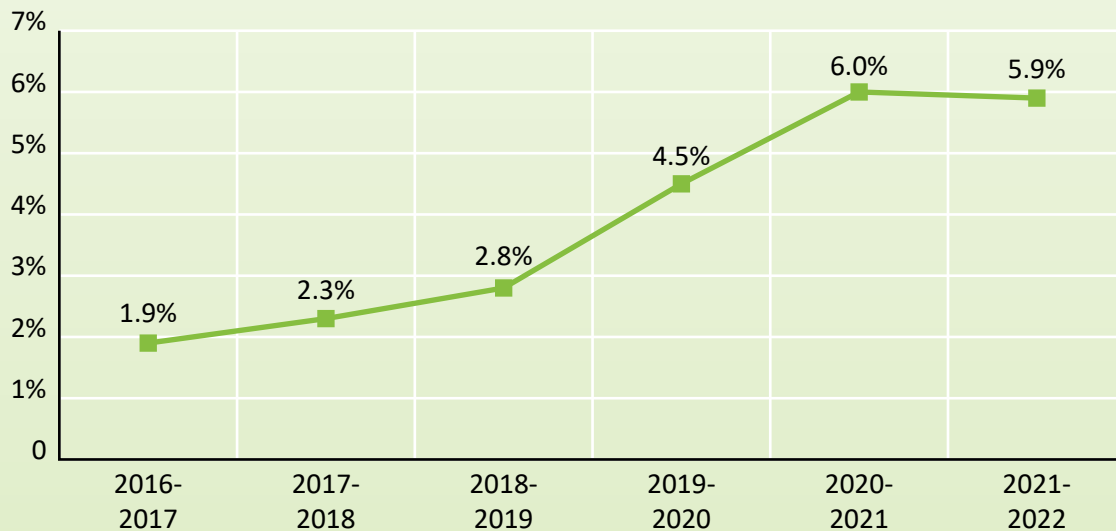


Providing Access to CPP to Children with Educational Disabilities

As previously discussed, a variety of funding sources exist to support preschool programming in Colorado. Children with disabilities, in particular, are able to utilize not only early childhood special education funding, but also CPP funding. The intent of the CPP Act is to provide services for children with the highest need, and children with an identified educational disability fulfill that intention.⁶ To utilize this opportunity, districts can combine a half-day of CPP funding (one position) with a half-day of preschool special education funding.

The proportion of children using this combination of funding has grown steadily over the years and is leveling off in the 2021-22 school year, to 5.9% (Figure 19).

Figure 19: Percentage of All Children in CPP Who Also Received State Per-Pupil Funding for Preschool Special Education (for combined full-day services) from 2016-17 to 2021-22



⁶ C.R.S. § 22-28-106(a)(1)(IV) and 1 CCR 301-32 2228-R 5.08

Student Growth

During the 2021-22
School Year

The Results Matter Assessment System

The Results Matter assessment system is an accountability mechanism designed to improve student outcomes. Any program serving state funded preschoolers is required to participate in Results Matter, which at its core, is an authentic formative assessment.

Authentic assessment through the Results Matter system seeks to improve child outcomes and support the use of data-based decision making for teachers, administrators, families, and policy makers. Authentic, formative assessment allows teachers to measure progress, individualize instruction, and monitor growth throughout the school year. Data from these assessments also inform program evaluation and improvement efforts for both administrators and policymakers.

Authentic assessment means that children are observed in their everyday learning environments and progress is noted in key areas of learning and development through the course of everyday routines and activities. By reviewing children's work samples, observing them at play with peers, and connecting with families, teachers can paint a unique, detailed view of each child that supports individualized instruction in the classroom and better outcomes for students.

At the forefront, the assessments utilized within Results Matter are formative and most beneficial for informing instruction and monitoring progress toward specific goals. However, a summative look can also be taken. Programs have the capability to see the overall picture of how children are performing in relation to widely held expectations of child development over the course of the school year.

Results Matter data, often in combination with other data, are utilized by teachers, administrators, and policy makers for various purposes. Some of those purposes are listed below:

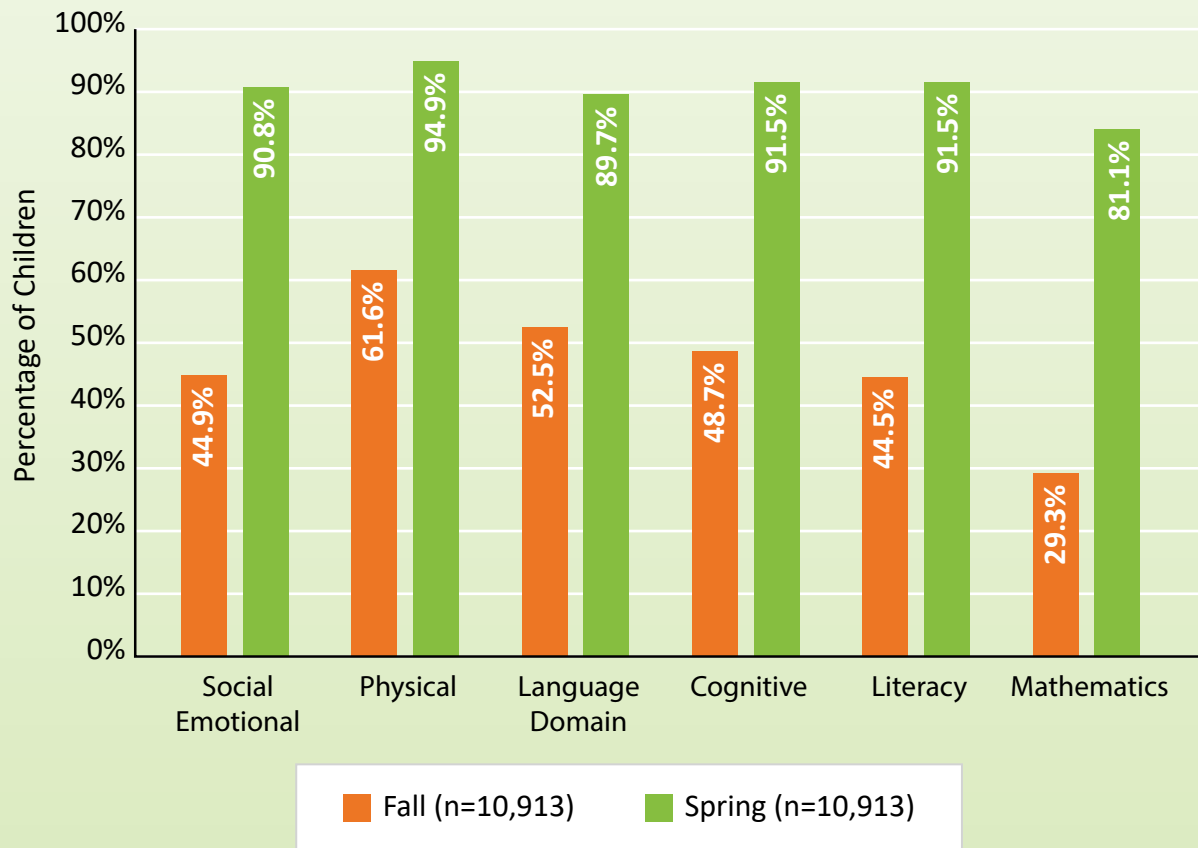
- Planning instruction, both individual and class-wide
- Planning classroom and program-wide improvement strategies
- Communicating, partnering, and engaging with families
- Allocating resources as a program-level
- Accountability reporting and program evaluation.



2021-22 CPP Results

Results displayed in Figure 20 demonstrate the growth from the fall to spring checkpoints for four-year-old children funded by CPP in the six measured domains: social-emotional, physical, language, cognitive, literacy, and mathematics. Nearly 90 percent or more of children either met or exceeded the age expectations at the end of the year in all domains except language and mathematics.⁷ Though fewer children met or exceeded age expectations in mathematics, the growth from fall to spring was highest in math (54.8% percentage points) compared to other areas. The percentage point increase from the fall to spring checkpoints ranged from 33.4% points (physical development) to 54.88 points (mathematics).

Figure 20: Percentage of Four-Year-Old Children in CPP Meeting or Exceeding Age Expectations (2021-22)



⁷ Results for 384 children assessed using HighScope COR Advantage are not reported here. COR is an assessment system on the Results Matter assessment menu.

Long-Term Outcomes

for Students Served by CPP

Positive outcomes for children who participated in CPP are seen not only in the growth within their preschool year, but also throughout their kindergarten through third grade experience, high school assessments, and graduation. A summary of the key findings over the years as well as data from the 2019-20 school year is shared below.

Key Findings Over the Years:

1. Previous analysis has demonstrated lower rates of retention in the early elementary grades (K-3) for students who participated in CPP compared to students who did not receive CPP programming.
2. Students who participated in CPP are more likely to graduate on time than children who did not participate in CPP.





Grade Retention Results

Although a serious consideration, grade retention is one of several interventions that a school can use to support a child’s trajectory of learning. Supporting children who repeat a grade increases the costs associated with funding public school. While high-quality preschool requires a significant investment, it generally costs less than retention and is associated with improved outcomes. The data below, which report grade retention from analysis on three different cohorts of children in recent years, suggest a return on investment in CPP.

Grade Retention Outcomes for CPP

Figures 21 and 22 show two different views of retention information. Figure 22 shows the overall proportion of children who were held back at any point in grades K-3 over the past three years (i.e., cumulative retention rate),⁸ whereas Figure 21 breaks retention data down further, providing the rates by grade level.

Both figures below look at grade level progression rates for children in three different cohorts, assuming a normal grade progression. The first cohort received CPP funding in 2013-14 and were expected to reach third grade by 2017-18. Children in Cohort 2 received CPP funding in 2014-15 and advanced to third grade in 2018-19, and children in Cohort 3 received CPP funding in 2015-16 and advanced to third grade in 2019-20. This analysis is lagged by one year, as the intention is to measure rates of retention through third grade. Consequently, in order to meet that goal, the additional year is needed to ensure that the student reaches fourth grade within the typical timeframe.

Key findings:

Cohort 2 saw a slight increase in retention; however, Cohort 3 rates of retention are much closer to those from Cohort 1, which had been captured two years previous.

Across all cohorts, retention rates are highest in first grade for children with no history of state-funded preschool but lower for CPP graduates.

These rates have remained steady over time.

⁸ See longitudinal data appendix for cohort and comparison group descriptions.



Figure 21: Cumulative Retention Rates: Kindergarten through Third Grade

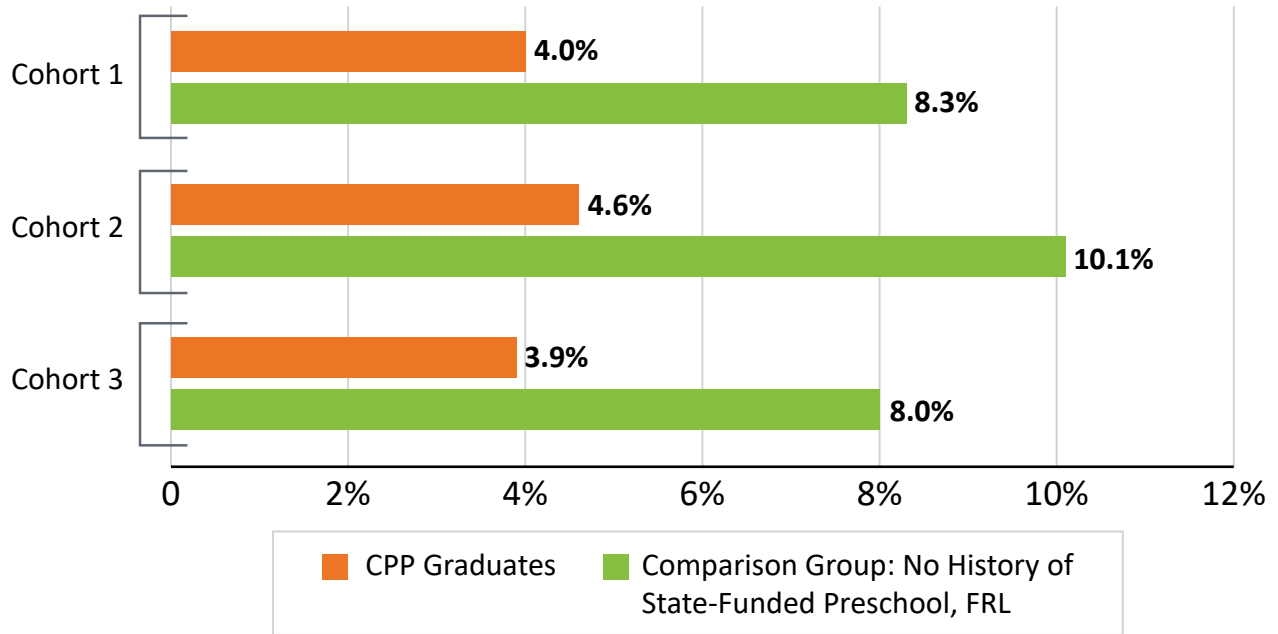
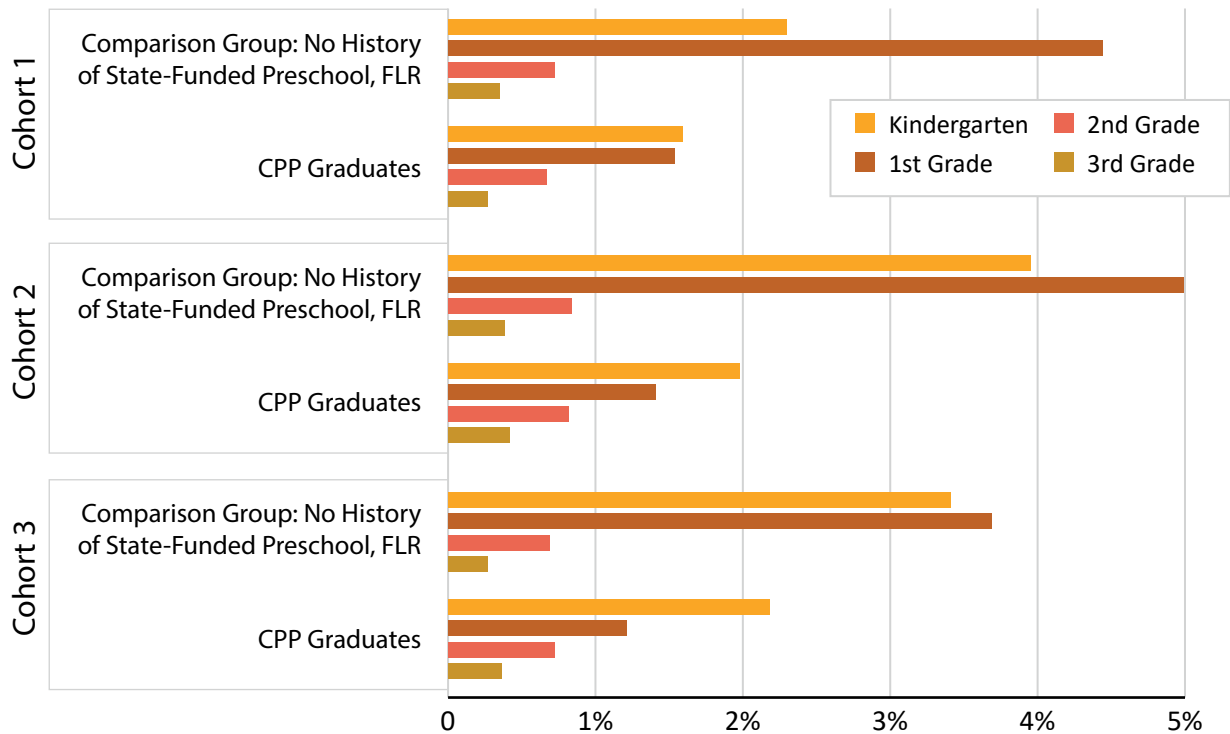


Figure 22: Percentage of Students Who Were Retained by Grade





On-Time Graduation Results

When looking at the rates of on-time graduation for the 2019-20 graduating cohort, students who received full-day CPP funding the year before kindergarten had the highest graduation rate (77.2%) in comparison to students who received half-day CPP funding (76.8%) as well as students who received no CPP funding but were eligible for free and reduced-price lunch (57.2%). This may suggest a greater long-term impact for students who received part- or full-day funding. However, caution should be used when interpreting these percentages, as these rates do not control for any additional demographic characteristics, like gender, race and ethnicity and disability status, nor any preschool services that may have been provided in a private, non-state funded setting.

Table 2. Comparison of On-Time Graduation Rates, 2019-20

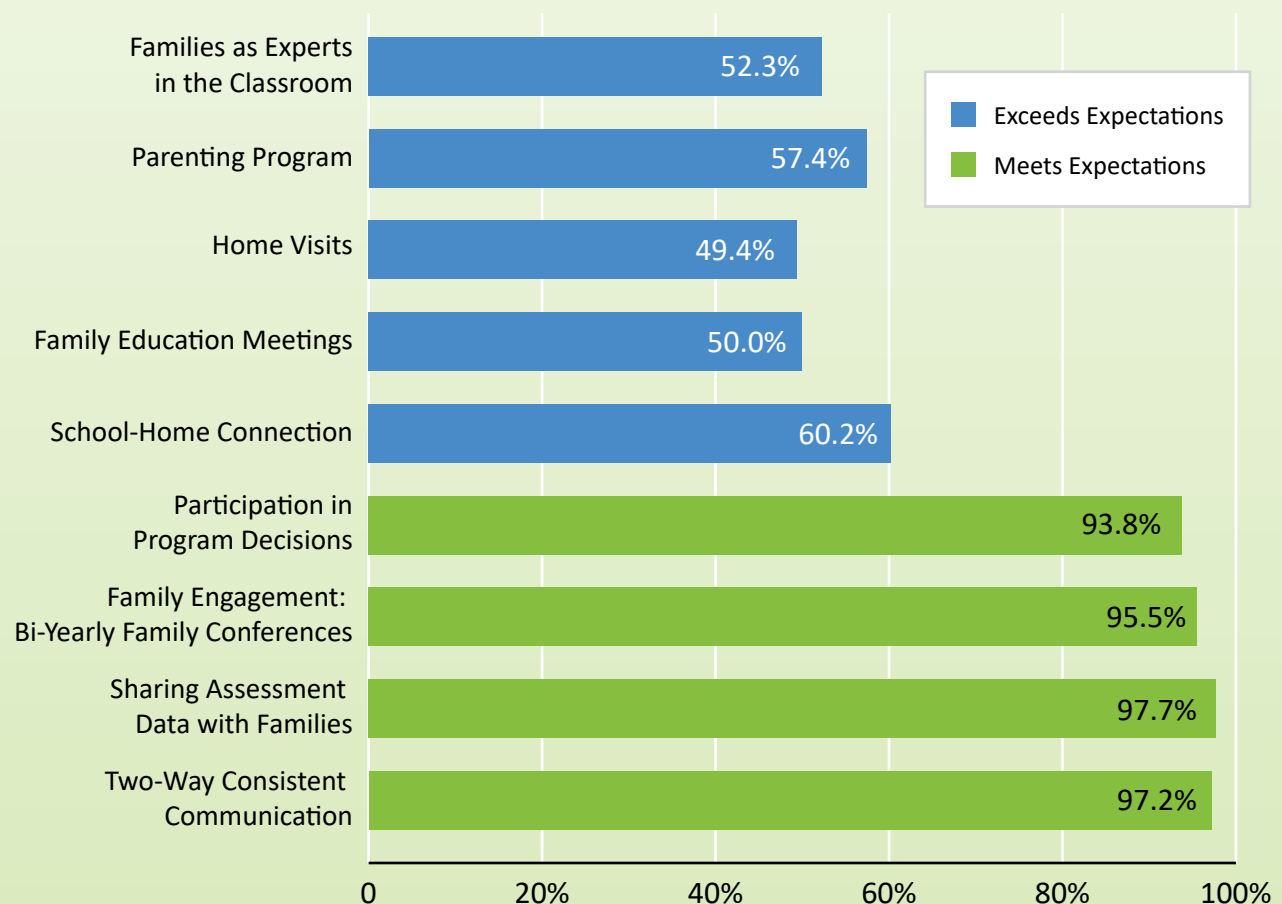
Subgroup of Graduating Class	Rate of On-Time Graduation
Students who did not receive CPP funding, but were eligible for free and reduced lunch	57.2%
Students who received half-day CPP funding the year before kindergarten	76.8%
Students who received full-day CPP funding the year before kindergarten	77.2%



The Vital Role of Family Engagement

CDE recognizes the importance of family engagement in every child's education. Parents and guardians of children funded through CPP are required to sign an agreement about their role in their child(ren)'s educational program.⁹ Programs serving children in the CPP actively engage their preschool families, using strategies like conferences and two-way communication that strengthen the connection between home and school. Many districts report using high-impact family engagement strategies that meet or exceed CPP program expectations.

Figure 23: Percentage of CPP-Participating School Districts Reporting Use of High-Impact Family Engagement Strategies in 2021-22



⁹ 1 CCR 301-31



Next Steps

HB22-1295 established the Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC) and the Universal Preschool Program. This new statewide preschool program will launch July 1, 2023, at which time, the Colorado Preschool Program will sunset. The high quality preschool services achieved through the Colorado Preschool Program have impacted the lives of hundreds of thousands of children, and CDE commits to partner with the new CDEC and the Colorado Universal Preschool Program to realize positive outcomes for Colorado's youngest learners.





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