

*Investing in the
development of our
youngest learners – children
under the age of 5 –
pays lasting dividends.*

*But the availability
of affordable, high-quality
early childhood care
and education in Denver
remains troublingly limited.*



*What will it take on our part to
make sure that all children get*

**OFF TO A
GOOD START**

in school and in life?

Early care and education widely needed

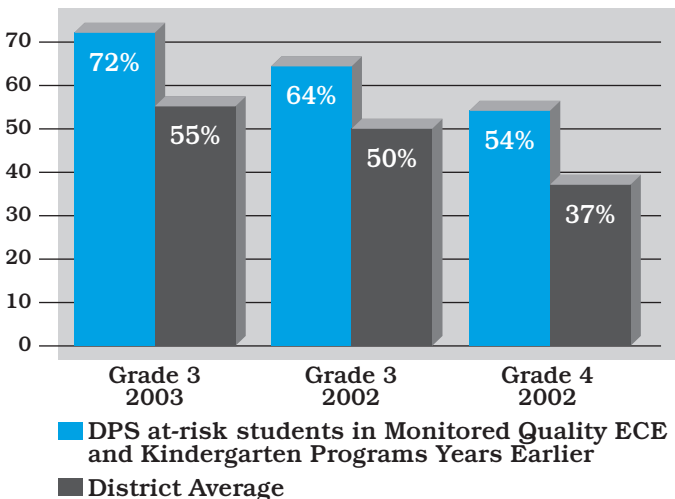
In Denver today, the majority of preschool-age children live in families where both parents work outside the home – and many live in households headed by a single parent who works full time. In the city of Denver alone, **more than half of all children under the age of 5 – nearly 21,000 kids** – require early childhood care and education (ECE) so their parents can work.

Early childhood care and education happens in a variety of settings, including: child care centers and family care homes, friends' and relatives' homes, schools, businesses, churches and synagogues, or a child's own home.

High quality early childhood education yields significant rewards

When children have high quality experiences in their earliest years – in child care settings or at

% Proficient and Advanced on Reading CSAP



home – they reap significant benefits in school, such as better test scores, fewer referrals to special education, and higher graduation rates.

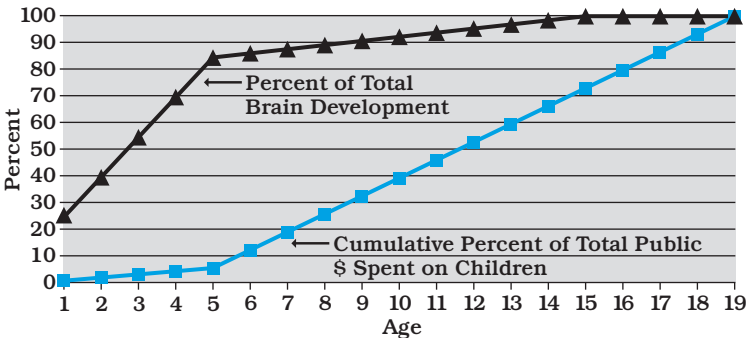
Recent research from the Denver Public Schools (DPS) shows that students at-risk for school failure who have a high-quality preschool and kindergarten experience perform far better than their peers.

High-quality, full-day kindergarten has been shown to boost academic performance, especially for at-risk children. Across the nation, roughly two out of three kindergartners attend a full-day program. But in Colorado, only 15% of kindergartners do so.

The long-term costs of a bad start

The casualty rate for children who get off to a bad start in school is high – and so are the continuing costs of their failure to thrive. Such children are more than twice as likely to fall behind and have to repeat a grade, to require remedial instruction, to drop out of school, to have trouble finding a job, to get involved with the law, to end up on welfare.

How Does Brain Development Compare with Public Expenditures?



Source: D. Purees, Body and Brain, 1988

Clearly, we can no longer afford to place such a low priority on the care and education of our youngest learners.

Patchwork of services

But the services in place to provide these experiences are a patchwork quilt of providers – some public and some private, some licensed and others unlicensed, some based in homes and some in centers, some providing rich learning environments and some offering little more than safe, clean surroundings.

Working parents must shop for early childhood care and education on the open market, where quality and availability vary widely. Even middle-income families have difficulty finding well-run, affordable services; poor families, whose children are at greatest risk of being unprepared for school, often have to rely on unlicensed day care.

Sixty-five percent of parents report being late to work or having to leave early because of child care problems, and four in five employers cite such problems as a major contributor to absenteeism and decreased productivity.



More expensive than college tuition

Once parents find services, the expense is significant. According to a 2002 survey of child care centers, where the great majority of children in licensed care are served, **the Denver-area market rate for fulltime infant and toddler care is \$10,200 and \$8,800 a year**, respectively – nearly 2-3 times higher than annual in-state tuition at the University of Colorado. And even at these prices, quality is not assured.

The greatest portion of high child care costs is salaries, yet the median hourly wage for a preschool teacher is \$9.23. The pay for child care workers is generally half of what a beginning DPS teacher makes.

Quality early childhood care and education is difficult to find

One in-depth study showed that **85% of Colorado's child care centers are of poor to mediocre quality.**

In Denver, only 4% of programs meet the accrediting standards of the National

Association for the Education of Young Children. For preschool teachers and child-care workers, the pay is low and often there are few opportunities for training and professional development. Thus, turnover is high.

This haphazard approach to early childhood care and education has not served us well.

*What is quality early childhood care?**

- Well-trained, educated providers
- Few children per adult provider
- Safe environment
- Age-appropriate materials
- Involved parents

*As described by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (See www.naeyc.org)

A growing number of youngsters – as many as one in three, according to a 2002 survey of Colorado kindergarten teachers – enter school without such basic skills as knowing how to grasp a pencil or being able to recognize the difference between letters and numbers, count to 20 or draw basic shapes.



The time to make improvements is now

According to a recent poll by Ciruli Associates, 86% of Denver voters believe preschool is a priority; 74% believe government should fund preschool for all 4-year-olds. What is needed now is a strong commitment on the part of all of us – parents, policymakers, business leaders, philanthropic organizations, community groups – to **work together to improve the availability, quality and affordability** of early childhood care and education so that all children get off to a good start.

***F**or every dollar spent on early childhood education, between \$4 and \$9 are saved over time in special education, health care, criminal justice and other social costs.*

What can you do?

Learn more. A good place to start is www.piton.org, where you will find a PowerPoint presentation packed with useful facts and figures about early childhood care and education in Denver, upon which this publication is based.

Get involved. Contact organizations working at the state and local levels to improve the quality and affordability of early childhood education, and find out what you can do to support their efforts. Try Educare at www.educarecolorado.org, the Colorado Children's Campaign at www.coloradokids.org, and the Colorado Office of Resource and Referral Agencies at www.corra.org.

Spread the word. Talk to the people in your life – friends, neighbors, co-workers and members of your church, club or community organization – about this issue, and encourage them to join you in staying informed and getting involved.

Help keep public officials aware. When issues of early childhood care and education are in the spotlight, let your public officials know you are keeping track of what is – and isn't – being done to address the issue. Write or call your city council representative, state legislator and other elected officials to express your interest in and support for strengthening early childhood education. Find them at www.denvergov.org and www.state.co.us

For additional information, contact Lisa Roy at The Piton Foundation at 303.825.6246, or Susan Steele at the Temple Hoyne Buell Foundation at 303.744.1688.

This document is a project of the Early Childhood Education Funders Network, a group of funders who share information, questions, research, and ideas focused on helping Colorado's youngest children get off to a good start in school and in life.

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Please note:

All data used in this publication is fully referenced in the presentation “Early Childhood Education in Denver” on-line at www.piton.org.