



COLORADO
Department of Early Childhood



FAMILY HANDBOOK

SCHOOL YEAR
2024 - 2025



**UNIVERSAL
PRESCHOOL**

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WELCOME LETTER



Hello and welcome! Thank you for your interest in the Colorado Universal Preschool Program. The program empowers you to choose the right preschool for your family – and provides funding for up to 15 hours of class-time per week!

Easily register online to explore nearby preschool options, select up to 10 preferences, and get paired with one of them during enrollment. Upon matching, you can directly communicate with the chosen provider to finalize enrollment. In the 2023-24 period, more than 98% of families secured one of their top two choices!

Through ongoing feedback, we're building on last year's successes with exciting improvements focused on:

- Smoother enrollment processes and clearer reporting features.
- A streamlined process for families eligible for special education with an Individualized Education Plan
- Expanded qualifying factors, and earlier funding notices for families.
- Easier registration for families and providers, with program details readily available.
- A public dashboard and website resources.

For children, Colorado Universal Preschool paves the way for stronger academic, social-emotional, and health outcomes, setting them on a path to lifelong success. For families, preschool is often one of the largest household expenses. Colorado Universal Preschool helps families save an average of \$600 a month.

In what follows, you will find detailed information about the program and how to best use it. This handbook covers enrollment processes, how to choose a preschool, payments, and more. We hope you find it useful, and welcome any questions or feedback you may have.

Together, let's build a brighter future for Colorado's children. We're confident that with your continued partnership, the Colorado Universal Preschool Program will continue to grow and empower families, communities, and early education providers throughout our state for generations to come.

We look forward to a successful and rewarding school year together!

Sincerely,

Dawn Odean

Dawn Odean
Director of Colorado Universal Preschool

ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

Welcome to the Colorado Universal Preschool Handbook - a guide for families enrolling children in high-quality preschools! This handbook is designed to assist you in understanding Universal Preschool in Colorado. It covers topics such as choosing a preschool program, navigating enrollment, eligibility criteria, and other relevant inquiries.

A group of diverse young children are playing outdoors with a large, colorful beach ball. The ball has vertical stripes in yellow, green, blue, purple, red, and white. The children are reaching up towards the ball with excitement. The background shows a bright blue sky with some clouds and green trees. A green banner with white text is overlaid at the bottom left of the image.

LET'S GET STARTED!

WHY PRESCHOOL?

Research is clear: the window from birth to age five is critical in a child's development. The experiences children have in the first five years of their life lay the foundation for their future.

Preschool plays a key role in supporting child development, and its impacts are immediate. Research shows preschool leads directly to gains in early reading and math, as well as increased social and emotional skills. Providing your child with access to stimulating, fun activities through high-quality preschool is crucial to this development.

Preschool offers lasting advantages that extend beyond early childhood. Research indicates that children who attend preschool are less likely to face academic setbacks or become involved in criminal behavior as they grow older. Moreover, preschool attendees are more inclined to pursue higher education, enjoy improved long-term health outcomes, and achieve higher earnings in adulthood.

Recognizing the importance of early childhood education for children, families, and Colorado businesses both big and small, the Colorado Universal Preschool Program offers up to 15 hours of state funding for preschool services for all children in the year before kindergarten.

The Department of Early Childhood is committed to ensuring all children and all families are healthy, happy, and thriving!



Preschool Improves:

- math
- early reading
- social and emotional skills



WHAT IS COLORADO UNIVERSAL PRESCHOOL?

Starting in August 2023, Colorado implemented Universal Preschool across the state. This voluntary program aims to ensure that every Colorado child in the year before they are eligible for kindergarten receives up to 15 hours of funded preschool each week for the August - May school year to attend a high-quality preschool of their choice.

One of the main features of Colorado's Universal Preschool Program, also known as Universal Pre-K (UPK), is the commitment to family choice. Through an innovative "mixed-delivery" program model, families are empowered to choose the "just-right" preschool setting for their child at a variety of program types.

Whether it's a licensed community-based, school-based, or home-based preschool provider, families can research, select, and be matched to the program that works best for them.

Universal Preschool is a big step in making early education available to all of Colorado's families. It's also a big step in making early education affordable.

Last year, families who participated in the program saved an average of \$600 a month, and \$6,000 a year, on preschool costs!



Up to 15 Hours of
FREE PRESCHOOL
for all Colorado children

WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

Children in Colorado can register for up to 15 hours per week of free, high-quality preschool in their year before kindergarten through Colorado's Universal Preschool Program, also known as Universal Pre-K (UPK).

- Families may qualify for more free hours based on a number of qualifying factors, per available funding, described further on page 8 and 9 and at bit.ly/QualifyingFactors.
- Depending on the provider, families have the option of paying for additional hours if desired.
- This school year, school districts will resume primary registration for 3-year-olds through their targeted 3-year-old program. If your child is more than one year away from being eligible for kindergarten, please reach out to your school district for potential preschool services.
- Special Education Administrative Units (AUs) and school districts will place preschool aged children eligible for special education according to their Individualized Education Program (IEP) throughout the school year.



ALL COLORADO CHILDREN
in the year before they start kindergarten
are eligible for up to 15 hours per week!

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR ADDITIONAL HOURS?

Dependent upon available funding, additional hours may be available for children who are “low-income” (defined as household income at or below 270% of the federal poverty guidelines) **and** have a “qualifying factor” listed below.

These qualifying factors include:

- Child is identified as homeless and/or unhoused.
- Child is a multilingual, meaning a child who is learning two or more languages at the same time, or a child who is learning a second language while continuing to develop their first language.
- Child is eligible for special education with an Individualized Education Program (IEP).
- Child is “in poverty,” defined as household income less than 100% of the federal poverty guidelines.
- Child is currently in the custody of a state supervised and county administered foster care home or in non-certified kinship care, meaning a child is being cared for by a relative or kin pursuant to [19-1-103\(102\), C.R.S.](#), who has a significant relationship with the child in circumstances when there is a safety concern by a county department of human or social services and where the relative or kin has not met the foster care certification requirements for a kinship foster care home or has chosen not to pursue that certification process.

To find out more information on qualifying factors, federal poverty guidelines, and more bit.ly/QualifyingFactors.

Household ‘low income’ <270% FPL



Unhoused

Multilingual

Foster/Kinship Care

Household ‘in poverty’ <100% FPL

Eligible for Special Education with an IEP

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR ADDITIONAL HOURS?

INCOME ELIGIBILITY

Dependent upon available funding, age eligible children may qualify for additional hours if they are low income and have at least one qualifying factor. Low income is defined as the annual household income at or below 270% federal poverty. The low income eligibility qualifications described below.

- Annual household income is defined as:
 - the total combined pre-tax income received by all members of a household within a 12 month period.
 - this includes pre-tax wages, salaries, self-employment earnings, Social Security benefits, pensions, retirement income welfare payments, and income from other sources.
- Household size is defined as:
 - the number of people who occupy a housing unit as their usual place of residence.
 - For example, if you are a household with 2 adults and 1 child, your household size is "3."
If your household consists of 3 adults and 3 children, please enter "6".

Low-Income Vs. In Poverty

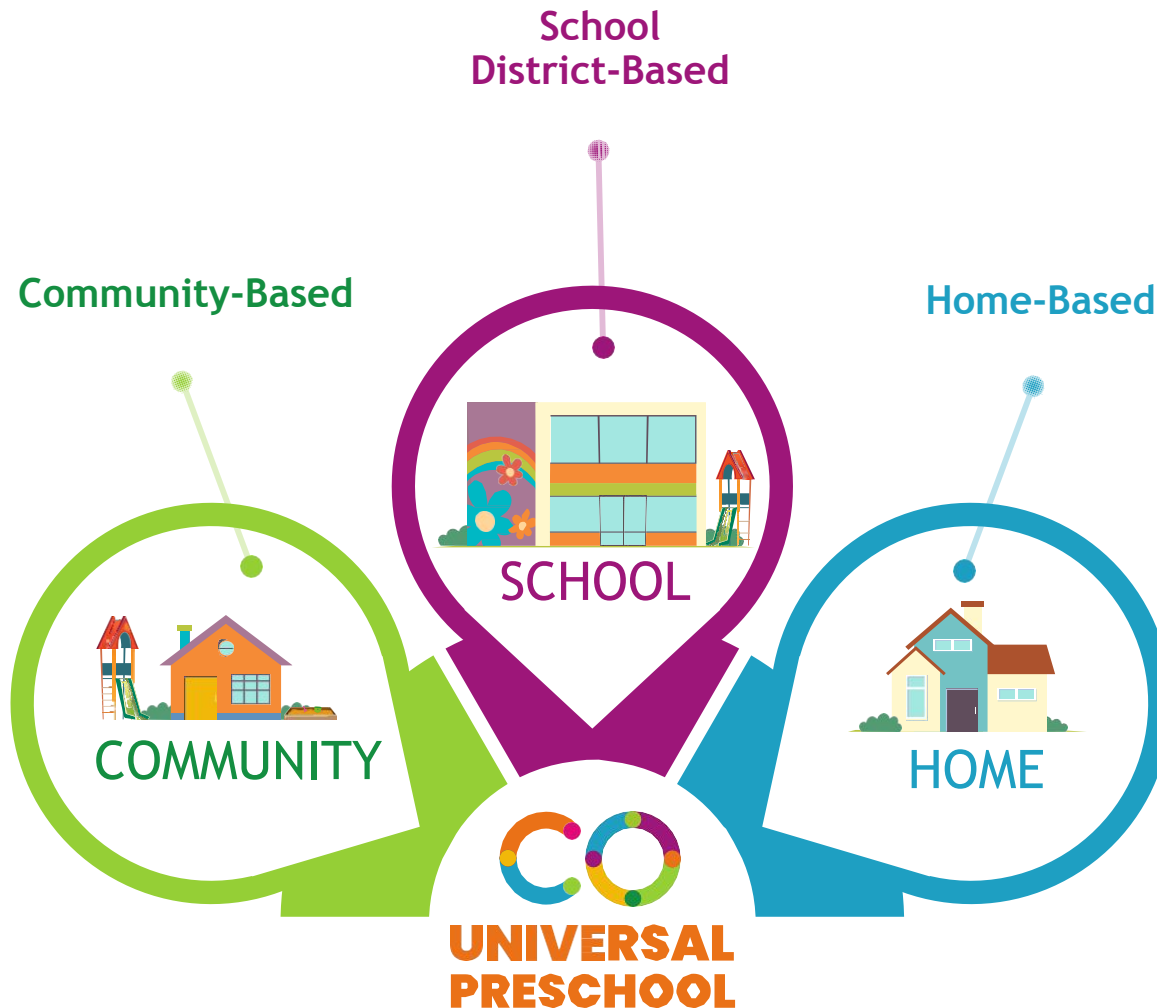
- To be considered 'low-income,' a child's parent or guardian's gross monthly income must not exceed 270% of the Federal Poverty Guideline (FPG), based on household size as illustrated in the table below.
- To be considered 'in poverty,' a child's parent or guardian's gross monthly income must not exceed 100% of the Federal Poverty Guideline (FPG), based on the household size as illustrated in the table below.

FAMILY SIZE	100% FEDERAL POVERTY GUIDELINE (FPG) MONTHLY INCOME	270% FEDERAL POVERTY GUIDELINE (FPG) MONTHLY INCOME
1	\$1,215.00	\$3,280.50
2	\$1,643.33	\$4,437.00
3	\$2,071.67	\$5,593.50
4	\$2,500.00	\$6,750.00
5	\$2,928.33	\$7,906.50
6	\$3,356.67	\$9,063.00
7	\$3,785.00	\$10,219.50
8	\$4,213.33	\$11,376.00
EACH ADDITIONAL PERSON	\$428.33	\$1,156.60

HOW DO I SELECT A PRESCHOOL?

PROVIDER TYPES

There are three types of licensed providers participating in the Colorado Universal Preschool program:



Providers offer a variety of early childhood education models that cater to different preferences and needs.

These models include different instructional approaches, specialized support services, language offerings, and more.

Additionally, preschools often provide different hourly attendance options.

For the purposes of Colorado Universal Preschool, these are defined as:

- Part-time (10-15 hrs/wk)
- Half-day (15-30 hrs/wk)
- Full-day (30-40 hrs/wk)
- Extended day (40+ hrs/wk)

QUALITY RATINGS

Choosing which provider fits your family's needs may feel overwhelming — but there are some tools to help you along the way.

[Colorado Shines](#) is a rating system that helps early learning programs to improve their quality year-round.

The Colorado Shines rating means that the program is licensed, in good standing with the State, meets health and safety standards, and is regularly monitored to evaluate a program's quality against a set of quality indicators.

This illustration shows what Colorado Shines considers in order to rate the quality of a child care and preschool programs.



QUALITY RATINGS

Once a program receives a rating, Colorado Shines provides support to help the program continue to improve its quality.

All licensed programs in the state of Colorado that serve children birth to five are assigned a rating level. When programs start, they receive a rating level of 1 automatically. Being rated this level does not mean that a program isn't high quality! It only means the state does not have data to determine if the provider meets higher rating levels.

A “things to consider” [checklist for searching for child care](#) can be found at bit.ly/checklistforchildcare.

Families can also search a program's licensing history through ColoradoShines.com. Here, you can see reports of inspection, complaints made against the program, investigations for child abuse/neglect, reported injuries at the program and any actions taken against the license.



Find info about a program at
COLORADOSHINES.COM



THINGS TO CONSIDER AS YOU SELECT YOUR TOP TEN PRESCHOOLS

Now that you know about Quality Ratings, here are some other considerations when picking preschools to be matched with.



LOCATION Think about whether you want a preschool near your home, workplace, or other convenient location where a family member can assist with pick-ups.



QUALITY RATING Use the Colorado Shines search feature to research a program's license history.



UNIVERSAL PRESCHOOL STATUS Free Colorado Universal Preschool is only available through participating providers. Visit upk.colorado.gov to confirm whether your pre-selected preschool providers are enrolled in this program so that you can receive this benefit!



VISIT Reach out to the preschools on your list to gather more information. See if you can schedule a tour to get a look and feel for your potential preschool program.

After gathering the information above, review your notes and impressions. Select your top ten preschools based on the criteria that align with your priorities. By following these steps, you'll be well-prepared to make an informed decision about the best preschool for your child.

HOW DO I ENROLL FOR UNIVERSAL PRESCHOOL?

Families looking to continue care with a known provider can pre-register a child who is currently enrolled, who has a sibling currently enrolled, or who has a parent or guardian currently employed with a Universal Preschool Provider. Families can register at upk.colorado.gov, select their current provider as their first choice, or work with their provider for a direct link, from February 29 through March 28, 2024.

Families looking for a new preschool provider can visit upk.colorado.gov to browse 2,000+ high-quality, licensed providers, see if they qualify for additional hours, and register to be matched with one of their top 10 providers of choice. Registration opens February 29 with family and provider “matching rounds” expected in April and July.

Families who have yet to register to Colorado Universal Preschool by the end of July will be able to work directly with a Universal Preschool Provider to enroll, through the end of the school year, as space allows.

Families with a child eligible for special education with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) can register for IEP Direct Placement to align Universal Preschool with their child's IEP through upk.colorado.gov.

 upk.colorado.gov



HOW DO I ENROLL FOR UNIVERSAL PRESCHOOL?

WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED WHEN REGISTERING:

ADDRESS

During this step, you will enter your address or indicate whether your family is experiencing homelessness.

CHILD NAME AND DATE OF BIRTH

During this step, you will enter the legal name of your child or children and their date of birth.

NUMBER OF PEOPLE AT HOME

During this step, you will enter the number of people living in your household to determine if your child may qualify for additional hours of free preschool.

ANNUAL INCOME

During this step, you will indicate your income will help determine if your child may qualify for additional hours of free preschool.

CONTACT INFORMATION

During this step, you will be asked to provide an email, and an optional phone number to be contacted if there are any questions about your registration.

RELATIONSHIP WITH CHILD

During this step, you will be asked to identify if you are the child's mother, father, or legal guardian.

RACE AND ETHNICITY

During this step, you will be asked to indicate the race, ethnicity, and gender identity of your child so the program understands what children they are serving.



Free half-day preschool
REGARDLESS OF INCOME



HOW DO I ENROLL FOR UNIVERSAL PRESCHOOL?

WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED WHEN REGISTERING:

SELECT PROVIDERS

- **Search and browse participating providers.** You can select up to your top ten providers and search them by address, name, or through map view. Not seeing results for providers, you may have selected? This may be due to the cut-off dates in your school district. Reach out to your LCO (bit.ly/FindMyLCO) for additional support.
 - **Entering the Universal Preschool Portal through a program link:** Some providers will send a “program link” for families to easily register with their program. When families enter the Universal Preschool Portal through a “program link”, the site will show that program as the pre-selected first choice. Families are encouraged to select additional programs.
- **Program Selections:** Families should select between 5 and 10 programs. These can be from the same provider or across many providers. While 98% of applicants were matched to their first or second choice in the program’s first year, multiple provider selections increase the likelihood of a first round match.
- **Program Ranking:** Families are asked to rank selected programs from 1st choice to 10th choice. Program rank is used in the matching rounds to maximize the number of 1st choice selections for families.
- **Continuity of Care & Pre Registration::** The Colorado Universal Preschool Program aims to create continuity of care between providers and families. When families register within the Pre-Registration process, they are asked to select where the child is currently enrolled, where the child has a sibling enrolled with a provider, or a provider where a child has a parent as an employee.

FINAL SUBMISSION

- You will be asked to sign a data sharing agreement to allow staff and providers access to the information you provide. You can read that at bit.ly/UPKDataSharing.
- Once complete, you will receive an email confirming your registration was submitted.



EASY TO REGISTER



ACCEPTING & DECLINING A MATCH

ACCEPTING A PRESCHOOL MATCH

Once you are matched with a preschool, you will receive a text or email to either accept or decline your match.

To view your child's match status, log in to your Universal Preschool account at upk.colorado.gov, click on your child's name and scroll to the bottom of the page to view their match status.

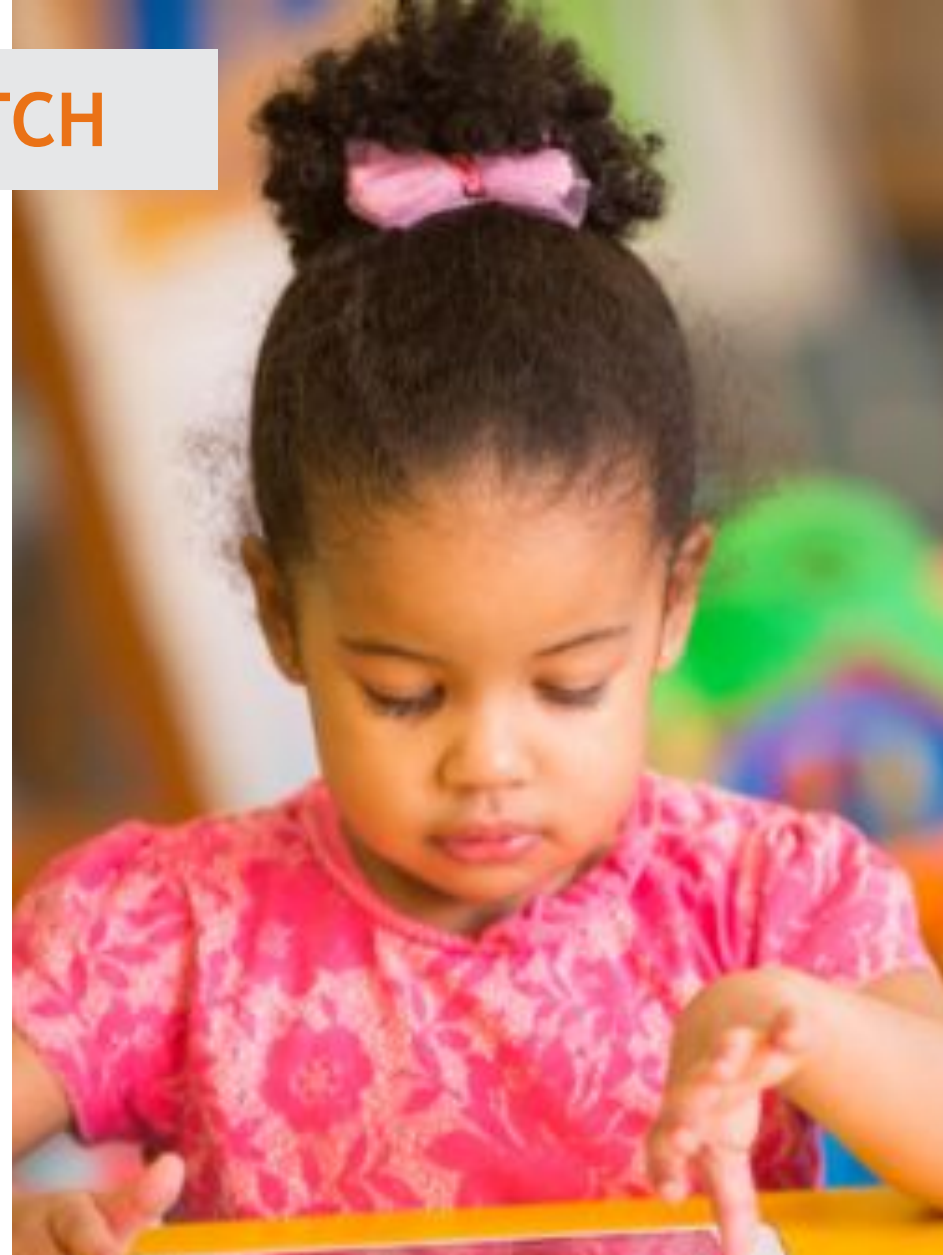
- When you see “MATCHED” status, you can accept your matched program and provider.
- When you see “ACCEPTED” status, reach out to the provider to finalize your child's enrollment.
- When you see “ENROLLED” status, your placement is finalized with the provider.

! **Note that your child's placement is not confirmed until your provider has completed their enrollment process.**

DECLINING A PRESCHOOL MATCH

If you were matched to one of your preferred provider preferences, but now would like to try and be matched to another, there's a process for that. Before you can do so, login to your Universal Preschool account at upk.colorado.gov and click “deny your match.”

! **Note that denying your match will require you to restart the process all over again, and does not guarantee placement at the provider you want most.**



**98% of families
received their top two
choices in 2023-24!**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

CHILD FIND

Do you have concerns or questions about your child in any of the following areas:

- How your child's speech is developing
- How your child is learning
- How your child sees or hears
- How your child plays and interacts with other children
- How your child moves their hands and body for daily tasks
- How your child responds to difficult situations or transitions
- How your child behaves and handles their emotions

If you answered “yes” to any of the above, reach out to Child Find at cde.state.co.us/cdesped/childfindcontact within your local school district.

Referrals of children with a suspected delay in development can be made to the local Child Find team where the family and child live.

The purpose of the Child Find process in preschool is to determine whether a child has a need for special education services. Learn more about Child Find at cde.state.co.us/cdesped/childfind.

Visit the Colorado Department of Education website at cde.state.co.us/cdesped/preschoolspciale for more information about special education for preschool-aged children.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

LOCAL COORDINATING ORGANIZATIONS (LCOs)

What Do LCOs Do?

- LCOs are your main point of contact for all things Universal Preschool.
- LCOs work to support families and child care providers who want to participate within your community.
- LCO staff members available to help answer your questions, provide you with additional resources, and more.
- LCOs can assist you in completing an application for Colorado Universal Preschool, locate a provider in your area, update your registration when things change, and provide a connection to other local early childhood resources in your community.

How Do I Find My LCO?

- If you don't know who your LCO is, we have a tool on our website that can help!
- Visit the bit.ly/FindMyLCO of our website.
- Click on the blue box that says "Find My LCO."
- Find your county and/or school district on the spreadsheet that pops up.
- Your LCO's name and contact information can be viewed there.

COLORADO CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (CCCAP) | Apply at peak.my.site.com

A state program that helps families pay for preschool, if they meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Parents are employed, actively seeking employment, or attending school.
- Children must be U.S. Citizens or Legal Residents.
- Household income must be less than your [county's entry income limit](#).

HEAD START | Apply at eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov or by calling 866-763-6481

A federally-funded program that offers free preschool, health services, and family support to children whose families meet the following criteria:

- Families who receive public assistance (TANF, SSI, or SNAP), and those with children in foster care or children who are homeless, also qualify regardless of income.
- Immigration status is not considered.

THANK YOU & STAY IN TOUCH!

We hope this handbook has been a valuable resource as you embark on an exciting journey in Colorado Universal Preschool. Remember, this process is not only about finding a preschool - it's about setting your child up for lifelong success.

If you have questions about the preschool provider's program, curriculum, hours of operation, or general provider information, contact your preschool provider directly.

Your local LCO can answer questions about your Universal Preschool funding, and connect you to other community resources.

Find your LCO by visiting bit.ly/FindMyLCO.

Connect with Colorado Universal Preschool!

✉ Submit Questions to bit.ly/UPKQuestions

☎ 303-866-5223

🌐 upk.colorado.gov



[Subscribe](#) to our Colorado Universal Preschool Newsletter!

We value your feedback | [Feedback Form](#)



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How do I pre-register with my known provider for continuity of care?

4 Steps:

1. Login to upk.colorado.gov or create an account if using a unique “provider link”.
2. Complete the first registration questions
3. Find your known provider, or if your provider sends a direct link, ensure they are pre-selected and ranked as your first choice.
4. Affirm that for your 1st selected provider one of the following applies
 - Your child is currently enrolled
 - Your child has a sibling enrolled with the provider.
 - Your child has a parent or guardian employed with the provider.

 [Watch This Short How To Video](#)

Is my child eligible based on their birthday?

- Look up your child’s birthday and school district to see if they are eligible for Colorado Universal Preschool on [this new UPK Age Eligibility Lookup Tool](#). You can also search for your school district based on your county and zip-code.

Should my 3 year old register for UPK?

- Not this year. Please use your child’s birthday and school district to see if verify eligibility dates with [UPK Age Eligibility Lookup Tool](#).
- If you find your child’s birthday is “ineligible”, please reach out to your LCO to find other preschool services that may be available in your school district or by other providers through bit.ly/FindMyLCO.
- *Note: Preschool aged children with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) are eligible for universal preschool funding and will be placed by their Special Education Administrative Unit (AU) or school district.*



FREE HALF-DAY PRESCHOOL FOR ALL COLORADO KIDS IN THE YEAR BEFORE KINDERGARTEN

Enroll your child in preschool and help them be kindergarten ready!



COLORADO
Department of Early Childhood