



Trust for Learning

September 30, 2021

Colorado Early Childhood Leadership Commission
Attn: Co-Chairs Susan Steele, Tom Massey, and Pamela Harris, PhD

Dear Commissioners:

Thank you for your leadership as experts and champions of early childhood education throughout the state. We appreciate your ongoing commitment to the children and families in Colorado. We are writing today to offer policy resources that we believe will be valuable for your work in creating the new Department of Early Childhood.

As outlined in the commission's Universal Preschool Policy Discussion Guide, Colorado's universal preschool program has the potential to provide equitable, high-quality learning experiences for all children and families. We can learn from states who have come before us and pave a path for those that will follow. Considerable research suggests that simply providing preschool programs is not enough to close opportunity gaps and set children up for Kindergarten and lifelong learning – program quality is of critical importance, and access to these high-quality programs must be universal for every child and their family. As the commission considers policy recommendations for building a universal preschool program rooted in equity, we encourage leaders to adopt a common framework for quality to help guide implementation across programs and settings. It is imperative that we provide a clear vision for what high-quality early learning opportunities look like at the programmatic level—in schools, child care centers, and other community-based settings across the state.

Grounded in the science of child development, the [Principles of Ideal Learning](#) environments were developed by early childhood experts and researchers and offer a quality framework that can be used across models and settings to support children's growth and development and prepare them for lifelong learning. Drawn from world-renowned early childhood approaches,¹ these principles outline the core elements of a diverse range of high quality early education programs, including a commitment to play; equity; relationship-based interactions; personalized instruction; an

¹ Montessori, Reggio Emilia, Friends Center for Children, Tools of the Mind, Bank Street College of Education, and Waldorf

ecologically-focused, child-centered perspective; and a strengths-based approach with children, adults and families. The recently published brief, [Making the Case for Ideal Learning in Colorado](#), provides an overview of the principles of ideal learning, the evidence behind them, and how they can translate into high-quality preschool environments for Colorado's children. Publicly-funded ideal learning programs are already thriving in some communities -- we can learn from these partners as we expand access throughout the state.

As the Commission wrestles with the many governance, systems, and workforce issues that are part of a challenge of this magnitude, we would like to highlight a few key policy priorities aligned with the principles of ideal learning that will enable consistently high-quality learning experiences for all children. Specifically, we recommend the development of a universal preschool program that will:

- **embed equity indicators** within state monitoring and accountability systems to help assess children's experiences;
- **provide fair compensation** for preschool educators that is on par with K-12 educators;
- **adopt assessments that reflect a holistic view** of children's growth and development;
- **require full inclusion** of children with disabilities and facilitate meaningful participation through individualized supports;
- **align state ECE teacher credentialing and licensure requirements** with ideal learning educator development training competencies and credentials;
- **eliminate harsh and exclusionary discipline practices** that disproportionately impact children of color and children with disabilities;
- **encourage multilingual learning** opportunities for young children, especially emerging bilinguals;
- **facilitate socioeconomic and racial integration** within early childhood program and classroom settings;
- **ensure regular developmental screenings and referral practices** to connect children with early intervention and supportive services if needed; and
- **disaggregate child outcome data** by race, disability, gender, and home language to inform policy and program improvement.

These policies are necessary in order to track and eliminate disparities in access to high-quality early learning opportunities and disrupt systemic inequities that impose barriers for vulnerable populations. Additionally, we recommend that the new department of early childhood develop guidance to support administrators and practitioners in implementing comprehensive, whole-child, ideal learning approaches that integrate curriculum, educator training, and ongoing professional development, as opposed to

one-time, piecemeal interventions that do not constitute a unified vision for supporting children's growth and development.

As the Commission considers recommendations for building an equitable universal preschool program, we encourage leaders to send a clear message regarding quality for all children. The principles of ideal learning environments offer a flexible, simple framework to guide program implementation and inform systems of quality oversight. It is our strong belief that together we can build a publicly-funded early learning system in Colorado that supports the unique and unlimited potential of every child, and we look forward to working with you to bring this vision to life.

Sincerely,

The Ideal Learning in Colorado Advisory Team

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