

THE DENVER PRESCHOOL PROGRAM: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the Denver Preschool Program (DPP)?

The Denver Preschool Program, approved by voters in November 2006, provides parents with a tuition credit to use at the preschool of their choice. It will be open and voluntary for all Denver four-year-olds and will include all licensed preschool providers who agree to participate in a quality improvement system.

How will the tax revenue be spent?

The vast majority of the funds will go to families for tuition credits and providers for quality improvement. Outreach and enrollment efforts will also be an important component of the program, especially in the early years, to ensure that parents and providers know about this program and take advantage of it.

Why is there a contract between the City of Denver and the Denver Preschool Program Inc.?

Since January 2007, the City of Denver has been collecting sales tax revenue that was approved by the voters in November 2006. The City is contracting the operations of the Denver Preschool Program to a non-profit corporation, Denver Preschool Program, Inc.

When will the Denver Preschool Program begin?

The DPP will start in the fall of 2007. There will be a tiered approach for bringing all services into existence. Tuition credits and quality improvement efforts will begin in the fall with the full program rolling out over the next year.

Why is early childhood education important?

More than 40 years of research shows that early childhood education provides significant educational and social benefits for children, families and communities. Almost 80 percent of brain development occurs before the age of five. It is critical that our children grasp basic and fundamental abilities early so they are prepared to learn when they enter kindergarten. Sadly, Colorado kindergarten teachers report that 1/3 of children come to school unprepared to learn and national research shows that children who start school behind their peers tend to stay behind.

Who manages the Denver Preschool Program?

The program is being administered by the Denver Preschool Program, Inc. an independent, non-profit organization which was created for the sole purpose of operating the Denver Preschool Program. It is overseen by a seven-member Board of Directors that makes all financial and business decisions about the program. A larger Board of Advisors counsels the Board of Directors on education policy issues. Both boards were appointed by Mayor Hickenlooper and approved by City Council. The Board of Directors is comprised of citizens with experience running businesses, non-profits and public programs. The Board of Advisors includes preschool providers, parents and leaders from the education, non-profit, foundation and business communities.

Does the Denver Preschool Program violate the principles of separation of church and state?

No. The tuition credits go to parents, who then choose the provider that they feel is best for their child. The program is carefully structured to ensure that parents have the freedom to choose a faith-based program, yet tax dollars will not be used to support religious instruction. Qualified faith-based providers who choose to participate in the Denver Preschool Program will agree to separate the religious aspects of their curriculum from the non-religious components. Quality Improvement Program dollars will be used only for non-sectarian purposes.

Will the program be protected if sales tax revenues fluctuate?

The program has been designed with flexibility to meet the changing needs and demands of the community and changing financial realities. The amount of the tuition credits will be determined by the Board of Directors on an annual basis.

How will you ensure our tax dollars are not being wasted on bureaucracy or otherwise misused?

The Denver Preschool Program Inc. is responsible for reporting annually on the number of children participating in the program, the quality of the preschool providers and the financial health of the program. Administrative costs will be limited to 5 percent of the sales tax revenue. The remaining 95 percent of the sales tax revenue will be used for tuition credits and quality improvement.

What if I don't want my child to participate in preschool?

Participation is completely voluntary. This program is open to every child in Denver the year before they are eligible to attend kindergarten, but it is not mandatory.

Do I have to send my child to the preschool in my neighborhood? Does the preschool have to be located in Denver to be eligible?

The tuition credit is awarded to the child through the family, meaning that families can choose where their children attend preschool. A Denver family may use the tuition credit with any preschool provider who is licensed by the state and has entered into a contract with the Denver Preschool Program, regardless of where that provider is located.

Can preschools charge families more than the amount of the tuition credit?

Yes. Preschools set their own tuition rates. The amount of the tuition credit will vary according to family income and the preschool's quality rating. The tuition credit may or may not cover the full cost of tuition.

What do providers have to do to participate in this program?

The only requirements are that providers be licensed by the state and agree to participate in a three-part quality improvement system. Providers will be eligible to receive technical assistance and funding to help develop and execute their quality improvement plan.

What will the three-part quality improvement system entail?

The Denver Preschool Program Inc. will contract with a quality rating and improvement organization to develop and administer the quality improvement system. While the details of the quality improvement system are left up to the Program and the organizations that it contracts with, it will include (1) an introduction to quality, (2) a quality rating and (3) development of a quality improvement plan for each provider. The quality criteria will be objective and based on early childhood education standards. All providers who participate in the quality rating system are eligible to receive assistance and funding from DPP to obtain their quality ratings and to help develop and execute their quality improvement plans.

What provider types will be eligible to participate?

While it may take some time to develop programs for all providers and all Denver residents, this program will be open to all provider types: for-profit, non-profit, public and private providers.

Will this program favor DPS early childhood education programs over privately run preschools?

No. DPS programs will not be given special status. Every licensed preschool provider with a commitment to quality will be eligible to participate.

Will participating providers be required to use a set curriculum?

No. The only requirements for participating are that the provider be licensed by the state and agree to participate in a three-part quality rating system.