

Highlighting DLL’s Strengths in Colorado’s Universal Preschool Program: What the 2023–2024 Report Tells Us

The Colorado Universal Preschool Program (UPP) first-year report reveals that UPP marked a significant milestone in the 2023–24 school year by serving 43,479 four-year-olds—68.7% of the state’s eligible 4-year-old population. Among these, 12.4% (approximately 5,388 children) were identified as Dual Language Learners (DLLs), highlighting the state's commitment to inclusive early childhood education.

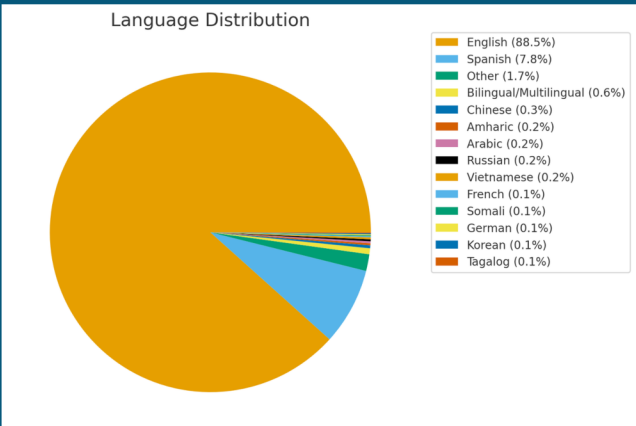
The program is open to all children in the year before kindergarten, with nearly seven in ten eligible children participating. Services were delivered through a mixed-delivery model, including community-based programs (46%), school-based programs (38%), and home-based/family child care settings (16%).

In total, \$239.4 million in funding was distributed to 1,925 providers statewide, supporting high-quality preschool opportunities. UPP also emphasized equitable access, family choice, and support for diverse communities and providers. While the report provides important information on participation and demographics, it lacks fully disaggregated and inclusive data on DLL children and the workforce.

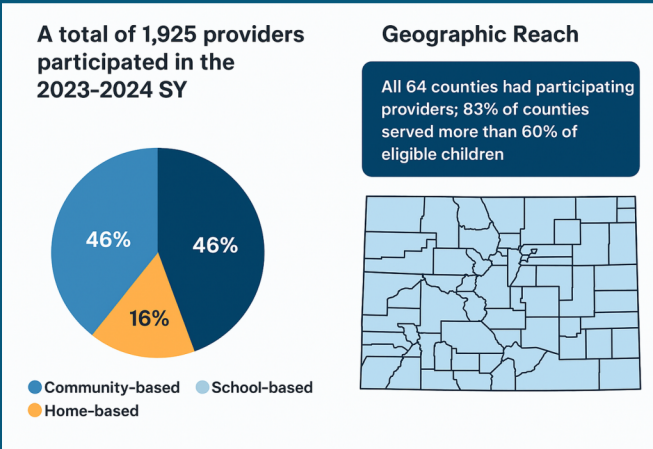
Key DLL Data and Gaps:

The report provides totals for Dual Language Learners (12.4%), low-income children (49.5%), and children with qualifying factors (26.4%); however, it does not indicate how these categories intersect. For example, we do not know how many DLLs were also low-income, how many DLLs had multiple qualifying factors, or how many DLLs received 30-hour versus 10–15-hour awards. These combinations are reported for all children but not specifically for DLLs, which limits the ability to conduct a full equity analysis.

Additionally, the program’s demographic data show that 88.5% of children spoke English at home, 7.8% spoke Spanish, and 3.1% spoke other languages. Yet data on bilingual/multilingual households were limited to 0.6%, and race and ethnicity data were incomplete, with 30.5% and 20.4% unspecified, respectively. This underreporting further complicates efforts to accurately assess and address the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse children and families.



Key Workforce Data & Gaps



- Workforce data includes a total number (1,925) of providers who participated
- Community-based:** 46% of providers (served 42% of children)
 - School-based:** 38% of providers (served 56% of children)
 - Home-based** (family child care): 16% of providers (served 1.9% of children)
- However, no statewide data has been reported on:
- Providers’ primary languages.
 - Number of bilingual/multilingual educators.



Equity Concerns

Despite the program's broad reach, some inequities persist:

- **Data Completeness:** Incomplete demographic data hinders the ability to fully understand and address the needs of DLLs.
- **Workforce Diversity:** The lack of statewide data on the linguistic diversity of the provider workforce limits the ability to ensure culturally and linguistically responsive services.
- **Program Hours:** DLLs are more likely to qualify for extended 30-hour programs; a lack of data on 30-hour awards vs 15-hour awards indicates a gap in service provision.



Improvements on the way!

Several promising initiatives were outlined in the report:

- **Mandatory Demographic Reporting:** Starting in the 2024–25 school year, race, ethnicity, and language questions will be mandatory in applications to improve data completeness.
- **Resource Bank Launch:** In 2025, a Resource Bank will be introduced, offering language access tools, translation materials, and cultural responsiveness training.
- **Quality Standards Implementation:** will require family engagement in home language and culture, translation services, and access to voluntary developmental screenings in the child's home language.



Conclusion & Recommendations

The Colorado Universal Preschool Program made major progress toward inclusive early learning access in its inaugural year, serving nearly 70% of eligible children statewide. However, for DLLs, the program remains in an early stage of equity implementation. Key achievements include identifying DLLs as a qualifying factor, expanding access to full-day preschool, and embedding cultural and linguistic responsiveness into new Quality Standards. Yet, data and system gaps persist — most notably:

- Incomplete demographic and language reporting
- Absence of provider workforce language data
- Lack of clear correlation between language diversity and access to expanded preschool hours

Upcoming changes in SY 2024–25 (mandatory demographic data collection, the “child in poverty” qualifier, and the Resource Bank for providers) are crucial steps toward building an equitable, linguistically inclusive system for Colorado’s children and families. To build on this momentum and ensure DLLs are fully represented in data and policy decisions, the following recommendations are suggested:

✓ **Collect and Disaggregate DLL Data:**
Mandate that DLL data be collected, disaggregated, and publicly reported by: Race and ethnicity, income, county, language(s) spoken, provider type, age, disability status / IEP, qualifying factors, awarded hours and matching status. Require this data to be included in public-facing dashboards, annual CDEC reports, and SMART Act hearings.

✓ **Standardize DLL Identification Across Early Childhood Settings:**
Require CDEC to adopt a uniform statewide process to identify DLLs, including:

- Consistent home language/intake questions at enrollment and renewal
- Clear data entry and reporting guidance for LCOs, school-based, and center based providers.

✓ **Implement a Standardized Home Language Survey (HLS)**
Require the use of a statewide standardized HLS during UPK enrollment and renewal that:

- Allows families to indicate multiple household languages, not just a “primary” language.
- Is culturally and linguistically responsive
- Extends beyond UPK to licensed child care, Early Intervention, and Head Start programs.

✓ **Include DLL Workforce Data in Annual Reporting:**
Require CDEC to collect and report DLL workforce data, including:

- Languages spoken by educators and staff,
- DLL-related credentials or training,
- Race and ethnicity,
- Retention and turnover rates,

✓ **Engage Families as Data Partners:**
Require CDEC and LCOs to meaningfully involve families in data collection by:

- Using multilingual, culturally responsive tools and formats,
- Collaborating with the Family Voice Council to design family input surveys,
- Collecting biannual qualitative feedback on access, satisfaction, choice, and experience.

✓ **Make DLL Data More Accessible and Transparent:**
Strengthen how data about DLLs’ is shared with the public by using existing state systems and reports. Require annual DLL data be included in:

- SMART Act hearings
- ECLC and family/provider advisory councils
- Public dashboards – to give families and communities easy access to key data
- CDEC Annual Reports

