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Blueprint for Opportunity

No. 3

Implementation Memo

TO: Governor-elect Ritter
Members of the 66th Colorado General Assembly

FROM: The Bell Policy Center – Frank Waterous, Senior Policy Analyst

DATE: December 4, 2006

**RE: Implementing Bell's Blueprint recommendation No. 3
to give parents the option for preschool and full-day kindergarten.**

In the 2006 Blueprint for Opportunity, the Bell Policy Center recommends:

Give parents the option to enroll their kids in quality, affordable preschool and full-day kindergarten

We should fully fund the Colorado Preschool and Kindergarten Program, extend it to all districts, and increase outreach to serve all families in need. We should also help school districts provide the option of full-day kindergarten to those parents who want it. This year, the legislature took a major step in this direction, but it needs to finish the job. (See *Blueprint*, pages 8-9)

This memorandum briefly discusses the issues surrounding this proposal, describes steps for implementing it, outlines some of the factors to consider and lists sources for additional information and resources.

If you are interested in pursuing this issue further, we are prepared to work with you. Please contact the author of this memo directly at (303) 297-0456 or waterous@thebell.org, or Rich Jones, director of policy and research, at (303) 297-0456 or jones@thebell.org.

Overview of the issue

A safe and stimulating early childhood sets the stage for success later in life. A child who masters literacy skills at an early age is far more likely to succeed in school and at work. Quality preschool and kindergarten programs lay the foundation for literacy and help narrow achievement gaps for low-income and minority children.

The Colorado Preschool and Kindergarten Program (CPKP) serves children across the state who are eligible based on family risk factors. School districts that participate in the CPKP have found that preschool education and family support can improve children's academic achievement, reduce special education

placements, lower the number of children held back a grade, and increase graduation rates.¹

For 2006-07, the General Assembly increased the available CPKP slots by 2,000 and provided \$5 million in additional funding for the program through the School Finance Bill (HB06-1375).² CPKP now includes a total of 14,360 slots — 12,206 for preschool and 2,154 for kindergarten. The lawmakers also stated their intent to add 2,000 more slots per year in the next two budget years, reaching an overall total of 18,360 slots by 2008-09.

Even with this additional funding, though, the number of eligible students who cannot be served by CPKP continues to grow — the result of an apparent increase in the number of at-risk



students and the identification of more eligible students as more school districts participate in the program.³

During the 2006 regular legislative session, the General Assembly also passed HB06-1005, a bill sponsored by Rep. Jack Pommer, that would have allowed school districts, upon voter approval, to impose an additional property tax mill levy to fund full-day kindergarten programs. Because of the funding made available to school districts that opted for such a tax, those districts would have been precluded from participating in the full-day kindergarten component of CPKP. Although the bill passed the legislature with widespread support, Gov. Owens vetoed it.⁴

In November, Denver voters approved the \$12 million Denver Preschool Program, which will be funded through a 0.12 percent sales tax increase. The program will:

- Allow any Denver child to attend preschool for the year before he or she is eligible to enter kindergarten.
- Provide tuition credits to families to use at the preschool program of their choice.
- Include any state-licensed child care provider that wishes to participate.⁵

Implementation steps

In order to give parents the option to enroll their children in quality, affordable preschool and full-day kindergarten programs, at least three policy steps could be taken.

- **Increase appropriations in the School Finance Act for the Colorado Preschool and Kindergarten Program** by at least \$5 million, and authorize at least 2,000 additional slots for the program. If possible, fully fund the approximately 6,000 additional slots required to cover the currently identified need throughout the state, with an increased appropriation of \$15 million. If this full funding is not possible, the legislature should continue to express its intent to continue to expand the program as quickly as possible, and to fully fund the program in the future.

- **Determine the number of students statewide eligible for, but not yet served by, the Colorado Preschool and Kindergarten Program.** Funding for such a study could come through the School Finance Act or other legislation. This study should include current and projected need in the 170 school districts now participating and in the eight districts not yet participating. The funding provided for this purpose should be sufficient to provide additional staff and resources, as needed, for CPKP to complete the study.
- **Enact legislation similar to HB06-1005, allowing school districts, with voter approval, to impose an additional property tax mill levy in order to fund full-day kindergarten programs.**

[HB06-1005 text](#)

[HB06-1005 fiscal note](#)

Factors to consider

The benefits of quality preschool and kindergarten programs for children's later achievement have been well-documented, especially for low-income and at-risk students. Nevertheless, the issue of who should and should not have responsibility for and involvement in a child's early learning can be controversial.

Given the sensitivity of this issue for many parents, state policies regarding preschool and kindergarten must emphasize that such programs are, and should be, optional, not mandatory. While the best interests of the child, the family, and the state are served by providing universal access to affordable, quality early learning opportunities, participation in them should remain purely voluntary at the parents' discretion.

Information and resources

📄 [Colorado Preschool and Kindergarten Program: 2006-07 Handbook](#), Colorado Department of Education

📄 [Colorado Preschool and Kindergarten Program, Request for Proposal For 2006 Expansion Slots For Districts Not Currently Participating in CPKP](#), Colorado Department of Education, May 15, 2006.

📞 📄 Lori Goodwin Bowers, senior consultant, Colorado Preschool and Kindergarten Program, Colorado Department of Education, (303) 866-6783 or bowers_l@cde.state.co.us

End notes

¹ 📄 [Colorado Preschool Program 2006 Legislative Report](#), Colorado Department of Education.

² 📄 HB06-1375, School Finance Act, [Concerning the Funding of Public Schools, and Making an Appropriation Therefor](#), Colorado General Assembly, signed by the Governor April 28, 2006

³ Personal communications (e-mail and telephone) from Lori Goodwin Bowers, senior consultant, Colorado Preschool and Kindergarten Program, Colorado Department of Education, (303) 866-6783 or bowers_l@cde.state.co.us

⁴ 📄 [Press release](#), “Gov. Owens’ Veto Letter Regarding HB 1005,” March 30, 2006. <http://www.colorado.gov/governor/press/march06/hb1005.html>

⁵ Detailed information regarding the Denver Preschool Program proposal:
📄 www.preschoolmatters.org/