



## Colorado Department of Early Childhood

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The Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC), Colorado's newest state department, began operations in July 2022 to provide a range of programs and services that support young children, families, and the professionals that serve them. This *issue brief* provides an overview of the CDEC, including its creation, programs and services offered through the department, and budget for FY 2022-23.

### Legislative History

The CDEC was established through [House Bill 21-1304](#) to align state early childhood program delivery and funding streams to develop a more comprehensive childhood system in Colorado. The bill created a working group, comprised of diverse stakeholders and experts in the early childhood space, tasked with developing an implementation plan for the new [state department](#) and a [universal preschool program](#). The group submitted its final recommendations to the Early Childhood Leadership Commission, the Governor, and the Joint Budget Committee in January 2022.

[House Bill 22-1197](#) provided initial departmental funding for hiring leadership and establishing data systems, while [House Bill 22-1295](#) further established operating procedures, authorized rulemaking authority for the executive director, and transferred programs and functions to the new department.

### Rulemaking and Evaluation

Through HB 22-1295, the executive director of the CDEC is authorized to promulgate rules with the support of a 15-member rules advisory council. The council members provide rulemaking

recommendations and are director-appointed to represent the diversity of persons and regions of the state, including a county subcommittee to advise on county issues. The director must provide a written explanation for any decisions that do not follow the council's recommendations. This rulemaking authority repeals September 1, 2024, after a sunset review.

The CDEC is required to contract for an independent evaluation of the department's performance by November 2025. The evaluation includes reviewing the transition of programs from current agencies to the CDEC, whether other programs should be moved to the CDEC, and whether a policy board with rulemaking authority should be created. In addition to an evaluation, the CDEC must report annually on progress made, challenges encountered, and the impact of its programs.

### Programs and Services

Beginning July 1, 2022, the CDEC is responsible for administering the programs and duties that were previously in the Office of Early Childhood in the Department of Human Services, as well as early childhood workforce development programs formerly in the Colorado Department of Education. Beginning in FY 2023-24, the CDEC will administer the newly created Colorado Universal Preschool Program. These programs are summarized below, and a complete list of programs offered by the department can be found on the [CDEC website](#).

**Health and safety programs.** The CDEC administers programs that protect the physical and mental health and safety of children in their early childhood years. These include community-based child abuse prevention programs, substance use programs, early childhood mental health consultations, and nurse home visitation programs. These programs also include support for children with developmental needs.

**Child care oversight.** The CDEC oversees programs that provide resources, tools, and financial assistance for families to access quality child care. The programs include:

- licensing child care facilities in Colorado;
- the Colorado Shines Quality Rating and Improvement System;
- the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP), which provides child care subsidies for families experiencing financial hardship; and
- a variety of grant programs, including quality improvement, facility, and emergency relief grant programs.

**Local coordination.** The CDEC coordinates with and oversees local family resource centers and early childhood councils, which allow families to connect to services within their communities. In addition, HB 22-1295 required that the CDEC select a local coordinating organization in each region of the state to serve as the point of entry for families and providers to access preschool, workforce development, and other early childhood programs and services.

**Early childhood education.** The CDEC oversees early childhood education programs, such as the Head Start program and Early Childhood At-Risk Enhancement program, which prepare the state’s most vulnerable youth for success in school. The department also oversees early childhood evaluations and intervention services.

**Early childhood workforce.** The CDEC oversees the early childhood workforce through the management of the Professional Development

Information System (PDIS) and the credentialing of early childhood educators. The CDEC’s Early Childhood Workforce Development Team supports early childhood educators in their career development.

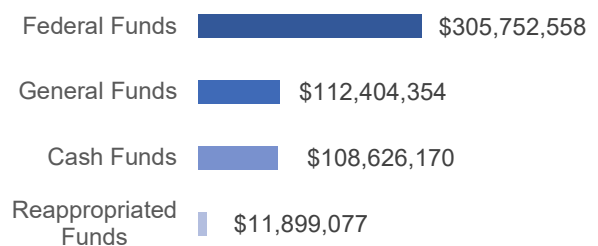
**Universal preschool program.** HB 22-1295 established CDEC oversight of the Colorado Universal Preschool Program, which was originally passed by voters in 2020 through Proposition EE. The program will provide at least ten hours of free preschool care per week for every Colorado child in the year before kindergarten. The bill also lays out provision of preschool for students with disabilities, the process for distributing funding to providers, and program evaluation and reporting. The program begins in Fall 2023 and will be accessed at the local level through the local coordinating organizations in each area of the state.

**Other services.** In addition to administering programs, the CDEC is required to work with local organizations and state and local agencies to collect and analyze data related to early childhood programing and workforce development. These efforts are aimed at expanding the state’s capacity to build a robust early childhood system and an educator workforce to support it.

## Department Funding

For FY 2022-23, the CDEC is appropriated \$538.7 million in total funding to establish the department and carry out its statutory responsibilities. The majority of funds will come from federal funding, as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**  
**FY 2022-23 Appropriated Operating Budget**



Source: [JBC Appropriations Report](#).