



Preschool Promise

Five Years of Serving Oregon's Youngest Learners

Preschool Promise progress report on statewide expansion and accountability improvements



Our Mission

The Department of Early Learning and Care (DELIC) fosters coordinated, culturally appropriate, and family-centered services that recognize and respect the needs of all children, families and early learning and care professionals.

Our Values

Respect | Trust | Equity | Relationships | Safety | Continuous Improvement | Integrity

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Letter from Director Chatterjee



Oregon reached a momentous milestone in preschool access marking five years of statewide Preschool Promise programming as of 2025. With the creation of this program, Oregon made a promise to our children, our families, and our futures. We set out to expand a preschool program rooted in equity, family voice, and the belief that every child – no matter their income, race, or zip code – deserves the opportunity to thrive. Today, that promise is becoming a reality.

Since expanding statewide in 2020, Preschool Promise has grown from a small pilot program in 17 counties to a program that reaches families in all 36 counties. In the 2024-2025 school year alone, **more than 5,000 children** learned, played, and grew in high-quality, inclusive classrooms supported by **nearly 220 providers across 330 sites statewide**. These settings reflect the cultures, languages, and lived experiences of the families they serve, thanks in large part to a provider network that includes many women- and minority-owned small businesses.

As we celebrate this growth, it's important to also recognize the work that still lies ahead. The transition of Preschool Promise from the Early Learning Division within the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) to the newly created Department of Early Learning and Care (DELIC) in 2023 presented both opportunities and challenges. During this transition period, we identified areas where our financial controls, monitoring systems, and accountability measures needed strengthening.

As a new agency, we have implemented significant improvements to ensure taxpayer dollars are used effectively. Above all, we are maintaining our commitment to serving Oregon children who are the least likely to have access to quality, affordable preschool options.

We know the impact: Children who attend high-quality preschool are better prepared for kindergarten, more likely to graduate, and more likely to thrive long term. Every dollar spent on quality early childhood education yields as much as **\$16 in return on investment that** benefits not just children, but entire communities. (See The Heckman Equation heckmanequation.org/)

Preschool Promise is more than access to early learning – it's about building trust with families, affirming community identity, and honoring parent choice. This requires the highest standards of stewardship.

This report details our progress over five years since expanding statewide. It also includes concrete steps we've taken to enhance accountability, transparency, and fiscal responsibility.

Thank you to every Preschool Promise provider, Early Learning Hub partner, advocate, state legislator, caregiver, and staff member who has made Preschool Promise a reality. Together we're building a stronger, more equitable early learning system for future generations.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alyssa Chatterjee', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Alyssa Chatterjee
Director, Oregon Department of Early Learning and Care

About Preschool Promise

Preschool Promise is a free, Oregon state-funded preschool program serving three- and four-year-old children from families earning up to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), or in the foster care system. Created by the Oregon Legislature in 2015, Preschool Promise began as a small, regional pilot and has since grown into a statewide initiative. Funded biennially by the Oregon Legislature, the number of available Preschool Promise slots depends on budget allocations. Today, the program serves all 36 counties, building equity and opportunity into the foundation of the state's early learning system.

The program provides families access to high-quality early learning services that reflect their culture, language, and values. Through a mixed delivery model, families can choose from home-based, center-based, school-based, or culturally specific settings. The program helps to strengthen the child care workforce by creating a stable revenue stream and a compensation structure that promotes recruitment and retention of experienced and qualified early learning educators.

Thanks to a provider network that includes many women- and minority-owned small businesses, these programs reflect the cultures, languages, and strengths of the

families they serve. They operate in one of the lowest-paying sectors of the economy, yet continue to deliver exceptional early learning experiences, highlighting both the deep expertise of the workforce and underscoring the importance of continued investment in a stable, equitable workforce.



Key Program Features

Preschool Promise is designed to provide children and families a stable, high-quality early learning experience rooted in relationships, responsive teaching, and whole-child development. The program's service levels mirrors Oregon's full-day kindergarten model and provides enriched learning environments staffed by qualified educators who receive ongoing professional development. Through research-based assessment practices, culturally responsive and inclusive instructional practices, and family partnership, Preschool Promise ensures that each child is supported, included, and prepared for future success.

Key program model features include:

Full-Day Learning: Children receive, minimally, 900 instructional hours per year across 265 days. The daily schedule must be no less than six hours per day at least four days a week, mirroring Oregon's full-day kindergarten structure.

Staff Qualifications & Adult to Child Ratio: Each classroom is staffed by an experienced and qualified teacher and teacher assistant. Ongoing professional development offered by the program includes coaching, technical assistance, and supports for degree obtainment. The ratio of adults to children exceeds minimum health and safety requirements.

Developmental Screenings & Assessments: All children receive Ages & Stages Questionnaires (ASQ and ASQ-SE) within the first 45 days of attendance to identify and support developmental needs early. And each child's developmental and learning growth are assessed at minimum three times per year.

Culturally Responsive, Inclusive, and Research-Informed Curriculum: Preschool Promise providers implement research-informed curriculum that reflects and honors each child's culture, language, and identity. While Preschool Promise does not require the use of a specific curriculum, providers must ensure that their chosen approach aligns with program standards and supports high-quality learning experiences. Learning environments are inclusive, creating emotional safety, preventing suspensions and expulsions, and ensuring that children experiencing disabilities are supported by intentional and individualized lesson planning.

Support for Dual Language Learners: Providers receive training and resources to nurture bilingual development and expand access to language-rich learning including support for emergent bilingual, multi-lingual and emergent language learners.

Family Engagement: Providers actively partner with families through orientations, regular conferences, and strong family-centered relationships. Families are also supported in the transition of their child to kindergarten.

Continuity of Care: Children can remain in the Preschool Promise program for up to two years, creating stability during a critical development stage prior to kindergarten entry.



Together, these features create a preschool experience that is stable, inclusive, and responsive to each child and family—promoting strong developmental outcomes and laying a solid foundation for future learning. As one of Oregon's early learning investments, Preschool Promise demonstrates what high-quality, community-centered preschool can achieve.

Access Based Funding Model

Preschool Promise is designed as an access-based funding model that recognizes operating costs for the program remain largely consistent, even during periods of low enrollment. Costs are tied to the programmatic and compliance requirements defined by the program. Preschool Promise programs must maintain a low child to adult

ratio and environments of high quality to promote learning outcomes. The space must meet all licensing (if not license exempt), and environmental & health standards regardless of enrollment levels. These expenses are incurred whether there are 0 or 18 children present in each classroom.

The cost modeling for Preschool Promise includes essential, non-discretionary expenditures such as:

- Salary guidelines for teachers and teacher assistants and other professional benefits such as paid leave and insurance
- Curriculum and associated materials, assessment tools, and screenings
- Equipment and supplies to create a high-quality learning environment
- Paid time for staff to do lesson planning, assessments, and service coordination
- Meals (at least one meal and snack daily; additional dependent on hours of programming)
- For some providers, transportation
- Professional development
- Family engagement activities and wraparound supports
- Administrative compliance (including insurance premiums that meet grant requirements)

Funding based on access ensures providers can maintain staff, facilities, and programming necessary to serve children as they enroll. Stable funding supports quality programming, staff retention, and long-term planning.

Oregon's Early Learning Landscape



Oregon's Mixed Delivery System: Programs and Services

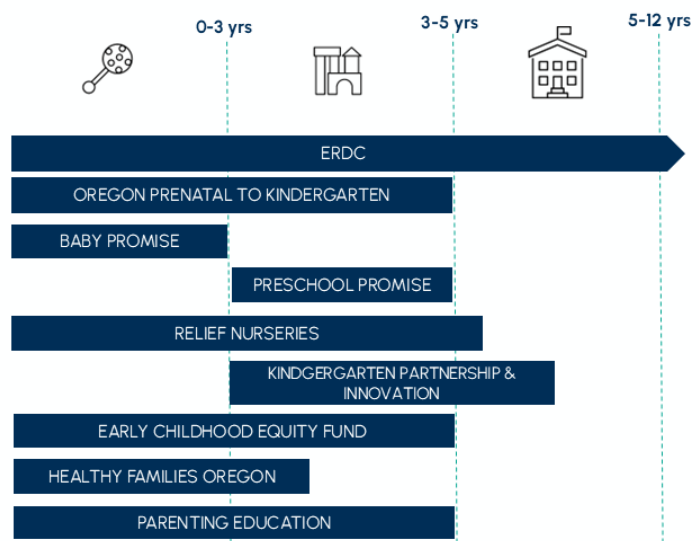
Our programs promote:

AFFORDABILITY

EARLY LITERACY

FAMILY SUPPORT

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT



DELC oversees a broad range of early learning and family support programs that work together to promote healthy development, early literacy, and access to high-quality care across Oregon. Each program plays a distinct and essential role in meeting the needs of children, families, and communities - offering multiple pathways to support learning, strengthen the early educator workforce, and honor family choice. Some

programs that are part of this system are funded through a mix of private, local, state, and federal sources. Providing high-quality, developmentally appropriate, safe, and reliable preschool staffed by a professionally compensated workforce requires significant investment. The true cost of operating a high-quality program is far beyond what most families can afford. Oregon's investment in programs like Preschool Promise and Oregon Prenatal to Kindergarten (OPK) helps bridge that gap, ensuring that families with the greatest needs have access to enriching early learning opportunities.

As part of this coordinated system, Preschool Promise operates alongside other DELC programs to contribute to a comprehensive and accessible early learning statewide system. Other programs that part of the early learning system include, but are not limited, to the following:

- **Employment Related Day Care (ERDC):** A subsidy program to help Oregon families afford child care. Many families use ERDC vouchers to extend Preschool Promise hours, covering wraparound care before or after the preschool day and on weekends.
- **Oregon Prenatal to Kindergarten and federal Head Start:** Comprehensive, high-quality family support and early education services for families who qualify based on income, housing instability or homelessness, foster care involvement, or other federally defined eligibility criteria. Services are available to expecting families, infants, toddlers and preschoolers.
- **Privately Funded Child Care:** Tuition-based early learning providers available to families of all incomes.
- **Multnomah County's Preschool for All:** A local taxpayer-funded preschool program that provides free preschool to three and four-year-olds in Multnomah County. The number of available seats will grow over the years until the program expands countywide.
- **Infant/Toddler & Family Support Programs:** This includes programs like Baby Promise, Relief Nurseries, and Healthy Families Oregon.
 - Baby Promise provides free, high-quality, full-day, year-round care for infants and toddlers from low-income families, available in child care centers and home-based settings.
 - Relief Nurseries provide therapeutic classroom settings for children of eligible families.
 - Healthy Families Oregon provides voluntary, evidence-based home visiting services that support positive parent–child relationships, promote healthy development, and strengthen family stability.

Oregon is unique in that one of its state-funded programs, OPK, follows a Head Start model. This model includes comprehensive services such as health supports, family engagement, mental health services, and other wraparound supports. While this model is more costly to operate, it provides holistic support for children and families and aligns with the Head Start Program Performance Standards. As a result of this innovative focus, national comparisons of state preschool programs do not always align neatly. Many states fund locally designed models that more closely resemble Oregon's Preschool Promise structure, and in many cases, other states fund services only for four-year-olds. Oregon stands out for investing in programs that serve both three- and four-year-olds, and for prioritizing families with the highest needs. Together, these programs form a coordinated early learning landscape that gives Oregon families multiple pathways to find the care and early learning that best meet their needs. Within this diverse system,

programs intersect and complement one another- extending hours of care, coordinating developmental supports, and ensuring families can access services from infancy through the transition to kindergarten. With this system-level context in place, the next section highlights how the Preschool Promise program has expanded access to high-quality early learning statewide and enrollment in Preschool Promise.

Program Impacts

Statewide Access and Enrollment

For Preschool Promise, the new Early Learning Account investments provided the opportunity for the program to serve families in every corner of Oregon—urban, rural, and everywhere in between. By focusing on inclusive access and community-rooted care, the program reaches families who have historically faced barriers to accessing early learning programming, including those in rural or remote areas, and from immigrant, refugee, Tribal, and linguistically diverse communities. Families are choosing Preschool Promise not just for care, but for connection to their communities.

[Oregon State University's 2024 Child Care Desert report](#) demonstrates the impact of these efforts. Child care deserts are defined as communities with three or more children for every available regulated child care slot. **Only nine counties remain a child care desert for preschool-age children thanks to the legislature's sustained investments in Oregon's early learning system.** Without publicly funded programs – defined as Preschool Promise, Oregon Prenatal to Kindergarten, Head Start, and Early Head Start – 28 of Oregon's 36 counties would be considered preschool deserts.

Within this landscape, Preschool Promise has been instrumental in expanding high-quality preschool access statewide. The creation of DELC has enhanced program flexibility by centering community insights in resource distribution. Through DELC's community-centered approach to redistributing program slots, Preschool Promise has achieved record enrollment numbers without requiring additional state investments, demonstrating how strategic program design can maximize existing resources.

Oregon's Preschool Child Care Deserts

What is a child care desert?

A child care desert is a community with 3 or more children for a single child care slot.

Without publicly funded slots, all except 3 counties would be child care deserts.



2018



2024

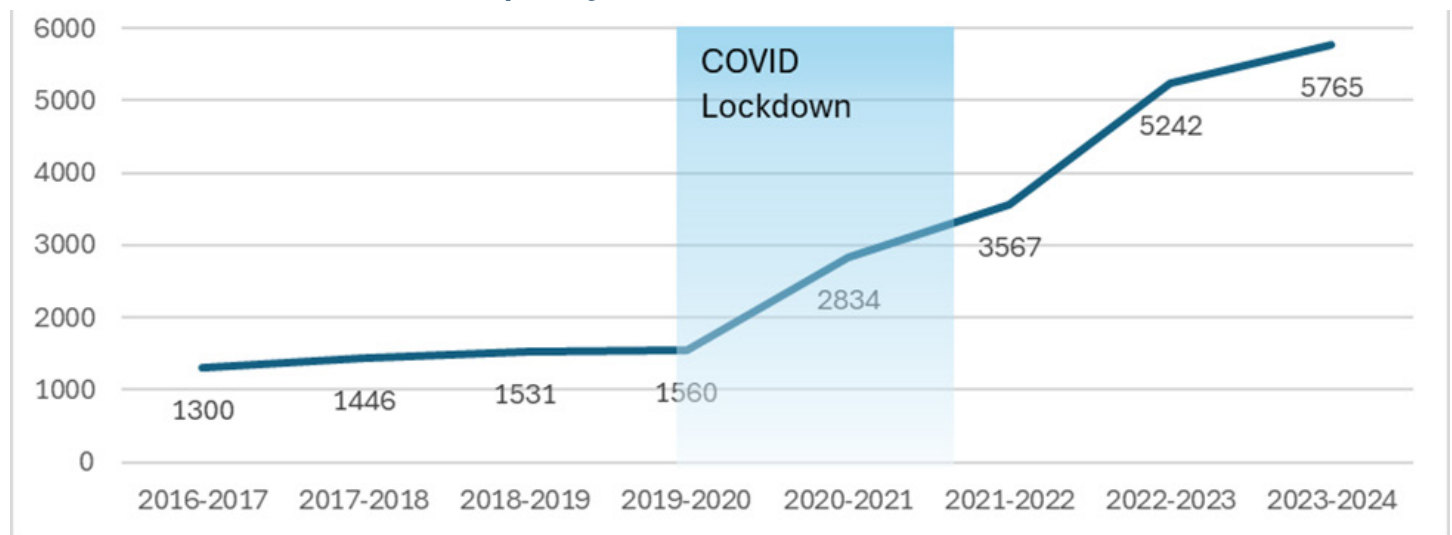


A new report commissioned by DELC was released by the Oregon State University Child Care Research Partnership titled "Oregon's Child Care Deserts 2024," which found a significant decrease in child care deserts for preschool-aged children, with just nine counties in that category in 2024 compared to 27 in 2018.

Source: 2024 OSU Child Care Desert Report

Preschool Promise enrollment has grown consistently since statewide expansion, despite challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic as shown in the chart below. Oregon has made significant strides in early childhood education access since 2020, driven by major legislative investments through the Student Success Act – Early Learning Account. These sustained investments, particularly during the 2021-23 biennium, enabled Oregon to outperform national trends in child care capacity recovery following the pandemic.

Cumulative Children Enrolled by Program Year, Preschool Promise 2016-2024



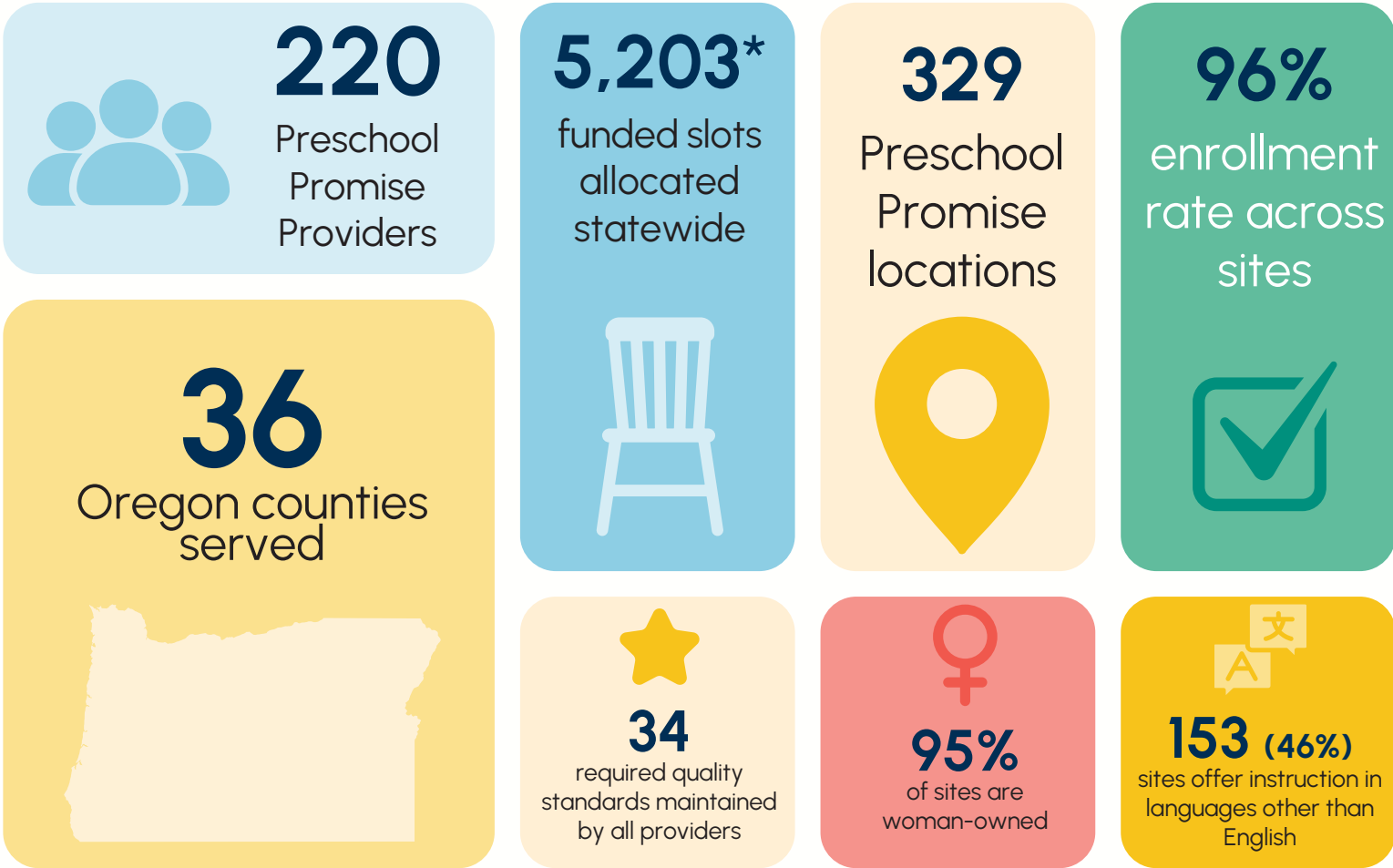
Note: Children enrolled is defined as all children who attended at least one day that year. Due to turnover, the number of children enrolled in a year may exceed the number of slots allocated that year

Source: Preschool Promise End of Year Reports

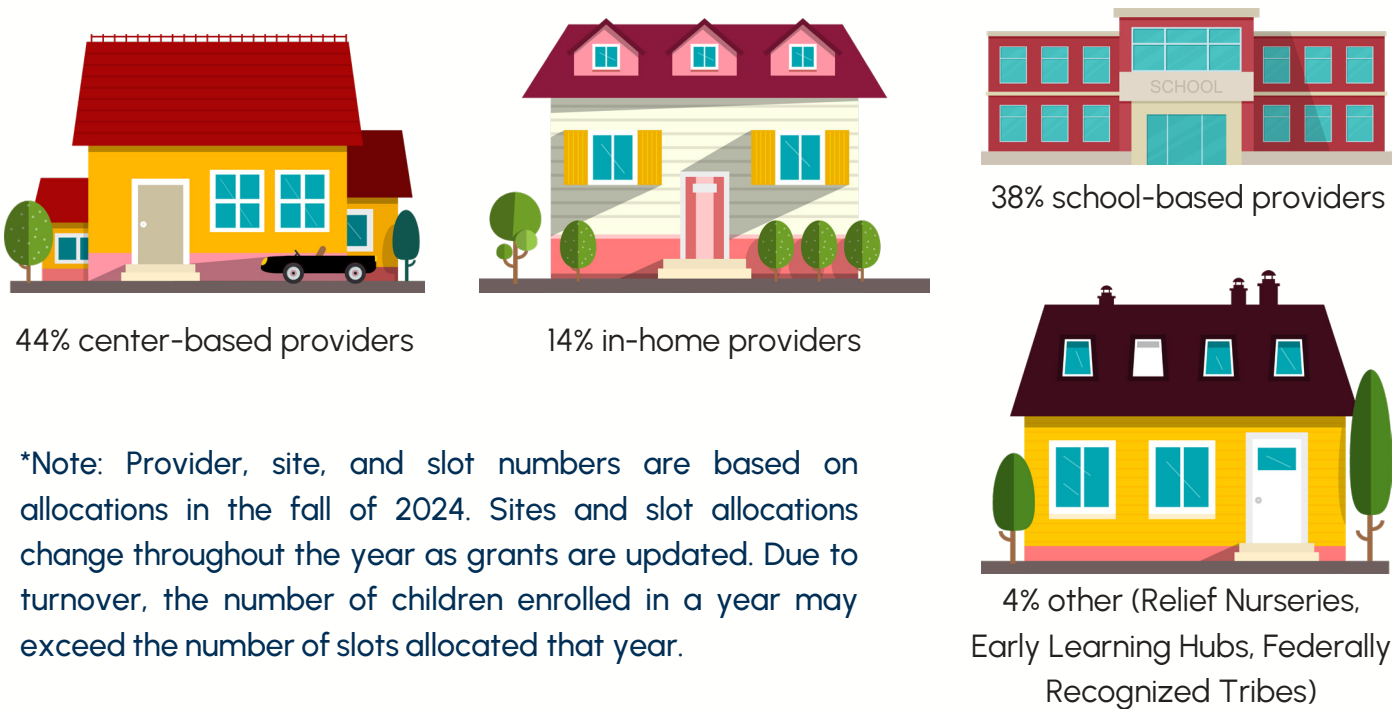
To deepen understanding of how Preschool Promise supports children, families, and providers beyond access and enrollment, DELC partnered with Pacific Research and Evaluation (PRE) to examine the program's effectiveness. PRE collected data directly from providers and caregivers, focusing on three areas: (1) economic impact and stability, (2) enhanced capacity for quality services, and (3) strengthened service delivery and reach. The following section summarizes key findings from [the study](#) alongside additional program data and impacts observed over the past five years.

2024 - 2025: A Standout Year

Highlights



Provider Distribution by Type



*Note: Provider, site, and slot numbers are based on allocations in the fall of 2024. Sites and slot allocations change throughout the year as grants are updated. Due to turnover, the number of children enrolled in a year may exceed the number of slots allocated that year.

Family Impact: Centering Children and Families

DELC remains committed to supporting the whole child through inclusive, culturally responsive early learning experiences. Central to this commitment is elevating family voice in decision-making and ensuring that programs are responsive to the diverse needs of Oregon's families. This includes:

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“His vocabulary has exploded and I'm just like, everything that happened was meant to be because we have this provider.”

- Preschool Promise Family

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- Preserving family choice through the mixed delivery model
- Ensuring access to nutritious meals and developmental screenings
- Preventing suspensions and expulsions through trauma-informed supports
- Expanding language access by supporting dual language providers

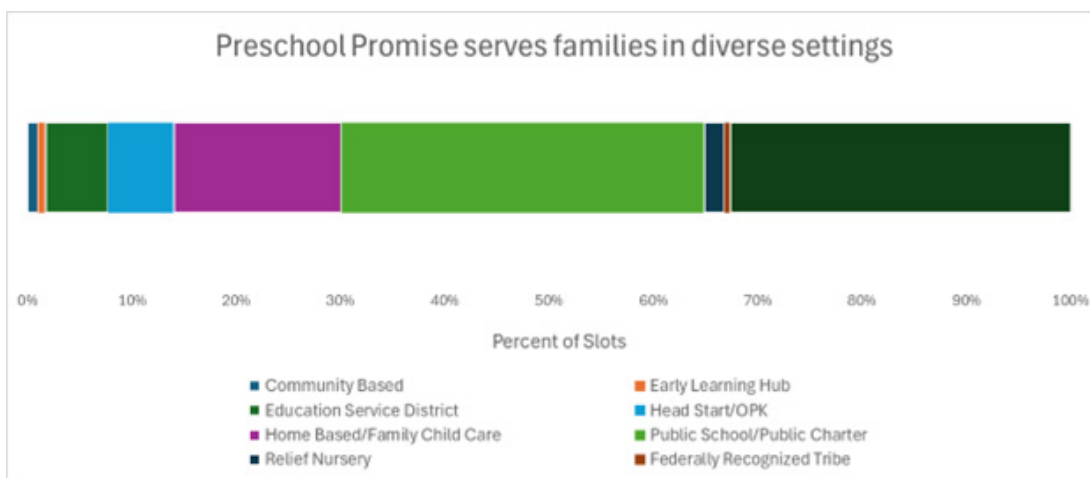
As Oregon continues to face rising costs and persistent disparities in access to early education, sustaining programs like Preschool Promise, paired with strong

accountability and continuous improvement, remains essential to ensuring that every child has the opportunity to thrive.

Choice of Settings

Preschool Promise is grounded in the belief that families should have the freedom to choose the early learning setting that best fits their needs, values, and circumstances. Eligible families across Oregon can select from a range of options, including neighborhood child care homes, culturally specific community-based programs, public school and charter classrooms, Head Start and Oregon Prenatal to Kindergarten sites, Relief Nurseries, and Tribally operated programs.

This mixed delivery approach recognizes that no single setting works for every family and allows Preschool Promise to meet families where they are, while also expanding access across urban, rural, and Tribal communities statewide. During the 2024–2025 school year, Preschool Promise supported thousands of preschool slots across these diverse provider types, reflecting both the scale of the program and its commitment to choice.



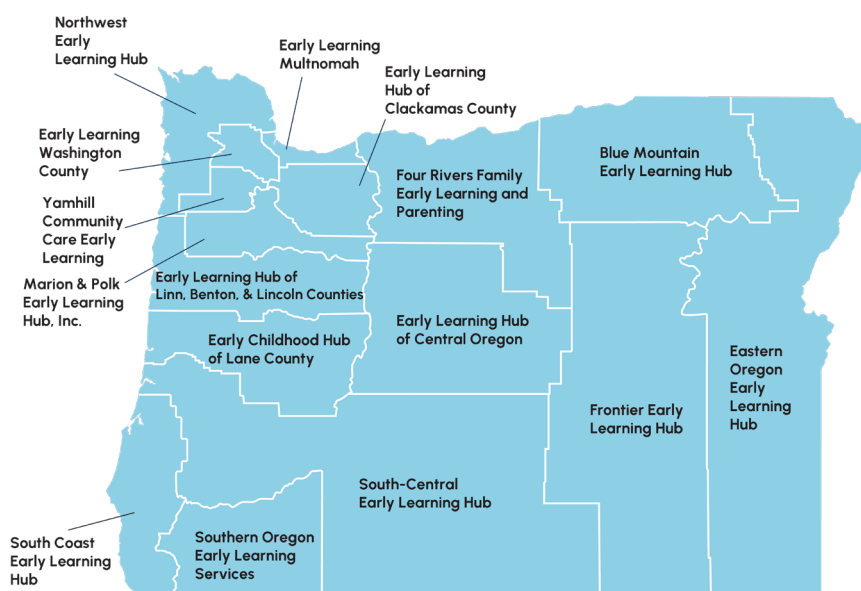
Preschool Promise Slots by Provider Type	2024-25 *all YTD
Community Based	50
Early Learning Hub	40
Education Service District	302
Head Start/OPK	321
Home Based/Family Child Care	817
Public School/Public Charter	1767
Relief Nursery	97
Federally Recognized Tribe	30
Certified Child Care Center	1659

Source: Oregon Department of Early Learning and Care

Coordinated Enrollment

Coordinated Enrollment is both a DELC grant and a statewide strategy, launched in 2020 alongside Preschool Promise expansion. In 2020, DELC began collaborating with Oregon's [16 regional Early Learning Hubs](#) to lead local efforts, supporting Preschool Promise enrollment, eligibility, and broader coordinated enrollment initiatives.

Previously, families had to navigate enrollment independently by contacting individual providers. Now, each Early Learning Hub has an enrollment specialist(s) that guides families through eligibility requirements and selecting the best site (or program) for their child. Early Learning Hubs also assess community needs to ensure families receive localized, streamlined and culturally responsive support. This also preserves local control and increases equitable access statewide. Hubs submit community needs/preference data to DELC which is then utilized by DELC to select Preschool Promise providers that align with community needs and preferences such as setting, location and language of instruction. This partnership allows DELC to deliver on the promise of a more connected, inclusive early learning system that meets families where they are and helps every child start strong.



Economic Impacts for Families

Findings from the recent study conducted by Pacific Research and Evaluation highlight the positive impact of Preschool Promise on families and caregivers.

PRE's evaluation included focus groups with families, who shared that Preschool Promise:

- Creates pathways to economic stability and career advancement by eliminating child care costs and providing reliable, quality care.

- Increases parents' ability to pursue day shift employment, additional training opportunities, and positions better aligned with their career aspirations.
- Reduces overall family financial stress and fosters environments which contribute to more stable homes for families

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“Taking that financial burden off us, allowed me to complete nursing school without having to worry about which bills to pay, if we need a loan, or what we need to give up in order to make it this month.”

- Caregiver of a preschooler

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Supporting Rural and Underserved Communities

PRE's research demonstrates that Preschool Promise's economic impact is especially notable in rural areas, where providers may represent the majority of early learning options available to families. By investing in all regions of the state, Preschool Promise strengthens local early learning infrastructure and ensures that families are not limited by geography in accessing high-quality care. This statewide investment supports consistent access to early childhood education in urban, rural, and Tribal communities alike, helping to close longstanding equity gaps, reduce barriers to academic achievement, and provide families with dependable early learning options that support both workforce participation and child development.

Parental Involvement

Preschool Promise has enhanced parental engagement in their children's learning through access to program resources and provider supports, according to the PRE report. Examples include:

- Family choice allows parents to select providers in settings that align their values and children's developmental needs with logistical needs, creating optimal matches between family circumstances and educational environments.
- The program demonstrates to parents their child's ability to succeed in structured educational settings.
- Supportive provider feedback reinforces parental confidence in their child's school readiness.

Preparing Children for Lifelong Success

Families in the PRE focus groups reported significant social, emotional, and academic benefits to participating in Preschool Promise:

- Developmental gains in their children across multiple domains, including enhanced social-emotional skills such as:
 - peer interaction,
 - emotional identification and regulation, and
 - communication abilities.
- Academic readiness improvements, including vocabulary development.
- Children demonstrate increased independence in daily living skills that positively impact home routines and family dynamics.

Provider Impact: Supporting the Child Care Workforce

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“Each day, we get to spend quality time with children—most of whom may not have had access to preschool prior to **Preschool Promise**. We see the benefits and hear that our students we teach are more prepared for kindergarten.”

– Stephanie Whetzel, Director of Early Learning Programs,
Salem-Keizer Public Schools

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Preschool Promise's Impact on Providers

The recent study by PRE also showed that:



Source: "[Preschool Promise Program: Impacts Achieved](#)" report for the Department of Early Learning and Care by Pacific Research and Evaluation

Behind every Preschool Promise classroom is a provider who plays a vital role in their community. Thanks to direct state grants, these providers — many of whom are minority-women-owned, or emerging small businesses (MWESBs)— can deliver high-quality care while growing their own sustainable businesses. This support has delivered high-quality preschool services and addressed long-standing child care deserts across Oregon.

DELC is committed to reducing barriers for small business owners interested in Preschool Promise. The agency provides technical assistance, communication, and training in both Spanish and English—based on the provider's preferred language. The entire application and selection process is available in both languages, too, making participation easy and inclusive. In fact, Preschool Promise was one of the first state programs to offer a Spanish-language grant application in 2020—marking a powerful step towards inclusive access to state resources for providers.

Provider Training & Technical Assistance

Preschool Promise providers don't go it alone. Across Oregon, [Child Care Resource & Referral](#) agencies deliver coaching, training, and technical assistance to strengthen program quality, accountability, and cultural responsiveness. These regional agencies equip providers with resources to navigate evolving standards and meet community needs.

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“These trainings have deepened my understanding of each child’s unique background and experiences. I have learned how to approach behavior through a trauma-informed lens and provide culturally responsive care. This has strengthened my relationships with families and helped build trust.”

– Preschool Promise Provider

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Preschool Promise Coaches offer individualized, relationship-based support—partnering with providers to enhance family engagement, implement trauma-informed and inclusive practices, and meet quality standards. For many providers, these coaching relationships are key to building confidence and long-term success.

Providers also receive guidance from Oregon's Child Care Licensing Division (CCLD) to ensure compliance with age-appropriate health and safety regulations (with the exception of school based programs which may not be required to be licensed). Together, CCR&Rs and CCLD form the backbone of Preschool Promise's quality support system, helping providers feel equipped, valued, and connected in nurturing Oregon's youngest learners.

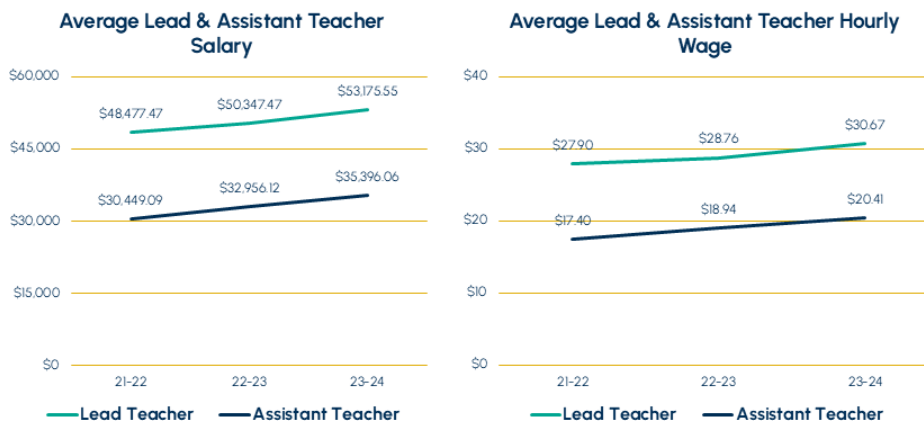
DELC complements these efforts with extensive onboarding, including one-on-one support, live and recorded webinars, written guides, and open office hours—available in Spanish with additional language support. DELC also partners with CCR&Rs to enhance training and is contracting with First Children's Finance to expand technical assistance and strengthen providers' fiscal reporting capabilities.

Supporting the Child Care Workforce

When Preschool Promise was originally [designed](#) in 2016 there were several goals for the program, including the professionalization and increased recognition for the early childhood workforce, as well as raising education and compensation levels.

Through sustained investments, DELC has been able to make continued progress towards these goals and intends to sustain competitive provider wages to strengthen recruitment and retention.

Preschool Promise Teacher Wage & Salary 2021-2024 (Statewide)



Note: Data sources include DELC Preschool Promise Quarter 1 Staff Report for program years 21-22, 22-23, 23-24. Salary calculated as annualized estimate of hourly wage and salary for 10-month full time position.

Between 2021-2024 the percentage of staff wages meeting minimum program requirements increased from 68% to 90%.

In 2022, the average range for teacher wages was \$16-\$23 (Oregon Child Care Research Partnership, 2024). For the past three program years, average PSP teacher wages met or exceeded this statewide range.

Economic Impact and Stability for Providers

The Preschool Promise program demonstrates notable economic impact for providers. Among those surveyed in the PRE report:

- **75% of providers** said they serve children who could not otherwise access high-quality care.
- **Nearly three-quarters of providers** said they would face closure or substantial service reductions without Preschool Promise funding.
- **70% of directors** said they can serve more children through additional staffing, enhanced materials, increased compensation, and broader services.
- **65% of directors and owners** reported that consistent Preschool Promise funding has strengthened their long-term business planning capabilities.

Enhanced Capacity for Quality Services

Preschool Promise funding has substantially enhanced providers' capacity to deliver quality early learning services. The provider survey showed that:

- 78% used funding for upgrading materials
- 59% added additional staffing
- 51% reported improved teacher-to-student ratios.

Strengthened Service Delivery and Reach

Preschool Promise funding has strengthened providers' service delivery capacity and expanded their reach to previously underserved populations. The provider survey showed that:

- **84% of all providers reached new populations** through the program
- **75% of providers reported improved service delivery** capabilities

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“With the support of PSP funding, our program has grown from serving just three children to now supporting 16 children of multiple ages. This growth has allowed us to expand our services to better meet the needs of whole families by offering a more inclusive, age-diverse environment that fosters peer learning and sibling connection.”

- Preschool Promise Family

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Sustaining Care in the Midst of a Global Pandemic

Prior to becoming a standalone state agency, key programs at DELC were with the Early Learning Division (ELD) within the Oregon Department of Education. When the pandemic hit in 2020, ELD was charged with sustaining and supporting early learning and child care programs as essential infrastructure. The ELD was responsible for effectively delivering critical funding to keep child care providers open, while simultaneously launching Preschool Promise statewide for the first time. Because of this, programs remained operational and thousands of families were able to maintain care for their children and were able to go to work.

During the 2020-2021 school year, enrollment in state-funded preschool dropped nationwide for the first time in 20 years, erasing a decade of progress in accessing high-quality early childhood education. Providers, already operating within a fragile business model, were pushed to the brink with increased health and safety requirements and even greater staffing challenges. Sharp declines in attendance and enrollment led to major income losses, while pandemic-related health and safety costs drove expenses up, forcing many programs to close or drastically reduce services. As a result, families—especially those most in need—faced reduced access to quality early learning opportunities at a time when they were most critical. Low-income and minority children were disproportionately affected.

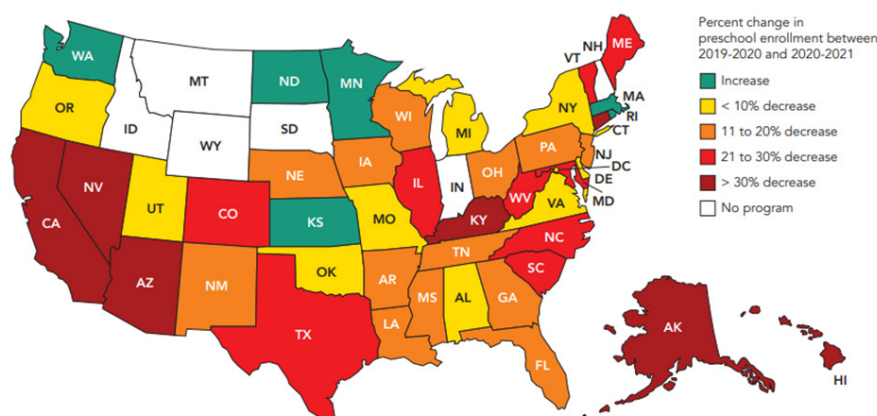
In response to these extraordinary challenges presented by the pandemic, ELD allowed for certain enrollment flexibilities to help programs stay open and adapt to local health conditions during the first year of statewide program operation. These included:

- Adjusted enrollment targets and attendance standards.
- Provided options between site based, virtual and hybrid models.
- Temporary waivers that allowed programs to adjust staff-to-child ratios and reduce group sizes in line with statewide and local health guidelines.

This map illustrates how the Early Learning Division's key decisions at the time helped sustain Oregon preschool enrollment well above the national average – **Oregon was one of 12 states in the country that had less than 10% decrease in enrollment** between 2019-2021 despite our state's implementation of public health measures that shut down many businesses across the state.

Pandemic and Recovery Years

FIGURE 1: PRESCHOOL ENROLLMENT DECLINED IN NEARLY EVERY STATE



Source: Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Garver, K. A., Hodges, K. S., Weisenfeld, G., & Gardiner, B. A. (2022). [The State of Preschool 2021: State Preschool Yearbook \(Full report\)](#). New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

These policy choices aligned with federal Office of Child Care goals to stabilize child care, and the goals of the Governor at the time. For the program year 2021-2022, ELD required in person services for Preschool Promise programs. This was a deviation from federal Office of Head Start but was a critical policy decision in response to the needs of families in Oregon. By the end of the program year (June 2022) Preschool Promise reached 75% enrollment. Coming out of the pandemic, ELD revised policies for the 2022-23 program year, establishing enrollment thresholds and low enrollment corrective action plans to strengthen enrollment oversight.



“ The difference that free preschool has made in my life, it’s actually been more impactful in more ways that I can count. But the most significant has been, having a really safe and educational, interactive place for my son to be while I work.

***– Aubrey Hall
Parent of a Preschool Promise
graduate***

Aubrey Hall and her son Lincoln CELEBRATE Preschool Promise graduation

Foundational Program Administration Practices

As Preschool Promise has rapidly expanded in the first 5 years since going statewide, DELC has focused on building foundational practices that ensure accountability, quality, equity, and family choice. DELC has simplified procurement processes to reduce administrative burden and maintain consistent services. Preserving and improving the existing network of grantees has been a priority, supported by targeted Requests for Applications (RFAs). These RFAs help identify providers who are ready to serve families, allowing slots to be allocated more quickly based on community input and regional priorities.

As a new agency, moving to two-year grant cycles and creating more responsive support structures gives providers greater flexibility to meet family needs while delivering consistent, high-quality care. These changes are laying the foundation for a more accessible and equitable early learning system across Oregon.

Fiscal Oversight

DELC ensures strong fiscal accountability while supporting grantee success through a dual approach of monitoring and training. DELC Grants Management Office staff review all submitted expenses to ensure they are allowable, that spending matches past patterns, and that each grantee draw report aligns with the associated claim in DELC's new Awards Management System (AMS) before posting to the Statewide Financial Management Application (SFMA). This monitoring considers different operating structures across the mixed-delivery model—for example, school districts often report minimal expenses for rent or utilities because these costs are covered by the district, while those same expenses can be a significant portion of monthly costs for small private or in-home Preschool Promise providers.

To encourage small businesses to do business with the State of Oregon, DELC provides grantees with comprehensive onboarding and ongoing support, including one-on-one assistance, live and recorded webinars, written guides, and open office hours—

available in Spanish and select additional languages. Enhanced training is being developed in partnership with regional Child Care Resource & Referral agencies and First Children's Finance to strengthen fiscal reporting and business practices. Real-time monitoring and technical assistance remain integral—any issues identified during payment review trigger immediate coaching, helping grantees correct errors and improve long-term compliance.

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“It has allowed us to hire more staff who have quality professional training and experience.”

- Preschool Promise Provider

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Building Trust Through Data

Building trust through data is a core component of DELC's commitment to transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement. In addition to the Pacific Research and Evaluation (PRE) evaluation- which provides independent, evidence-based insight into Preschool Promise's impacts for families, providers, and communities- DELC continues to expand public access to program data. In 2024, the agency launched the first Preschool Promise data dashboard, offering transparent, monthly enrollment information for providers across all 36 of Oregon's counties. The online dashboard also shares insights into the types of early learning settings available, reinforcing Oregon's mixed-delivery model that centers family choice, and allows interested parties to compare trends over time.

Strengthening Program Administration

Today, DELC is guided by a strategic plan, [Growing Oregon Together](#), aligned with [Raise Up Oregon](#), the state's early childhood system plan developed by the Governor's Early Learning Council. Growing Oregon Together provides a framework to build strong practices and protocols focused on oversight, accountability, and program operations. Guided by this framework, Preschool Promise will build on the foundational infrastructure to strengthen program policies, accountability and transparency.

Program Policies & Monitoring

Providing support and technical assistance to Preschool Promise providers is a key component of program administration and DELC is advancing oversight of Preschool Promise through both policy improvements and expanded monitoring capacity. To support this work, the agency reorganized to add one staff person with a focus on compliance and monitoring and a second position was recently funded by the legislature in the 2025 legislative session. While these additions strengthen capacity, statewide monitoring remains resource-limited, so DELC is exploring creative approaches such as leveraging existing child care licensing visits for supplemental oversight. Any monitoring added through licensing will be limited in scope and require dedicated investment.

An enhanced program monitoring protocol is being developed, with new elements including an updated low enrollment policy, and will be implemented in the 2025-2026 program year. These improvements build on progress already made, including the continuation grant policy and procedure completed in February 2025. That policy introduced stricter standards for under-enrollment, documented guidelines and decision-making rubrics for addressing under-enrollment and compliance history, ensured consistent application of these guidelines across committees and management, and maintained clear communication with grantees.

These efforts reflect DELC's commitment to strengthening accountability and transparency while ensuring Preschool Promise programs remain responsive to community needs.

Coordinated Enrollment Redesign

Oregon's regional Early Learning Hubs implement Coordinated Enrollment across the state, serving as local Preschool Promise connectors by leading recruitment, eligibility determination, and placement, in addition to coordinating enrollment efforts with other publicly funded early learning programs and systems partners in the region. This supports family awareness of program options for their children, empowers families to make informed decisions, and supports a thriving, diverse array of programs.

In October 2025, DELC launched the Coordinated Enrollment (CE) Redesign project, a two-phase effort to enhance the capacity of CE to streamline access for families to information and pathways to enrollment into public early learning programs. The project builds on the recommendations of the CE Work Group which includes Early Learning Hub and Head Start program representatives along with DELC staff. DELC continues to facilitate this work group to inform the redesign.

The initial phase of the CE redesign includes strengthening oversight of the Hubs' role in PSP enrollment and clarifying cross-team roles and processes at DELC. This is in addition to implementation of an initial selection of CE Work Group recommendations with a focus on improving coordination of enrollment across the Preschool Promise, Head Start, and Oregon Prenatal to Kindergarten programs. This work will be implemented by April 2026, while phase two implementation will go into the next biennium, guided by a CE Redesign Roadmap that will be developed by Jan 2027.

DELC recieved the 2026 Preschool Development Grant and activities associated with this grant will also contribute to the coordinated enrollment redesign through the development of a cross-program eligibility screening tool and early learning and care resource page for families.

Grants Management

The Grants Management Office, responsible for the fiscal oversight of grants, is creating an operational risk assessment tool for all DELC agreements that evaluates grantee reporting timelines and rule compliance. This will help identify financial, operational, and compliance risks using data from the Awards Management System, Child Care Licensing, Program Monitoring, Procurement, and other sources.



"We offer more resources and services to diverse families, we use quality materials and curriculum fidelity, as well as improve benefits for teaching staff." - Preschool Promise Provider



Program Changes: Meeting the needs of families and providers

In the coming years, DELC will strengthen program administration and responsiveness by building on lessons from the past five years, continue to implement strategies for improvement that are in [Growing Oregon Together](#).

As we look to other publicly funded preschool programs, we see where Preschool Promise can be strengthened to support the early education workforce and continue to support families, including:

- Expanding workforce development pathways, paired with increased compensation and sustained professional supports, will help stabilize the early educator workforce and increase program capacity statewide.
- Strengthening inclusion supports, both in classrooms and through coordinated partnerships, will improve access and participation for children with disabilities and those needing individualized services.
- Adjusting funding approaches, particularly in rural communities where classroom-based models may better reflect local realities than per-slot funding, can improve stability for providers and ensure families have reliable access to care.
- Continued improvements to data systems, coordinated enrollment, and culturally and linguistically responsive outreach will further reduce administrative burden and support equitable access.

Together, these strategies position Preschool Promise to evolve alongside Oregon's diverse communities and better meet the needs of children, families, and providers in the years ahead.



Conclusion

Investing in early learning is one of the most effective ways Oregon can support families, strengthen communities, and build a more equitable future. Research such as the previously cited Heckman studies show that high-quality preschool yields long-term benefits for children's education, health, and economic outcomes. Preschool Promise is one of several programs that reflect Oregon's commitment to this goal.

Preschool Promise has demonstrated significant impact in expanding access to quality early learning across Oregon while learning important lessons about accountability and oversight. The challenges identified during the transition to DELC have been met with comprehensive reforms that strengthen financial controls, enhance monitoring capabilities, and improve transparency while maintaining the program's commitment to equity and family choice.

With legislative support for future enhancements in monitoring, robust data systems, and provider support, Preschool Promise is positioned to continue serving Oregon's youngest learners with both effectiveness and accountability. The existing program foundation, combined with strengthened oversight measures, ensures the program will continue delivering on its promise to children, families, and communities across Oregon.

As Oregon continues to build an early learning system that works for all families, sustained investment will be key to ensuring that programs like Preschool Promise remain strong, stable, high-quality, and widely available.



Hortensia and Javier with their child Daniel share a warm embrace at a Preschool Promise graduation.

Appendix A: Timeline of Key Milestones



Appendix B: Provider and Family Testimonials

From the Pacific Research and Evaluation grantee survey and caregiver focus groups:

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“Without PSP funding, our program, which serves a high-low income area, would face even more significant challenges. In this community, many families are unable to afford private preschool, and a large number do not receive Employment Related Day Care (ERDC) assistance. As a result, our program is often the only accessible and affordable option for early childhood education.”

- Preschool Promise Provider

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“From the very first year, my boy was always talking about his teachers...They are so caring, so kind.”

- Preschool Promise Family

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“PSP funding has positively impacted my program’s economic sustainability because this grant allows me to cover operational, administrative, and salary expenses.”

- Preschool Promise Provider

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“They started becoming more social, making more friends.”

- Preschool Promise Family

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“We have been able to improve the outdoor area with more mobile equipment for children and more materials they can use for fine and gross motor development. We have also been able to have more materials to rotate in indoor areas with more variety of educational materials and teaching more aligned with our curriculum.”

- Preschool Promise Provider

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Preschool Promise

Oregon Department of
Early Learning and Care

