

Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County (ECPAC)
Remarks by Jared Polis
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Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank the Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County (ECPAC) for having me speak today. Your unique partnership reflects comprehensive county participation – from early childhood, social services and health agencies to school districts, cities, and judicial district officials. In particular, I want to thank the following people:

- Elizabeth Groginsky, Chair of ECPAC and Adams County Head Start Administrator
- Conference chairs – Adams County Commissioner Alice Nichol and District Attorney Don Quick
- The other elected officials and other public officials who are here today, many of whom I have worked with over the years, and who I know to genuinely care about improving the lives of young children.

We have here today:

- Local school board members from Mapleton, Brighton, and Adams 12;
- Superintendents Charlotte Ciancio (Mapleton), John Lange (Adams 14), Roberta Selleck (Westminster 50), and Mike Paskewicz (Adams 12);
- Adams County Sheriff Doug Darr and Coroner James Hibbard;
- Judge Kathy Delgado and Magistrate Melanie Gilbert
- Evie Hudak, my colleague from the State Board of Education;
- City council members from Thornton, Westminster, and Commerce City;
- State legislators – Senators Suzanne Williams and Lois Tochtrop and Representatives Judy Solano and John Soper.
- The Adams County Education Consortium, represented by Director Sandy Steiner, which does good work in promoting business and education connections here in Adams County

Introduction

As I wind down my six-year term on the State Board of Education here in the next couple of months, I am struck by the importance of early education to so many of the goals for young children that we in the K-12 field strive for. As a businessman, this issue is critical for the current and future workforce. For today's working parents, it is essential that their children receive safe and nurturing early education that will provide peace of mind when they must work full or even part-time. For our future workforce, children in good quality preschool programs will be more strongly equipped to succeed in school and in the increasingly competitive economy.

Research in Brief

The research is clear, but public policy has not caught up with the research. As you heard from Nobel Prize winner James Heckman in this very room last year and know from many other research studies throughout the country, scientific findings reveal major benefits to children participating in good preschool both in the short-term and throughout their lives. These benefits come with large savings to all of us in terms of reduced government costs in a wide range of areas. Outcomes include significant positive results in:

- Education
- Economic
- Crime prevention

Policy Movement

As cities such as Denver, counties such as Eagle and Summit, and the state legislature all consider policies to expand early care and education, we are hearing elected leaders – Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper, Eagle County Commissioner Arn Menconi, Representative Judy Solano and others - cite this research with increasing regularity in an intensive effort to gain increased funding for these programs. Adams County

leaders, as we hear today, are part of this growing recognition that early education is central to our society's success.

Early Education Connects to Many Policy Areas

Because of our economic needs of two-parent working families and the realities of single parents who must work, most children spend most of the day in child care and early education (two-thirds to three-quarters of pre-Kindergarten age in the metro area). This situation has led our policymakers, state and local agency staff, and advocates to understand that early education has critical relevance and linkages to other significant policy areas – health, mental health, and family support, including parent education and family literacy. Preschool and early care and learning programs become an ideal place for young children and their families to gain these crucial comprehensive services.

I have found this also to be true for the K-12 system, and that is why it's so important to bring comprehensive services to where most children are, whether it's family literacy, parent involvement, counseling, good nutrition, after-school programs, or health and mental health services.

Outline of Presentation

After I detail some of the important research outcomes of good early care and education, I'll discuss several policy implications at the local (school district, city, county), state, and federal levels, as well as a potential private sector idea that I mentioned here last year.

State Board of Education and Local Boards Support Good Preschool

At the SBE level, my colleagues from both parties emphasize the importance of early learning such as preschool to the most critical components of education: literacy, language, parent involvement, parent education, critical thinking, communication, and access to comprehensive health and nutrition services. For the third consecutive year, the State Board of Education is including increased state funding for quality preschool for at-risk children. The Colorado Preschool and Kindergarten Program (CPKP) is a program directly under our jurisdiction being run out of CDE.

Good early education programs in Colorado don't end with the CPKP, however. At the local school board levels, many of you here today exemplify the increased school district emphasis on good early education. Statewide, the Colorado Association of School Boards (CASB) has formed an early childhood task force this year (several members are here this morning – Marge Rinaldi of Westminster, Laurie Beckel of Clear Creek, and Scott Groginsky of Gilpin). This group is proposing that CASB take some clear early education positions through some progressive legislative resolutions. The Colorado Association of School Executives (CASE) held a special statewide meeting on preschool earlier this year for its elementary school principals and drew participation from Speaker of the House Andrew Romanoff.

The K-12 field in general has increased its attention on good preschool programs. Because of its enormous and long-term impact on high-school success, quality early education was a major recommendation of the recent Colorado Commission on High School Improvement, which I co-chaired; it is documented as a proven strategy to prevent achievement gaps among poor and minority students; and increased funding for preschool and full-day Kindergarten were recommended by the state's School Finance Task Force last year.

Quality is Key for Return on Investment

When we talk about quality preschool, that notion is integral to a successful system, and not just words. Particularly in at-risk environments like in Adams County, there is huge importance to quality because research has found that low-quality programs can actually hinder healthy child development and good future results, but high-quality programs support good future results. As a business analogy – if I know that a certain business activity produces a good return on investment, I invest in that activity or product, not a cheap, scaled down version of it because it won't give us that return. The same is true for early childhood education.

Because quality services cost more, we need to shift the political will to ensure that decision-makers at the

local, state, and federal levels understand that we must pay for quality because all of the outcomes are based on quality, good and bad. So we must ensure that policymakers know clearly what quality means:

- Teachers and providers with adequate training, education and experience;
- Teachers with good pay and benefits;
- Teacher-child interaction;
- A healthy and safe environment with low adult-child ratios;
- Compliance with licensing standards; and
- Comprehensive services – meaning access to health, nutrition, mental health, other social services, and parent education and involvement to children and families enrolled in preschool and child care.

Good quality is critical for all types of early education programs and for a range of services that meet children and families' needs, including child care centers, family child care homes, preschool programs, Head Start, and parent education programs

This state is fortunate to have a rating system run by the nonprofit entity, Qualistar, which visits programs and rates programs on the abovementioned quality components using a zero to four star system, so parents, staff, and the public know what the level of quality is, and necessary improvements can be made for the benefits of children.

The time is now to move forward on expanding good early care and education because it is a bipartisan issue and increasingly state and local leaders are talking about and advocating for early care and education.

Research Details

The research slides that I'll be showing you come from Denver Public School Board Member Bruce Hoyt, who has been one of the leading advocates in this state and is another member of the CASB early childhood task force. Bruce was gracious in permitting me to share some of his slides with you.

General

Those of you who were here last year heard some of this same research from Dr. Heckman, so I'll briefly go through the key findings, which are quite convincing about the importance of good early education. In an era where all policies are judged on their fiscal implications, it is necessary to consider the massive long-term savings realized from these programs.

Research is clear that disadvantaged children who enter Kindergarten without quality early care or education have:

- Lower IQs,
- Difficulties with numbers and letters
- Worse behavioral problems
- Less parental involvement in schools

Scientific brain research has shown that children's brain development occurs more quickly for children under age 5 than during any other time.

A number of national studies have found that Closing the Achievement Gap is a process that is aided by starting early in a child's life, and that good preschool is a key strategy in that process.

Education

Several key studies on early education are longitudinal, tracking students' progress over time. I will highlight the basic findings from the Perry Preschool Study; the Abecedarian Study; and the Barnett study out of Rutgers. Most of the children studied come from low-income families. The key findings - as you'll see from the next several slides - include:

- Improved academic achievement - as measured by:
 - o better test scores
 - o lower special education rates (82% of preschool participants didn't require SPED compared to about 62% of non-participants who did)
 - o higher on-time graduation rates (63% vs. 42%)
 - o lower retention rates (70% vs. 45% not retained a grade)
 - o higher college attendance rates (38% vs. 15% attend 4-year college)

These and other similar studies have documented shorter term effects of good early care and education on:

- Higher IQ's
- Easier transition to Kindergarten and elementary school
- Better language skills

Economic

Clearly good educational outcomes lead to good economic outcomes, and we'll see that from the following couple slides. Because of these persuasive outcomes, we see economic experts such as James Heckman, and Doug Price – the CEO of Qualistar, who came from the banking industry - focusing on early education.

At age 27, the Perry study found:

- Higher earnings – nearly 30% of preschool participants earn \$2000 or more per month compared to 8% without preschool
- Home ownership – (35% vs. 12%)
- Welfare dependency – (42% vs. 20%)

These results were confirmed again when the participants turned age 40.

The Federal Reserve conducted a study on the economic, education, and social benefits as well, and concluded that an investment in quality early care and education results in major economic returns for society. The Fed study specifically asked, "What is the return on capital of an investment in human capital?" I will talk a bit more about this in a few minutes.

Crime Prevention

It's insightful to notice the increased interest in the early education issue among law enforcement officials (DA's, police), again represented here today locally by DA Quick, Sheriff Darr, and other judicial officials. A national organization known as "Fight Crime Invest In Kids" (comprised of DA's and sheriffs around the country) has been focusing on early education for most of the past decade.

The slide from the Perry study again shows the substantial difference between the number of arrests of preschool participants and non-participants. Resulting incarceration rates are a huge component of the cost savings that we'll discuss next.

Cost Savings

The improved education, economic and crime prevention outcomes caused by quality preschool results in significant cost benefits and savings to our society. As you can see, the next slide specifies where the savings come from, with the largest portion coming from crime costs. From a public education perspective, lowering special education placements and grade retention are huge savings to our education budgets.

When the Perry preschool participants reached age 27, the

- Total Benefit-Cost Ratio was \$8.74 to every \$1 invested;
- The Estimated Total Annual Rate of Return was 16%; and
- The Public Rate of Return was 12%

As you see from the next couple slides - by the time these participants reached age 40, these numbers remained steady.

Policy Implications

These findings are about as clear as any research gets in terms of pointing to solutions for public policymakers from all levels and sectors.

Local

Adams County

Because Colorado is a local control state and it's where the work of educating children actually happens, I will start with the local policy implications.

Here in Adams County, you've heard how school districts are partnering with local Head Start programs and child care programs to maximize access and quality through innovative partnerships that have led to an increased number of hours for services. These efforts demonstrate open, creative, mutual collaboration in this county. Again, such expansions are supports for both the workforce of today and of tomorrow.

Adams County Early Childhood Partnerships with Head Start

Policy and program leaders in Adams County are working across school district, county and municipality lines to create a funding solution. One of the best ways to do this, as evidenced in this county, is to coordinate with Head Start because this program, funded with federal dollars for children living in poverty or with disabilities, has the infrastructure to provide comprehensive services. Federal standards require Head Start to provide parent involvement, and access to health, nutrition and mental health services. This structure makes Head Start programs an ideal system with which to connect other early childhood services.

Specific Adams County Partnerships and Expansions

Head Start partners with Adams 14, Westminster, and Brighton school districts to provide full-day Head Start by districts providing Head Start with CPKP funding to provide full-day and comprehensive early education services for at-risk children (including health, mental health, nutrition, dental health). Adams 14 and Westminster also give CPKP funds to community sites – child care providers – to support similar, full-day child care and before and after-school services.

In Mapleton's case, Head Start gives the school district Head Start money to provide full-day services. This is done this way because of specific facility needs. In Mapleton, the school district can provide the facilities, which is the opposite in other districts, where the districts use the Head Start facilities.

The agreements with school boards and superintendents are similar to business partnerships that I have formed with untraditional partners. In my K-12 experiences, such collaborations are reminiscent of some of the unique ways that some school districts, including Adams 14 and the Aurora Public Schools, have worked to create the New America charter schools that I founded for older children of immigrants.

Eat Smart Be Smart

Another innovative and intergenerational program that I plan on visiting soon here in Adams County is "Eat Smart Be Smart." This program, which operates in Adams 14 and Adams 12 schools, incorporates an essential element for healthy development for all children and adults – good nutrition.

Some of you know that I have been involved in supporting state policies at the legislature and elsewhere that ensure that students in public schools have access to healthy food and drink choices. Policy pressure in Colorado, other states, and federally, as well as threatened litigation in this area, has helped move the snack and beverage industry to begin to remove most junk food from the schools. And the federal child nutrition

law now requires all school districts to adopt policies on healthy food, nutrition education, and physical activity.

Here in Colorado and specifically Adams County, Eat Smart Be Smart is educating low-income families with very young children about good nutrition, how to shop for healthy food economically, and how to talk to their children about it. Through this effort, parents are increasing their literacy skills, reading and interacting more to their children, and learning good consumer skills.

Local Ballot Initiatives

As I alluded to earlier, voters in Denver and Eagle counties this year face ballot initiatives to expand early childhood services, and last year Summit County voters passed an initiative to improve the quantity and quality of early education.

Denver's Preschool Matters (Ballot #1A), supported by Mayor Hickenlooper, would raise the Denver sales and use tax by .12% for the next decade – raising about \$12 million per year – to increase access to 4-year old preschool. The program is voluntary and some of the funding would go to quality.

The funds would provide a credit to families for preschool tuition and support outreach for enrollment so any family who wants their child in preschool would be able to do so. The initiative would also provide resources for accountability (monitoring, measurement) and administration.

In Eagle County, the proposal is broader, allowing funds to be used for quality early care and education, parent resource and visitation services, health care programs, social-emotional services, and special needs services for young children. It would raise the local property tax by up to 1 and ½ mills through 2022, which would cost the average taxpayer about \$50 per year.

State

At the state level, the legislature, governor, Lt. Governor, and SBE all have important roles in leading and administering supports for early education.

The legislature has funded the CPKP for about 20 years, and makes decisions about increasing slots. State lawmakers also created the consolidated child care pilots/councils in 17 counties, and are examining a possible expansion – Governor Owens vetoed this expansion last year (HB 1397 – Rep. Solano/Sen. Shaffer). This year, another expansion of the councils may be proposed, and Adams County seems as poised as any county in this state to take this on thanks in large part to ECPAC. It is important that the quality early education focus of this law not be reduced in importance, because this is the central piece that attracts policymakers who care about education achievement.

Other Possible State Solutions

Other Possible State Solutions include:

- Change the PPOR for CPKP from .5 PPOR to .75 PPOR to support CPKP quality components and quality ratings.
- Allowing more full-day Kindergarten slots in the CPKP expansions (there is currently a cap on full-day Kindergarten of 15% of new slots)
- Modify the group size for CPKP from 15 to 16, which still would meet the 1:8 teacher: child ratio and relieve financial burdens on providers.
- Establish a P-16 council (Sen. Tupa bill that was vetoed by Gov. Owens last year)
- Examine the proposed early childhood commission and governance bill proposed
- Maybe need for statewide ballot initiative, importance of connecting with a wide range of policymakers from all levels.

Our current governor unfortunately has not had a large focus on early education, and I expect that our next governor will do so, whoever is elected. Our Lt. Governor, Jane Norton, has administered the State Head Start Collaboration Office, helping to guide the coordination of Head Start with state programs.

At the State Board of Education, we will continue to advise lawmakers about the needs for preschool and full-day Kindergarten, and I'd like to acknowledge Evie Hudak for her leadership on our board in this area.

Federal

- Head Start bill –Regrettably President Bush has proposed a Head Start budget that regrettably includes flat funding a year after Congress cut the program by 1%. All former presidents from both parties had been increasing funds to this successful preschool program for poor children.
- Related is the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) legislation, which funds Colorado's early childhood pilots, school readiness ratings, and some after-school programs. Again the President proposes no new funding for it
- Welfare reform – through the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) – President Bush again proposes more work requirements for recipients without accompanying increases in child care funding.