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A Critical Policy Analysis of Universal Preschool in Colorado: Its Roots, Intentions, and Development

Abstract

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This study analyzes documents and audio sources to provide insight into Colorado's political and historical context. It highlights the intentions behind the transition and the challenges it aims to address. While the universal preschool policy seeks to create a more equitable early education system, funding priorities may perpetuate inequities for historically marginalized populations and their families.

This research offers guidance for jurisdictions transitioning from targeted to universal preschool programs, with specific recommendations for Colorado. Suggestions include a phased approach, comprehensive targeted universal strategies, adequate funding based on individual needs, and collaborative data evaluation. Future studies should focus on implementing the universal preschool program in Colorado and conducting policy analyses of similar initiatives in other jurisdictions.

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A critical policy analysis of universal preschool in Colorado: Its roots, intentions, and
development

A Dissertation in Practice

Presented to
the Faculty of the Morgridge College of Education
University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Jamita Horton

June 2024

Advisor: Dr. Lolita Tabron

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Chapter I

Introduction

Preschool is the first formal schooling experience for many 4-year-old children. High-quality preschool experiences are essential as they are often their first opportunity to learn foundational reading, mathematics, and social-emotional skills to prepare for a smooth transition to kindergarten. High-quality preschool is defined beyond the curriculum. It includes program standards, class size, teacher and assistant teacher qualifications, number of staff in the classroom, ongoing staff support (such as professional development and coaching), student-staff ratio, access to health screenings and referrals, curriculum supports, and systems in place for continuous improvement (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2022).

Research demonstrates that attending high-quality preschools positively affects children academically, emotionally, socially, and physically, yet many children across the United States do not have access to these preschools (Gormley Jr. et al., 2011; Hahn & Barnett, 2023; Hawkins-Lear & Grisham-Brown, 2019). Children from families of color (primarily Black and Latino), families from economically under-resourced areas, and children receiving special education services who attend preschool benefit from attending (Bassok et al., 2016; Bassok & Galdo, 2016; Latham et al., 2021; Molla & Nolan, 2019). Children who do not have access to high-quality preschool or are not enrolled in preschool lack kindergarten readiness skills like vocabulary, mathematics, and print

awareness and have lower test scores than their peers who attended preschool (Hustedt et al., 2015). Bakken et al. (2017) found that 90% of the students who attended a high-quality preschool program received average or above-average social skills, including emotional maturity and age-appropriate social interactions. Additionally, access to high-quality preschool may be indirectly tied to lower crime rates and reduced dropout rates later in life for program participants (Hahn & Barnett, 2023).

The Johnson Administration's establishment of Head Start in 1965 marked the first federal investment in preschool (Rippner, 2016). Since 1965, steady federal investment has expanded Head Start, and federal dollars began supporting state programs in the 1980s (Rippner, 2016). State-funded programs typically offer one of two preschool programs – targeted or universal. Targeted preschool programs provide funding for specific children to attend programs for an allotted number of hours. In contrast, universal preschool programming offers a certain number of hours for all 4-year-olds and some 3-year-olds in a city, state, or county (Colorado Department of Education, 2022; Friedman-Krauss et al., 2022; Rippner, 2016). Note that Head Start is a federally funded, targeted approach, while state programs can choose between a targeted or universal approach and can have diversified private and public funding.

While enrollment steadily increased in preschool programming over the years as more states implemented their state programs, research demonstrated the benefits of preschool, and demand from families increased; access remained a challenge (Friedman-Klauss et al., 2023; Rippner, 2016). Between 2002 and 2006, the percentage of the 4-year-old population enrolled in a preschool program went from 14% to 20% (Friedman-

Klauss et al., 2023). While a modest increase, it demonstrated that around 80% of the 4-year-old population still needed to be enrolled in a preschool program.

The Obama Administration marked the next substantial federal investment in preschool (Rippner, 2016; The White House, 2013). In 2013, the Obama Administration aimed to increase access to high-quality preschools by investing federal funds and encouraging states to do the same through the Preschool for All Initiative (The White House, 2013). The Obama Administration emphasized the significant unmet need for access to high-quality preschool, especially for Latino, Black, and economically under-resourced families, and created the Preschool Development Grant program to address the challenges with access (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The Preschool Development Grant program invested federal dollars in incentives to “provide a solid base upon which we can build voluntary, universal access to high-quality early education” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, p. 5). While the federal government continued to fund Head Start during the Obama administration, the Obama administration marked a national investment in building access to universal, high-quality preschool programming, emphasizing 4-year-olds.

Access to preschool remains a challenge. 57% of the population of 4-year-olds across the United States are not enrolled in any preschool program (Friedman-Klauss et al., 2023). Only the District of Columbia, Vermont, Florida, New York, Georgia, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Oklahoma serve more than 50% of their population of 4-year-olds. Notably, the six states mentioned above have implemented a universal preschool program. Interestingly, Idaho, Indiana, Montana, Wyoming, New Hampshire,

and South Dakota are the only states that do not have state-funded preschool programs (Friedman-Klauss et al., 2023).

As challenges to access persist, one question stands out regarding the intersection of policy and preschool: “Do our leaders have the political wherewithal to reserve government-funded spots to the highest quality programs for the nation’s children that need it most?” (Rippner, 2016, p. 73). In Colorado, access to high-quality care and education was a priority for improving the state-funded preschool program (Early Childhood Leadership Commission, 2018). The Colorado Preschool Program, established in 1988, used a targeted approach to fund an allotted number of preschool hours for children with identified risk factors such as homelessness or foster care (Colorado Department of Education, 2023). In 2022, Colorado passed Colorado House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program, which shifted from a targeted program to a universal preschool program. The bill was introduced to ensure that all 4-year-olds in the state had access to a given number of preschool hours, thereby improving their access to high-quality programs. The passage of the universal preschool bill marked a significant move towards a universal model of preschool education in Colorado but still begs the question of whether this model supports access to the highest quality preschool programming for those who need it most.

In the current study, I critically examined the bill that created universal preschool in Colorado to understand the political process, the problems it intended to solve, how the policy of the universal preschool program was framed, and whether it intentionally or unintentionally advantages some groups while disadvantaging others. In the current chapter, I will introduce the background of the preschool policy nationally and in

Colorado. In addition to the background of preschool policy, I will explain the purpose of the study and my research questions. Next, I will identify and discuss the conceptual framework to lay the foundation of the current study's research design. Afterward, I will discuss the significance of the study, in addition to limitations, delimitations, and assumptions that should be considered regarding the scope of the study.

Background to the Problem

Federal Influence on Preschool Programming

In the 2013 presidential address, former President Obama emphasized the importance of access to high-quality preschool for all children, launching the Preschool for All Initiative (The White House, 2013). Preschool for All called upon elected officials across the country and Congress to increase access to high-quality preschool programs and invest in early learning programs for children from birth to five years old (The White House, 2013). This initiative led to the White House Summit of Early Childhood Education, resulting in \$250 million for the Preschool Development Grants Program from the U.S. Department of Education and up to \$500 million from the U.S. Department of Health Services for Early Head Start Childcare Partnerships program (The White House, 2014).

In January 2015, the U.S. Department of Education documented the inequity in access to high-quality preschool in the United States. It noted that students who did not have access to preschool entered kindergarten with lower social, emotional, and academic skills than their kindergarten peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). According to the U.S. Department of Education, there was an unmet need due to more than 2.5 million 4-year-olds needing access to publicly funded preschool programming. More specifically,

only 40% of Latino children, 50% of Black children, and 41% of economically disadvantaged children participated in preschool programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). To combat this unmet need, the Obama Administration administered preschool development grants to support state work to “expand high-quality preschool for the children who need it most” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, p. 8).

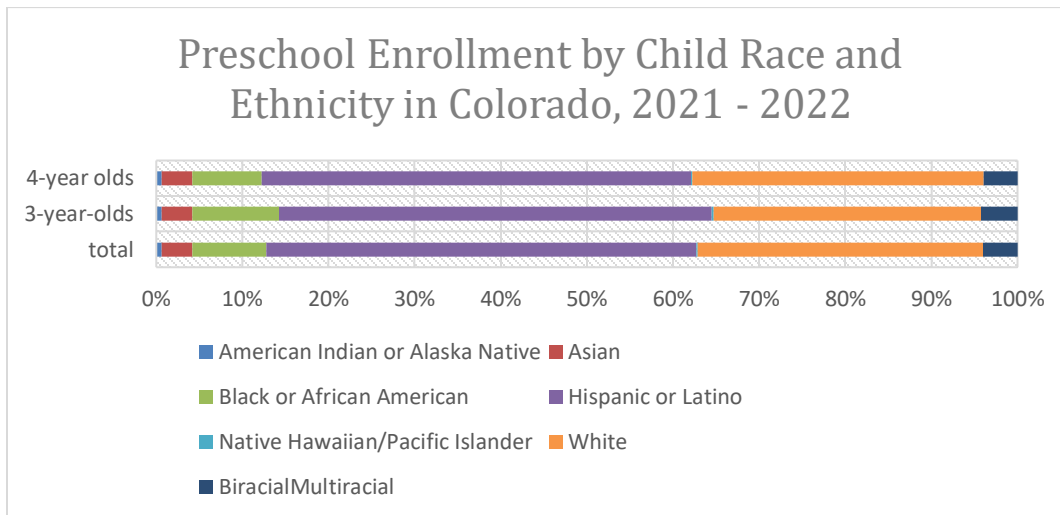
As a result of increased federal attention on early childhood education, partly due to the Preschool for All Initiative and Preschool Development Grant that increased incentives for financial investment, more states used federal dollars to create state-funded preschool programs (Bassok et al., 2014). In 2015, state preschool programs across the United States saw a modest increase in enrollment, with 29% of the national population of 4-year-olds enrolled from 26% in 2009 and 5% of the 3-year-old population enrolled from 4% in 2009 (Barnett et al., 2016; Friedman-Klauss et al., 2023). Additionally, the total state funding for pre-k programs increased by \$6.2 billion across 42 states, including the District of Columbia (Barnett et al., 2016). However, by 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic largely impacted progress made in preschool funding and enrollment. More specifically, enrollment decreased, and state funding declined for the first time since 2014 (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2022). By 2021, “states served only 29% of 4-year-olds and less than 5% of 3-year-olds” (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2022, p. 14).

Colorado Context of Preschool Programming

The state of Colorado largely mirrors the federal efforts and timeline with some nuance. Established in 1988, the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP), initially designed to support children with language needs, served two thousand 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds (Colorado Department of Education, 2020). In 1992, CPP became a permanent program that expanded to serving students with a variety of indicators that could negatively impact school readiness, including being in foster care, having a history of abuse in the family, and being eligible for free or reduced meals (Colorado Department of Education, 2020; Friedman-Krauss et al., 2022). By 2019, the program continued to expand to include more children across the state, hiring more staff to support the providers of CPP (Colorado Department of Education, 2020). However, like the rest of the country, the pandemic negatively impacted preschool in the state of Colorado, including a 21% decrease in enrollment - Colorado enrolled 18,188 children in preschool, which was 4,748 less than the previous year (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2022). In 2020, Colorado ranked 26th in access for 4-year-olds in the United States, including the District of Columbia and Guam (Friedman-Klauss et al., 2022). The rank in access for 4-year-olds did not improve during the 2021-2022 school year, with only 23% of the 4-year-old population enrolled in the preschool program. 50% of the children enrolled in the CPP identified as Hispanic or Latino, 33% as white, and 9% as Black or African American (see Table A1, Figure B1 below).

Table A1*Preschool enrollment by child race and ethnicity in Colorado, 2021 – 2022*

	Total	3-year-olds	4-year-olds
American Indian or Alaska Native			
Native	128	34	94
Asian	723	186	537
Black or African American	1763	535	1228
Hispanic or Latino	10216	2655	7561
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	40	12	28
White	6775	1642	5133
Biracial/Multiracial	822	226	596

Figure B1*Preschool enrollment by child race and ethnicity in Colorado, 2021 – 2022*

On April 25, 2022, Governor Jared Polis signed House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program into law to give families with 4-year-olds access to free preschool for an allotted number of hours the following year to save money for families and benefit children (Meltzer, 2022). The 2022 House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program had multiple components, including creating the universal preschool program, creating the Department of Early Childhood for the state of Colorado, transference of some programs and services to the new department, and establishing local coordinating organizations (LCOs). Local coordinating organizations are meant to liaise between the local community and the Department of Early Childhood. For this study, I will primarily focus on the creation of the universal preschool program to examine how it sought to increase access to high-quality preschool for historically marginalized populations.

Statement of the Problem

The 2022 Colorado House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program marked a shift from the targeted preschool program approach to a universal approach that provides funding for all 4-year-olds to have a certain number of preschool hours instead of just targeted populations, such as children in foster care and children experiencing homelessness (Colorado Department of Education, 2022). In the 2021-2022 school year, 23% of the 4-year-old population was enrolled in the state-funded preschool program, meaning 77% were left unenrolled or without access to high-quality preschool. Children without access to preschool are less likely to have the social-emotional and academic skills to demonstrate kindergarten readiness than their

peers who attended preschool (Bakken et al., 2015; Hustedt et al., 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

After the bill was signed, some questions still needed to be answered. One of the main concerns was the allocation of free preschool for all 4-year-olds, including deciding the number of hours families may be eligible for. It was unclear how families could qualify for more than the allotted hours promised if they felt they needed more (Meltzer, 2022). Another issue was ensuring access to high-quality preschool for families across the state, especially when the state only met four out of ten quality benchmarks for high-quality preschool (Friedman-Klauss et al., 2022; Melzer, 2022). It also needed to be clarified how the newly established department, school districts, and local coordinating organizations would work together and how decisions would be made regarding universal preschool programming (Melzer, 2022). Even as the bill was signed into law, these concerns were paramount.

Therefore, in this critical policy analysis, I will examine how the bill addresses questions about access to high-quality preschool with particular attention to historically organized populations and how the creation of the new department impacted decision-making amongst the different entities (e.g., school districts, the newly formed Department of Early Childhood, and LCOs). Access to preschool programs may be challenging for various issues depending on the context of a family. Challenges may arise due to distance and disparities in their neighborhood based on race, income, or rurality (Anderson & Mikesell, 2019; Latham et al., 2021; Sipple et al., 2020). Access may also be challenging due to competing policy interests and early childhood standards that depend on the state or the community (Morris et al., 2018). For the current critical policy

analysis of the universal preschool bill, understanding all these challenges, how they contribute to the early childhood ecosystem, and how the bill is designed to influence them (intentionally or unintentionally) will be especially crucial.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

This qualitative critical policy analysis approach aimed to analyze the process that turned the 2022 Colorado House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program into law, the challenges it meant to address, and its potential “role in reinforcing the dominant culture” and the way the policy may distribute power, knowledge, and resources (Young & Diem, 2017, p. 4). While the universal preschool bill had multiple components, the universal preschool program itself was the primary focus of this critical policy analysis. Moreover, in this study, I examined any potential shifts in dynamics when it came to decision-making in early childhood education in Colorado, given the creation of the Department of Early Childhood and the role of local coordinating organizations. Understanding the bill’s foundation may assist in examining program effectiveness after implementation and whether the universal preschool program fulfilled its intended purpose in future research.

Central Research Question

To critically analyze 2022 House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program, the problem the bill was intended to solve, and how the bill was developed, the following research question guided the study:

- How, if at all, was Colorado's universal preschool school policy designed to create more equitable access to education for historically marginalized children and their families?

I analyzed the bill to determine how it addressed equitable access in its written text and how supporters discussed it. Additionally, I looked at the goals of the universal preschool program and why it was framed specifically to identify potential implications for its implementation. Regarding decision-making and shifts in the policy's development, I examined the role of values and ideology, power dynamics and shifts, and political culture using Fowler (2013) as a guide. In the discussion of power, I briefly touched on Liu (2014) to understand the role of power in the civic arena and different sources of power.

When considering dominant culture, it is essential to note that the culture in the United States has been controlled by mostly White elites (Feagin, 2012). Feagin (2012) noted the implication of this reality not just in the political context of the United States but also in other areas, including power and resource allocation. Feagin noted that

The actual authoritative allocation of society's important material resources, as well as of less tangible items such as power and prestige, has been dramatically inequalitarian, massively skewed toward the elite's group interests, and aggressively legitimated by a dominant white political, racial, and class framing of society. (p. xii)

Furthermore, it was significant to investigate how the dominant culture may have been sustained through the choices made by policymakers, local decision-makers, universal preschool practitioners, and the families and children impacted by universal preschool. It was critical to acknowledge any instances where decisions were made to favor dominant groups, which may have put other groups at a disadvantage, and to take into account the perspectives of historically marginalized populations. Fowler (2013) and Liu (2014) were utilized to examine the interests of the dominant elite and how the universal preschool

program addressed power distribution while potentially perpetuating the dominant culture.

Conceptual Framework

To analyze 2022 House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program, the critical paradigm grounded my worldview (Anderson, 1990; Capper, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Researchers with a critical worldview view reality as subject to and controlled by underlying structures and systems, determining who holds power and who does not in society and calling for change (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I also consider myself a critical theorist; therefore, critical theory influenced the current study. “Critical theorists in education have sought a better understanding of the often-invisible ways in which societal interaction is ‘structured,’ and power wielded, and privileged interests protected in the organizational context” (Anderson, 1990, p. 40). The written text and verbal discourse for the universal preschool bill demonstrated some of the invisible and visible ways power showed up, with particular attention to the articulated goals of the bill, the way the bill was framed, and the fiscal allocation of resources.

The fundamental principles of critical theory inform my critical worldview. These principles emphasize examining power dynamics and distribution within organizations and systems, focusing on social justice and change, and emphasizing equity of voice and group decision-making (Anderson, 1990; Capper, 2018; Shrunk & Betties, 2019). With this critical worldview, I grounded my research in two key concerns of critical policy analysis identified by Young & Diem (2017): first, a concern regarding the policy's roots, development, and its role in reinforcing the dominant culture, and second, a concern with

the distribution of power, resources, and knowledge, as well as the creation of policy "winners" and "losers" (p. 4).

To analyze the universal preschool bill in Colorado effectively, I utilized Stone's (2012) framework on the policy paradox. Stone's policy paradox states that policy is inherently paradoxical. Stone emphasized that policy cannot be separated from politics and the ideas and values of those who create and advocate for policy. "People fight with ideas as well as about them. The different sides in a conflict create different portrayals of the battle – who is affected, how they are affected, and what is at stake" (Stone, 2012, p.36). These ideas then shape policies such as the universal preschool policy.

Stone (2012) guided my analysis of how stakeholders framed the universal preschool policy, the issues it attempted to solve, and why the shift to universal preschool was the best solution. According to Stone (2012), framing is done chiefly through symbols, causes, interests, decisions, and numbers. According to Stone, the values of liberty, efficiency, equity, welfare, and security usually influence a policy's goals. For example, a policy could be primarily based on being in the best interests of businesses or private investors while relying on the values of efficiency and liberty (Stone, 2012).

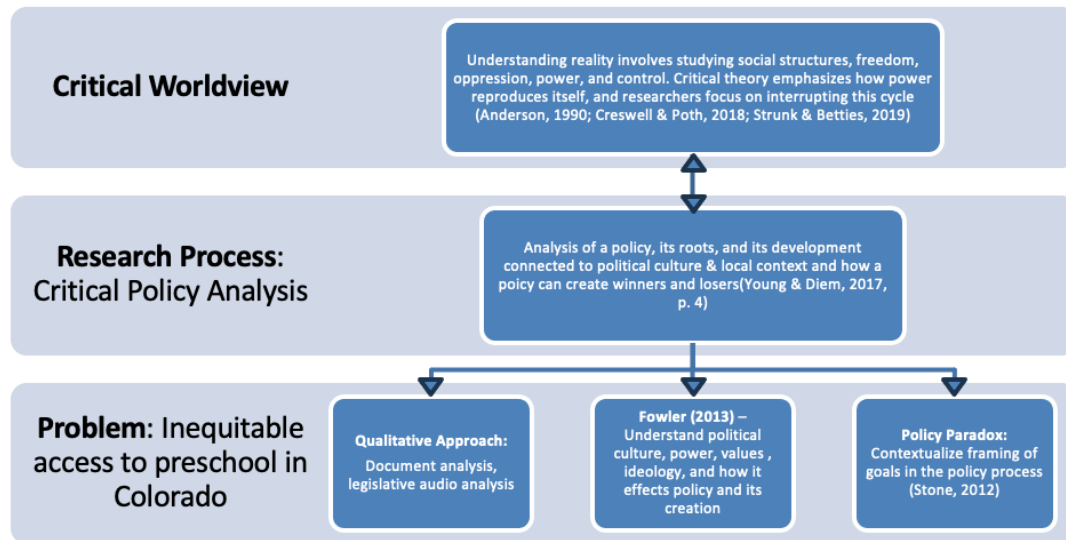
I analyzed the roles of power, power distribution, and types of power in the universal preschool policy using Fowler's (2013) framework. The study focused on the different types of power and distributions of power. I used Fowler's framework for the universal preschool policy to examine potential power dynamics shifts and identify who may retain and gain power after creating the 2022 Colorado House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program. The analysis also included identifying the economic and demographic groups that may benefit or be disadvantaged

by the bill's creation. Specifically, I looked at how the power may shift and how the decision-making groups, such as superintendents, preschool providers, the new early childhood department, and local coordinating organizations, may benefit or be disadvantaged. Additionally, I used Liu's (2014) framework to support Fowler (2013) in understanding power in the civic arena and identifying the factors contributing to the shift toward universal preschool.

This comprehensive approach enabled me to conduct a critical policy analysis deeply informed by critical theory while also grounded in a thorough examination of power dynamics, policy framing, and the political context of the universal preschool policy in Colorado. Since the universal preschool bill was created to address access issues in preschool programming, an analysis with a critical lens will focus on power distribution and whether the new universal preschool program ultimately benefits historically marginalized populations in a way that the targeted preschool program did not. Figure B2 illustrates how my conceptual framework was used for the current study.

Figure B2

Conceptual Framework for the Current Study



However, Stone (2012) and Fowler (2013) are limited due to the date of their creation and the shifts in the world since then. When Fowler and Stone drafted their works, the world had yet to experience the COVID-19 pandemic, the social unrest caused by the death of George Floyd and the Trump administration. While the texts work together because both cover similar aspects of the policy process, the values and ideologies behind decision-makers, and the impact of power, neither work is inherently critical or encompasses the changes that happened in the world after the years they were published. For this reason, concepts from the literature review, such as the impacts of COVID-19, challenges of the workforce, and issues around access to preschool, supported further analysis of 2022 Colorado House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program and its creation in Colorado.

Limitations, Delimitations, Assumptions

Assumptions

As a researcher, I assumed people were honest and knowledgeable about preschool programming in their legislative testimony, whether they supported or opposed the universal preschool policy. I also assumed that the most prominent supporters and champions of the bill were the individuals speaking on the bill during the legislative session. Similarly, I assumed that the individuals speaking against the bill were the more prominent opponents. I also assumed that each version of the bill text I used had no errors and was written by someone with knowledge of writing education policy.

I also relied heavily on my critical worldview (Anderson, 1990; Creswell & Poth, 2018), which influences my views of power, privilege, and the power of social change. Additionally, my assumptions about different community interests come from my experiences as a person from different historically marginalized populations, experiences working with and living around others from different historically marginalized populations, and how Fowler (2013) and Feagin (2012) position the views of elites and other groups. All of these assumptions were underlying factors in this critical bill analysis.

Limitations

One limitation of the study was the reliance on the bill text and legislative testimony to understand its roots and development into a policy and how it may create winners and losers. Since I could go back in time to talk to the actors who impacted, advocated for, and advocated against the policy at that given point in time, I will rely on

what is documented. As such, it may not have been easy to fully understand the complete and accurate motives behind the policy's creation.

Delimitations

This qualitative critical policy analysis was limited to examining the original universal preschool bill, its revised version, the final bill text, the original and final fiscal note of the universal preschool bill, selected audio from the legislative session, documents related to the Colorado Preschool program, and the governor's State of the State addresses as sources of data. As such, most of the data analysis considered those data sources information to understand the goals of the policy, its framing, development over time, and the creation of potential winners and losers. The testimony supported my understanding of how and why the policy changed over time and the reasoning of individuals (and organizations) behind any shifts. Additionally, testimony added further evidence to understand the rationale for support, opposition, or neutrality by listening to the values and ideology present. These documents and audio recordings were chosen because they all came from public data sources and are directly tied to the origins of the universal preschool policy and the policy process.

Three iterations of the bill text and its corresponding fiscal notes will be analyzed. The three iterations will include the original bill, the rerevised version (which includes all amendments), and the final bill. Due to the sheer number of pages of each bill text, the study is more feasible if only the essential pieces of select bill texts are examined to understand the bill's evolution while listening to the corresponding legislative audio. Additionally, I only listened to the House Education and Senate Education sessions.

Listening to the audio gave more context and rationale on how the changes in the bill came about. The audio also helped me understand the stakeholders' perspectives.

The Colorado Preschool Program legislative reports from 2020 – 2022, focusing on the Commissioner of Education's welcome letters, provided clues for the shift to universal preschool. The governor's State of the State speeches revealed how preschool was spoken about in the political context outside of the legislative session. While other news articles and speeches could be included, I had to limit the document and auditory analysis due to the study's time frame and the number of documents already being examined.

Significance of Study

A critical policy analysis on creating the universal preschool program will add to research on program rollout and the potential positive and negative consequences of creating a universal preschool program – intended or unintended. It will also demonstrate a state's political and social context to move from a targeted approach to a universal one. For the state of Colorado, stakeholders may utilize the research to inform further decisions on implementation from a local, district, and state level. The critical policy analysis will also provide states that wish to implement a universal preschool in the future with recommendations on ensuring more significant equity.

Strategically, analyzing the roots of universal preschool in Colorado could inform an understanding of its development and implementation. As the policy is enacted and the program is implemented in the future, understanding the bill's foundation will support answering questions about program effectiveness, whether it is fulfilling its intended purpose, and its potential role in reinforcing the dominant culture. Moreover, universal

preschool may increase demand for preschool across the state, making it essential to have a foundational understanding of the policy's development to address potential challenges with access, the recruitment and retention of a high-quality workforce, and how the policy may shape decision-making. Furthermore, this critical policy analysis will add to the limited research on Colorado's preschool program. It will also add to critical research on preschool in the state and the country to comprehend how a universal policy is created and evolved in a state. Since Colorado is a local control state, this study will explore how the state balanced a more centralized early childhood system with universal preschool with local control.

Definitions of Terms

- **Early childhood education:** Education programs and services that focus on improving academic and social-behavioral outcomes for children from birth to third grade (Institute of Education Sciences, n.d.).
- **High-quality preschool:** Friedman-Klauss et al. (2022) identified the following ten benchmarks to determine preschool quality: early learning and development standards; inclusion of curriculum supports; the lead teacher has a bachelor of arts; the lead teacher is specialized in training prekindergarten or preschool; the assistant teacher has Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or its equivalent; staff have access to professional development; class sizes of 20 or fewer; staff-child ratio is 1:10 or better; there is access to vision, hearing, and health screening and referrals; and the program has a continuous quality improvement system

- **Historically marginalized populations:** The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (2021) defined historically marginalized populations as “a population that has historically and systematically been denied access to services, resources and power relationships, which has resulted in poor outcomes across the spectrum. They are often identified based on their race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, geography, religion, language, sexual identity and disability status” (p. 7).
- **Preschool:** prekindergarten; classrooms with children ages 3 to 5 (Institute of Education Sciences, n.d.).
- **Universal preschool:** a preschool programming model that provides public funding for an allotted number of hours to all 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds in a state, city, or district (Friedman-Klauss et al., 2022; Rippner, 2016)

Chapter Summary

This qualitative critical policy analysis will analyze the 2022 Colorado House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program, designed to create more equitable access to preschool programs for historically marginalized populations. I studied the origins of universal preschool in Colorado, its development over time, how the policy was framed, and how it may or may not reinforce the dominant culture. I also investigated how the policy created potential winners and losers through power distribution. The policy paradox (Stone, 2012) will analyze how the policy is framed – its goals, the problem it attempts to address (and in what way). Additionally, I will draw on Fowler (2013) to further examine the power and political culture of Colorado, the values and ideologies present in the policy, who economically benefits and

is disadvantaged by the bill, and who demographically benefits and is disadvantaged by the bill.

In Chapter 2, I conduct a review of the literature. Namely, I delve into the development of preschool programs in the United States and provide an overview of the Colorado preschool from its inception to when it was signed in April 2022. Additionally, I review the impact of high-quality preschool and gaps in access. Workforce challenges will also be included in the literature review since the workforce keeps the program running, and the type of workforce employed in universal preschool contributes to its quality. Furthermore, I investigate the nuances between state implementation in local areas and its impact on those who make the decisions around policy implementation, such as superintendents and providers.

In Chapter 3, I explain the methods for the study. This includes the research questions, rationale for critical policy analysis, and my positionality as a researcher. This chapter will also explain my research design, including data collection and methods, data analysis, credibility and trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. In Chapter 4, I discuss the data collection and analysis results. The results are tied directly to the research question - how was Colorado's universal preschool school policy designed to create more equitable access to education for historically marginalized children and their families? In Chapter 5, I discuss the results of the current study, including a critical analysis of the universal preschool policy and whether it addresses the issues of access to preschool in Colorado. Finally, I conclude with overall reflections on the study, the results, and the discussion. I highlight contributions to current research and educational

policy studies, as well as any limitations and delimitations to the data, before making recommendations for future research.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

The question of how to best provide equitable and high-quality preschool education to our nation's youngest learners remains paramount for educators, policymakers, and parents. As such, I conducted a narrative literature review to explore the intricacies of the early childhood system in the United States. I aimed to understand how the system works, examining the various preschool programs and policies and their impact on children's access to high-quality early learning opportunities. By examining the existing body of early childhood education research, I aimed to provide a critical synthesis of strengths, limitations, and opportunities within early childhood education, specifically related to access to high-quality preschool.

I began my literature review by exploring the national landscape of early childhood education and the federal policies implemented to increase funding and enrollment in preschools across the United States. Next, I examined preschool's short-term and long-term benefits, including kindergarten readiness, academic and social benefits, and potential health benefits. Then, I investigated challenges around policy and decision-making with preschool policy, workforce challenges, and issues around accessibility for families. I also investigated the different indicators of preschool quality. The insights gleaned from the review of the existing literature will provide a holistic

understanding of the early childhood ecosystem and highlight the benefits and challenges of different preschool programs and policies.

Methodology of Literature Review

For this narrative literature review, I used a mixture of peer-reviewed articles, policy briefs, research briefs, reports, book chapters, and news articles from 2011-2023. I used the University of Denver library database (Compass) for peer-reviewed articles, which houses other education databases such as SAGE and ERIC. First, I wanted to find general articles about early childhood education. I used the terms “early childhood,” “preschool,” and “prekindergarten.” After finding general articles about early childhood education, I wanted to learn more about universal preschool, especially if there were any new programs in cities or states. I used the keywords “universal preschool” and “universal PreK” to find articles about universal preschool programs.

After learning about universal preschool programs and early childhood education in general, I researched the benefits and challenges to understand national trends. I used the terms “early childhood education,” “ECE,” “prekindergarten,” “universal PreK,” “PreK,” and “preschool.” I also wanted to find out more about the intersection of policy and preschool programming, so I used the terms “early childhood,” “policy,” “leaders,” and “leadership.” Both searches yielded some results alluding to the workforce and workforce challenges. I deepened my search into workforce issues by using the terms “early childhood education,” “workforce,” “teachers,” “educators,” “retention,” and “compensation.” A lot of these articles included literature about preschool access and quality issues. To find articles specifically about access to preschool, I used the terms “early childhood” and “access” along with “access to preschool” and “preschool access.”

Again, many articles about preschool quality came up in the search for articles about access, but I also wanted to find articles specifically about preschool quality. I used “early childhood,” “preschool,” “high-quality,” and “preschool quality.”

As I continued to read and learn more about the early childhood space, I used many of these terms to search individually for all articles; I often used variations of at least two— for example, “early childhood education” AND “teacher retention.” Once, I felt like I had exhausted the University of Denver library search because of duplicate articles returning in the search, I used a website called Lit Maps. Litmaps.com helped me find articles like others on the same topic when I put in one article. I input Graue (2013) and Cascio (2023) to find more articles under their seed function. I did this because I precisely wanted to see if I could find articles about local control and preschool and about the preschool program's cost-effectiveness. I also used their “Discover” function to find gaps in their reference list. This led me to research childcare deserts. Lit Maps provided a few articles about childcare deserts.

Some articles referred to the benchmarks for preschool quality by the National Institute of Early Education Research, so I found that information through a Google search. I also used reports, briefs, and other documents from policy organizations and government departments because I found more updated data on preschools nationally and in Colorado. I used a textbook from one of my doctoral courses for the history of education policy. I included news articles and documents from the Colorado Department of Education because they could give more specific context to Colorado. I also had a lot of early childhood documents in my Zotero database from past research on the subject. All these search methods brought up 99 results. I intentionally included some

international articles because they included indigenous populations, a policy frame analysis, and policies to address the retention of early childhood workers. I excluded articles about classroom instruction, classroom environment, school culture, early childhood expulsions and suspensions, and most international articles. This excluded 42 articles, leaving 54 full-text articles. I reviewed all 77 results and decided to incorporate 57 of the resources.

Literature Synthesis and Critiques

Early childhood education includes programs and services focused on children from birth to third grade (Institute of Education Sciences, n.d.). Preschool, also known as prekindergarten or pre-k, incorporates classrooms with 4-year-old and sometimes 3-year-old children (Rippner, 2016). Preschool can take place in a variety of settings. Formal settings include center-based organizations (CBOs), Head Start, schools, and standalone preschools. Informal settings include family, friends, neighbor care (FFN), and home daycare centers. Formal and informal settings can be funded publicly or privately (Bassok et al., 2016; Early Milestones, 2023).

Two presidential administrations- the Johnson and the Obama administrations- marked high federal investment in early childhood education. In 1965, the Johnson Administration commissioned a committee of education experts as part of the administration's war on poverty. The Johnson administration's war on poverty and antipoverty rhetoric stemmed from the idea that changing social conditions for those in poverty would, in turn, curtail criminal behavior (Alexander, 2011). The war on poverty signaled a shift towards a focus on law and order in political rhetoric, which led to a slew

of discriminatory practices and policies by later presidential administrations, especially for those part of the African American community (Alexander, 2011).

As previously mentioned, Head Start was created through this report as a recommendation to address the cycle of poverty and a way to shift social conditions that lead to criminal behaviors (Alexander, 2011; Rippner, 2016). Before the establishment of Head Start, the government funded some childcare initiatives to get women into the workforce during World War II (Rippner, 2016). The 1965 report marked a shift from focusing on supporting women in the workforce to the benefits of early childhood education for children (Rippner, 2016). Head Start included academic, health, and social services and marked the first public investment in early childhood education (ECE) in a previously private sector.

In 1969, the Office of Economic Opportunity, the government office that housed Head Start, conducted a study that found that Head Start did not have the ideal results they initially thought it would have. The children who attended Head Start did not have any significant academic or developmental skills than their peers who did not attend Head Start (Rippner, 2016). However, the government still expanded Head Start, which served only 4-year-olds, to include Early Head Start, which served 3-year-olds, showing a desire to scale while still tackling issues around quality. Instead of abandoning or scaling the initiative, government officials worked on quality standards to improve it (Rippner, 2016). In 1975, the Office of Head Start created the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential for early childhood professionals who demonstrated core competencies to improve preschool quality. By 2022, Head Start supported about 39 million children ages birth to 5 and their families since its creation in 1965 (Office of

Head Start, 2023). 37% of the people who took part in the Head Start program identified as Hispanic or Latino, 28% identified as Black or African American, and 33% of the children identified as dual language learners (see Figure B3 for more details).

While the federal government fully funds Head Start, it has also increased financial incentives for states to fund their preschool programs. State-funded programs focus on early childhood education for at least two days a week, usually serving 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds (Friedman-Klauss et al., 2023). The Obama Administration's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge invested up to \$75 million in preschool programming in 20 states from 2011 to 2013 (Rippner, 2016). In 2013, the Obama Administration's Preschool for All Initiative emphasized the importance of access to high-quality preschool for all children (The White House, 2013). Preschool for All marked a new era of the federal effort to increase funding and enrollment in early childhood education through grants (The White House, 2013). The increased incentives, usually in the form of grants, from the federal government led to more state-funded preschool programs (Bassok et al., 2014).

When the National Institute of Early Education Research conducted its first review of state-funded programs in the 2001-2002 school year, 38 state-funded programs enrolled about 700,000 children (Barnett et al., 2003). State-funded preschool programs spent over \$2.4 billion at the time, which equates to \$4.52 billion today. They enrolled 14.8% of the population of 4-year-olds and 2.7% of the 3-year-old population across the United States (Barnett et al., 2003; Friedman-Klauss et al., 2023). Most of these preschool programs were offered to children from economically disadvantaged families or had other indicators that put them at risk of failing school or challenges navigating the

education system, such as homelessness and being in foster care (Barnett et al., 2003). In 2022, there were 62 state-funded programs in 44 states and the District of Columbia (Friedman-Klauss et al., 2023). Funding for state-funded programs is usually a mixture of local, state, and federal funds. By the 2021-2022 school year, states spent nearly \$10 billion on preschools with an enrollment of about 1.5 million children (Friedman-Klauss et al., 2023) – 32% of the 4-year-old population in the United States and 6.4% of the 3-year-old population in the United States. The demand for preschool has grown over time, given the above numbers, especially as more research found that enrolling in preschool can benefit children, including improved academic, emotional, social, and physical development (Gormley Jr. et al., 2011; Hahn & Barnett, 2023; Hawkins-Lear & Grisham-Brown, 2019).

Benefits and Challenges of Preschool

Preschool can positively impact children socially, emotionally, and academically (Gormley Jr. et al., 2011; Hahn & Barnett, 2023; Hawkins-Lear & Grisham-Brown, 2019). Researchers found that preschool can positively impact children academically when entering kindergarten (Hustedt et al., 2015; Lipsey et al., 2018). Hustedt et al. (2015) found that children who entered kindergarten after completing preschool in Arkansas had gains in vocabulary, mathematics, and print awareness. The researchers chose vocabulary, mathematics, and print awareness as content areas since they were associated with kindergarten readiness. Similarly, Lipsey et al. (2018) found similar positive outcomes for students entering kindergarten in Tennessee. Specifically, they found notable literacy, language, and math gains for students upon entering kindergarten.

Research also indicates that preschool can benefit children socially and emotionally (Bakken et al., 2017; Gormley Jr. et al., 2011). Gormley et al. (2011) noted that high-quality preschool programs in Tulsa can support the development of social-emotional skills, precisely noting that more students were defined as attentive and outgoing upon entering kindergarten after attending preschool.

Long-term benefits of preschool have also been noted. Researchers found that preschool children had long-term benefits of social-emotional development and some long-term health such as access to health screenings and reduced alcohol use (Bakken et al., 2017; Hahn & Barnett, 2023). Bakken et al. (2017) examined a cohort to decide if children from economically disadvantaged areas receiving access to high-quality preschool had any long-term benefits five years after attending preschool. The researchers discovered preschool children had positive math and reading scores, emotional maturity, and positive behavior outcomes due to their social skills. Similarly, Cascio and Schanzenbach (2013) focused on children from economically disadvantaged households who attended universal preschool and found they had higher math scores through eighth grade.

Hahn and Barnett (2023) conducted a review of centered-based early childhood care and how it can benefit children focused on the effectiveness of early childhood on health, the economics of ECE, and the potential impacts of early childhood on health equity. The researchers found several instances of long-term health benefits directly and indirectly from ECE. Direct benefits included nutritional support, health screenings, and physical activity (Hahn & Barnett, 2023). Indirect examples included social-emotional

skills, cognitive skills, and reductions in rates of depression and alcohol use for those adults who attended preschool in their childhood (Hahn & Barnett, 2023).

Preschool can also benefit children who receive special education services (Barton & Smith, 2015; Bakken et al., 2017). Bakken et al. (2017) noted that placement in special education for students who went to preschool was lower than that of their control group. The authors also found that 28% of children were less likely to be placed in special education by 4th grade (Bakken et al., 2017). In addition to children who receive special education services, children who are dual language learners (DLL) also receive substantial benefits from Head Start, according to Morris et al. (2018).

Research indicates that high-quality preschool programs benefit all students, especially those needing special education services or navigating systemic barriers, including generational poverty (Bakken et al., 2013; Barton & Smith, 2015; Cascio, 2023; Hahn & Barnett, 2023). Therefore, it is vital to make this option accessible to all families in the state, regardless of the setting. Interestingly, Cascio and Schanzenbach's (2013) research revealed that preschool education may have little impact on children from areas that are not economically disadvantaged. The researchers found no significant improvement in student achievement for children from higher-income households. Nonetheless, families from households with a higher socioeconomic status were more likely to switch from private to public schools, which saved their parents money (Cascio & Schanzenbach, 2013). Cascio (2023) provided a rationale highlighting universal preschool as more efficient than a targeted approach. However, the author noted that while universal preschool programs serve all children, “universal programs serve higher-income children, for whom formal care or education in the absence of state-funded pre-K

is relatively common” (p. 29). In other words, universal preschool programs serve children from affluent families who would have access to early childhood education without state-funded initiatives.

Some researchers noted that some initial benefits of preschool do not last as students get into higher grades (Hill et al., 2015; Lipsey et al., 2018). Lipsey et al. (2018) noted some academic benefits when students entered kindergarten, but the advantage in math skills, language, and literacy decreased after kindergarten. Similarly, Hill et al. examined math and reading scores of two different cohorts of children who completed Tulsa preschool programs to see if the initial benefits persisted through third grade. In the first cohort, the researchers saw no effects of participation in the preschool program in math and reading test scores. For the later cohort, the researchers saw some effects in the math scores but no statistical significance in reading scores (Hill et al., 2015).

Some explanations for this difference include the maturation of the preschool program, improvements made over time, or potential shifts in accountability within the program (Hill et al., 2015). Furthermore, the authors noted an emphasis on professional development in math that may have contributed to the math score difference in the later cohort (Hill et al., 2015). The findings of Hill et al. (2015) and Lipsey et al. (2018) demonstrate that the long-term data on the impact of preschool may have little effect on test scores.

While most researchers denoted short-term positive impacts of preschool, most of the research named the benefits occurring in the year or two after preschool (e.g., Hustedt et al., 2015; Lipsey et al., 2018). Additionally, the specific content areas of benefits in mathematics and reading tend to vary depending on the study, the type of preschool, and

the location of the preschool program (Bassok et al., 2016; Cascio & Schanzenbach, 2013). Most articles on preschool effectiveness consider test scores and academic skills related to kindergarten readiness, with little research on the impact on social-emotional skills, including interpersonal relationships with peers. Another critical limitation of the literature regarding the impacts of preschool is the lack of consensus and studies that focus on long-term impacts. The researchers that have examined the long-term benefits of preschool often indirectly impact health benefits for those individuals and community benefits (Hahn & Barnett, 2023).

Moreover, preschool programming has unique challenges, including recruiting and maintaining its workforce, access to preschool, and preschool quality (Friedman-Klauss et al., 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated and intensified challenges in preschools across the United States (Friedman-Klauss et al., 2022). More specifically, enrollment dropped for the first time in 20 years, negatively impacting economically disadvantaged families and historically marginalized populations (Friedman-Klauss et al., 2022). Additionally, quality standards dropped, and funding challenges led to cuts in pay and benefits for the workforce (Friedman-Klauss et al., 2022).

Research critiquing universal preschool was limited. While authors noted the more significant impact on historically marginalized students, none outright said that the targeted approach was better than universal preschool. Blau (2021) noted, “Preschool provides a boost to children who otherwise would be in a less enriching environment, while children from more advantaged families are more likely to be exposed to a developmentally stimulating environment even in the absence of access to high-quality preschool” (p. 62). On a similar note, Cascio (2023) named some logical reasons why a

targeted approach would be preferred in some cities for states “by targeting benefits on difficult-to-change characteristics correlated with low levels of human capital, policymakers can reduce moral hazard, keep costs down, and redistribute toward those most in need” (p. 2). Powell et al. (2019) noted that targeted strategies and universal strategies have pitfalls in policy. “Universal approaches can exacerbate disparities by addressing only one barrier to achieving the goal” (Powell et al., 2019, p. 10). Meanwhile, targeted approaches may seem unfair to some since some groups may see the group receiving the targeted policy as underserving or that the issue lies with the group being targeted for a policy and not with the broader society. As such, Powell et al. described the concept of targeted universalism. Policies using a targeted universal approach focus on achieving a universal goal by addressing the specific needs of different groups affected by the societal issue through the implementation of targeted strategies (Powell et al., 2019). A targeted universal approach to policy could be utilized with preschool programming.

The following sections will explore critical issues in preschool. First, I will investigate the nuances of a preschool policy and how it can affect decision-making statewide and in communities. Then, I will review the literature about the challenges of recruiting and retaining the workforce. Next, I will examine families' issues accessing preschool in their communities. I will conclude the section by investigating preschool quality and its indicators in early childhood education. Examining the benefits and challenges of early childhood education will demonstrate the state of the early childhood landscape.

The Interplay of Local and State Factors in Program Implementation

Local community factors can influence decision-making for educational leaders when implementing and maintaining a preschool program, but leaders also must consider broader statewide political and institutional factors (Casto & Sipple, 2011). Policies, especially when shifting the program type, may have unintended consequences of influences on the workforce and the early childhood ecosystem (Akaba et al., 2020; Bassok et al., 2014; Graue et al., 2016).

Casto and Sipple (2011) found that the school leaders leaned on their local community members regarding implementing preschool programming. The researchers found that while school leaders were conscious of the institutional actors, such as department heads and legislators, school leaders primarily focused more on how children would be served and how funding would be spent to best support the communities they serve (Casto & Sipple, 2011). Similarly, Akaba et al. (2020) noted the impact of public policy on preschool teachers when the universal program was rolled out in New York City. The authors found that teachers experienced less autonomy and felt they had to shift away from developmentally appropriate practices in favor of standards-based learning. Akaba et al. (2020) and Casto and Sipple (2011) demonstrate the need to consider how local interests may have tension with more institutional interests.

However, framing a policy from its creation and during implementation is influenced by political interests and may shift with context (Molla & Nolan, 2019). Using a policy frame analysis, Molla and Nolan (2019) found that the government discussed the importance of promoting a fair and just society where everyone is included. However, the government needed to provide more information about the active policies to assist

families from economically disadvantaged areas or those who belong to indigenous communities in Australia. The authors also noted that shifts in the policy framing occurred over time as the government shifted from increasing access to promoting participation in the program (Molla & Nolan, 2019). Molla and Nolan's (2019) case study on policy framing over time demonstrated how policies such as preschool policy are not necessarily stagnant – framing its goals may shift depending on political, social, and cultural contexts.

Government interventions to create universal preschool may have the unintended consequence of crowding out private providers (Bassok et al., 2014). Bassok et al. (2014) noted that government intervention led to more publicly funded childcare and employees leaving private settings to go to public settings. Bassok et al. (2014) highlighted how a shift in policy can influence not just those who work in the public sector but also those in the private sector providing preschool programming.

Graue et al. (2016) noted that local control and preschool policy could sometimes seem contradictory. The authors discovered that despite participants merging two seemingly conflicting ideas, such as standardization and local control, they could still find common ground. Graue et al. wrote that this argument "helps to paint a more nuanced picture of accountability politics, showing that policymakers are actively bringing together elements of contradictory discourse in the way they think about preschool, rather than simply splitting into contentious political camps" (p. 22).

The nuanced relationships between state and local policy and policymakers are essential to monitor with the creation of a preschool program. However, the literature on policy discussed potential tensions between local and state decision-makers, and the

literature about the impact of local control on education policy needed to be more extensive. The intersection of policy, its intentions, and the reality of implementation is complex, especially given the shifting political, social, and cultural contexts that may continuously influence the goals of a preschool program. The articles in this section demonstrated an interplay between the trickle-down effects of the program on communities, the workforce, and education leaders, in addition to the importance of continuous improvement and monitoring the progress of such large-scale programs.

Early Childhood Workforce

When developing a preschool policy, stakeholders should note the workforce experience (Akaba et al., 2020). The early childhood workforce includes directors, lead teachers, assistant teachers, and paraprofessionals from birth to 5 years old (Colorado Department of Early Childhood, 2021; Friedman-Klauss et al., 2023). Early childhood educators in New York City found different challenges with implementing universal preschool, including changes in assessment, more focus on academics than social-emotional development and play, and less autonomy in their work with a heightened focus on compliance (Akaba et al., 2020). As such, the researchers recommended that policymakers listen to teachers more to determine what is feasible regarding work conditions, access to resources, compensation, and what is best for their students/communities (Akaba et al., 2020).

Additionally, compensation and benefits present an ongoing issue with recruiting and retaining the early childhood workforce (Boyd, 2015; Bridges et al., 2011; McDonald et al., 2018). Bridges et al. (2011) conducted a study on the Childcare Initiative Project, which awarded 36,750 stipends to 23,330 Early Childhood Education (ECE) educators

over three years. The researchers found that Latina ECE staff members were likelier to participate in the program. The study also revealed that within two years, nearly 25% of participants left their buildings, but only 12% left the field entirely (Bridges et al., 2011). Teacher directors had lower turnover rates compared to assistants and leads. Bridges et al. concluded that although the findings regarding participation and growth in the program were modest, it had a solid initial response and was more effective for lower-paid staff and Latino aides and teachers. The authors suggested further research to evaluate the impact of teacher retention on center programs, especially for those paid lower rates (Bridges et al., 2011).

On the other hand, McDonald et al. (2018) examined reasons early childhood professionals in Australia chose to stay in the workforce despite low wages. The researchers found three main reasons why educators stayed – intrinsic reasons, structural reasons (i.e., finances), and workplace-related practices such as leadership and management (McDonald et al., 2018). Additionally, the authors noted that intrinsic motivation was a strong reason for retention for the educators who stayed along with feeling as though their voices matter within the workplace (McDonald et al., 2018). Additionally, when management communicated that they valued their educators through formal and informal means like professional development and compliments, retention was more likely for educators (McDonald et al., 2018).

Another aspect of the workforce to consider, especially with universal preschool, is attempts made to professionalize the workforce and the potential impacts of professionalization on the workforce. Boyd (2015) found that while many early childhood professionals valued their work, the value needed to equate to adequate pay

and working conditions (Boyd, 2015). Boyd found that while teachers saw themselves as professionals whose roles were complex and required development and knowledge, they also felt that their role was "devalued and exploited" (Boyd, 2015, p. 16). Considering that the practitioners had to know various areas – child development, speech, social-emotional learning, and academics – early childhood professionals' role in schools requires continuous learning and higher education. However, while they are expected to partake in training and take on more responsibilities consistently, they often do not see an increase in their wages (Boyd, 2015). Therefore, even though the educators were increasing their qualifications in an effort of professionalization, the significance of that work was not noted, nor was it reflected in their pay. Furthermore, the authors found that the "increase in professional qualifications and skills without a corresponding increase in professional status, benefits, and wages led many early educators to consider leaving the early education workforce" (Boyd, 2015, p. 16). As such, professionalization without compensation and elevation may lead to more teacher turnover instead of retention.

One part of professionalization and teacher quality is practitioners' qualifications and understanding of potential barriers to getting those credentials. Oke et al. (2021) deduced that finances play a significant role in a practitioner's decision to pursue further qualifications or a degree. While many practitioners acknowledged the importance of continuous development and a degree, their ability to participate in ongoing development was limited due to a lack of finances and part-time courses.

Oke et al. (2021) also found that most participants did not believe that a degree or theory alone determined a teacher's quality or qualifications. Instead, the researchers emphasized the importance of years of practice in demonstrating a practitioner's quality.

Based on these findings, Oke et al. recommended several measures to support Early Childhood Education and Care professionalization. Firstly, leaders should be required to obtain a degree, while assistants should have certification. Secondly, the government should provide grants to support practitioners in upskilling. Third, practitioners with more than five years of experience in the sector should have their experience recognized. Lastly, to support the retention of practitioners and to increase time and capacity for those who choose to upskill, practitioners could shift to part-time (Oke et al., 2021).

As such, when analyzing and understanding the creation of a preschool program, it is essential to note the impacts on the workforce. Additionally, the workforce presents individuals who may experience benefits or disadvantages because of creating a universal preschool program, especially if it marks a shift from a more targeted, decentralized program to a more universal, centralized one.

Access to Preschool

According to Barton and Smith (2015), access "refers to providing a sufficient frequency and intensity of contextually relevant learning opportunities across settings for every child by identifying and eradicating structural barriers and improving physical environments" (p. 72). However, there is a gap in access to high-quality universal preschool (Anderson & Mikesell, 2019; Bassok et al., 2016; Bassok & Galdo, 2016; Latham et al., 2021; Molla & Nolan, 2019; Sipple et al., 2020).

Access to high-quality programs has benefits for children academically, socially, and emotionally in the short term and long term (Bakken et al., 2017; Gormley Jr. et al., 2011; Hahn & Barnett, 2023; Hustedt et al., 2015; Leggett et al., 2020; Lipsey et al., 2018). In addition, access to programs with inclusive practices for students with

disabilities has positive benefits for children receiving special education services and those not (Barton & Smith, 2015). However, access to preschools and high-quality early childhood care can be challenging for various reasons, including childcare deserts, childcare costs, and other inequities (Anderson & Mikesell, 2019; Latham et al., 2021).

In a systemic review of the literature, Anderson and Mikesell (2019) found that most research focused on the type of childcare in rural areas with little research on access. The content the researchers did find on access noted the lack of early childcare options in rural settings (Anderson & Mikesell, 2019). The researchers speculated that "families are likely constrained in what is available in their immediate vicinity in rural areas, and thus rely on family or neighbours to provide such care, a reasonable solution" (Anderson & Mikesell, 2019, p. 1823).

Similarly, in the state of New York, access to childcare depended on context, including the impacts of current policies, such as the implementation of state-funded preschool programs (Sipple et al., 2020). In this study, the authors noted that "rurality has a negative effect on the capacity for infant and toddler child care in a community. This effect remains when controlling for community wealth, race, school district expenditures, and enrollment, and has persisted over time (2007–2016)" (Sipple et al., 2020, p. 174). The findings indicated that universal preschool may have the opportunity to increase access to programs for 4-year-olds, but that access may be at the expense of infant and toddler-care programs (Anderson & Mikesell, 2019; Sipple et al., 2020).

Another challenge to access is racial inequity (Latham et al., 2021). While Sipple et al. (2020) noted the challenges with access throughout the state, Latham et al. (2021) found access issues within New York after the new implementation of New York City's

universal preschool program. The authors found a more significant gap in quality between programs attended by white and Black children, but also gaps between those attended by Latinx children (Latham et al., 2021). Specifically, the researchers noted that those White-Black disparities are mainly due to residential segregation and local supply differences, especially given the preference that Black families had to enroll in preschool closer to their residences (Latham et al., 2021).

Access to preschool may be a challenge for a variety of reasons depending on the context of where the preschool programming is taking place (Anderson & Mikesell, 2019; Gulosino & Maxwell, 2022; Latham et al., 2021; Sipple et al., 2020). Gulosino and Maxwell (2022) noted the lack of transportation for preschool programs in Tennessee as a barrier for families from disadvantaged neighborhoods and that those who live in those neighborhoods need more resources. A state solution to access issues may be a targeted program that enrolls specific groups of children or a more universal approach. One thing to consider when determining if a targeted or universal approach is best for the state or community is the cost of the program versus the overall benefits of the program. Through a cost-efficiency analysis, Cascio (2023) found that children benefit more from universal, state-funded preschool programs than targeted ones. Moreover, the author found that all children benefit, especially those from economically disadvantaged communities.

Universal preschool programs can also encourage families to enroll in preschools that may have yet to sign their children up for preschool without the universal preschool model. Cascio and Schanzenbach (2013) found evidence that children were more likely to be enrolled in a preschool because of universal preschool. Access to preschool also impacted the parents since mothers of children in economically disadvantaged

households were likelier to work because of universal preschool implementation in their state (Cascio & Schanzenbach, 2013).

Although the above articles provide a snapshot of the access challenges and how different preschool program models posited to solve the access issue, there were some gaps and limitations to the data. Most studies about preschool that featured information about access still primarily focused on quality in this traditional literature review. Additionally, most childcare articles specifically speak about childcare rather than preschool. Childcare deserts often focus on infant and toddler care when childcare is not generally discussed (Anderson & Mikesell, 2019). However, expanding preschool access for 4-year-olds was alluded to as one of the causes of childcare deserts in infant toddler care (Anderson & Mikesell, 2019; Sipple et al., 2020). Another challenge with access research was finding literature that focused on the impacts of access along racial differences, rurality/urbanicity, familial, economic status, special education services, and migrant status. While some data was presented on the challenges, more research is needed.

Preschool Quality

Friedman-Klauss et al. (2022) identified the following ten benchmarks to indicate preschool quality: early learning and development standards, curriculum supports, teacher has a bachelor of arts, teacher is specialized in training prekindergarten or preschool, assistant teacher has Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or its equivalent, staff have access to professional development, class sizes of 20 or fewer, staff-child ratio is 1:10 or better, access to vision, hearing, and health screening and referrals, and a continuous quality improvement system. According to the National

Institute of Early Education Research (NIEER), only five states – Hawaii, Michigan, Mississippi, Rhode Island, and Alabama – meet all 10 minimum preschool program benchmarks (Friedman-Klauss et al., 2023). Notably, "meeting all 10 standards does not necessarily guarantee that a program is of high quality, but no state's prekindergarten policies should be considered fully satisfactory unless all 10 benchmarks are met" (Friedman-Klauss, 2023, p. 25).

Another rating system is the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), which, like NIEER, is utilized "a tool for States and communities to explore key issues and decision points during the planning and implementation of a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS)" (National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance, n.d., para. 1). First developed in 1990 to reward higher subsidy reimbursements to accredited, high-quality providers (National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance, n.d.). QRIS has evolved into a tool used by states to consistently improve their early childhood ecosystem that offers steps to increase the quality of services, support professional development for practitioners, develop a cross-sector framework to support early childhood in different settings, and create "a roadmap for aligning many pieces of the early care and education system" (National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance, n.d., QRIS Resource Guide section). Each state implements its own.

Another organization that has benchmarks nationwide to establish preschool quality is the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The benchmarks include positive relationships between adults and children, implementation of a consistent curriculum aligned with child development and growth, teacher practices that are developmentally appropriate for children, assessments that are continuous

informal, formal, and systemic assessments to monitor a child's growth and learning, the incorporation of health and nutrition, staff qualifications for working with young and ongoing support and development, a collaborative relationship with families that encourage involvement and child's development, use of community resources and partnerships, a safe, healthy classroom and school environment, and systemic policies, procedures, and leadership that supports ongoing program improvement (National Association for the Education of Young Children, n.d.). It is worth noting that NAEYC accredits individual programs and centers, including Montessori and center-based programs, while NIEER applies the benchmarks to statewide programming.

The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) is an observational tool for prekindergarten through third grade used to examine teacher-child interactions within classrooms (Teachstone, 2022). As an observational tool, CLASS focuses on three domains – emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support (Teachstone, 2022). While CLASS is one tool used in preschool classrooms to determine the quality of instruction, there are other tools, such as Teaching Strategies Gold (TS Gold) and COR Advantage. Tools like CLASS can improve student learning and enhance teachers' professional development within classrooms while looking at individual centers and programs (Teachstone, 2023).

However, Reid et al. (2019) noted that “poor children have been more likely to be in lower quality programs than middle-income children, at least prior to the advent of UPK” (p. 192). In their analysis of universal preschool in New York City, Reid et al. (2019) found that “CBO administrators were more likely than school administrators to say that complying with PKA requirements regarding teacher qualifications was difficult

because of the lower salaries, longer workdays, and longer work-years at CBOs” (p. 202). Additionally, when discussing the quality of educator practices, the researchers discovered CBOs needed help complying with the new learning standards. However, using CLASS data, the researchers found that preschool classrooms in school buildings had higher CLASS scores overall than CBOs and Head Start in the instructional support and classroom organization domain. Still, they saw no difference in emotional support (Reid et al., 2019). While class scores are not the only indicator of quality, the fact that Head Start scores were the lowest is profoundly concerning, considering Head Start is primarily for economically disadvantaged families.

Reid and Ready (2013) examined classroom composition emphasizing socioeconomic status and discovered that most classrooms had socioeconomic diversity (Reid & Ready, 2013). When investigating the intersection of classroom socioeconomic status, teacher quality, and income diversity, the authors found that income diversity in a preschool classroom benefits learning, receptive language, and expressive language (Reid & Ready, 2013). Through this lens, the authors posited another example of considering program quality and the potential benefits of programs encouraging income diversity (Reid & Ready, 2013).

Another aspect of high-quality preschool that is not included in the NIEER benchmarks, or NAEYC, is the inclusion of students who receive special education services. While NAEYC has an inclusion statement, it is not explicitly named in their standards (NAEYC). Using the NAEYC inclusion statement as a framework, Barton and Smith (2015) conducted an online survey asking about challenges and solutions to inclusion in their state, city, or community preschool program. The authors found that

districts need more support to change their attitudes and beliefs and implement high-quality preschool inclusion (Barton & Smith, 2015). As a result, the researchers developed the following recommendations: identify and leverage current resources, support ongoing research, and utilize an implementation science framework to reduce the gap in research and practice (Barton & Smith, 2015).

Neighborhood segregation, sometimes compounded by racial and economic disparities, can impact preschool quality (Anderson & Mikesell, 2019; Gulosino & Maxwell, 2022; Latham et al., 2021; Sipple et al., 2020). Gulosino and Maxwell (2022) emphasized that access to and availability of high-quality preschools can be challenging when creating a cost-effective preschool program.

When reanalyzing data from the Head Start Impact study, Morris et al. (2018) emphasized the variance of effectiveness based on multiple factors like the context for the Head Start site— including population, urbanicity, and state-level policy. Through this more nuanced look at Head Start, the authors found that different contextual clues, including urbanicity and state policy, can contribute to the quality of education in a given setting (Morris et al., 2018). For example, families and children who live in states with less rigorous state standards and policies around definitions of high quality might have a vastly different experience than those who live in states with more rigorous policies and standards (Morris et al., 2018).

A preschool setting may also impact a preschool's quality (Bassok et al., 2016). Uneven quality preschool persisted within and between formal and informal caused the following critical differences in formal settings: more caregivers obtained a degree in early childhood education or a related field, participated in ongoing professional

development, and were more likely to incorporate reading and math into daily activities (Bassok et al., 2016). There were also notable distinctions in the qualifications of caregivers in formal Head Start settings versus those in school-based settings. Those in school-based settings typically held a degree, whereas Head Start caregivers were more prone to partake in ongoing development. These differences underscore the varying levels of quality in preschool education, which is contingent on the specific setting and even within that setting.

Preschool quality can vary depending on context (Anderson & Mikesell, 2019; Bassok et al., 2016; Gulosino & Maxwell, 2022; Latham et al., 2021; Morris et al., 2018; Sipple et al., 2020). Multiple systems have been utilized to determine a preschool's quality, including NIEER benchmarks, NAEYC benchmarks, CLASS, and other quality improvement systems. However, there are other challenges to creating a high-quality system, including the inclusion of students with disabilities, neighborhood segregation, racial disparities, and economic disparities (Anderson & Mikesell, 2019; Gulosino & Maxwell, 2022; Latham et al., 2021; Reid & Ready, 2013; Sipple et al., 2020). More literature on how preschool programs used different quality rating systems to improve would be beneficial. Additionally, I found limited research on the intersections of preschool quality and inclusive programs in different states. More research is needed to highlight differences and similarities within governance models, especially for different models of government from state to state, as Graue et al. (2016) noted in their discussion of intersections between governance and accountability and the influence of local control.

Overview of Preschool in Colorado

The Colorado Preschool program was established in 1988 and expanded in 1992 as a permanent program to reach more children in the state (Colorado Department of Education, 2020). Colorado has a mixed delivery system for preschool. A mixed delivery system is defined as a mixture of types and provider settings that are both public and private. That mixture of delivery includes faith-based early learning programs, family childcare homes, elementary schools, center-based organizations (referred to as CBOs, which can be for-profit and nonprofit), and stand-alone preschools (Early Milestones, 2023).

Additionally, Colorado is a local control state. Local control is outlined in the Colorado Constitution as stated below:

The general assembly shall, by law, provide for the organization of school districts of convenient size, in each of which shall be established a board of education, to consist of three or more directors to be elected by the qualified electors of the district. Said directors shall have control of instruction in the public schools of their respective districts. (Colo. Const. art. IX, §15)

As such, local entities largely control aspects of their school districts, including funding and policy implementation. Under local control, the assumption is that instead of relying solely on instructions from state officials on issues around education, communities can decide the most effective methods to assist themselves and the students in their communities. For example, local school districts and preschools look to their local organizations, such as early childhood leadership councils, for support with implementation and funding decisions. At the same time, the state gives them the funding to spend with some guidance on what it should spent on, but again, local actors mainly

make those decisions. As a result, tensions may not arise between local entities and state departments from various school issues, including funding priorities, policy implementation, and resource allocation.

A considerable policy that impacted the landscape of early childhood in Colorado was the passing of Colorado House Bill 1427: Cigarette Tobacco and Nicotine Products Tax in 2020, which led to a ballot measure called Proposition EE. Proposition EE, which passed on the ballot, increased taxes on cigarettes and tobacco products and allocated the new income to housing, health care, K-12 education, rural schools, and the expansion of preschool programming (CO HB1427, 2020). The initial step of the passage of Proposition EE, in addition to enacting full-day kindergarten in 2019, was foundational policy measures that ultimately led to the development of the 2022 Colorado House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program (referred the universal preschool bill at times throughout the chapter). The steps taken by Colorado's legislation, such as the 2022 Colorado House Bill 1427: Cigarette Tobacco and Nicotine Products Tax, Proposition EE, and full-day kindergarten, led to the creation of 2022 House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program. The universal preschool bill passed in 2022 to create a new Department of Early Childhood, a universal preschool program for the state of Colorado, and it established local coordinating organizations (LCOs) to liaise between communities and the newly formed Department of Early Childhood. Colorado introduced and passed the universal preschool bill to ensure all 4-year-olds can attend preschool for a given number of hours, improving their access to high-quality preschool programs. The bill's passage was a significant step towards a universal model of preschool education. Still, it raises questions about whether

this model supports access to high-quality preschool programming for historically marginalized populations.

Colorado Preschool Challenges: Access, Quality, and Workforce

Colorado has the fifth highest cost of childcare across the United States and the District of Colombia (The Anne Casey Foundation, 2023). For toddlers, families can spend an average of \$16,333 a year for children in centers-based programming (Colorado Children's Campaign, 2023). However, even with Colorado's mixed delivery system of preschools, private, public, home-based, and faith-based care, there is only the capacity to service about 2/3 of the children who are estimated to need childcare for children birth to 5 years old (Colorado Children's Campaign, 2023). 51% of Coloradoans live in a childcare desert, meaning these communities have little or no childcare access (First Five Years Fund, 2022). Childcare deserts in Colorado include Moffit County, Weld County, and La Plata County, which have much of rural Colorado (Brown, 2023). However, childcare deserts can also stretch East Colfax in Denver, about six miles from the Colorado State Capitol building (Roy, 2022). Given the challenges with access, steps must be taken to increase access while maintaining quality without putting the burden of cost on families (Early Milestones, 2021).

Colorado Shines is Colorado's quality rating improvement system. Colorado Shines rates preschool policy based on the following five aspects on a scale of 1 – 5: "supports family health and safety, ensures staff are well-trained and effective, provides a supportive learning environment that teaches children new skills, helps parents become partners in their child's learning, demonstrates good leadership and business practices" (Colorado Shines, For Programs section). Nevertheless, in the most recent examination of

Colorado's preschool program, Colorado met 4 out of the 10 benchmarks in 2021 and again in 2022 for NIEER (Friedman-Klauss et al., 2022, 2023). The four benchmarks that Colorado met are the comprehensive early learning and development standards, teacher training with a specialty in prekindergarten, class size, and the ratio of staff to children (Friedman-Klauss et al., 2023).

In Colorado, about 82% of early childhood professionals were retained at the start of the 2020-2021 school year (Colorado Department of Early Childhood, 2021). However, the following areas reported a retention rate of 75% and below: Ouray County, Gunnison County, Pitkin County, Grand County, Clear Creek County, Gilpin County, Park County, Teller County, and Elbert County (Colorado Department of Early Childhood, 2021). The average wage of a preschool teacher is \$16.80 or \$34,950 annually in 2022 (Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, 2022). The living wage for an individual with no children in Colorado is \$19.22, and for two working adults with one child is \$22.21 (Glasmeier, 2023). The preschool teacher wage does not include benefits or retirement. Importantly, not all preschool teachers are given benefits, retirement, and paid sick leave as part of their compensation (Colorado Early Childhood Compensation and Benefits Task Force, 2023).

Colorado's challenges with access, quality, and workforce, tied to recent policy initiatives, provide a nuanced state of Colorado's early childhood ecosystem. With the passage of 2022 House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program, it will be interesting to see how much this policy aligns with addressing these problems, if at all.

Chapter Summary

This literature review aimed to acquire a complete understanding of the primary topics, difficulties, and advantages in the early childhood sector in the United States with a focus on the period between 2011 and 2023. The literature review provided a deeper understanding of the benefits and challenges in preschool education, including access, quality, and workforce challenges. It also provided a comprehensive overview of federal, state, and city preschool programming. However, what preschool policies best promote access is more nuanced and less straightforward despite the growing consensus federally and statewide about the importance of preschool investment (Friedman-Klauss et al., 2023; Hahn & Barnett, 2023; The White House, 2013). The context in which a preschool policy is created and implemented can contribute to its challenges and successes, shifts in how it is framed, and may ultimately shift the goals of the original policy (Akaba et al., 2020; Gulosino & Maxwell, 2022; Molla & Nolan, 2019; Morris et al., 2018). In Colorado, the shift from more targeted, decentralized programming to a more universal program may have ripple effects on these aspects of the early childhood ecosystem, intentionally or unintentionally.

Upon review of the articles, little focus was placed on the development of preschool policy. Most articles focused on the importance of preschool, the implementation of preschool programming, and ways to improve preschool programming for families and the workforce (Morris et al., 2018). Some literature noted the impact of shifting from a more targeted approach to a more universal one, but more research is needed on why states or cities chose universal preschool (Akaba et al., 2020). More literature investigating state governance and the impact of political context on preschool

policy is needed. For instance, only one included a state with local control, and none of the articles focused specifically on the impact of local control and preschool policy in Colorado (Graue et al., 2016).

My critical policy analysis of 2022 House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program contributes to the broader literature base to inform practice by providing additional research on the role local control can play in a statewide program for preschool policy, how, if at all, universal preschool policy can solve issues around accessibility, and the anticipated shifts of going from a decentralized system to a system with a central department that collaborates with local entities. Existing research indicates accessibility as a core challenge to implementing a preschool policy, whether targeted or universal. From a critical lens, examining a preschool policy may give insight into how policymakers anticipated universal preschool as a policy solution to access, workforce, and quality challenges and for whom. It would also give insight into who is likely to benefit from the universal preschool policy and if it aligns with the intended goals of the policy as it was written. Additionally, an analysis of the context around the bill may provide insight into what conditions, politically and socially, may be helpful to have in place to get universal preschool policy passed in other states and cities.

Taking a step back and conducting a critical analysis of the policy could lead to a better understanding of whether the policy exacerbates old problems or creates new problems. In the case of universal preschool policy in Colorado, a critical policy analysis would illuminate the nuanced context of Colorado and analyze how policymakers proposed universal preschool as a solution to Colorado's accessibility, quality, and workforce challenges.

Chapter III

Methodology

Traditional policy analysis is a pragmatic, empirical research approach using data like existing data sets and documents to study different aspects of the political process (Diem et al., 2014). Traditional policy analysts see the policy process as relatively linear and predictable, where policy problems are indefinable with clear solutions (Diem et al.; Stone, 2012). The context, power structures, and other nuances of the policy-making process and policy implementation are missing from traditional policy analysis. A critical policy analysis explores the context around a policy, including the political environment, power dynamics, and cultural values (Diem et al., 2014; Young & Diem, 2017). This approach can yield valuable insights into the underlying factors and influences that shaped the policy's creation, development, framing, and creation of winners and losers.

In 2022, Colorado recently introduced House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program to provide universal access to preschool education for families with 4-year-old children. This new policy is a slight departure from the earlier Colorado Preschool Program, which only provided an allotted number of free preschool hours to targeted populations such as economically disadvantaged families and families experiencing homelessness. If a family met eligibility requirements, they could participate in the program and send their child to a qualified provider approved by the Colorado Preschool Program (Colorado Department of Education, 2022). A critical

policy analysis is necessary to understand the roots and goals behind this shift from targeted preschool to universal preschool. Such an analysis will help to illuminate whether the policy is framed to meet the needs of all Coloradans or only certain groups.

The 2022 Colorado House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program encompassed the creation of the Department of Early Childhood, the universal preschool program, and the role of local coordinating organizations (LCOs). For this critical policy analysis, the primary focus will be the universal preschool program and how the local coordinating organizations (LCOs) and the Department of Early Childhood (DEC) are expected to interact and deliver the program to families in Colorado. Moreover, the universal preschool program outlined in the bill represents Colorado's most recent policy change regarding increasing access to high-quality preschool statewide.

The current study focuses on the second and third fundamental concern of critical policy analysis: an examination of a policy's roots, its development over time, and the problem the policy intends to solve, in addition to how a policy creates winners and losers through power distribution (Diem et al., 2014; Young & Diem, 2017). To analyze these fundamental concerns, I discuss the articulated goals of the universal preschool policy, the problem it is intended to solve, and how the policy developed over time. Additionally, I will examine how the preschool policy is framed in the bill text and legislative audio. By gaining more context of the articulated goals and framing, I will use the data to determine how, if at all, the universal preschool approach creates more equitable access to preschool for historically marginalized children, including if the policy potentially perpetuates the dominant culture and intentionally or unintentionally

advantages certain groups while disadvantaging others. The following research question will guide the study:

- How, if at all, was Colorado's universal preschool school policy designed to create more equitable access to education for historically marginalized children and their families?

Given the shift to a universal preschool program, learning how this new policy is designed will help understand potential unintended consequences compared to the previous preschool program. Examining the previous program will also build more context for the roots of preschool in Colorado that set the stage for the universal preschool policy to pass. Because the Department of Early Childhood and the universal preschool program are established in the same bill, and both will be rolled out parallel to each other, it is essential to know the goals behind the policy, how the policy evolved, how it was framed, and how power is distributed. In this chapter, I outline my positionality, research methodology, research methods, the data collection and analysis process, how credibility and trustworthiness were established, any ethical considerations, and limitations to the study.

Researcher Positionality

My positionality as a Black woman from a segregated midwestern town, a former educator and school administrator, and the current director of policy at a nonprofit all influence my approach to the research. My experiences growing up in a segregated town included experience in schools where the racial population and income level of the neighborhood reflected the quality of the schools. I also have specific memories of changing schools often because it was challenging to find high-quality schools in the

area. I went to a private school for my first few years, but it became too expensive, leading me to go from one school to another. As a child, I did not fully understand what my mom meant by a “good” school, but in hindsight, I saw that the issue was about access. The private school was financially accessible, and my mother, a single mother, did not yet know what schools were the best in the district and how to access them. This experience influenced my assumption that all children should have access to high-quality schools. My barriers to accessing high-quality school when I was younger were financial and geographical because of the neighborhood I initially lived in. It is one reason for my interest in learning more about historically marginalized communities and the impact of systemic inequalities on children's education.

My educator expertise and experience are in early childhood education, as those are the grades I taught in and later acted as an instructional coach and assistant principal. Initially, I wanted to become a preschool teacher, but the difference in pay between preschool and kindergarten teachers was a deterrent. As a researcher and member of the Colorado policy ecosystem, I advocated for the full-day kindergarten policy. I conducted research as a policy research fellow for a nonprofit about the early childhood landscape in the United States. I work at an education nonprofit and have connections to different education departments, including the Department of Early Childhood that the bill created.

All these identity markers and career pathways have influenced how I understand the importance of preschool and access to high-quality preschool in historically marginalized areas. These identities and experiences also piqued my interest in the new universal preschool policy, primarily whether it benefits historically marginalized

communities such as families in economically under-resourced areas and children who may be eligible for special education services.

A few experiences in my life connect to my interest in critically analyzing policy. First was the experience of going from school to school, which I mentioned above. Another experience I had as a new kindergarten teacher in Colorado coming from Wisconsin was learning that families had to pay for kindergarten and preschool. I wanted to know if it was something I had not noticed in Wisconsin or if this was purely a Colorado policy. I began to dig deeper and learned how costly it was for families, which made me want to advocate for full-day kindergarten. As someone who hopes to become a parent, I could not fathom how costly it is. After seeing the success of advocating for full-day kindergarten, my attention went to preschool. I worked with many people who had younger children, and one coworker, in particular, struggled to find the best services for her children who needed special education services. Watching her journey and learning more about how challenging it was to access preschool and how costly it was to pay for it made me curious about different preschool policies.

In 2018, I did work learning about preschool across the United States as a Teach Plus research fellow. I got to interview different preschool educators from different states, and it opened my eyes to how different preschools looked from state to state based on policy, funding, and governance. I wanted to know more about states and cities that chose a universal preschool model, how it was funded, and how it would benefit families. As I continued to research and talk to people in the early childhood arena, I learned that many assumptions about preschool were wrong. For instance, the funding structures in

one state can look different in another. Not only that, but I also began learning more about rural spaces in Colorado through my policy work and coursework in 2021.

When I left my assistant principal position in 2022 and moved into the education policy space, I saw the complexity of the education policy world in Colorado. My experience as a Teach Plus research fellow was slightly removed from the policy process since I still went into a school building daily to teach students or coach teachers. In this new position, I saw strategic relationships, personal interests, and policy constantly interacting. In the 2023 legislative session, I observed the tension around different school discipline bills with different groups. I was deeply interested in the rhetoric used by opposing sides on why a bill should or should not be passed and the perceptions each group had of each other. I also noted the importance of power and position when supporting, opposing, or staying neutral on a bill. Now that I am more rooted in the policy space, I experience how context, rhetoric, relationships, and power play an important role in determining everything from what policies are prioritized to who sponsors a bill to why someone may or may not support a bill almost daily. My experience this last year has pulled me more towards critical policy analysis because of the multiple factors influencing a policy decision and how many of those factors lie outside the capital building.

The experiences mentioned above highlighted the different challenges in early childhood and how they can look similar and different based on context. When universal preschool became a more prominent topic in the Colorado policy arena, I wanted to explore its creation and how it may be a solution for families across Colorado, especially looking at different groups. What would impact families from historically marginalized

populations if universal preschool provided a certain amount of time for all children in Colorado? My research in 2018 as a research fellow primarily looked at what the implementation of preschool programs looked like, but I had never taken a step back to look at the policy process and how the programs came to be. Also, since I advocated for full day, universal kindergarten in the past, it felt like the right next step to learn more about the potential of a universal preschool program. However, I believe the targeted universal approach would be best. Targeted universal policies use targeted strategies based on groups' needs toward a universal goal (Powell et al., 2019). In the case of universal preschool, I believe the targeted universal approach would look like providing more preschool hours to families based on need, like those from economically disadvantaged areas or students experiencing homelessness. At the time of this study, I was uniquely positioned where the program is in its early stages. I could observe and research its development and implementation early instead of years later. Additionally, I could determine if the universal preschool program is targeted universalism or universalism.

Methodology

Qualitative research flows from “philosophical assumptions, to interpretive lens, and on to the procedures involved in studying social or human problems” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 43). A key aspect of qualitative research is that a researcher collects multiple forms of data through strategies such as observing behaviors and document analysis. The data is then turned into codes, categories, and themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Research is also situated contextually, emphasizing understanding how social, historical, and political contexts may influence participant perspectives. Additionally,

multiple perspectives are investigated, and qualitative researchers reflect on their position in the study and how it informs their interpretation of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

For the present study, qualitative research was the best methodology for multiple reasons. First, I focused on a social problem – access to preschool education for children and families in Colorado. Through critical policy analysis, I investigated the context around 2022 House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program and how that impacted its creation, development, and passing. To better comprehend the roots of the universal preschool policy, I analyzed the previous Colorado Preschool Program. To understand the political and social context surrounding the bill, I used data to analyze different perspectives and see how the policy goals are framed. Since I cannot physically go back and observe behaviors, I relied on legislative audio and document analysis to see what values are presented in the perspectives of those who support, oppose, or are neutral about the universal preschool program. As a researcher, I could understand the program's goals and how the policy was framed from document analysis and legislative testimony. Since the goal and framing of a policy cannot be understood through statistical methods, quantitative research, and mixed methods would not be the appropriate methodology.

Methods

Approach to Inquiry

The research study was a critical policy analysis. According to Young and Diem (2017), critical policy analysis scholars pay attention to the complex systems where a policy is made, including the cultural and political context that shaped a policy's creation and development. When considering each aspect of critical policy analysis, it is valuable to distinguish between traditional and critical approaches to policy analysis. Traditional policy analysis has four foundational beliefs (Diem et al., 2014). The first foundational belief is that they view the policy process as a manageable step-by-step process that includes problem identification, policy creation, and implementation, followed by evaluation. The second foundational belief is that goals drive policy, and there is rational-based decision-making where outcomes can be easily explained or are foreseeable (Diem et al., 2014; Stone, 2012). Another foundational belief is that data such as documents and data sets provide knowledge representative of reality (Diem et al., 2014). The last foundational belief is that policy alternatives, practices, and evaluations can identify and address problems (Diem et al., 2014). Traditional policy analysis is usually a more straightforward process based on rationality that does not consider the social, political, and cultural contexts around a policy's creation, implementation, or evaluation.

Researchers noted the need for more nuance and complexity and how limiting the traditional policy analysis could be to address problems (Diem et al., 2014; Young & Diem, 2014). Young and Diem (2014) noted that many researchers have shifted from the more positivist traditional approach to a more critical one. Critical policy analysis critiques traditional methods of understanding policy, its objectives, and development

through a more critical lens, which may include an analysis of the policy's context and the perspectives of groups furthest from power (Young & Diem, 2017). This combined policy analysis and critical theory approach considers the unintended consequences of policy decisions on historically marginalized populations and emphasizes the importance of examining the underlying power structures that influence policy formulation and implementation.

Therefore, critical policy analysis goes beyond the standard positivist approach, focusing primarily on empirical data and objective analysis. Instead, it critiques the positivist approach and emphasizes the importance of considering the social, economic, and political context in which policies are formulated and implemented (Young & Diem, 2017). Critical policy analysis provides a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of policy development and implementation, which can help promote more equitable and effective policy outcomes.

Critical policy analysis examines the role of power in policy and an alternative lens to how critical theories, including more specific critical theories like queer theory, interact with other policy issues. Critical policy analysis usually addresses any of the following five “critical concerns”: the differences between policy rhetoric and policy implementation, the development of policy, the distribution of resources, knowledge, and power through a policy, the way resistance or engagement in policy shows up in historically marginalized populations, and the interplay between policy, privileges, and equality (Young & Diem, 2017).

As a critical policy scholar, it is essential to approach this work with a critical eye and an open mind while acknowledging the potential influence of my background and

subjectivities, which will be reflected in reflective journaling and understanding my positionality. The current study is grounded in the second fundamental concern of critical policy analysis, which focuses on the roots of a policy, its development, and the problems the policy intends to solve (Diem et al., 2014; Young & Diem, 2017). Furthermore, analyzing the 2022 Colorado House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program through a critical lens means understanding the different values and perspectives of those whom the creation of a universal preschool program may impact. As Diem et al. (2014) noted, “part of interrogating the policy process involves examining the players involved in the process as well as policy construction” (p. 1075). Understanding that the players, their values, and perspectives may vary will be especially important when examining who may see themselves as positively or negatively impacted by the bill as practitioners, users (namely families and children), and decision-makers.

Research Setting

Colorado, which gained its statehood on August 1, 1876, drafted its current and only constitution in the spring of 1876 (Colorado General Assembly, 2023a). This constitution has been amended many times since its creation and is the foundation for governance in Colorado. Fowler (2013) categorized Colorado’s political culture as a moralistic state, meaning the people “favor an activist government that initiates new programs when necessary. They also believe participation in politics should be as widespread as possible” (p. 83). Evidence of widespread participation can be seen through the ease of voter registration through the Department of Motor Vehicles and the mail-in ballots that do not require people to vote in person. Those citizens in states who

value moralistic political cultures prioritize fairness and impartial policy implementation and tend to have a favorable opinion of government bureaucracies and civil service systems (Fowler, 2013). There are likely to be more public debates on different issues and advisory councils in these states. Colorado is known for having different working groups and task forces as part of the policymaking and policy implementation process, such as the At-Risk Measure for School Finance Working Group that came out of Colorado House Bill 1202 (CO HB1202, 2022) and the Health Care Cost Analysis Task Force that came from Colorado House Bill 1176 (CO HB1176, 2019).

According to the University of Colorado-Boulder's Political Culture Survey (Nava et al., 2022), among likely voters, 46% of the population identified as or leaned toward Democrat, 16% identified as Independent, and 38% identified as or leaning toward Republican. The current legislative body leans towards the Democratic party, with 71 Democrats and 31 Republicans. There are 47 Democrats and 19 Republicans in the House of Representatives. In the Senate, there are 24 Democrats and 12 Republicans in the Senate (Colorado General Assembly, 2023b).

Local control still plays a large part in education policy (Colo. Const. art. IX, §15). Local control means that local school districts are primarily in charge of policy implementation, funding decisions (but not the funding amount), and resource allocation in their district. While the state may give guidance, it primarily comes down to local districts to make decisions, creating a more decentralized education system. With this structure, the legislature passes a bill, a department such as the Department of Education may be responsible for allocating funding for it or giving guidance on implementation, and the local district is in charge of implementation and resource allocation.

Given this context, it was essential to determine the sponsors of 2022 House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program, whether it was partisan or bipartisan, and what impact that had on the bill's creation, evolution, and eventual passing. Legislative testimony, other audio from the legislative session, and its ease of accessibility are further examples of the moralistic political culture of Colorado, where issues can be debated publicly and widespread participation is encouraged. Listening to the policy process for the bill demonstrated some benefits or challenges to that value within a moralistic culture. Also, universal preschool was a new initiative, and an analysis of its creation and development gave insight into why this legislative body and the supporters of universal preschool saw this new initiative as necessary instead of continuing the more targeted approach. In the current study, an analysis of the political context of Colorado and how it may have influenced the passing of 2022 House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program highlighted some practices in the policy process that may have had a negative or positive impact. It was also helpful to have a clear idea of who was in the legislative session and their political alignment to see how it might have affected the policy's creation, development, and framing.

Data Collection

The sample for the study was the 73rd General Assembly of the Colorado legislative session in 2022. I collected qualitative data, including legislative documents and audio from the legislative session. The study included an in-depth analysis of the initial, rerevised, and final version of the 2022 House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program, the original and final fiscal notes, and audio recordings of the legislative session related to the bill. Audio from the legislative session was limited to the introductions of the bill to the House Education Committee, witness testimony during the introduction into the House, the introduction of the bill to the Senate Education Committee, and a panel of experts who responded to questions during the introduction in the House. By listening to those specific legislative sessions, I had a firmer grasp of the circumstances and reasoning for the goals of the universal preschool policy, how the problem was framed, why an amendment was made, and how the bill potentially addresses equitable access.

The documents for the document analysis were limited to legislative documents and audio about 2022 Colorado House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program because the documents outline the policy that became the universal preschool program. Legislative testimony was vital in outlining the perspectives of those who questioned, supported, and opposed the bill. Listening to testimony also illuminated values held by supporters and gave a broader understanding of the political and social context.

Research Question: How, if at all, was Colorado's universal preschool school policy designed to create more equitable access to education for historically marginalized children and their families?

To address the research question, the following data was collected: the 2022 Colorado House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program bill text (including the original version, the rerevised version that has House and Senate amendments, and the final version), legislative audio, the first and final fiscal notes of the universal preschool bill, reports on the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP), and the governor's State of the State transcripts from 2020 - 2022. Reports on the Colorado Preschool Program helped me understand the roots of why there was a shift to universal preschool by focusing on the Commissioner of Education's welcome letters. Additionally, the governor's state of the state transcripts showed how the governor spoke about preschool and the potential rationale for the belief that there needed to be a shift to a more universal approach to preschool. The transcripts also gave clues to Colorado's political and social context.

An analysis of the bill text and audio determined how supporters articulated the goals of the universal preschool policy and how it developed over time. It also determined if there was any misalignment between the legislative audio and the bill text around the bill's goals. It was also helpful to learn why the bill was eventually passed and for what reasons. Listening to the questions asked during the session about the bill illuminated some doubts and curiosities held as the bill went through the legislative process, which in turn may have informed its goals. Finally, an analysis of the different iterations of fiscal notes demonstrated how funding for the program shifted and changed

from its introduction to its enactment and if those shifts aligned with the program goals. It was helpful to see what the bill intended to fund and whether it aligned with the universal preschool program's goals.

I used the bill text and legislative audio to understand the policy's framing and the problems it intended to solve. By reading the bill text, I learned how the universal program was framed, including whom the program was perceived to benefit and how the supporters framed its importance. It also determined how the problem the policy intended to solve was framed and why universal preschool was the solution. Listening to legislative audio also helped to see how people expressed their values and how they were framed to support or oppose 2022 Colorado House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program. I learned the different perspectives based on position (policymaker, practitioner, advocacy organization, provider, community member), location (rural, urban, suburban), setting (district, private providers, centers-based organizations), and political background. Such data collection provided a broader understanding of which stakeholders felt they might be advantaged and disadvantaged because of the universal preschool bill. The bill text demonstrated how the bill discussed access to preschool, if at all. It also demonstrated who the bill intended to increase access for, if it is mentioned, and how. After examining how the bill discussed equitable access, I looked for alignment in the fiscal note. It was helpful to see what aspects of the bill text came with funding and which did not.

Legislative bill text, legislative audio, and information about the legislator's political affiliation were public information housed on Colorado's legislative website. The legislative website housed each iteration of the policy, each iteration of the fiscal

notes, and all audio recordings of the legislative session. The Colorado Channel also had live recordings of each assembly but did not provide video of each committee. For that reason, audio recordings were used. I also researched the official stances of organizations on the Secretary of State's website to see which organizations took an official position on the bill. To understand the values, stances, and perceptions of the universal preschool bill, I analyzed the testimony of individuals and organizations. Testimony provided a clear stance and potential rationale using the words of the individual or organization they represented.

Process

Due to the large volume of data, I collected and analyzed it simultaneously. In the upcoming section, I will explain the analysis process in detail. This section focuses on the sequential order of data collection. Initially, I gathered the Colorado Preschool Program legislative reports and the governor's state of the state transcripts to gain insight into the political context before the creation of 2022 Colorado House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program.

After analyzing these reports and transcripts, I followed a strategic approach while collecting the legislative audio and bill texts. Each time I approached an iteration of the bill, I listened to the legislative audio and read the bill text. After that, I read the fiscal note, which was followed by an analysis of the transcripts of the legislative audio. However, regarding the amendments to the bill, I used the associated legislative audio (witness testimony and the introduction to the Senate, which included much questioning about the bill) and the rerevised version. I analyzed the rerevised version and the final version because the rerevised version of the bill showed all the changes to the bill

including the amendments from the House and Senate. I also analyzed the final fiscal note to see if any changes came from amendments (see Table B2).

Analysis

Data analysis was done in multiple stages. NVivo was used, given the length of the documents to be analyzed and the length of the audio that will be collected. Data collection and coding occurred simultaneously. Inductive and deductive coding were used for all data collected, including legislative audio, bill texts, and transcripts. Using deductive coding, a preliminary codebook was created using codes and later categories derived from the policy paradox conceptual framework, Fowler (2013), critical theory, and key concepts from the literature review. Inductive codes were derived from the data as concepts and ideas emerged, including some reflected in the literature review. Throughout the data analysis process, the content of the codebook changed as more information was gathered during data analysis. The codebook included preliminary code descriptions and expanded during the data analysis process.

Codes about the political, historical, and cultural context and power were largely derived from Fowler (2013). Those codes were then categorized under the different aspects of political culture—traditional, moralistic, and individualistic (Fowler, 2013). Those categories then became themes that examined understanding the goals of universal preschool and how it differed from the previous preschool program, along with the influence of the political culture and context on the passing and framing of the bill.

The current study aligned with the second and third fundamental concern in critical policy analysis, which analyzes a policy's roots, development over time, how the problem was framed, the role of the dominant culture, and how power is distributed to

potentially advantage some groups and disadvantage others, (Diem et al., 2014; Young & Diem, 2017). Some codes from Stone (2012) aligned with this concern, specifically equity, power, welfare, decisions, causes, and rights. Additionally, the preliminary codebook had categories directedly tied to the concern in critical policy analysis with a focus on the policy's roots, development, and intentions.

The policy paradox provided codes for identifying policy solutions, goals, and framing problems (Stone, 2012). Policy goals were categorized as equity, efficiency, welfare, liberty, and security. These goals were represented by codes that helped analyze whether equitable access for historically marginalized populations was named a goal for universal preschool and what other goals may have been present. The codes were symbols, numbers, causes, interests, and decisions for framing the policy.

Key concepts from the literature review were also used to code when conducting data analysis since neither Fowler (2013) nor Stone (2013) included specific issues around early childhood or the state of Colorado. Inductive coding allowed patterns to emerge without being boxed in by the deductive codes. Those codes were then added to the categories in the codebook, and new categories and themes were added to accommodate all the deductive and inductive codes.

During my analysis, I relied on Fowler (2013) to provide additional support in defining similar or identical concepts connected to Stone's (2012) ideas. For instance, both Fowler (2013) and Stone (2012) explored efficiency nuancedly concerning policy. However, a key distinction is that Fowler directly links terms to education policy, whereas Stone (2012) connects terms to policy in general. Fowler played a crucial role in my analysis by allowing me to connect to policy in general and education policy.

When necessary, some items were recoded, especially after examining the analytic memos and after the documents and audio analyses. Those potentially recoded items were sorted into the corresponding themes. The themes aligned with the research questions focusing on political culture and context, the goals and framing of the policy, the bill's development over the legislative process, values and ideology, power distribution, and the role of reinforcing dominant culture. For this reason, the analysis needed to stay flexible in case other themes emerged.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness in the analysis of this policy, three strategies were employed: triangulation, peer review, and reflexivity. Triangulation is using multiple data sources to corroborate evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I utilized triangulation to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the goals of the universal preschool program. The three data sources for triangulation were the document analysis of the fiscal notes, bill text, and legislative audio. Utilizing all documents helped to determine if perspectives are aligned or misaligned when discussing the universal preschool program goals and framing. For document analysis of the bill text, I closely examined the documents, paying particular attention to how the bill sponsors articulated the goal of universal preschool and how it is framed. The same data sources were used to triangulate information regarding the bill's development, framing, and potential impacts on different demographics. Utilizing this method ensured that the discoveries were corroborated and rooted in solid evidence. I also chose triangulation through these different data sources because I used documents and audio from a past event. I will not be able to interview stakeholders to gain more information, so I needed to triangulate the

legislative testimony, bill text, and fiscal notes to ensure I had a fuller picture – especially when themes began to emerge.

When conducting research, it is crucial to seek the input of other experts in the field through a peer review process. This allows for valuable feedback that can enhance the quality of the research and ensure its accuracy. Peer review can also help identify potential biases or limitations in the study, which is essential for a comprehensive and objective analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Given my positionality, it was imperative to engage in peer review to ensure that any subjectivities were identified and addressed in the research. This helped maintain the integrity and credibility of the work, ultimately contributing to advancing knowledge in the field. I specifically seek peer reviews from doctoral students in my current program, a person who works in the early childhood field, and a colleague with experience in rural areas and a superintendency to give feedback. By leaning into peer review, they saw gaps and opportunities I need to have as the researcher, especially since I will be strategic about which aspects I want them to review.

Reflexive journaling was another key strategy that I used to enhance the credibility of a study. This technique, like peer-reviewing, will assist in identifying any potential subjectivities that may emerge during the research process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Given my position in the policy space, it felt essential to document any thoughts, emotions, biases, or reflections that may arise during data collection and analysis. Particularly when reviewing audio recordings of legislative sessions related to the universal preschool policy, reflexive journaling proved particularly useful in identifying any strong reactions to stakeholder discussions. Additionally, it was beneficial to reflect on the emotions periodically felt throughout various stages of the

research process, mainly since this study was based on past documents and conversations about a current program in the early implementation process.

I implemented triangulation, peer review, and reflexivity to establish the trustworthiness and validity of this critical policy analysis. I utilized these techniques at each stage of the research process to enhance the overall quality of our study and to ensure that any potential biases were identified and addressed. By employing these methods, I am confident that the findings were trustworthy, accurate, and relevant to creating the universal preschool program in Colorado.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were crucial to this study. First, I completed the Human Subjects Research and Determination Form. This form indicated that I could skip the Institutional Review Board's (IRB) process. Since the current study utilized public data, did not involve an intervention or interaction with human subjects, and did not include any clinical investigation, it did not meet the requirements to complete the IRB process.

Even though it did not need to be part of the IRB process, trust and credibility were essential for readers and for conducting an ethical study. I was upfront about the study's purpose, the types of data collected, and how the data would be used. Since this study used public data on a state website and potentially data about organizations from their websites, the data was easily verifiable and replicable.

Confidentiality was still important, as all the data sources were public information in this study. When drafting critical information, such as legislative sponsors of the universal preschool bill and organizations such as the governor's office, these names remained the same since they gave more political context of the time. However, the study

did not share the names and identifiable information when referring to individuals giving legislative testimony. Instead, names were changed, and their perspective or position was the only describing factor. All data analysis tools and documents were under a password-protected computer device.

Anticipated Limitations

Some limitations of this critical policy analysis included the data sample, the formality of legislative language, and the complexities of the current rollout of universal preschool. Due to the number of hearings involved in the legislative process, including multiple readings of the bill, the study focused only on limited sessions of audio that included the bill's introduction, legislative testimony, legislators discussing the bill's merits, and any amendments to the bill. Those legislative sessions were chosen because they were more representative of people sharing their purpose of the bill, the problems they hoped it would address, and their concerns about the bill.

Besides the limitations of audio sampling, interpreting legislative language can also be difficult for those unfamiliar with it. The language can be complex and ambiguous, making it hard to understand. Nevertheless, comparing the legislative audio with the policy helped identify discrepancies and gaps between the policy's interpretation and the actual legislative language in the bill.

Another research limitation was the number of pages in each bill iteration. There are seven versions, and each one contains over 400 pages. For this reason, I have limited the analysis to an in-depth analysis of the first and rerevised version of the bill texts. I utilized the rerevised version of the bill text because it included every amendment from the House and Senate in addition to the changes for the final bill. Given the length of

these documents, qualitative research software is the best option to ensure a thorough analysis. However, using software also had its limitations. The use of software requires a time investment in terms of how to use the system properly. However, one way to mitigate this limitation is through analytic memos and reflexive journaling to triangulate data and reflect on the data analysis process.

The present scenario and updates regarding universal preschool implementation also felt complicated. Due to my connection with the Colorado Department of Early Childhood and some parties involved in the universal preschool program, it sometimes felt challenging to separate the current situation from the bill's original intent. For this reason, reflexive journaling was essential to ensure my interpretation of the past was not influenced by the current situation. Reflexivity highlighted any bias, feelings, or thoughts that came up during data collection and analysis and supported me with effectively navigating those aspects so that they did not impact the research,

To conduct a thorough analysis, I utilized qualitative research software, analytic memos, and reflective journaling to aid in triangulating data and reflecting on the data analysis process. It was crucial to remain aware of any subjectivities, emotions, or thoughts that arose during data collection and analysis and to manage them effectively to ensure they did not affect the research.

Chapter Summary

The state of Colorado moved from a targeted approach to preschool programming to a universal approach with the passing of 2022 Colorado House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program. By examining artifacts collectively, I hoped to gain a more comprehensive and three-dimensional understanding

of the policy. This understanding may lead to significant policy-making shifts, decision-making recommendations, and a more equitable preschool system. A critical policy analysis is crucial to better comprehend the motivations of all stakeholders and evaluate the policy's effectiveness in serving the needs of all Coloradans. This type of analysis may provide valuable insights and recommendations for decision-makers at all levels, from local program actors to those in the legislature.

To conduct a thorough critical policy analysis of the universal preschool bill, I examined various data sources, such as legislative session documents and audio recordings. Scrutinizing these sources lead to a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of the state's political and social landscape. It was essential to explore how the bill was introduced, framed, and presented, as well as the motivations behind its framing. By closely analyzing these factors, stakeholders can better understand the bill's potential consequences, both presently and in the future.

Additionally, conducting a critical policy analysis promotes transparency and accountability to the diverse demographics and communities throughout the state, while also helping to assess whether the policy is achieving its intended outcomes. Using this approach, I had the ability to examine potential power imbalances and come up with recommendations to shift them. Critical policy analysis can ultimately support long-term planning and continuous improvement of the program, ensuring that all Coloradans have equitable access to high-quality preschool education.

In the next chapter, I collect data and use that to determine findings in this critical policy analysis of the universal preschool program framed by Fowler (2013). Through data collection and findings, I investigate the articulated goals of the universal preschool

program, how it was framed, its development, whether it addressed access for historically marginalized populations, and its potential role of reinforcing dominant culture.

Moreover, the present study will explore any unintended consequences that may occur through the universal preschool approach.

Chapter IV

Findings

In the 2021-2022 school year, only 23% of the 4-year-old population were enrolled in the Colorado Preschool Program, with 50% of the children who enrolled identified as Hispanic or Latino, 33% as white, and 9% as Black or African American (Friedman-Klauss et al., 2022). Following the approval of the 2022 Colorado House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program, the Colorado Preschool Program, which served a targeted group of children, was replaced with a universal approach. This study aimed to assess the extent to which 2022 Colorado House Bill 1295, also known as the Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program, was specifically designed to enhance educational opportunities for historically marginalized children and their families. In this context, marginalized populations refer to rural communities, children and families who are economically-disadvantaged, children and communities of color, children with disabilities, and emergent multilingual children.

In this study, I employed Young and Diem's (2017) conceptualization of critical policy analysis. I focused on the second critical policy concern, a concern regarding the policy, its roots, and its development. Furthermore, I cited the third concern Young and Diem (2017) raised concerning power, resources, and knowledge distribution and the intentional and unintentional means by which a policy may produce advantages and

disadvantages. I accomplish this by conducting a rigorous analysis of five data sources, which encompass the following: (a) annual State of The State Address from 2020-2022, (b) Colorado Preschool Reports, (c) 2022 Colorado House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool, (d) legislative testimony, and e) fiscal notes. This chapter presents the study's findings by providing a detailed analysis of Colorado's journey toward implementing a universal preschool policy. It explores the origins, the development process, and the transition into law. Additionally, it examines the potential impact of the policy, both intended and unintended, on different groups of people.

Drawing from the Colorado State of The State Address and Colorado Preschool Reports from 2020-2022, I initiated my analysis by examining the political roots of the Universal Preschool Policy. This involved exploring the political culture in which the bill was introduced and the specific issues it aimed to address. Second, I presented the findings from my critical examination of the bill text, transcripts of legislative testimony, and fiscal notes to understand and describe how legislators framed the problem of access to universal preschool in Colorado and how they sought to address it. During this analysis, I closely observed the bill's introduction in the House and Senate Committee, legislative testimony, and subsequent amendment changes to comprehend the bill's progression through the legislative process. This in-depth critical analysis of the 2022 Colorado House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program illuminate various dimensions of power (i.e., ideas, state action, resources) and the extent to which this bill equitably distributes or reinforces existing power structures and advantages to families who already had widespread access to preschool, such as wealthy families or white families.

Navigating Colorado's Path to Universal Preschool Policy

To examine the political culture of Colorado and the shift towards universal preschool in Colorado, I used the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) Reports from 2020 – 2022, focusing on the commissioner's welcome letters and the Governor's State of the State Transcripts from 2020-2022. This section discusses how the political landscape, shaped by the 2021 House Bill 1304: Early Childhood System and Proposition EE Funding Retention Rate Reduction (hereafter referred to as Proposition EE), facilitated the transition from CPP to universal preschool. The section also explores the foundational principles underpinning this transition.

Colorado's Political Culture, 2020-2022

Fowler (2013) defined political culture as “a collective way of thinking about politics that includes beliefs about the political process, its proper goals, and appropriate behavior for politicians” (p. 81). As a critical policy analyst, it is essential to examine political cultures because it contextualizes a bill within the political culture at a given time, aids in understanding why specific policies are upheld, and illustrates how societal norms and values influence the development and implementation of public policies. A single context rarely exhibits only one political culture; hence, these cultures can remain stable or fluctuate.

In Colorado, various political cultures often emerge during local elections. For instance, an election in Douglas County may display a different political culture than a school board election in Boulder County or Larimer County. However, if we were to aggregate Colorado's political cultures at the state level for 2020-2022 (the focus of my analysis), I would characterize it as having a moralistic political culture. This culture

encompasses widespread political participation, an emphasis on education in political platforms, and the presence of advisory councils (Fowler, 2013).

Widespread Political Participation

Governor Jared Polis celebrated bipartisanship when it came to passing legislation and cited it as a primary factor contributing to the state of Colorado's resilience and success. An example of this celebration of bipartisanship was highlighted in Representative Polis' 2020 State of the State Address. Governor Jared Polis posited that:

Working together last year, we lowered health care costs, lowered taxes for small businesses, provided more affordable housing, made the largest ever state investment in transportation, and delivered universal free Full Day Kindergarten for all! ...We should be proud that 95% of the bills I signed into law last year were passed with Republican and Democratic votes (Colorado Public Radio, 2020)

Bipartisanship exemplifies the ability of the major political parties to come together and find common ground on various political matters. The above quote addressed one of the vital political steps that paved the way for universal preschool—the passage of the bipartisan, universal full-day kindergarten bill. With the passing of the to fund full day kindergarten, the money typically allocated for full-day kindergarten in the Colorado Preschool Program was redirected to fund more children's attendance at preschool programs.

Emphasis on Education

The governor celebrated the success of increased funding for preschool in the 2020 State of the State Address, highlighting the significance of education in moralistic cultures. In his address, he proudly announced,

Last year, we were able to fund 5,100 additional slots for at-risk children in the Colorado Preschool Program. And in my budget this year, we're proposing to help an additional 6,000 children attend preschool, which for the first time will bring coverage to half of all eligible kids in Colorado (Colorado Public Radio, 2020).

This statement underscored the augmented funding for the preschool program and the governor's commitment to facilitating access to preschool for eligible children statewide. Although full-day kindergarten was not implemented through a ballot measure, the governor's strong support for it highlights his conviction in the crucial role of education in his political agenda.

Additionally, in the same 2020 State of the State Address, the governor stated his commitment to universal preschool and increasing access to preschool programming by the end of his first term in 2022. "We can and we must do better, which is why I'm committed to achieving universal access to quality preschool for 4-year-olds by the end of my first term" (Colorado Public Radio, 2020). This quote demonstrated two things – the governor's plan for universal preschool to be established by the end of his first term in 2022, the year of an election, and the governor's commitment to universal access to preschool programming. In this statement, access is linked to quality. In other cases, access is related to affordability. For example, in the 2020 State of the State Address, the governor stated, "It's not that parents don't want preschool — It's that they can't afford it" (Colorado Public Radio, p. 2020). By putting the sentiment of both statements together, the Governor framed access to quality and affordable preschool programming as equitable for all of Colorado's children.

The Commissioner of Education also emphasized the state's prioritization of education, particularly for young children.

The [universal preschool] initiative has the potential to, combined with [the Colorado Preschool Program] provide preschool education for all of Colorado's children while maintaining the state's commitment to supporting children who are at risk for educational challenges (Colorado Department of Education, 2022, p.2).

An interesting part of this data point is the idea that in the future, the Colorado Preschool Program at that time would still exist with the creation of universal preschool programming. In other words, the more targeted approach of CPP would still exist with the universal approach. This data point suggested that implementing both the universal preschool program and CPP would ensure that all children in Colorado receive fair and equal assistance while simultaneously maintaining support for historically marginalized communities.

Proposition EE, Increased Taxes on Tobacco and Nicotine. In 2020, 68% of voters supported Proposition EE, a ballot initiative that increased tobacco and nicotine products taxes and allocated funds to programs, including universal preschool (Seaman, 2020). This marked the second political stride towards expanding preschool programs and transitioning to universal preschool, showcasing significant voter engagement and highlighting the importance of preschool in Colorado's moralistic political culture. In his 2020 State of the State address, the governor emphasized the connection between prosperity in Colorado, bipartisanship support, and endorsement of universal preschool by voters. Similarly, the Commissioner of Education celebrated the passage of Proposition EE as a critical step towards universal preschool in the welcome letter in the Colorado Preschool Report.

Finally, Colorado showed a strong commitment to preschool by passing Proposition EE in November 2020, providing funding for universal preschool for Colorado's 4-year-olds. CDE is committed to working with

the State Board of Education, Governor Polis, legislators, district leaders, and local preschool providers as the state moves forward with design and implementation (Colorado Department of Education, 2021, p.3).

In Governor Polis' 2021 address, he reiterated this vision, emphasizing the importance of initiatives like paid family leave, universal preschool, and affordable higher education in making Colorado an ideal state for families. Despite the absence of legislation for universal preschool, the governor's remarks underscored his clear vision for its implementation.

Advisory Councils

The 2021 Colorado House Bill-1304: Early Childhood Systems marked a pivotal progression toward the 2022 Colorado HB-1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program. This legislation established a unified early childhood system, created a transition advisory group to provide recommendations on preschool programming for the state, and created the Department of Early Childhood (CO HB1304, 2021). The Department of Early Childhood was tasked with collaborating with multiple stakeholders, including families, providers, and agencies, to create a mixed-delivery early childhood system and to “provide high-quality, voluntary, affordable early childhood opportunities for all children in Colorado” (CO HB1304, 2021, p. 16). Additionally, the Department of Early Childhood must “coordinate the availability of early childhood programs and services in Colorado to meet the needs of all families” (CO HB1304, 2021, p. 16).

Under this bill, the governor would appoint the executive director, and the Early Childhood Leadership Commission (ECLC) would be relocated from the Office of Early Childhood within the Department of Education to the newly established Department of

Early Childhood (CO HB1304, 2021). This shift meant that early childhood, previously a subset of the Department of Education, would become its own department, housing various offices related to early childhood and other pertinent services. The Early Childhood Leadership Commission must then convene a Transition Advisory Group tasked with advising the transition working group, developing the transition plan and the new preschool program recommendations, and facilitating the creation of policies and procedures for the new department and preschool program. The focus of the advisory group would prioritize the child and family experience in accessing and utilizing early childhood programs and services, ensuring the new department and preschool program are child and family-centered (CO HB1304, 2021, p. 4).

Consequently, the Transition Advisory Group would “develop recommendations for a new statewide, universal, voluntary preschool program to begin operating in the 2023-24 school year administered by the new department” (CO HB1304, 2021, p. 11). These recommendations would later serve as the foundation for HB-1295: Department of Early Childhood and Colorado Preschool Program, sponsored by Representatives Sirota and Garnett and Senators Fenberg and Buckner. The governor’s office was intimately involved in HB-1304: Early Childhood System as it would contract the consultants for the transition working group and hire two full-time employees to lead the transition efforts.

In summary, states with a moralistic political culture, like Colorado, strongly emphasize widespread voter participation, active governance, fair policies, and robust debate over essential issues (Fowler, 2013). Governor Polis took proactive steps to prioritize early childhood education, particularly advocating for full-day kindergarten and

universal preschool funding. Governor Polis incorporated early childhood education as a fundamental tenet of his political platform, attituding it to the state's future prosperity.

Proposition EE's successful ratification on the ballot indicated the electorate's desire to act on a significant matter, namely the provision of financial resources for universal preschool. Governor Polis' focus on education as pivotal to Colorado's future resonated strongly with constituents. Establishing a transition advisory group to recommend universal preschool initiatives mirrored the participatory approach common in moralistic political cultures.

In contrast, states with traditional political cultures would typically adopt a more centralized decision-making process with limited stakeholder involvement.

Bipartisanship and celebratory gestures of cooperation may be less common, as one party often dominates such states. Moreover, the resistance to change prevalent in traditional political cultures might impede the transition from the Colorado Preschool Program to universal preschool.

On the other hand, in individualistic political cultures, the focus tends to be more on academic outcomes and personal benefit. While early childhood education may still be an investment, ideas and issues hold less sway than business considerations prioritizing individual interests (Fowler, 2013).

Understanding the Legislative Framing of Access to Universal Preschool in

Colorado

This section presents the findings from my critical examination of the bill text and transcripts of legislative testimony to understand and describe how legislators framed the problem of access to universal preschool in Colorado and how they sought to address it. I

present my findings through a comprehensive analysis of the bill's introduction, its developmental process, its evolution, its amendments, its potential ramifications on various historically marginalized groups, and its eventual enactment into law. I analyzed the legislative audio, the original bill text, the revised version of the bill text that included all amendments, and the fiscal notes that accompanied the original bill and the revised bill. For the original and revised bill text versions, only the following sections were studied: the rules of the Department of Education (DEC), local coordinating organizations (LCOs), early childhood leadership councils (ECLCs), the universal preschool program, and the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP). The other sections focused on family services and other programs that moved under the Department of Early Childhood but did not necessarily connect to the universal preschool program.

Bill Introduction

On March 17, 2022, Representatives Sirota and Garrett (both Democrats) presented the 2022 Colorado House Bill-1295 to a panel of their colleagues in the House of Representatives. The bill was then supported by expert testimony from professionals in the field, including members of the Early Childhood Leadership Commissions and its Transition Advisory Group.

Problems the Bill was Intending to Solve

The purpose of the 2022 House Bill-1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program was to establish the responsibilities of the Department of Early Childhood, which the 2021 House Bill-1304 had already created, to create the universal preschool program and transfer several services from other agencies to the

Department of Early Childhood. The responsibilities of the DEC, according to the original fiscal note, are outlined below:

Beginning July 1, 2022, the DEC is responsible for administering the current responsibilities of the Office of Early Childhood in the Department of Human Services (CDHS), the current duties in the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) related to early childhood workforce development, and, beginning in FY 2023-24, the Colorado Universal Preschool Program (CO HB1295, 2022b, p.2)

The universal preschool program, sometimes referred to as universal prekindergarten or pre-k, was meant to provide “children in Colorado access to voluntary, high-quality, universal preschool services free of charge in the school year before a child enrolls in kindergarten” (CO HB1295, 2022a, p. 191). Additionally, the following two critical directives of the universal preschool program below pertain to the current study’s question regarding access to preschool for historically marginalized populations:

to provide access to additional preschool services in the school year before kindergarten eligibility for children in low-income families and children who lack overall learning readiness due to qualifying factors; (CO HB1295, 2022a, p. 192)

to provide access to preschool services for children who are three years of age, or in limited circumstances younger than three years of age, and are children with disabilities, are in low-income families, or lack overall learning readiness due to qualifying factors (CO HB1295, 2022a, p. 192).

The distinct responsibilities of the Department of Early Childhood and the purpose of the universal preschool program outline a department whose purpose was to operate a more streamlined, efficient early childhood system across the state. Additionally, the bill created a universal preschool program that would be voluntary for families and providers to increase access to high-quality preschool programming services.

Bill Framing

In presenting 2022 House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program, proponents and sponsors positioned the bill as an essential progression towards establishing centralized oversight over early childhood programs, improved accessibility to preschool programming for families throughout Colorado, and more streamlined funding systems. The 2022 House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program uses state action to move the state from a more targeted approach to preschool programming to a universal approach.

Power. According to Liu (2014), power in the civic arena is defined as the ability to motivate the community to act in the best interest of an organization, group, or individual. Six power sources were identified - physical force, wealth, state action, social norms, ideas, and numbers, which refers to the number of people mobilized. Liu further noted three laws of power: power is not static but instead flows like water in everyday life, and it compounds over time. In this section, I will analyze the types of power that align with the present bill, namely state action and ideas.

State Action. State action refers to using law and bureaucracy to hold power over an organization, group, or individual. Through this bill, the government used state action to shift the state from a targeted approach to preschool programming to a universal approach. This state action would create a new department and shift funding priorities for how early childhood systems would work throughout the state.

Ideas. The shift from the targeted preschool programming approach to a universal approach was based on the notion that universalism was the best approach to increasing access to the universal preschool program. The primary goal of the universal preschool

program was to increase access to high-quality preschool programming for all 4-year-olds across Colorado. Instead of a more targeted approach, the universal approach was posited as the solution to grant access to high-quality preschool. This idea of universalism, cultivated by the governor, became the foundation for creating the universal preschool bill. Throughout the legislative audio and the bill text, universal preschool was sometimes positioned as more equitable and, at other times, highlighted as a more equal approach than the targeted approach of the Colorado Preschool Program. The Manager of Policy from Clayton Early Learning echoed this sentiment - “All Colorado children and families deserve the vision of universal and voluntary access to early childhood services before kindergarten entry” (Manager of Policy and Advocacy at Clayton Early Learning). This statement illustrates the correlation between universal preschool, access, and all children in Colorado. Although “equity” is not overtly mentioned in the statement, it effectively underscores the universal approach's place in potentially expanding access for families. Efficiency, liberty, and equality emerged as crucial values supporting the transition from targeted to universal preschool programming.

Values and Ideology. The values of efficiency, equality, and liberty were present throughout the legislative audio and bill text. In this section, I will analyze how efficiency, equality, and liberty show up in the introduction to the bill and the original bill text. First, I will outline how the new Department of Early Childhood would create a more efficient, streamlined system to reduce the burden on families and providers. After exploring efficiency, I will examine the tension between the values of equality and equity in legislative audio and bill text. The proposed 10 hours for each 4-year-old, created

through Proposition EE, showed value or equality, while the potential of additional preschool hours based on a family's need illustrated the value of equity. Finally, I will investigate how the value of liberty shows up through the voluntary nature of the universal preschool program and the mixed delivery system overseen by local organizations.

Efficiency. Across legislative audio, bill text, and fiscal notes, a consistent theme emerged: the passage of the universal preschool bill would improve accessibility for families and reduce burdens for providers by enhancing efficiency. Efficiency can be tied to the benefits of a service being worth the return on investment (Fowler, 2012; Stone, 2012). Efficiency can also look like trust in the government to oversee the delivery of public goods to a community (Stone, 2012). For the 2022 Colorado House Bill-1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program HB-1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program, efficiency was presented as the trust in the government to provide an easily accessible, streamlined public good, such as preschool programming, through a more centralized authority, the Department of Early Childhood (DEC).

Centralization was a key theme in establishing the Department of Early Childhood—the centralization of funding streams, services for families, and some centralization of eligibility requirements. In the introduction to the House of Representatives, Speaker Garrett, a primary bill sponsor in the House, explained the complexities and fragmentation of the early childhood system at the time.

The current way we provide this service in our communities is fragmented. It is not streamlined, and it is confusing, probably for everybody involved, whether it's the families, the children, the providers,

the funders, or the administrators. There are a lot of moving pieces that live in different agencies and departments have different regulations, and that does not provide for an easy to navigate system...The purpose of this [HB1295] is to improve that system (CO House Education Committee, 2022).

Similarly, Speaker Garrett posited the Department of Early Childhood as a centralized solution to increase efficiency and support families' access to high-quality preschool programming. "The Department of Early Childhood will be Colorado's One Stop Shop for families to access really high-quality early childhood education for parents. And I know this firsthand - this system is complicated" (CO House Education Committee, 2022). Another statement by Representative Sirota, the other primary House sponsor, identified the new Department of Early Childhood as a solution to the fragmentation of the early childhood system. "We can do far more to support children's development in the early years beginning with addressing this fragmented governance of the early childhood system, which exists today" (CO House Education Committee, 2022).

Efficiency in funding streams was also highlighted as a goal of HB-1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool program. The decentralized funding systems impacted families and providers due to the different touchpoints with different funders. The two data points below demonstrate the desire for more efficient funding streams.

In Colorado, programs currently exist to cut across multiple state agencies with various eligibility requirements and funding streams. This fragmentation makes it difficult for parents and providers to navigate these programs, threatening both quality and accessibility for 1000s of kids (President of Mile High Early Learning, CO House Education Committee, 2022).

A county commissioner highlighted the need for a simpler, more accessible application process. “The creation of a simple single application process makes it less burdensome, burdensome for families to know what's available to them and allows them to choose the services to meet the needs of their family” (Eagle County Commissioner, CO House Education Committee, 2022).

The local coordinating organizations (LCOs) and early childhood councils were key players in providing efficient systems in HB-1295. Under the bill, local coordinating organizations and early childhood councils would collaborate to provide early childhood services to families in a given area. The original bill text explained the councils' goal of efficiently creating a system and considering local needs.

Together, the councils throughout the state shall serve to create a seamless system of early childhood services representing collaboration among the various public and private stakeholders for the effective delivery of early childhood services to children five years of age or younger in a manner that is responsive to local needs and conditions (CO HB1295, 2022a, p. 58)

Local coordinating organizations that work collaboratively with schools, universal preschool providers, and other early childhood providers, including infant and toddler care, operate more efficiently than individual services operating independently. This approach was presented as particularly effective in providing marginalized populations with the resources necessary to succeed.

The coordination of universal preschool and school programs with support programs and services under the LCO's will provide a better opportunity to identify at risk families and get those at risk families to the resources. In the LCOs we operated it at the community level is that what we know is one size does not fit all that the needs of underserved communities, the needs of rural communities, the needs of Metro communities are different and we need to address that at the community level (Executive Director of

Public Policy at the Kemp Foundation, CO House Education Committee, 2022).

The bill's supporters situated efficiency as a critical goal by connecting efficiency to increased accessibility to high-quality preschool, centralized funding streams and services, and collaboration with local coordinating organizations.

Equity or Equality? Equality and equity values were present in the legislative audio, bill text, and fiscal notes. Stone (2012) explained that equity can occur in multiple ways and may differ depending on how a good or public service is distributed. The distribution of hours is allocated based on group characteristics such as age, the requirement for special services, and economically disadvantaged groups, in accordance with Stone's concept of equity as the distribution and fulfillment of group needs. On the other hand, Fowler (2013) discussed the connection between equality and education through the notion of equal opportunity. “Equal opportunity exists when everyone has a similar chance to get a good education...regardless of race, sex, sexual origination, handicapping condition, age, or national origin” (Fowler, 2013, p. 97). The universal preschool bill frequently framed equity regarding family access to and affordability of preschool programming, whereas the allocation of hours demonstrated equality.

In the legislative audio, supporters framed universal preschool as essential for all Colorado's children. At other times, they framed it as a necessity for historically marginalized populations, illustrating the values of equality and equity. Below are examples from legislative audio highlighting the value of equality and emphasizing that universal preschool policy would benefit all children in Colorado (CO House Education Committee, 2022)

And I know that the 10 hours of free high-quality preschool that the voters delivered on and that is going to be a promise of universal pre K will help all the kids across Colorado have the same experiences that my wife and I fought so hard for our children to have.

Ready Colorado is a group of conservatives that believes all kids should have access to a high-quality school regardless of where they live or how wealthy their families are.

The statements above emphasized the importance of universal preschool, giving every family equal access to high-quality early education. The second statement likened the universal preschool program to an opportunity for wealthy families to access high-quality programming. Meanwhile, some advocates emphasize the significance of equity in the proposed bill. Advocates of the universal preschool program policy framed it as a chance to expand preschool programming accessibility for historically marginalized communities, which were typically described as those most remote from opportunities, most vulnerable, or in greatest need.

This bill will prioritize equitable access for children who are the furthest from opportunity... We are invested in the early childhood system in Colorado that works for all especially for those who need it most (Business Leader, Member of the Early Childhood Leadership Commission, CO House Education Committee, 2022).

Access to effective diverse programs breaks down structural barriers that have prevented all children, particularly children of color, and children from disadvantaged families from achieving their full potential (President of the Colorado Education Association, CO House Education Committee, 2022).

The universal preschool program, framed to increase access to historically marginalized populations, illustrates Stone's (2012) definition of equity. Another example of equity framing was through affordability. Multiple supporters stated that the passage of Colorado House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool

Program would address the needs of working families, leading to more equitable access to preschool services.

Any parent who works a full-time job needs full-time quality care for their children. I'm so excited for the potential of House Bill 2212 95 as it is showing working families like mine that the state has decided to invest in our children in a way that we have never done before (Parent, Ambassador for Clayton Early Learning, CO House Education Committee, 2022).

As the city continues growing and prices continue increasing, families are burdened by the cost of childcare even more than ever before. Barely paying for a high-quality early childhood program is becoming more difficult for families. Providing full-day and accessible early childhood programs to families will give them the tools needed to become self-sufficient Please provide quality and free early childhood programs to our youngest children (Family Engagement Liaison at Clayton Early Learning, CO House Education Committee, 2022).

Supporters emphasized the challenges of working families when it comes to affording preschool programming and slated the universal approach as beneficial for working families. Each statement highlighted the importance of full-day care for working families or families who find their childcare options unaffordable and inaccessible. Both statements also demonstrated an assumption of full-day program funding. Yet, the bill text emphasized allocating 10 hours for all children with the potential of additional hours based on undetermined qualifying factors.

Proposition EE ensured that every child in Colorado would be eligible for 10 hours of preschool education in the year before they start kindergarten. The bill also mentioned that economically disadvantaged 4-year-olds, some demographics of 3-year-olds, and other 4-year-olds with certain undetermined qualifying factors may receive additional hours of free preschool education. This approach is closer to targeted universalism, which aims to provide targeted support based on need while maintaining a

universal goal (Powell et al., 2019). The bill recognized that some groups may require more hours of preschool education than others based on need. However, the additional hours of preschool education would be subject to available appropriations after funding was allocated for the 10 hours for every child and children with disabilities.

Subject to available appropriations, a child who is three years of age, is not eligible to enroll in kindergarten in the next school year, and is a child with disabilities, is in a low-income family, or meets at least one qualifying factor may receive the number of hours of preschool services established by department rule (CO HB-1295, 2022a, p. 193).

Subject to available appropriations, a child who is in a low-income family or who meets at least one qualifying factor may receive additional preschool services for the number of hours established by department rule in the school year preceding the school year in which the child is eligible to enroll in kindergarten (CO HB-1295, 2022a, p. 193-4).

According to the bill text, children meeting specific criteria may receive additional preschool services subject to available appropriations. This dual approach aims to balance universal access with targeted support where it is most needed, though the approach is limited to funding availability.

Equality and equity were laced throughout the bill text and legislative testimony regarding why the universal preschool program was necessary to increase access and combat affordability challenges families faced. The new universal preschool policy attempted to achieve equitable access to preschool programming through universal preschool programming, including targeted universalism to meet the needs of families and children. However, this vision of equity purely depended on the amount of funding available and would be prioritized after providing 10 hours to every eligible 4-year-old across the state.

Liberty. The mixed delivery system and local coordinating organizations (LCOs) were important in the 2022 Colorado House Bill-1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program. Local coordinating organizations allowed for decentralized decision-making based on community interest. The mixed delivery system provided families with options of public and private preschools to enroll their children, reflecting parental choice. “The department shall work with the LCOs to make available throughout the state a mixed delivery system of public and private preschool providers to accommodate parent choice” (CO HB-1295, 2022a, p. 6). Legislative audio echoed the importance of parent choice and the mixed delivery system.

By orienting towards a whole child, whole family approach to services and supports, the Department of Early Childhood will create a mixed delivery model for universal pre-K, where families could choose between a school district program or a community-based one that they may already be a part of (Early Childhood Provider, CO House Education Committee, 2022).

Local coordinating organizations had an important role in communities and were slated as knowledgeable of their communities and community needs. Local coordinating organizations would be responsible for allocating resources provided by the Department of Early Childhood in collaboration with local community members. However, they had some freedom of choice on how the money was allocated. The role of the LCO is outlined below:

The coordination of universal preschool and school programs with support programs and services under the LCOs will provide a better opportunity to identify at-risk families and get those at-risk families to the resources. In the LCOs we operated it at the community level...we know that one size does not fit all that the needs of underserved communities, the needs of rural communities, the needs of Metro communities are different, and we need to address that at the community level (Executive Director of Public Policy at the Kemp Foundation, CO House Education Committee, 2022).

Supporters emphasized the importance of the mixed delivery system and the role of local coordinating organizations. The mixed delivery system allowed parents to choose the type of preschool that works for them, whether it is public, private, home-based, or center-based. Local coordinating organizations were responsible for ensuring that the mixed delivery system reflected the unique needs of each community and had the freedom to allocate funds in ways that supported their communities.

Proponents also framed the bill's components as essential to solve the problems that families and children faced consistently due to the inefficiency and inequity of the current system. The story of the fragmented early childhood system that the bill aimed to fix included the importance of a more efficient system, run by local communities, that gave families a choice in where they send their children. The universal approach of allotting 10 hours of preschool to every child demonstrated a commitment to universalism. However, the potential additional hours for economically disadvantaged families or those who met qualifying factors illustrated the intention of targeted universalism within a universal system. The establishment of the new department and the shift to universal preschool was framed as the best solution for families, children, and the state's future to improve equitable access to preschool programming.

Universal Preschool Bill Evolution, Amendments, and Demographic Considerations

On March 17, two weeks after being introduced in the House Education Committee, the amended version of the bill was presented to the Senate Education Committee by its principal sponsors, Senator Buckner and Senator Fenberg, both Democrats. The legislative audio of the Senate Education Committee and the revised version of the bill text showcased the legislation's development in response to stakeholder

critiques and concerns. The amendments focused on several matters, such as the organizational structure of the Department of Early Childhood and the potential impact of the advisory council on decision-making. They also addressed the role of local coordinating organizations, the timeline for establishing the Department and universal preschool program, preschool programming for children with disabilities, and funding for the childcare assistance program and children from historically marginalized populations. To explore the different amendments, I will critically examine the issues over authority and power and subsequently evaluate the demographic factors that may potentially put certain groups at a disadvantage in the transition towards universal preschool, intentionally or unintentionally.

Power

Liu (2014) analyzed the six power sources, whereas Fowler (2013) provided a similar explanation of various types of power—force, economic dominance, authority, and persuasion. Fowler also discussed different power resources—material, social, and knowledge. For the evolution of the preschool policy, I will specifically examine authority as a type of power and the employment of social and material resources. I will analyze authority as a type of power utilized by the bill by comprehending how it outlined various bodies of authority and their corresponding decision-making procedures. My analysis of power resources will focus primarily on the bill's funding priorities. By analyzing the bill's development, I will demonstrate how the exercise of power has influenced the bill, potentially benefiting or harming various groups, deliberately and inadvertently.

Authority. In addition to invoking the power of state action, the 2022 Colorado House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program established the Department of Early Childhood as a centralized authority in Colorado's early childhood system. This department is led by an executive director who oversees its operations. However, there have been concerns regarding the roles of the Rules Advisory Council and the Executive Director of the new Department of Early Childhood when creating rules. The Rules Advisory Council would be convened by the executive director "for consultation and advice in promulgating rules for the functions, programs, and services that the department provides" (CO HB-1295, 2022a., p. 10). The council's original objective was to incorporate diverse viewpoints from persons involved in Colorado's early childhood system, including parents, providers, early childhood professionals, a county-level administrator, and school-based providers from rural, urban, and suburban regions. However, questions were voiced about the council's representation and power distribution between the council and the executive director. These worries reflect apprehensions about Colorado's moralistic political culture, which advocates for widespread participation in government.

During legislative discussions, the Chair of the Board of County Commissioners expressed confusion regarding the council's role, stating,

The Advisory Board will be in name only with no authority or ability to influence the outcome. We are confused as to why the sponsors believe that a single director constitutes good governance. Assigning an executive director to the sole decision-making authority essentially pushes counties, the implementers, out of having a voice to advocate for the families that we that counties, the implementers, directly serve (CO House Education Committee, 2022).

Additionally, there were concerns regarding the centralization of decision-making authority in the executive director, disregarding the input of counties directly involved in serving families. One suggestion for improvement is to implement a voting system inside the advisory council for determining regulations rather than only relying on the executive director for decision-making power. The Colorado Association of School Boards (CASB) suggested the establishment of an elected board to guarantee that community members and stakeholders have a say in matters that impact students (CO House Education Committee, 2022).

In the bill's final version, there was a modification to the governance structure through a Senate amendment (CO HB1295, 2022d). This change granted the executive director of the Department of Early Childhood the power to select advisory council members. The executive director will review a carefully selected list of candidates the Early Childhood Leadership Commission curates. The executive director would select the 17 council members, considering the nominees recommended by the Commission. The Commission would publicly solicit applications and collaborate with partners, including counties, parents, and school districts.

Voting within the advisory council was introduced in the final bill, requiring recommendations to be approved by a majority vote and provided to the executive director in writing. Members in the minority could submit a written explanation of their stance. Nevertheless, the executive director retained the final authority to make decisions but was obligated to seek input from the council and consider their recommendations before promulgating a rule. If the executive director disregarded the council's recommendations, they were obligated to provide a written explanation for their choice.

Further amendments to the Rules Advisory Council included adding county departments to the advisory group, establishing subcommittees, and creating a specific subcommittee for counties to advise on implementing the newly transferred early childhood and family support program (CO HB1295, 2022d). This decision was driven by concerns from counties and districts, particularly rural ones, regarding their capacity to implement the universal preschool program. The modifications implemented to the Rules Advisory Council responded to apprehensions regarding the centralization of power. Although modifications were implemented to incorporate voting within the advisory council and involve county departments in the group, the executive director retained the final authority in decision-making. The centralized structure of the council gave rise to issues over limited representation and the exclusion of views from the local level, particularly from counties and districts affected by the council's decisions.

Another amendment to the bill regarding authority was the division of responsibility between two departments regarding legal power for delivering services to children with disabilities (CO HB1295, 2022d). The original bill text stipulated that the Department of Education and the Department of Early Childhood would establish a formal agreement to assist children with disabilities. “The department shall collaborate with the department of education through an interagency agreement to ensure all 3- and 4-year-old children with disabilities are served per federal and state requirements for children with disabilities” (CO HB1295, 2022a, p. 6). Additionally, local coordinating organizations were required to “manage a mixed delivery system of preschool providers and, in coordination with administrative units within the community, provide, to the

extent possible, access to inclusive preschool settings for children with disabilities” (CO HB1295. 2022a, p. 43).

In the House Education Committee, the Consortium of Directors of Special Education made further amendments to ensure that students with disabilities received the maximum support level as mandated by federal and state laws. Consequently, several revisions were specifically formulated to provide additional detail on special education services, the interagency agreement between the Department of Education, and local coordinating organizations' roles.

One fundamental shift was the memorandum of understanding between the Department of Early Childhood and the Department of Education. The memorandum of understanding outlined the agreement between the two departments to provide support for the local implementation of best practices, develop training for preschool providers on their legal obligations when serving children with disabilities, define the responsibilities and timelines for collecting and sharing data per federal requirements, ensure that preschool program requirements align with and comply with IDEA and ECEA, and guarantee that the rules governing preschool programs address all legal obligations for providing services to eligible children with disabilities (CO HB1295, 2022d).

The House and Senate proposed revisions to the federal regulations governing special education programs for children with disabilities. Although adjustments have been made, further elucidation is required regarding the precise details of the memorandum of agreement and the respective responsibilities of the Department of Early Childhood and the Department of Education.

Material Resources. Power is dependent on the resources available for people to exercise it. According to Fowler (2013), resources include material, social, and knowledge resources. The universal preschool bill was heavily influenced by the requirement for material resources, which played a crucial part in the bill's inception and the subsequent revisions related to the capacity of districts and counties and the timeline restrictions.

In legislative audio, concerns about the capacity of districts, mainly rural districts, to adjust to the changes presented by the bill were also top of mind as a concern. One individual explicitly contradicted the facts in the fiscal note, asserting that counties cannot incorporate the modifications using their current budgets. The Director of Larimer County Department of Human Services emphasized, "There is no way that Larimer County can increase rates upwards of 15 to 20% and absorb that within existing allocations. We will be forced to serve fewer kids" (CO House Education Committee, 2022)

Capacity was also highlighted as a challenge by the Colorado Rural Schools Alliance, indicating that "more support was needed due to the capacity," stating, "the application process and implementation process is a really heavy lift, and our rural communities just don't have [the] capacity to do that" (CO House Education Committee, 2022). Similarly, the Colorado Association of School Executives (CASE) noted the need for support for rural schools, along with other amendments, stating, "CASE is supportive of amendments brought forward by our partner associations, calling for additional support for our rural schools, some really close analysis, and some changes in the

governance structure, more clarity about the local leads, and especially more clarity around the funding" (CO House Education Committee, 2022).

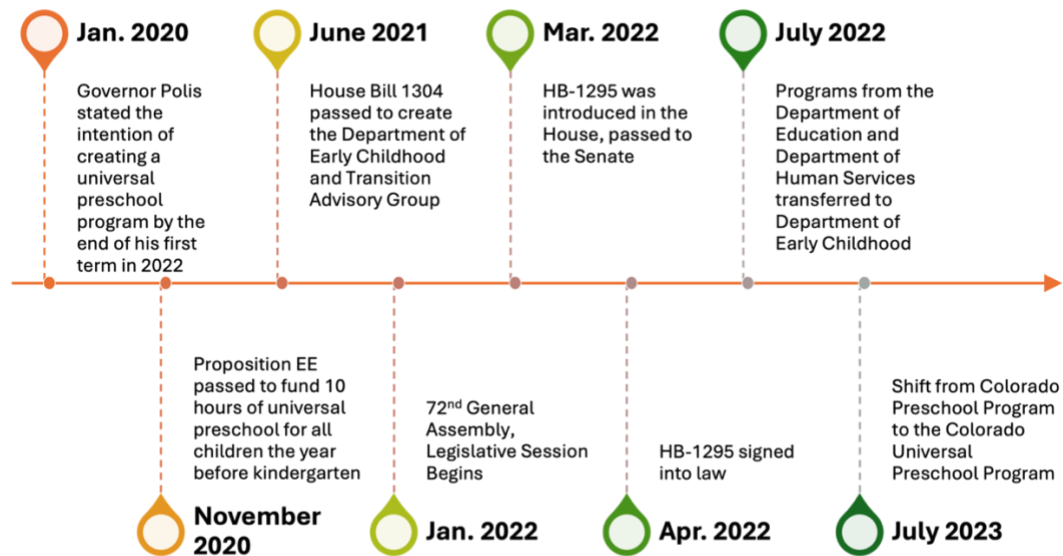
Additional measures were added to the final bill regarding supporting counties, especially rural ones, that may need more capacity support. The Department of Early Childhood shall:

The Department [of Early Childhood] may adopt guidelines and procedures to assist in implementing and the programs and services that the department provides pursuant to this title 26.5. When appropriate to reduce potential administrative burden, the department may differentiate in the adopted guidelines and procedures among communities, including communities in rural areas, based on community capacity and readiness for implementing programs and delivering services (CO HB-1295, 2022c, p.10).

These amendments addressed issues around capacity, or energy, for districts and counties, explicitly naming rural counties. However, the amendments only address some of the challenges. The schedule for transferring services and programs to the Department of Early Childhood posed some capacity difficulties when it was to be built out. In the 2020 State of the State speech, the governor said, “We can and we must do better, which is why I’m committed to achieving universal access to quality preschool for 4-year-olds by the end of my first term” (Colorado Public Radio, 2020). 2022 held significance due to its status as an election year for the gubernatorial race. Furthermore, the declaration provided a specific timeframe for the legislative body to pass a universal preschool bill. Figure B4 illustrates the timeline of events laid out in HB-1295. The timeline was described as “compressed” by a co-chair of the Early Childhood Leadership Council (CO Senate Education Committee, 2022).

Figure B4

A Timeline of the Path from Colorado Preschool Program to Universal Preschool Program



The turnaround for building out the Department of Early Childhood while creating the universal preschool programs posed difficulties for districts and counties, particularly those in rural areas. The Colorado Rural Schools Alliance elucidated these difficulties while still endorsing HB-1295. In the legislative audio, the Executive Director of Colorado Rural Schools Alliance emphasized the need for differentiated support and timelines for rural schools in an amendment – “We’d like to see language like we have with the State Department of Education, encouraging differentiated rules and processes and even timelines for rural communities in recognition of how different it will look and the different resources it will take” (CO House Education Committee, 2022). The Executive Director of the Colorado School Executives Association (CASE) voiced

apprehensions over the timeline and formulation of budgets, particularly for superintendents in rural districts. “We must be 18 months plus ahead before we can make the financial commitments necessary for facilities, for materials, for personnel, for staff” (CO House Education, 2022).

Inquiries into the timeframe extended beyond financial matters. Senator Kirkmeyer, a Republican, expressed concern over the quick turnaround for creating an online portal for families to apply to universal preschool and other services. When probed on a date, the Transition Director responded, “I do not have a date certain for that other than to tell you that that is a high priority” (CO Senate Education Committee, 2022). With a hastened timeline, creating an online portal could be rushed and potentially cause challenges for families during the application process.

With the expedited timeline, counties, districts, and legislators were concerned about whether the program would be ready to support families from the application process to budget creation. The combination of the department's centralized power and the executive director's decision-making power, in addition to the concerns about energy and time, reflect power shifts created under the new universal preschool bill and allude to potential concerns around its implementation.

Bill Passage and Potential Role in Reinforcing the Dominant Culture

On April 25, 2022, the governor signed HB-1295 into law. The votes for passing HB-1295 in the House of Representatives were primarily divided along party lines, with a few deviations, on this legislation exclusively supported by Democrats. Table A4 outlines the votes by representative and political party affiliation. Representative Woog,

Representative Larson, and Representative Bradfield were the only Republicans in the House to vote to pass HB-1295 to the Senate.

HB-1295 passed in the Senate unanimously, with all senators in attendance. However, an amendment, L. 100, was needed to shift the vote outcome from 23 in favor and 11 against to unanimous agreement. The amendment added foster care, kinship care, and guidelines for a report on the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program to committees, including the Joint Budget Committee and the Public and Behavior Health and Human Services Senate Committee.

In the following section, I will examine the role of dominant culture within the policy-making processes and the potential perpetuation of dominant culture due to the 2022 Colorado House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program. I will focus my analysis of dominant culture by drawing on the critical policy concern of how a policy may intentionally and unintentionally create policy “winners” and “losers” (Young & Diem, 2017). Feagin (2012) argued that society’s essential resources, including power and prestige, have been disproportionately allocated to the wealthy elite. This phenomenon has been validated by a prevailing white political, racial, and class perspective, which has consequences for political decision-making and the distribution of resources. I will examine the potential perpetuation of dominant culture in the context of universal preschool policy, including the perspectives of policymakers, local decision-makers, universal preschool practitioners, and the children and families impacted by universal preschool. I will assess whether prevailing ideologies influenced viewpoints without considering historically marginalized

populations and whether decisions were biased toward dominant groups to the detriment of other groups.

Potential Beneficiaries of Colorado's Universal Preschool Bill

The shift to a universal approach to preschool has positive implications for various stakeholders, including the governor's office, the Democratic Party in Colorado, families who were already financially capable of affording daycare, and families who previously did not contemplate enrolling their child in preschool but choose to do so due to the bill. Furthermore, assuming sufficient funding exists, it would be possible to allocate equitable hours for children based on their individual needs and the 10 hours of preschool. Therefore, the implementation of the universal preschool bill has the potential to be highly beneficial for 4-year-olds throughout the state over several years.

The governor's office achieved a policy victory by implementing a universal preschool program, a crucial component of Governor Polis' political platform. The governor aimed to conceptualize universal preschool by the conclusion of his initial term in 2022, and this bill fulfilled that time frame. The Democratic party in Colorado was another winner as all Democratic members in the House and Senate sponsored the bill, while no Republicans did. This decision appears to strategically position the Democrats as the primary advocates of this legislation.

Universal preschool, specifically with 10 hours per week for every child, may benefit families with the means to afford preschool education. Given the allocation of 10 hours each week, few working families would derive any benefit from having those hours funded. Wealthier families or families with more flexible schedules may find it more feasible to allocate either two hours per day or two 5-hour days for their activities.

This arrangement would suit those requiring no more than 10 hours per week. The allocation of 10 hours per week may prove advantageous primarily for the dominating elite since they may perceive these hours as reduced costs rather than essential fiscal support. This sentiment becomes especially true if, due to how the financing is prioritized, there is insufficient funding to provide additional hours to families who may have benefited from extended hours, either in a half-day or full-day program. Allocating funding for additional preschool hours for economically disadvantaged families and other qualifying individuals would enhance the universal preschool program by providing families with access to preschool programming tailored to their schedule and fulfilling their children's specific needs. If sufficient funding were available, the universal preschool bill would not be aligned with preserving the prevailing culture and granting privileges to affluent, privileged white families.

Potentially Disadvantaged Groups

Implementing a universal preschool program may result in unforeseen repercussions, causing adverse effects on specific individuals or groups. This includes those who previously benefited from targeted preschool programs, those residing in remote areas, children with disabilities, and programs catering to infants and toddlers. Furthermore, families who require more than 10 hours of preschool per week but need more financial means to pay for it or receive assistance through the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program may also face drawbacks. Inadequate funding for children requiring additional hours of preschool programming will result in a lack of equity, placing these children at a disadvantage. This may disproportionately impact families of color,

immigrant families, or other families that have historically had challenges with accessing preschool programs.

Local coordinating organizations and providers in rural communities may need more capacity to quickly transition from the targeted preschool strategy to the universal preschool approach, especially given the limited timeframe. Those organizations must actively collaborate with the Department of Early Childhood during its development, familiarizing themselves with the policies of the universal preschool program as it is being established. They should also serve as intermediaries to their community, addressing any inquiries regarding the new program. Families may have questions about their eligibility for additional hours. Nevertheless, because the bill text needs more clarity regarding the criteria for qualification and the availability of funds for additional hours of preschool programming, local organizations may need to possess all the necessary information to address families' inquiries.

Furthermore, due to the joint responsibility of the Department of Education and the Department of Early Childhood in supporting children with disabilities in the preschool program, there is a higher likelihood of unintended consequences and the possibility of perplexity for local organizations. The absence of a singular department assuming complete accountability for this group may lead to inadvertent disregard for legal requirements on children with impairments. Multiple departments may engage in mutual accusations in the event of legal challenges. Local organizations may also encounter contradictory information, confusing families and providers. Additionally, infant and toddler programs may be negatively impacted due to the increased attention and funding toward universal preschool programming.

The Role of Reinforcing Dominant Culture

The main objective of the 2022 Colorado House Bill 1295, known as the Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program, was to guarantee that each child receives a minimum of 10 hours of preschool education each week or 2 hours per weekday. Nevertheless, this strategy may ultimately favor privileged white families who already possess the financial resources to enroll their children in preschool without relying on a universal preschool program. However, this approach may not adequately cater to the needs of historically marginalized populations. Suppose there is insufficient funding to provide additional preschool hours. Historically excluded families may have received more benefits from the former Colorado Preschool Program than the new universal preschool program.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I conducted a critical policy analysis of the HB22-1295, Department Early Childhood, and Universal Preschool Program, to understand its roots, its development, and the potential “winners” and “losers” (Young & Diem, 2017). I performed a rigorous policy analysis to examine a particular policy's origins, development, and power distribution. To gain insights, I referred to the Colorado Preschool Program Reports and Governor Polis' State of the State Addresses from 2020-2022. Additionally, I presented an analysis of the political landscape of Colorado, the framing of the universal preschool bill, and how the bill sought to tackle the issue of accessibility to preschool programs for children in Colorado. I also examined the possible influence of the bill on different groups and its potential to reinforce the existing dominant culture.

The moralistic political culture of Colorado fostered a transition from the targeted approach of the Colorado Preschool program to a more universal approach through the significance of extensive political participation, the emphasis on education, and the existence of advisory councils. The universal preschool bill employed state intervention and the notion that the transition towards universalism would benefit every 4-year-old in Colorado. Supporters of the measure emphasized its significance based on efficiency, equality, and liberty. As the bill evolved and developed, the amendments and discourse focused on the Department of Early Childhood's centralized authority and the local coordinating organizations' role and capacity in swiftly implementing a mixed delivery system.

The primary objective of the 2022 Colorado House Bill -1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program was to ensure that all children, including those with disabilities, get 10 hours of preschool in the year before they start kindergarten. The secondary funding objectives encompassed children from socioeconomically disadvantaged families and those meeting other eligibility criteria, subject to the availability of funds. If money is unavailable, limiting targeted universalism may disadvantage families who require additional preschool programming hours.

It is crucial to closely monitor the process of determining the qualifying factors, the influence of the rules advisory council in establishing these factors, and the ability of districts and counties to meet the needs of their communities within the budget constraints during the universal preschool rollout and implementation. The present findings highlight the concerns expressed at the time regarding the rollout and

development of universal preschool programs. In the following chapter, I will analyze the findings, contextualize them within the existing literature, outline the implications for the universal preschool policy and its implementation, and provide clear recommendations.

Chapter V

Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to conduct a critical qualitative policy analysis of the 2022 Colorado House Bill-1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program. Throughout the preceding chapters, I examined the roots, intentions, and development of the bill, as well as its role in reinforcing the dominant culture. I also examined how the bill may have intentionally and unintentionally benefited some groups and disadvantaged others. The central research question for this study was: How, if at all, was Colorado's universal preschool school policy designed to create more equitable access to education for historically underserved children and their families? By analyzing data from multiple sources, including data from the annual State of The State Address from 2020-2022, Colorado Preschool Reports, select news articles, the 2022 Colorado House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool, legislative testimony, and fiscal notes, I aimed to discern how this bill's design either disrupts or reinforces the dominant culture. This study characterizes the dominant culture as families who may have been able to afford preschool programming without government support, namely elite, white, and affluent families. This concluding chapter discusses the study findings, drawing connections between and the existing literature, outlines their implications, and offers recommendations for future research.

Discussion

Between 2020 and 2022, Colorado's political culture, as evidenced by the Governor's State of the State Speeches and the Colorado Preschool Programs legislative reports, shifted from a targeted preschool program based on factors like family income and language needs to a universal approach, providing 10 hours of preschool programming per week for every 4-year-old across the state. However, this study's findings indicate that this focus on ensuring 10 hours per week, or 2 hours per weekday, may disproportionately benefit white and affluent families who could already afford preschool programming even without the implementation of universal preschool while doing little to address the needs of historically marginalized populations effectively. Consequently, historically marginalized families may have benefited more from the previous Colorado Preschool Program than the new universal preschool program.

Universal Preschool: Who are the primary beneficiaries?

While a moralistic culture may seem to encourage widespread participation and reflect constituents' interests, a critical examination revealed nuances within this political culture, reinforcing privilege and access to quality preschool programming for families who already had access but now enjoy greater financial relief. To effectively address the barriers historically marginalized populations face in accessing preschool education, it is necessary to go beyond simply offering universal preschool and ensuring that all Colorado children receive the same number of hours. This study identifies four reasons why this bill reinforces the status quo.

Insufficient Funding and Affordability

First, there is a discrepancy between the goals of the universal preschool policy and its funding priorities. The universal preschool policy aims to provide high-quality preschool education to all 4-year-olds. However, the policy's funding priorities focus on equal access rather than addressing the unique needs of limited-income families and children with other qualifying factors. Notably, while some families may be able to afford to pay for more hours out of pocket, others may not. This disparity becomes evident in the language of the bill. The universal preschool policy had three main purposes, as outlined in the bill text:

- (a) to provide children in Colorado access to voluntary, high-quality, universal preschool services free of charge in the school year before a child enrolls in kindergarten;
- (b) to provide access to additional preschool services in the school year before kindergarten eligibility for children in low-income families and children who lack overall learning readiness due to qualifying factors;
- (c) to provide access to preschool services for children who are three years of age, or in limited circumstances younger than three years of age, and are children with disabilities, are in low-income families, or lack overall learning readiness due to qualifying factors (CO HB-1295, 2022c, p. 224).

These three purposes carried equal weight and pointed towards a more equitable process where those who may need additional preschool services receive them. The purposes of the universal preschool policy align with current research focused on the benefits of access to high-quality preschool programming (Gormley Jr. et al., 2011; Hahn & Barnett, 2023; Hawkins-Lear & Grisham-Brown, 2019). The connection to kindergarten readiness also echoed the findings of Hustedt et al. (2015) and Lipsey et al. (2018), who found positive outcomes for students in the year preceding their enrollment in kindergarten.

However, funding for preschool programming primarily aims for equality, with additional hours available only if funding permits. This lack of targeted funding may leave low-income families without adequate support to access the required preschool programs.

Equal Access vs. Equitable Access

Second, the emphasis on equal access rather than equitable access and the limited focus on targeted funding may perpetuate disparities in access to high-quality preschool programs for these populations. In legislative testimony, supporters emphasized prioritizing those furthest from opportunity, which this study refers to as historically marginalized populations. The eligibility requirements for the preschool program, including prioritizing working families over families pursuing secondary degrees, could shift under the department's rules; however, it is important to note that the funding for the program has not increased and continues to be limited (CO HB-1295, 2022c). Supporters seemed to believe that the current funding for preschool programming and Proposition EE would provide enough funding for eligible families applying for the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program. The bill did not, however, expand the funding for the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program. As such, the barriers around affordability for children who may need more than just 10 hours a week were not necessarily addressed.

The universal preschool policy prioritizes funding for all 4-year-olds, including those with disabilities, guaranteeing 10 hours of preschool per week. Notably, the original bill text did not address funding priorities for children with disabilities when listing the prioritization of funding in the bill text. This was added, along with other legal language, through amendments. State and federal laws like the Individuals with

Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Exceptional Children's Education Act (ECEA) may have contributed to the prioritization of children with disabilities compared to other groups of students, such as those from rural areas and those from communities of color. This prioritization aims to ensure appropriate actions are taken to prevent potential legal consequences. This means children with disabilities receive the same coverage of preschool programming as they did under the previous Colorado Preschool Program. However, targeted funding for historically marginalized populations remains a secondary priority that needs clarification.

The Illusion of Representation

Third, while HB22-1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program prioritizes certain historically marginalized populations, such as children with disabilities, other groups receive less focus in terms of access and allocation of hours, leading to an illusion of representation. Throughout 2022, Colorado House Bill-1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program prioritized certain historically marginalized populations, particularly children with disabilities, in accordance with state and federal laws. However, other groups of historically marginalized populations were mentioned in different capacities throughout the bill text and legislative audio, with less focus on access or allocation of hours. Economically disadvantaged children and families were explicitly mentioned, particularly in discussions regarding the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) and the universal preschool policy.

Eligible families could apply for CCCAP; however, county commissioners stated in their testimony that the program's funding needed to be revised, especially in rural

communities and smaller districts. Rural communities often have limited options for early childhood care, making childcare assistance essential in these communities (Anderson & Mikesell, 2019). Instead of focusing on increasing the reach of CCCAP to eligible families, the bill prioritized universal funding allocation, with income level as a secondary focus. Although the bill aimed to decrease the administrative burden on rural communities, there is a need for clarity on the support provided by the Department of Early Childhood and the duration of that support. Including children whose primary language at home was not English in the quality standards shows the importance of considering how to support that particular group of children. However, the bill requires more clarification on which children may be eligible for additional hours. Additionally, while data collection and reporting disaggregated by factors such as race, ethnicity, and immigration status may give insight into the program's implementation, it does not directly affect children participating in the universal preschool program's first year. However, it would inform future program implementation and may affect funding priorities.

Unclear Qualifying Factors. The vagueness of qualifying factors throughout the bill may stem from the influence of the Rules Advisory Council, which determines these factors. While a diverse stakeholder group could theoretically agree on qualifying factors, the bill does not guide what these factors could be. The lack of clarity may leave families wondering if their children are eligible for more hours, making planning and budgeting difficult. The Executive Director of the Department of Early Childhood still has final decision-making powers on qualifying factors, but the lack of guidance may leave families uncertain until enrollment approaches. Additionally, the transition advisory

group and the Early Childhood Leadership Council emphasized the opportunities for constituents to weigh in on Colorado's ideal early childhood system. However, even in these meetings, decisions are primarily determined by the majority, which may suppress opposing viewpoints, including those from marginalized communities of color or rural regions, whose perspectives were not explicitly represented in the legislative audio.

Limited Preschool Programming Hours

Finally, the bill also maintains the status quo by not expanding the number of hours available for preschool programming. With only 10 hours of preschool programming per week or 2 hours per day, children are left with several hours each day without access to full-day preschool. This limited schedule may disproportionately benefit families who can already afford preschool programming. On the other hand, historically marginalized communities, such as communities of color, rural areas, families with limited income, and emergent bilingual families, may continue to face barriers to access. This disparity could exacerbate inequities in access to high-quality preschool programs across the state (Anderson & Mikesell, 2019; Bassok et al., 2016; Bassok & Galdo, 2016; Latham et al., 2021; Molla & Nolan, 2019; Sipple et al., 2020). Research indicates that high-quality preschool programming greatly benefits historically marginalized populations more than those from advantaged families (Blau, 2021; Cascio & Schanzenbach, 2013). Therefore, the limited 10 hours do not address the affordability concerns of families who cannot extend those hours for their children. This discrepancy highlights the need for a more equitable distribution of preschool hours to ensure

historically marginalized populations have access to the same educational opportunities as families who can afford full-day preschool.

Further Connections to Existing Literature

The stated purpose of the universal preschool program is consistent with the existing research on the advantages of accessing high-quality preschool programming for children in the year before kindergarten, both in the short term and in the long term (Bakken et al., 2017; Gormley Jr. et al., 2011; Hahn & Barnett, 2023; Hawkins-Lear & Grisham-Brown, 2019; Hustedt et al., 2015; Lipsey et al., 2018). These benefits are especially true for children from historically marginalized populations like children with disabilities, emergent bilingual children, children in rural communities, from communities of color, and economically disadvantaged children (Bakken et al., 2013; Barton & Smith, 2015; Cascio, 2023; Cascio & Schanzenbach, 2013; Hahn & Barnett, 2023). However, the bill's current funding prioritization may exacerbate issues discussed in current literature and our understanding of the importance of equitable access. Barton & Smith (2015) defined access as ensuring that every child can attend preschool with sufficient time aligned to their needs, which includes addressing and eliminating structural barriers. Affordability is a structural barrier that the bill fails to address if the funding prioritizes equality over equity in providing access to preschool programming for historically marginalized populations.

Centralizing Colorado's early childhood system under the Department of Early Childhood was another key aspect of the 2022 Colorado House Bill – 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program. The centralization of authority under the Department of Early Childhood highlighted tensions around power and

decision-making. Some concerns about authority and material resources focused on considering local interests in tension with institutional interests (Akaba et al., 2020; Casto & Sipple, 2011). The rules advisory council and amendment changes surrounding it reflected similar concerns about considering local interests, such as school leaders, county commissioners, and providers, in developing rules for the universal preschool program. As the centralized authority on early childhood, the Department of Early Childhood must be mindful of how their decisions trickle down to impact the workforce, families, and providers, including infant and toddler programs.

While the universal preschool program's purposes align with the documented benefits of high-quality preschool education, carefully considering funding priorities and the potential impact of centralization on local interests and the broader early childhood education landscape remains necessary. These considerations may impact the development of the Department of Early Childhood and the implementation of the universal preschool program.

Implications

The Colorado universal preschool program policy provides funding for 10 hours of preschool to all 4-year-olds across the state, including preschool for children with disabilities aligned to their individualized education plan needs. However, insufficient funding may prevent children from economically disadvantaged areas and other qualifying factors from accessing additional preschool hours, potentially exacerbating inequities. According to legislative audio, funding constraints have already resulted in fewer families being served than those eligible for the targeted Colorado Preschool

Program. There may be a need for more than the standard 10 hours per week for children who would benefit from additional preschool programming.

Despite the universal system, families may still need help accessing high-quality early childhood education, including providing opt-outs, limited funding, and longer waiting lists. Local coordinating organizations will be crucial in successfully implementing the universal preschool program. They must shift their focus from current operations to the new program and ensure effective communication between the department and the community. Additionally, the quick timeline may stress the current infrastructure of the early childhood system, leading to longer waiting lists and potential compromises in quality standards. For example, the quick timeline may also stress the current infrastructure of the early childhood system. With the potential of more demand, providers may have longer waiting lists, and some quality standards, such as student-teacher ratio, may suffer. As providers try to meet the needs of families and cover their costs, there may be shifts to the infrastructure to accommodate them. If the department decides to make such changes, classroom providers may have more challenges with more children in the classroom and fewer adults.

Additionally, the Department of Early Childhood and Department of Education's shared responsibility for children with disabilities, which is protected by state and federal laws like the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, may create challenges with universal preschool implementation and accountability. Lack of clarity around which department is responsible for this group may result in unintentional negligence around legal obligations. If legal issues arise, the departments might attribute culpability to each other, deepening the situation. Additionally, local coordinating organizations will receive

information from different departments in matters around implementation, which may lead to confusion, especially as information is disseminated to families and providers. Therefore, collaboration among various departments, agencies, and organizations is essential to ensure the successful execution of the policy and equitable access to high-quality preschool education.

Discourse and further study should focus on the challenges and implications of implementing a universal preschool program, particularly regarding equity issues, funding constraints, and coordination among various stakeholders. The study's findings emphasized the challenges of providing equitable access to high-quality preschool education, particularly for children from historically marginalized populations. Policymakers and practitioners must carefully consider designing and implementing universal preschool programs to address equity concerns effectively, assessing whether a more targeted approach suits their community. The study also underlined the importance of collaboration among different departments, agencies, and organizations to ensure the successful execution of the policy.

Recommendations

The recommendations below are intended for states and cities that want to transition from a targeted program to a universal one while improving access for children from historically marginalized populations. Some recommendations are specific to Colorado, while others apply to any jurisdiction considering a program model change. Additionally, there are suggestions for future studies.

Sufficient Funding to Ensure Equitable Access

If a city or state moves towards a universal preschool model, funding should be adequately set aside to ensure equitable access for all families. Policymakers and decision-makers should carefully assess the fiscal capacity of the state or city and establish appropriate funding mechanisms to support the program. This includes considering the diverse needs of families across different locations, such as single parents in rural areas, working families in urban areas, and affluent families in suburban areas. To ensure adequate funding, stakeholders should evaluate various aspects of the early childhood system, including its workforce, the number of providers, and the current state of affordability. Input from providers, families, superintendents, county commissioners, departments of human services, and other stakeholders would provide insights into the challenges currently faced in the early childhood system and brainstorm solutions. With funding considerations in mind, policymakers and stakeholders could explore ways to simulate different funding mechanisms and determine how much funding would need to be allocated to support a universal preschool program effectively.

Comprehensive Targeted Universalism

The funding priorities of the universal preschool program should shift towards a more fully targeted universal approach instead of a limited, targeted universal program. Powell et al. (2019) outlined targeted universal policies as policies with a universal goal and targeted strategies to meet the needs of different groups. In the case of universal preschool, a shift in the funding priorities could build on the Colorado Preschool Program and the work done there, moving the policy towards a more targeted universal approach. Currently, the program ensures that children with disabilities have adequate preschool

hours, notably, 10 hours a week for all children across Colorado, with additional hours only available if funding is available. By adopting a more comprehensive, targeted universal preschool program, the Department of Early Childhood could focus on providing equitable time, resources, and support to more historically marginalized populations. A comprehensive, targeted universal approach would help the Department of Early Childhood better address the specific needs of historically marginalized communities, like communities of color and economically disadvantaged children, while ensuring broader access to preschool education for all children statewide. The comprehensive, targeted approach with funding priorities that reflect it would highlight the bill's goal of equitably increasing access to high-quality preschool education. Furthermore, a more comprehensive and targeted approach with aligned funding priorities could prevent reinforcing the dominant culture, providing preschool funding to families who may not require as much financial support as others.

A Phased Approach to Universal Preschool Rollout

Other states or cities that may want to move from a targeted preschool program to a more universal one should consider a more phased approach to the shift. Such an approach may have been beneficial to the universal preschool rollout. By implementing a phased approach, the Department of Early Childhood could have built itself thoroughly, allowing for the deliberate creation of a universal preschool system. The phases could include time to focus on building out the Department of Early Childhood, time for the rules advisory council to determine eligibility requirements, funding priorities, and resource allocation to different communities, and more time for local coordinating organizations to plan to implement the preschool program. Another phase could include a

more limited rollout of the universal preschool program with a more expanded version in the next phase. Evaluation and adjustment after each phase, including stakeholder input, would have given more time to prepare for universal preschool and a potentially easier rollout. Such an approach would also help support the efficiency of the universal preschool program, making it more accessible and reducing administrative burdens for local organizations and providers.

Data Collection, Evaluation, and Reporting

Data collection, evaluation, and reporting were already outlined in the bill text, including disaggregated data regarding race, ethnicity, immigration status, languages spoken at home, and income level. I would further include data collection, evaluation, and reporting through stakeholder groups, including families, providers, county commissioners, and superintendents. Understanding the impact on the workforce, including administrative burden, quality standards, and the new centralized department, may significantly impact the workforce plans developed by different local coordinating organizations and may impact the department's interactions with those groups overall. Additionally, the inclusion of multiple voices and widespread participation coincides with the presence of extensive political involvement and advisory councils present in Colorado's moralistic political culture. The Department of Early Childhood may also want to collect data on how the universal preschool program impacted the affordability, accessibility, and workforce of infant and toddler programs statewide. While the universal preschool program is intended to increase access to preschool for 4-year-olds, it may have unintended negative consequences for infant and toddler programs (Anderson & Mikesell, 2019; Sipple et al., 2020).

Contribution to Existing Literature

The current study adds to the existing literature on critical policy analysis, universal preschool programming, and how policy could potentially impact historically marginalized populations. It adds to research contextualizing the policy process as part of a political, social, and historical context. The policy process involves interactions between individuals, organizations, and policymakers from pre-bill inception to passage, as evidenced by support for universal preschool. Additionally, the findings highlight the importance this study adds to the existing literature on universal preschool policies and their potential impact on historically marginalized populations. They highlight the need to move beyond equal access to preschool programming toward more equitable access that addresses the specific needs of families from limited-income households and children with other qualifying factors. Moreover, the study identifies the importance of targeted funding to ensure that those who need additional preschool services receive them. These insights align with current research on the benefits of access to high-quality preschool programming and their positive outcomes for students the year before they enter kindergarten. Overall, this study adds to the growing literature on the need for more equitable policies that address the specific needs of historically marginalized populations.

Recommendations for Future Study

Future study recommendations include a study on the implementation processes of the Colorado Universal Preschool program and a policy analysis of different states and cities' development of universal preschool programs.

Future studies on implementing the universal preschool program can be divided into several focus areas. First, it is important to examine the role of local coordinating organizations and the Department of Early Childhood. Secondly, there is a necessity to ease the access for application of the program by families. Thirdly, analyzing the participation rates of providers compared to those who opted out, exploring reasons for non-participation through interviews, and evaluating the experiences of participating providers are essential. Finally, it is important to study the program's impact and assess its efficiency when compared to the previous program.

In addition, future studies should focus on the impact of the universal preschool program on different groups of children. These groups can be disaggregated based on their race, ability, language spoken at home, location, and immigration status. It would be especially interesting to compare the program's effectiveness in increasing access for historically marginalized populations to its predecessor, the Colorado Preschool Program. Such a study would demonstrate whether the shift to universal preschool increased the impact of the program only for certain groups of children, like affluent white children, while decreasing access for historically marginalized families.

A policy analysis of different states and cities that moved from targeted preschool to universal preschool programs, especially places with political cultures, would provide insights into how different states and citizens frame and view the issue of preschool programming. The policy analysis could include a document analysis, like the current study, and interviews of individuals involved in creating legislation. Additionally, interviews with organizations directly involved with the bill and those who may feel out

of the policy process would provide a broader view of people's opinions about the shift to a universal preschool program.

Chapter Summary

This chapter concludes the critical policy analysis of Colorado's universal preschool program by analyzing the study's findings, describing the implications, and making recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and future research. Through this critical policy analysis, I found that the new universal preschool program may have unintended consequences for access to preschool for historically marginalized populations while potentially reinforcing the dominant culture. While the funding priorities provide 10 hours a week of preschool programming for all 4-year-olds in Colorado, the expansion of eligibility might come at the expense of historically marginalized populations if funds are insufficient. Further, the expedited timeline of the universal preschool creation may have unintended consequences as local coordinating organizations will attempt to support families in applying to and learning about the new universal program. At the same time, the Department of Early Childhood is concurrently being built out, and the universal preschool program itself will be created. This simultaneous process, meant to be completed within a year, poses challenges and risks to effective implementation.

By examining the political culture that shaped the 2022 Colorado House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program and its evolution throughout the legislative process, it becomes apparent that the bill was not designed to prioritize the needs of all historically marginalized populations. Access to preschool programming for these groups will heavily rely on funding beyond the allocated 10 hours

per week. If funding falls short, those who could have benefited from the Colorado Preschool Program may find themselves with reduced access to the new universal preschool program.

An unintended consequence of focusing on universality and equality, signified by the 10 hours per week, may provide more privileged, affluent families access to the universal preschool program when they may have already been able to afford it independently. HB-1295: The Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool Program created a universal preschool program where economically disadvantaged families, those from rural communities, and other historically marginalized groups may only receive up to 2 hours a day of preschool programming. This limitation arises from their ineligibility for the entire program or insufficient funds allocation to give them the required amount of preschool programming.

Despite its intention to establish a universal preschool initiative, the 2022 Colorado House Bill 1295: Department of Early Childhood and Universal Preschool program may result in potential systematic deprivation for economically disadvantaged families, rural communities, and other historically marginalized groups. This small allocation of preschool hours not only falls short but also perpetuates inequity for some of our most vulnerable children.

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Appendix A: Tables

Table A2

Current Study Data Collection and Analysis Process

	Data Source	Analysis
Stage 1	Colorado Preschool Program reports 2020-2022 Governor State of the State Transcripts 2020-2022	In depth Inductive & Deductive Codes of all documents
Stage 2	Legislative Audio (Introduction to the House of Representatives 3/11/22) Original Bill Text HB-1295 Fiscal Note, 3/15/2022	In depth Inductive & Deductive Codes of all documents & audio
Stage 3	Legislative Audio (Introduction to the Senate 3/31/2022) Rerevised Bill Text (includes all House and Senate Amendments) Final Bill Text Final Fiscal Note (7/27/2022)	In depth Inductive & Deductive Codes of all documents; in depth inductive and deductive analysis of sponsors introduction to bill; brief analysis on legislative audio through notes
Stage 6	Votes Analysis Power Map	Brief Analysis of Votes

		<p>Analysis of organizations, stances, to inform power map pulled testimony and from Secretary of State website</p>
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Table A3*House of Representatives Votes on the 2022 Colorado House Bill 1295 with Party**Affiliation*

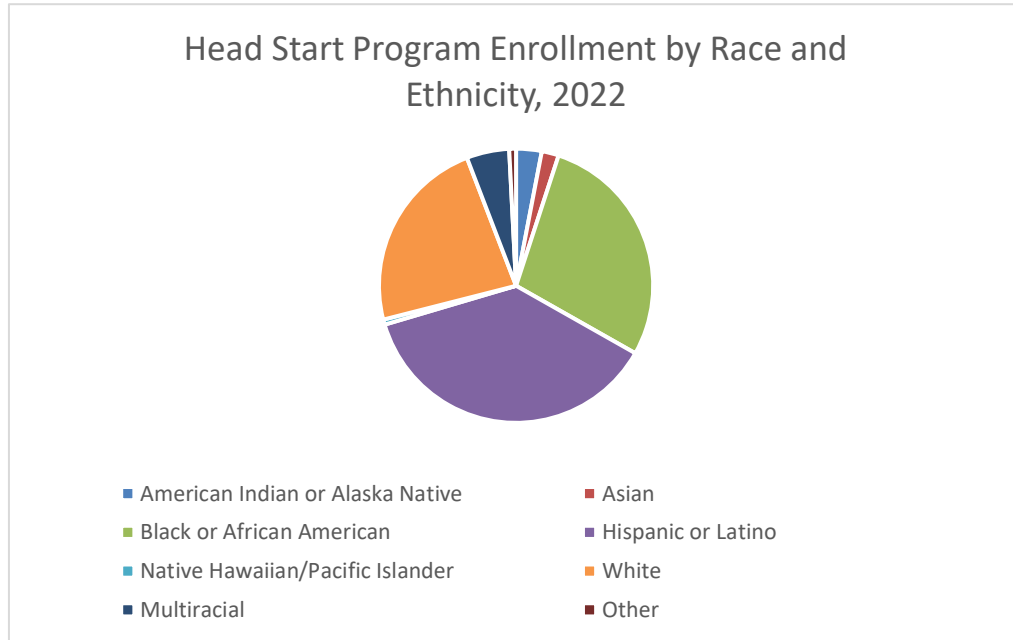
Name	Party	Vote
Amabile	Democrat	Yes
Bacon	Democrat	Yes
Baisley	Republican	No
Benavidez	Democrat	Yes
Bernett	Democrat	Yes
Bird	Democrat	Yes
Bockenfield	Republican	No
Bradfield	Republican	Yes
Caraveo	Democrat	Yes
Carver	Republican	No
Catlin	Republican	No
Cutter	Democrat	Yes
Daugherty	Democrat	Yes
Duran	Democrat	Yes
Esgar	Democrat	Yes
Exum	Democrat	Yes
Froelich	Democrat	Yes
Garnett	Democrat	Yes
Geitner	Republican	No
Gonzalez-Gutierrez	Democrat	Yes
Gray	Democrat	Yes
Hanks	Republican	Excused
Herod	Democrat	Excused
Holtorf	Republican	Yes
Hooton	Democrat	Yes
Jodeh	Democrat	Yes
Kennedy	Democrat	Yes
Kipp	Democrat	Yes
Larson	Republican	Yes
Lindsay	Democrat	Yes
Lontine	Democrat	Yes
Luck	Republican	No
Lynch	Republican	No
McCluskie	Democrat	Yes
McCormick	Democrat	Yes
McKean	Republican	No
McLachlan	Democrat	Yes

Michaelson Jenet	Democrat	Yes
Mullica	Democrat	Yes
Neville	Republican	No
Ortiz	Democrat	Yes
Pelton	Republican	No
Pico	Republican	No
Ransom	Republican	No
Rich	Republican	Excused
Ricks	Democrat	Yes
Roberts	Democrat	Yes
Sandridge	Republican	No
Sirota	Democrat	Yes
Snyder	Democrat	Yes
Soper	Republican	No
Sullivan	Democrat	Yes
Tipper	Democrat	Yes
Titone	Democrat	Yes
Valdez A.	Democrat	Yes
Valez D.	Democrat	Yes
Van Beber	Republican	No
Van Winkle	Republican	No
Weissman	Democrat	Yes
Will	Republican	No
Williams	Republican	No
Woodrow	Democrat	Yes
Woog	Republican	Yes
Young	Democrat	Yes

Appendix B: Figures

Figure B3

Head Start Program Enrollment by Race and Ethnicity, 2022



Note: Data from Office of Head Start (2023). *Head Start Program Facts: Fiscal Year 2022*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/data-ongoing-monitoring/article/head-start-program-facts-fiscal-year-2022>

Appendix C: Preliminary Codebook

Categories	Code Name	Description	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Example
Critical Policy Analysis	Roots	Ideas, documents, or other evidence that inter the need to move to a more targeted approach to preschool to universal preschool	Any evidence that explains why there is a shift to universal preschool from the more targeted program	Any evidence that occurs after HB1295 has passed	“House Bill 21-1304 created the DEC and established a transition working group to develop a transition plan and recommendations for the new universal preschool program” (CO HB1295, 2022b, p. 5)
	Political Culture	“a collective way of thinking about politics that includes beliefs about the political process, its proper goals, and appropriate behavior for politicians” (Fowler, 2013, p. 81); moralistic political culture, individualistic, and traditional political culture	Any evidence that demonstrates a moralistic political culture, individualistic, or traditional political culture as defined by Fowler (2013); can include information about elections, voting, ballot measures, political platforms	Any evidence that does not include information about elections, voting, ballot measures, or political platforms	“It means ensuring Colorado is the best state in the country to start and raise a family by offering paid family leave, universal preschool, universal full-day kindergarten, and truly affordable higher education” (Colorado Public Radio, 2021)

	Revision	Substantive changes in HB1295 made by the House or Senate; amendments to HB1295	Any evidence of the universal preschool policy that was changed, removed, or added	Evidence that changes the name of a position or shifts a definition in a way that does not impact HB1295	
	Access	“providing a sufficient frequency and intensity of contextually relevant learning opportunities across settings for every child by identifying and eradicating structural barriers and improving physical environments” (Barton and Smith, 2015)	Any evidence that discusses access or limiting financial, structural, and fiscal barriers to preschool programming; this can be housed under equity and efficiency depending on the content	Any evidence that does not discuss barriers to preschool programming. Any evidence that discusses access to K-12 schools, universities.	“Last year we were able to fund 5,100 additional slots for at-risk children in the Colorado Preschool Program. And in my budget this year, we’re proposing to help an additional 6,000 children attend preschool, which for the first time will bring coverage to half of all eligible kids in Colorado” (Colorado Public Radio, 2020)
	Powers	Source/Types of power – force, ideas, state action, economic mobility (Liu, 2014) or force,	Any evidence that shows who the decision maker is on the policy process and	Evidence that does not identify sources/types of power, such as force, economic	“Before promulgating a rule, the executive director shall solicit feedback from and consider

		economic dominance, authority, or persuasion; distribution of power or resources (Fowler, 2013); who has the authority and capacity to make a decision; regarding dominant culture - allocation of powers are largely aligned to or decided by elites (Feagin, 2012)	design of the preschool program; any evidence that shows who has the decision making ability in the preschool program	dominance, authority, or persuasion, related to the preschool program; Evidence that does not address the distribution of power or resources within the preschool program; Evidence that does not identify the decision-makers with the authority and capacity to make decisions regarding the preschool program; Evidence that does not address how power allocation within the preschool program is aligned with or decided by elites.	the recommendations of the council. If the executive director decides not to follow the recommendations of the council with regard to a rule, the executive director shall provide a written explanation of the rationale for the decision” (CO HB1295, 2022c, p. 15)
	Concern	Critiques on the universal	Any evidence of	Any evidence	“How are we actually

		preschool program	critiques or concern around universal preschool, child care assistance, and the department of early childhood; Any evidence that lead to an amendment	that critiques any of the programs being transferred to the Department of Early Childhood	leading to getting families to success when we're taking a tool out of the toolbox over here and fragmenting this system. So we can get over here, essentially, to get to universal preschool, which isn't even to be going to be for everybody in our state. So how to how does that make sense?" (CO Senate Education Committee, 2022)
	Marginalized populations	A population that is historically marginalized and under resourced including rural populations, emergent bilingual children, communities of color, children with disabilities	Any evidence related to marginalized populations that is connected to the universal preschool program or child care assistance	Evidence related to dominant elites, evidence related to marginalized populations that is not connected to universal preschool	"Many parents, disproportionately women, have had to choose between working and caring for their children at home. Sadly, but not surprisingly, women of color have been disproportionately

					ely impacted, with an 8 percent decline in labor force participation over the last year. When women across Colorado — across America — suffer, then our communities and our state suffer too” (Colorado Public Radio, 2021)
Goals	Equity	“Distributions are regarded as fair, even though they may contain equalities and inequalities” (Stone, 2012, p. 41)	Any evidence that discusses the distribution of preschool – hours, affordability for different groups, access to preschool locations	Any evidence that discusses demographics of students in preschool	“This bill will prioritize equitable access for children were the furthest from opportunity” (CO House Education Committee, 2022)
	Efficiency	“Efficient programs are ones that result in the largest benefit for the given cost” (Stone, 2012, p. 63)	Any evidence that suggests universal preschool is more effective than the previous decentralized program across the state	Any evidence that does not show how to improve the funding streams or how to make the early childhood system	“And early childhood education isn’t just about giving our kids a great start in life. Every dollar invested in high-quality preschool produces a seven dollar return on

				more effective	investment due to higher earnings, lower special education needs, greater tax revenues, less dependency on public assistance, and lower crime rates” (Colorado Public Radio, 2020)
	Welfare	A need, a resource or item that a person or community needs to survive (Stone, 2012)	Any evidence that shows the goal of universal preschool is a needed resource in the community	Any evidence that describes what the universal preschool program does	“[The Colorado Preschool Program] is absolutely crucial to the economic security of families across the state. Families are eligible if they are actively working, searching for work, attending school or homeless. It allowed them to access childcare at a lower cost rate so that they can continue to work through some of the challenges of living in a

					state where the cost of living continues to rise” (CO House Education Committee, 2022)
	Liberty	Freedom to do what a person wants without causing harm to others (Fowler, 2013; Stone, 2012)	Any evidence that shows a freedom of choice of an individual, family, or community	Any evidence that describes rules for an organization that does not pertain to choice, freedom, or flexibility	“And this [bill] really does try to enshrine that mixed delivery process because we think parents should have that choice” (CO Senate Education Committee, 2022)
	Security	Minimize harms and risks (Stone, 2012)	Any evidence that indicates minimized harm and risk	Any evidence that discussed rules and guidelines for preschool spaces	N/A
Problems	Symbols	Stories, metaphors, and synecdoche used to tell a story about a policy (Stone, 2012)	Narratives about a policy where there are perceived heroes and villains, any small part of a policy used to represent the totality of the policy, and when one	Narratives that do not involve the portrayal of heroes and villains. Narratives that do not use any small part of a policy to represent the totality of the	“This past Fall, when it came time to enroll Fiona in Kindergarten, Samantha and her husband knew a full day at school was important, but simply couldn’t afford the cost” (Colorado

			policy problem is treated as similar to another policy problem	policy. Narratives that do not treat one policy problem as similar to another policy problem	Public Radio, 2020)
	Numbers	Using numbers or measures to define a policy or tell a story about a policy (Stone, 2012)	Any evidence of a strategy involving numbers as part of the problem definition or framing or to tell a story about preschool programming	Strategies that do not involve the use of numbers or measures as part of the problem definition, framing, or to tell a story about preschool programming	“And early childhood education isn’t just about giving our kids a great start in life. Every dollar invested in high-quality preschool produces a seven dollar return on investment due to higher earnings, lower special education needs, greater tax revenues, less dependency on public assistance, and lower crime rates” (Colorado Public Radio, 2020)
	Causes	A reason why the problem was created (Stone, 2012)	Any evidence of events, needs, or reasons that could be the	Evidence that does not include events, needs, or reasons that	“For most businesses COVID has only magnified the importance of access to

			reason for the preschool program	could be the reason for the preschool program; evidence that does not focus on identifying reasons why the universal preschool was created	affordable early child care and education for the workforce and the ability to retain and recruit talent” (CO House Education Committee, 2022)
	Interests	“people or organizations who have a stake in any issue or are affected by it” (Stone, 2012, p. 229); regarding dominant culture interests and ideas aligned to white, male beliefs; (Feagin, 2012)	Any evidence of individual interests or community interests that show a stake in preschool	Any evidence that does not show any stakeholder interest in preschool programming	“It is therefore in the state's best interest to establish a comprehensive system of early childhood councils to increase and sustain the availability, accessibility, capacity, and quality of early childhood services throughout the state” (CO HB1295, 2022a, p. 53)
	Decisions	A policy problem is framed as having alternative solutions but one solution is framed as the right decision	Any evidence that frames the preschool program as the right decision instead of an alternative solution	Any evidence that discusses the importance of preschool, but does not frame it as the right	“Colorado is really going to be leading the way for and we're going to be an example, I think for the rest of the country about how to do this how to do this

		(Stone, 2012)		decision; Does not include decision making processes	right” (CO House Education Committee, 2022).
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Appendix D

Power Map

Champions

- Sponsors: Representative Sirota, Speaker Garnett, Senator Buckner, Senator Fenberg
- Governor's Office
- Colorado Department of Education
- Early Childhood Leadership Commission
- Bill Jaeger from Colorado Children's Campaign
- Anna Jo Garcia Haines
- Michael Cooke, Transition Director at Department of Early Childhood

Active Allies

- Clayton Early Learning Center
- Mile High Learning
- Ready Colorado
- Colorado Succeeds
- Council for Strong America
- Rose Community Foundation
- Parent Possible
- Early Childhood Council Leadership Alliance

Critical Allies

- Colorado Association of School Executives
- Consortium of Special Educators
- Colorado Educators Association
- Colorado Rural Schools Alliance
- Counties and County Commissioners
 - Counties and Commissioners Acting Together
 - Arapahoe County
 - Colorado Counties, Inc
 - Weld County
 - Boulder County
- School Districts
 - Adams 12 Five Star Schools
 - Boulder Valley School District
 - St. Vrain Valley School District
 - Pikes Peak Area School District Alliance
- Colorado Consortium of Directors of Special Education
- Colorado Association of School Boards
- Department of Human Services
 - Jefferson County Human Services

- Douglas County Human Services

Passive Allies

- Education Reform Now
- Executives Partnering to Invest in Children (EPIC)
- Florence Crittenton Services
- AFT Colorado
- The Kempe Foundation for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect
- Transform Education Now
- Save the Children Action Network
- Stand for Children
- Small Business Majority
- Opportunity Coalition
- Invest in Kids
- Gary Community Investment Company
- Headwaters Strategies/Better Beginnings Colorado
- Healthier Colorado
- Illuminate Colorado
- The Arc of Colorado
- Colorado Association of Family Child Care
- City of Northglenn

Neutral

- Senator Lundeen
- Colorado Education Association
- Colorado Alliance of YMCAs
- Colorado Springs School District 11
- Colorado Teen Parent Collaborative
- Colorado Women's Chamber of Commerce
- Mesa County Human Services
- Learning Care Group
- The Klapper Firm
- Waterford

Passive Opposition

- The Centennial Institute

Active Opposition

- Senator Kirkmeyer (shifted to neutral by the end of the policy process)