



Early Childhood Education

APA has worked in the area of early childhood education (ECE) for nearly a decade, assisting states, districts and counties on various ECE projects. APA's work in this area primarily focuses on ECE program evaluation and finance, bringing a long history and experience in evaluation, school finance and cost estimation to the ECE field. As part of this work, APA has also developed a number of ECE interactive tools to model the impacts of changes to programs, and to calculate the returns on investment for ECE spending.

ECE Cost Estimation Models

APA has developed early childhood cost estimation models for the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, Colorado, Minnesota, Massachusetts, New York, and Palm Beach County, Florida. APA works closely with clients at the state or county levels to collect data on ECE programs and to make this data accessible through interactive, web-based models. These models allow policy makers and practitioners to view entire ECE systems and estimate the impacts of various changes to variables like funding, enrollment criteria, and population distribution. The development and use of these models helps create understanding and consensus among a variety of stakeholders. It strengthens public engagement, and can lead to more deeply informed policy deliberations and decisions. Many of APA's models include a return on investment component, which uses rigorous research to estimate returns realized by a program or by a comprehensive ECE system.

Colorado Early Investment Model

APA worked with the Colorado Early Childhood Leadership Commission (ECLC) to develop the Colorado Early Investment Model. The model analyzes the current state and federal funding of Colorado early childhood programs serving at-risk children and their families. Users can adjust for variables like enrollment and quality across programs. The model can calculate costs within individual programs, for groups of children, and for the system as a whole. The tool was the first of its kind in the nation to include an extensive state database of public early childhood funding streams, and to include return on investment as part of its calculations.

Quality Rating and Improvement Systems and the Cost of Quality

APA has experience working with states and programs on issues related to Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS). Program quality is integral to any discussion of return on investment for

Provider Cost of Quality Calculator

The Provider Cost of Quality Calculator is an online tool developed for the U.S. Office of Child Care to help states and providers understand the cost of operating centers or family child care homes at different levels of quality. In essence, the tool helps answer the question: "What does it cost for different types of providers to operate a program at each level of quality in a QRIS?" APA worked with national cost of quality experts and with a number of states to gather the data that drives the tool, and to pilot the tool before the national launch.

ECE programs, with research suggesting that gains in child outcomes in the years following preschool are specific to high-quality programs. In addition to integrating discussions of QRIS and program quality into many projects, APA also evaluates *Step Up To Quality*, Nebraska's QRIS, helping the state refine its new system to ensure increased program quality. APA also worked closely with Anne Mitchell and the U.S. Office of Child Care to develop the Provider Cost of Quality Calculator, an interactive tool that helps states estimate the cost of providing high-quality ECE.

ECE Program Evaluation

APA's long history in program evaluation has also been applied to the early childhood field. APA works collaboratively with clients to gain consensus on evaluation research questions; to identify key outcomes, measures and data sources; and to clearly communicate results and recommendations in a manner that clients (and their constituents) can understand and use for action. APA's evaluations use a mix of methods, including focus groups, surveys, interviews, and sophisticated data analysis. APA works closely with clients to determine the most appropriate data collection methods and to ensure that evaluations are independent and also useful to programs, providing actionable recommendations. APA has led the evaluation team for the Denver Preschool Program since 2007. APA research for the Denver Preschool Program was used to justify reauthorization of the program in 2014. APA also evaluates *Step Up to Quality*, Nebraska's QRIS, as well as a number of local Colorado programs, including programs focused on serving children and families in low-income and minority populations.

The Denver Preschool Program (DPP)

APA has led the evaluation team for DPP since the program's inception, helping DPP understand how parents, children, and preschool providers access the DPP program, and helping DPP learn the strengths and weaknesses inherent in the program's current design. To inform the annual program evaluation, APA administers parent and provider surveys and conducts focus groups, interviews, and reviews of program data. APA works closely with Clayton Early Learning to conduct the child outcomes evaluation, and recently began performing analysis of third grade TCAP results, using a propensity score matching approach to assess DPP's persistence effects.

Expert Technical Assistance

APA has worked with a wide range of clients to help create understanding of the financial and structural implications of child care programming. Clients have included nonprofit and advocacy organizations, such as the Children's Defense Fund; The National Center on Education and the Economy; the Colorado Children's Campaign; state child care agencies in Washington, Colorado, and Maine; and a range of other clients, including the National Child Care Information Center and the Boulder County Early Childhood Council. APA has helped clients answer the following questions:

- What is the cost of national full-day kindergarten?
- What is the true cost of a high-quality ECE program?
- How do costs of high-quality early education vary by state?
- What is the cost of a county-level comprehensive early childhood system?
- How much would it cost to expand child care authorization periods in a state?
- What should states consider when developing and administering market rate surveys?

About APA

Denver-based Augenblick, Palaich and Associates (APA) has more than 30 years of experience analyzing education systems and policies. APA has worked with hundreds of clients—including legislatures, education agencies, boards of education, state and county leaders, business leaders, and foundations—to provide in-depth, policy-oriented analyses to help improve our country's education systems.

