



UPK Communications Campaign

COSPRA Medallion Award Entry

Special Communications Project

DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

DPS Communications Team

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UPK Round 1 Campaign

Synopsis

Every school district in Colorado, including Denver Public Schools (DPS), is working with the Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC) to expand its Early Childhood Education (ECE) with an enrollment process for [Universal Preschool Colorado](#) (UPK).

UPK ensures that every child, in the year before they are eligible for kindergarten, is eligible for half-day, state-funded, voluntary preschool. There is potential for additional funding for 3- and 4-year-olds with qualifying factors.

The Problem

UPK was implemented for the 2023-24 school year. The program required families to complete the UPK application through the state in addition to the SchoolChoice application, and the timelines for these applications were not aligned.

ECE families are able to participate in the same spring Round 1 window as grades K-12 for the upcoming fall term. Unlike K-12 grades, ECE families can also continue to apply for open ECE spots throughout the school year, and many DPS families were used to being able to enroll their children right before classes began in the fall. With the UPK application, enrolling on the same day was not possible as the state's application process had an unclear timeline for processing, leaving families unsure of when their students could actually start classes.

In addition, UPK had outdated deadlines listed on their website for months, information on the process and eligibility kept changing, the language was verbose and the steps were not outlined for parents to follow. This caused a lot of confusion for our families and staff, who were not equipped with the information to guide families.

As a district, our priority is our students. This process could greatly impact the educational success of our students long term. [Data collected by DPS](#) shows that students who do not attend a DPS preschool go on to read at a lower level in third grade than students who did attend a DPS preschool. The students who performed at a lower level in third-grade reading also show a [greater risk of not graduating high school](#). If the only thing stopping families from enrolling their child in preschool is the unawareness of or navigation of the UPK application, we needed to do anything in our power to simplify that process. Our goal was to break down the information and make it available in various languages of preference.

Our Solution

In July-August 2023, we developed and implemented a [strategic communications plan](#) to support three enrollment goals around ECE and UPK enrollment.

1. Redirect families that have the expectation they can enroll in ECE during registration or on the first day of school.
2. Communicate that the UPK process needs to be completed in advance for fall enrollment.
3. Prepare the schools with resources around UPK/ECE enrollment for the first day of school.

Research

The research process included gathering data from internal and external sources to identify enrollment barriers, budget decisions and language needs. The first step in our research process was to connect with our Enrollment and Early Education departments. We met with them multiple times to gather qualitative and quantitative information. They were able to provide frequently asked questions that hotline representatives were receiving about ECE and UPK enrollment. We also addressed ECE enrollment with front office professionals during training sessions over the summer. Our front office staff were often asked to walk families through the UPK application, especially those who speak another language. We asked them what resources would be the most useful for their teams, what questions they were unable to answer for families and what they experienced from looking at the UPK application. Their first-hand experience was used to guide the language and tactics used in our campaign.

We brought together communications and enrollment experts within the district, researched marketing tactics available to us within our defined budget, and determined which tactics we would use after thoughtful consideration about how certain tactics would connect with each of our defined audiences.

In addition to internal resources, we made a point to connect with those outside the education system. We connected with the Denver Housing Authority and Sun Valley Youth Center, which are community organizations located in our low-enrollment areas. In our communication with them, we learned a major area for improvement for UPK was the language barrier on the information available. DPS has [Consent Decree languages](#) that we provide translated materials for. However, these organizations let us know of additional languages in these communities that were not being addressed. With their help, we identified Oromo, Zulu, Kirundi, Russian and Farsi as languages parents in that area needed information available in to help enroll their children in ECE.

Planning

Our planning process included using our research to define our audiences, developing intercultural and multilingual strategies, utilizing a project management system to engage relevant stakeholders and define responsibilities, and defining our budget for each tactic.

Audience

Audience	Primary	Secondary
Parents/families	x	
Community members		x
Advocacy groups		x
Media		x

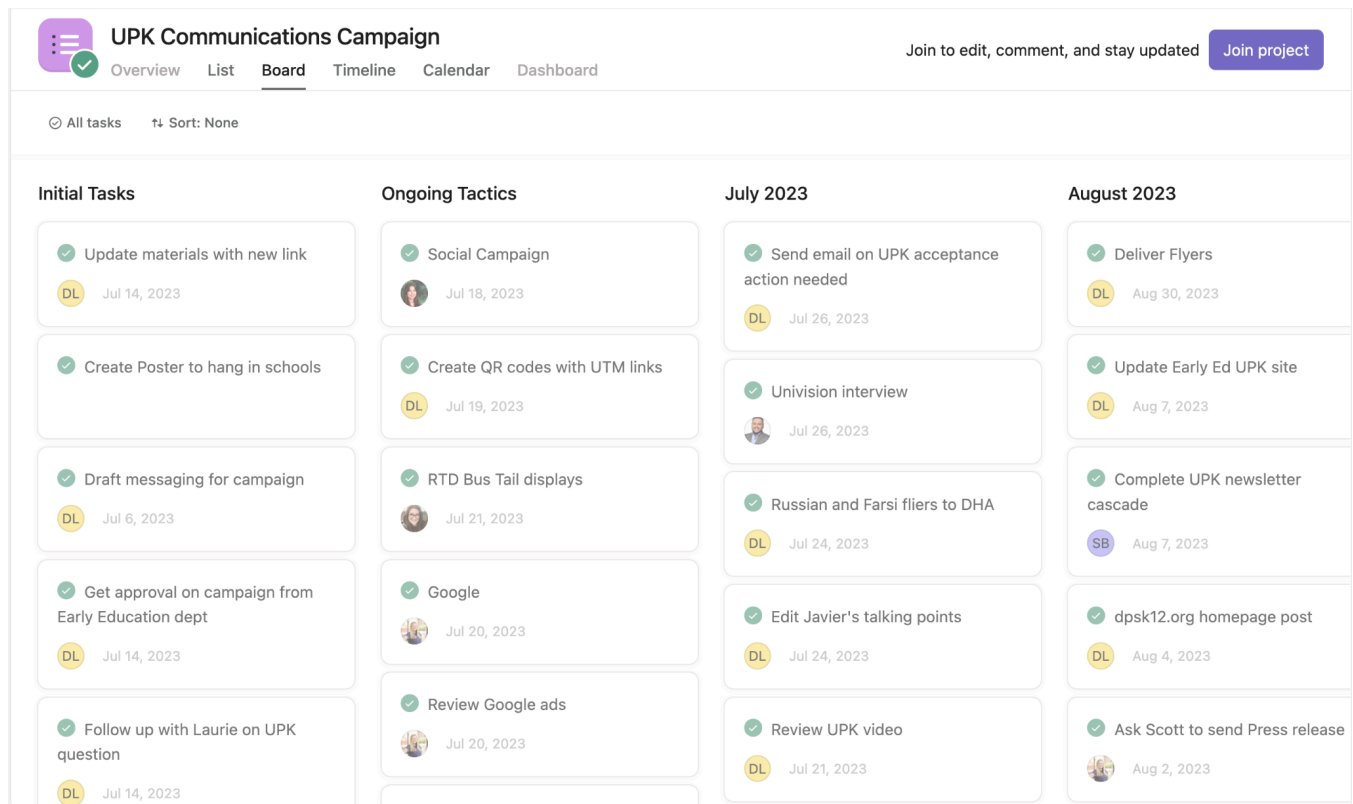
Students		X
Principals	X	
Teachers and school staff	X	

Strategies

Our strategies ranged from digital to print to direct outreach and addressed our [key messages](#).

- Simplify the UPK application process by creating clear steps to follow through mailers in English and Spanish, flyers in 14 languages and web pages in nine languages.
- Provide schools and families with resources to clarify the enrollment process for UPK through advertising campaigns, flyers, videos and tabling before the first week of school.
- Include families who do not have online access by providing alternative messaging through printed materials/ads, events and phone calls.

Our team used [Asana](#) to assign tasks to relevant team members and keep track of our progress.



The screenshot shows an Asana project board titled "UPK Communications Campaign". The board is organized into four columns: "Initial Tasks", "Ongoing Tactics", "July 2023", and "August 2023". Each column contains several task cards, each with a checkmark, a description, a due date, and an assignee (indicated by a profile picture or initials). The tasks are as follows:

Initial Tasks	Ongoing Tactics	July 2023	August 2023
Update materials with new link (DL, Jul 14, 2023)	Social Campaign (DL, Jul 18, 2023)	Send email on UPK acceptance action needed (DL, Jul 26, 2023)	Deliver Flyers (DL, Aug 30, 2023)
Create Poster to hang in schools (DL, Jul 6, 2023)	Create QR codes with UTM links (DL, Jul 19, 2023)	Univision interview (DL, Jul 26, 2023)	Update Early Ed UPK site (DL, Aug 7, 2023)
Draft messaging for campaign (DL, Jul 6, 2023)	RTD Bus Tail displays (DL, Jul 21, 2023)	Russian and Farsi fliers to DHA (DL, Jul 24, 2023)	Complete UPK newsletter cascade (SB, Aug 7, 2023)
Get approval on campaign from Early Education dept (DL, Jul 14, 2023)	Google (DL, Jul 20, 2023)	Edit Javier's talking points (DL, Jul 24, 2023)	dpsk12.org homepage post (DL, Aug 4, 2023)
Follow up with Laurie on UPK question (DL, Jul 14, 2023)	Review Google ads (DL, Jul 20, 2023)	Review UPK video (DL, Jul 21, 2023)	Ask Scott to send Press release (DL, Aug 2, 2023)

Budget

A [\\$75,500 budget](#) was split between this campaign from July-Aug. 2023 and a second campaign that ran from Nov. 2023 to Feb. 2024. We spent nearly \$40,000 of the \$75,500 on Round 1 of the campaign.

Implementation

Our implementation process spanned over two months and included a variety of tactics, with the goal of reaching our diverse audiences before the start of the school year.

July 2023

- The DPS Enrollment team conducted English and Spanish phone calls to families that attended DPS for ECE-3 and had not completed their ECE-4 applications.
- Flyers were distributed at low enrollment schools, community centers, libraries, Family and Community Engagement (FACE) centers, the Denver Housing Authority, pediatrician offices, community barbecues and back-to-school registration events. Flyers were created in English, Spanish, Arabic, Vietnamese, Amharic, Somali, Mandarin, French, Nepali, Oromo, Zulu, Kirundi, Russian and Farsi, with additional languages added as requested by the Denver Housing Authority and Sun Valley Youth Center.
- Flyers were shared digitally on the Denver Housing Authority social media pages.
- Informational mailers were distributed to families with 2- to 4-year-old children in zip codes with low ECE enrollment.
- A televised interview with Univision, a local Spanish-language channel.
- Mobile application pop-up ads targeted families in low ECE enrollment neighborhoods.
- A social ad campaign via Meta with GIF and slide displays targeted parents of young children in low enrollment neighborhoods.
- We ran a Google ad campaign with ads targeting recruitment in low ECE enrollment neighborhoods.
- A new webpage was developed to clearly outline each step families needed to take to complete their ECE application before the first day of school. All campaigns were directed to this webpage, but we created Urchin Tracking Module (UTM) codes for each tactic to better track and analyze the return on investment of each tactic type.

August 2023

- Ran radio ads on Spanish-language radio stations.
- Billboards ran throughout the month in areas of Denver that are on the border of DPS and Jeffco boundaries and other neighborhoods with low ECE enrollment numbers.
- Ads were placed on the back of 25 different RTD buses that ran through low ECE enrollment neighborhoods.
- We hosted a Facebook Live event on Entravision's (Spanish-language) social media page.
- A press release was sent out to local media channels.
- We created a [toolkit](#) with social media graphics, newsletter blurbs, banner designs and videos. The toolkit was distributed to principals and school staff via email and internal newsletters.
- A "How to Enroll" video in English and Spanish was filmed to explain the ECE application process and was posted on DPS websites and social media channels.
- An "EDUCA" podcast episode (English and Spanish versions) on the UPK process was posted on the DPS website and social media channels.

- A direct email with enrollment instructions was sent to families who attended ECE-3 at DPS but had not yet enrolled for ECE-4.
- Print ads ran in “La Voz” (bilingual) and “Greater Park Hill” newsletters.

Evaluation

Our identified problem was that the UPK application process was confusing and unclear, and we were not confident that families had received the information that they needed in their preferred language or method of communication. Our campaign broke down the action items needed from families in order to receive UPK funding and enroll their ECE students in classes before the start of the school year. Before our campaign started on July 9, 66% of our ECE seats were filled. On Sept. 1, the last day of our campaign, 73% of our ECE seats were filled -- **a 7% increase or an increase of 349 students**, bringing in over **\$3.5 million** for the district and giving an additional 349 students a head start on their education.

Overall Result Analysis

- The full [campaign analysis document is available here](#).
- Our campaign brought **5,700** new visitors to our UPK landing page. **1,935** clicked on the application buttons, with Google ads, Meta, and Our DPS Weekly community newsletter providing the highest click rates. **Approximately 34% of our visitors** clicked on the application buttons.
- Our **Google ads were the highest-performing tactic** based on a combination of the relevance of the targeted audience, the number of clicks/impressions, and a high engagement time.
- When considering engagement time, flyers performed best at an average of **48.5 seconds** engaged on the landing page, followed by the mailer at **48 seconds**.

Google Ads

Our highest-performing tactic

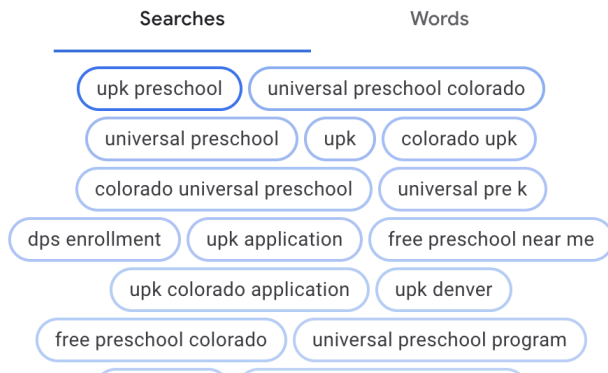
- Served **4,150** clicks and **601,000** impressions; **2,855** new users.
- The top-performing city was Denver, followed by Glendale, Thornton, Lakewood and Aurora.
- Engagement time was higher than other tactics: an average of **32 seconds** on the landing page.
- Investment for Round 1 was **\$9,530**.

Click-through rates (CTR) performed above average (average CTR for the education industry is 3.78%), with some essential keywords performing extremely well. Our top five keywords for CTR were:

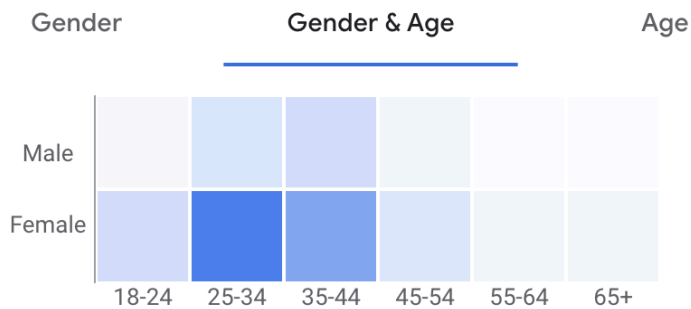
1. register for preschool → 19.77% CTR
2. preschool enrollment → 18.89% CTR
3. preschool enrollment near me → 15% CTR
4. best public preschool near me → 12% CTR
5. best preschools near me → 9% CTR



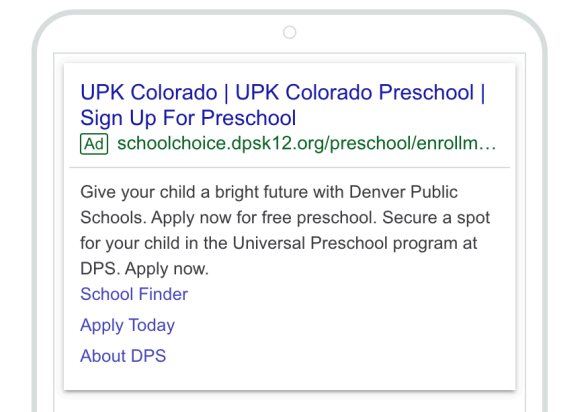
The top keywords per click were very relevant.



Demographic relevance: 25 to 44, majority female (target age of mothers of young children)



Example Google ads





Mobile App Ads

The second-highest number of clicks; extremely low engagement

- Served **250,000 impressions** and saw **1,310 clicks** to the website; **1,308 new users**.
- CTR of 0.52% was nearly double the market benchmark (between 0.25-0.30%).
- However, engagement time on the website was **less than a tenth of a second**.
- Investment for Round 1 was **\$2,039.47**.

Example mobile app ads



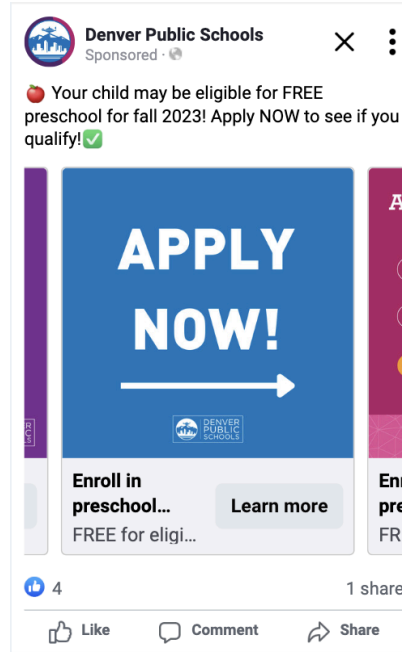
Meta Ads

The third-highest number of clicks; moderate engagement

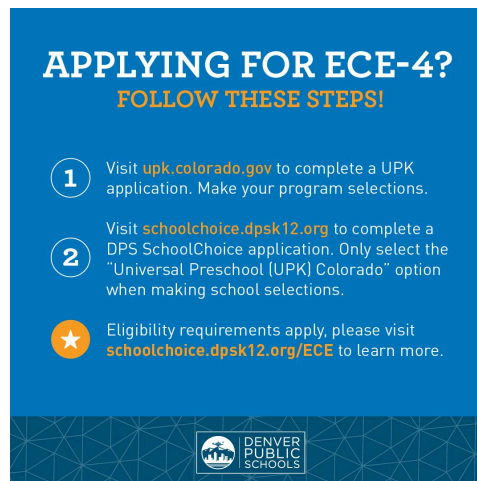
- Served **393,808 impressions** and saw **4,363 total clicks** (including link clicks, likes/comments/shares, or clicking on Facebook profile). Served **1,695 clicks** to the website; **970 new users**.
- Boosted posts and promoted click-throughs performed better than awareness ads.
- While we invested half of our budget into Spanish ads and half of our budget into English ads, Spanish ads performed better than English.
- Video ads performed best, followed by image carousels and then GIFs.
- Certain captions/copy performed better than others. We will use this info to improve for Round 2.
- The average engagement time on the landing page was **7 seconds** -- moderate engagement.
- Investment for Round 1 was **\$6,520.87**.



Example Meta ads



Example social media posts



**¿DESEA SOLICITAR INSCRIPCIÓN
EN PREESCOLAR PARA
NIÑOS DE 3 AÑOS O ECE-3?
¡SIGA ESTOS PASOS!**

- 1** Visite schoolchoice.dpsk12.org para completar una solicitud EscojoMiEscuela de DPS.
 - 2** Visite upk.colorado.gov para completar la solicitud UPK. Reciba información sobre financiamiento adicional de UPK.
- ★ Es necesario reunir los requisitos para ser elegible, visite schoolchoice.dpsk12.org/ECE para obtener más información.



**¿DESEA SOLICITAR INSCRIPCIÓN
EN PREESCOLAR PARA NIÑOS
DE 4 AÑOS O ECE-4?
¡SIGA ESTOS PASOS!**

- 1** Visite upk.colorado.gov para completar la solicitud UPK. Seleccione sus programas.
 - 2** Visite schoolchoice.dpsk12.org para completar una solicitud EscojoMiEscuela de DPS. Seleccione únicamente la opción "Universal Preschool (UPK) Colorado" al seleccionar la escuela.
- ★ Es necesario reunir los requisitos para ser elegible, visite schoolchoice.dpsk12.org/ECE para obtener más información.



Bus Ads

The fourth-highest number of clicks; moderate engagement

- Served **25 bus routes** and saw **68 new users**.
- The average engagement time on the landing page was **6 seconds** -- moderate engagement.
- Investment for Round 1 was **\$3,750**, which is a low investment.

Example bus ads





Additional Support Materials

Billboard

[How-To Apply for UPK Video: English](#)

[How-To Apply for UPK Video: Spanish](#)

“La Voz” Ad

CSU Pueblo President states the importance of diversity

Did you know? Your child may be eligible for **FREE** preschool! Apply today.

¿Ya lo saben? Sus hijos pueden ser elegibles para asistir a preescolar **GRATIS**. ¡Soliciten ingreso hoy mismo!

Scan the QR code to learn more!

Escaneen el código QR para obtener más información!

Mailer

Spots still available for fall 2023 in Denver Public Schools. Apply today!

¿Escaneen para obtener más información!

FREE PRESCHOOL PREESCOLAR GRATIS

Going to preschool is important for your child's development. Did you know that high-quality preschool is now available for free for Colorado families? Apply today to attend Denver Public Schools through Universal Preschool Colorado (UPK).

Asistir al preescolar es importante para el desarrollo de los niños. ¿Sabía que ahora las familias de Colorado pueden disponer de educación preescolar de alta calidad de manera gratuita? Envíe su solicitud hoy mismo para asistir a las Escuelas Públicas de Denver a través del programa Preescolar Universal Colorado (UPK, por su sigla en inglés).

Planning for the Next Campaign

- We plan to continue Google ads with an increased budget for future campaigns due to the success of this tactic. We plan to explore Meta ads further in future campaigns, tweaking them to include more Spanish ads, videos and boosted posts and introducing more of a focus on Instagram and stories.
- We saw bus ads on the back of the bus performing moderately well and would like to explore bus ads inside the bus and in bus shelters.
- District emails performed well with moderate engagement and clicks. Since this is a free tactic, we will continue to invest time in this effort.
- Mailers and flyers had high engagement, demonstrating the value of print materials but a relatively low number of new users for the cost. We will continue to distribute flyers throughout the community. We will use mailers sparingly, making sure our lists are highly targeted.
- Impressions for billboards are unknown, but new users were low, and the cost was comparatively high. We will use billboards sparingly in the future.
- We did not see any engagement come through for the “La Voz” ad, and only one engagement for the “Greater Park Hill” ad. We will use it only when targeted efforts to Spanish language audiences or Park Hill audiences are needed. We may try “El Comercio,” another Spanish-language paper, or other small localized neighborhood papers, for future efforts.
- We will try English radio ads for future campaigns and develop unique URLs for tracking Spanish radio ads for future campaigns. We would like to explore TV spots in English and Spanish for future campaigns if the budget allows, and expand focus on video ads, potentially including YouTube ads.
- We would like to explore ads in malls and the airport for future campaigns.
- We would like to explore streaming radio ads such as Pandora or Spotify for future campaigns.
- We will explore more A/B testing in future campaigns to evaluate which text and photos perform best.

Conclusion

Starting school at the ECE level is highly beneficial for children and impacts their success in the classroom in later years. To prevent families from not enrolling in ECE due to the complicated UPK application, we focused on breaking down the ECE and UPK application steps into deliverables that families could understand, in their language of preference.

Our tactics brought **5,700** new visitors to our UPK landing page. **Approximately 34% of our visitors** clicked on the application buttons. Before our campaign started on July 9, 66% of our ECE seats were filled. On Sept. 1, the last day of our campaign, 73% of our ECE seats were filled -- **a 7% increase or an increase of 349 students**. Having 349 additional ECE students brought in over **\$3.5 million** for the district and gave those students a head start on their education.