

NEWS: EDUCATION

Ballot measure to boost child care funding in Garfield, Pitkin, Eagle counties headed to victory

Other local measures designed to send more dollars to child care initiatives were too close to call Tuesday night.



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A student colors May 9, 2025 at Little Eagles Child Development Center in southeast Colorado Springs. (Mark Reis, Special to The Colorado Sun)

Early election results for a spate of local ballot measures aimed at ramping up funding for child care initiatives across Colorado were mixed, with at least one measure appearing on its way to victory and another looking likely to fail Tuesday night.

A proposal to create a 0.25% sales tax in Garfield and Pitkin counties and a portion of Eagle County was winning decisively in all three counties, though all returns weren't in. The measure aims to establish the Confluence Early Childhood Development Special Service District, Colorado's first Early Childhood Development Special District spanning an area from Aspen to Parachute and creating a shared taxing authority.

The measure would generate an estimated \$10 million to \$12 million to give families tuition assistance based on a sliding scale related to their income and family size. It would also fund a grant program to help providers boost teacher pay and add to the number of slots available for children.

Meanwhile, early returns for a proposed 0.25% sales tax in Larimer County to help cover child care tuition assistance, teacher pay and construction projects indicated the measure was failing by a narrow margin. That measure would have collected \$28.7 million each year.

Other local ballot initiatives designed to steer more funding toward child care were too close to call Tuesday night in Chaffee, Custer, Eagle, Gilpin, Hinsdale and Ouray counties.

A proposed lodging tax increase to 5.9% in Chaffee County would produce \$3.5 million annually to **support child care and other community priorities including affordable housing and public safety**. Early returns there showed Ballot Issue 1A losing, with 4,884 votes against and 3,616 in favor.

In Custer County, a proposed lodging tax increase to 6% projected to pull in \$180,000 per year, **half of which would be directed to child care**, was failing. With about 45% of ballots counted around 9:30 p.m., 745 people had voted in favor and 1,488 against.

In Ouray County, a new 6% lodging tax on properties in unincorporated parts of the county was inching toward victory Tuesday night. The measure is projected to generate about \$182,000 each year to **help pay for local law enforcement, fire protection services, affordable housing and child care facilities**.

A lodging tax increase to 4% in Eagle County **would collect \$4.5 million annually for child care along with tourism and public safety**. The measure was failing by a slim

margin, according to early returns. While 3,570 voters rejected the measure, it garnered approval from 3,454 voters.

A lodging tax increase to 6% in Gilpin County would generate **\$340,000 per year for child care, housing and infrastructure**, Chalkbeat Colorado reported. Early returns there indicated the measure was winning by a slight margin, with 1,158 voters saying “yes” and 951 ballots cast against the initiative.

Another lodging tax increase to 6% in Hinsdale County would result in \$240,000 each year for **child care and other priorities such as medical services and search and rescue**, Chalkbeat Colorado reported. No results had been posted by the Colorado Secretary of State by 10:30 p.m.

The flurry of local ballot initiatives reflects an escalating need for more public funding in the child care sector at a time many families simply can’t afford child care, early childhood education experts say.

“It shows there’s a strong public will for investment in child care and it’s a real message to our policymakers that they need to do better at investing in child care and treating it as infrastructure,” Mathangi Subramanian, director of early childhood policy for the nonprofit Colorado Children’s Campaign, told The Colorado Sun. “And I think it just shows the level of underinvestment in our system.”

Subramanian said that child care is becoming more widely recognized as a public good, but significant funding gaps remain even as it draws broad bipartisan support.

Without an adequate child care system, the economy suffers as some parents opt out of the workforce to stay home with their children, she said.

And then there are the lifelong impacts on kids. Since brains are developing at hyper speed from birth to age 5, child care programs where teachers can identify mental health struggles and track developmental delays are critical to set young learners up for long-term success in school and with their peers, Subramanian said.

“This is one of the few areas where you can invest and get rewards 10, 20, 30 years down the line,” she said.

