

# ANNUAL REPORT



For:

State Fiscal Year 2022-2023

Concerning the Colorado Imagination Library Program

State of Colorado Department of Education

From:

**The Imagination Library of Colorado**

a Colorado nonprofit corporation, a 501(c)(3) organization, and the Colorado affiliate for:  
Dolly Parton's Imagination Library and the Dollywood Foundation

The Imagination Library of Colorado

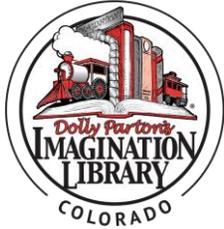
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June 30, 2023

Ms. Nicolle Davies  
Assistant Commissioner  
Colorado State Library  
Department of Education  
State of Colorado  
201 E Colfax Ave  
Denver, CO 80203

RE: Annual Report of the Colorado Imagination Library Program

Dear Assistant Commissioner Davies:

In accordance with the provisions of C.R.S. 24-90-120, it is my pleasure to present you with the attached annual report highlighting the activities of the Imagination Library of Colorado during the past fiscal year, July 1, 2022 through today. I think you will find that our organization and our program have had a successful year, which has seen Dolly Parton's Imagination Library program grow to include more and more children in more and more counties across our state.

Our other staff members join me in saying what a privilege it is to serve the people of Colorado by promoting a program that has such a tremendous impact on the future success of our state's children. We thank you for this opportunity to lead and for the funding that has allowed the Imagination Library to expand.

Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jack Tate".

Jack Tate  
President and CEO  
Imagination Library of Colorado  
<https://www.imaginationlibrarycolorado.org/>



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# The Imagination Library of Colorado – Annual Report SFY 2022-23



## **Board of Directors**

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Pigeon Forge, TN  
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Thank you for sharing in my dream – “Create a love for books and reading - give every child the start they need in education and life.”

Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library began with Dolly’s desire that every child, regardless of income, would have access to books. Growing up in poverty with a father who was functionally illiterate, Dolly witnessed as a small child how her father’s inability to read and write held him back from achieving his dreams. With her father as inspiration, the Imagination Library comes from a very personal place for Dolly.

Thank you, General Assembly of the State of Colorado, and Governor Polis, for agreeing that it is imperative for Colorado children from birth to 5 years old have access to high-quality, age-appropriate books on a monthly basis at no cost to families.

We know nothing is more basic, more essential, more foundational to a child’s success in life than the ability to read!

We proudly support our 501c3 statewide Colorado partner, The Imagination Library of Colorado, in Promoting, Growing and Sustaining Imagination Library programs in all 64 Colorado counties.

Experience with other statewide programs has proven that a successful participation goal per county is ~65%. Statewide expansion happens over multiple years, with average growth of 15 – 25% new children per year. We look forward to the enrollment growth from current 4% of 0-5 Colorado children enrolled to 35% over the next 2 years.

The Dollywood Foundation is thrilled to partner with Imagination Library of Colorado and Colorado Department of Education to get more books into the hands of more Colorado children and families!

Kindly,

*Nora Briggs*

Nora Briggs  
Executive Director, The Dollywood Foundation

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1996, Dolly Parton launched Dolly Parton's Imagination Library (DPIL) book gifting program to foster a love of reading in Tennessee's children. Each month, 1 brand-new, developmentally appropriate book is mailed to a child's home at no cost and no hassle to parents. The program model provides a turnkey, replicable “blueprint” to promote early childhood literacy and kindergarten readiness.

In 2000, the program became available for replication to any community willing to champion it locally. Over the years, several Colorado organizations scattered throughout the state formed Imagination Library programs to service the young children in their community.

In 2019, a group of Colorado community leaders saw the impact the Imagination Library program was having on young children in Colorado and put in motion a plan to mail books to all Colorado children ages 0-5. On February 26, 2020, Senators Jack Tate and Jeff Bridges introduced Senate Bill SB20-185 to the Colorado General Assembly to provide a vehicle for the organization and funding of a statewide Imagination Library program. The bipartisan legislation was signed on July 10, 2020 and became effective on September 13, 2020. Subsequent legislation, SB21-268, HB22-1329, HB22-1390, and SB23-287 have added provisions which funded the program launch and continued expansion.

In April 2021, the Imagination Library of Colorado, a Colorado nonprofit corporation, became a 501(c)(3) organization and the Colorado affiliate for Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library and the Dollywood Foundation. Along with a Board of Directors poised to help champion the course of the Imagination Library of Colorado’s purpose of increasing literacy through the promotion of reading by Colorado children through the provision of books and ancillary activities, programs and benefits, the organization is positioned to help all Colorado children be ready for kindergarten and read at grade level by no later than the end of third grade.

In November 2021, Governor Polis and Education Commissioner Anthes introduced the Imagination Library of Colorado and its partnership with the Dollywood Foundation’s Imagination Library to offer a hardback, age-appropriate book mailed every month to every child in Colorado under the age of five at no cost to the family. The Imagination Library of Colorado thus serves as a catalyst and ongoing support to Coloradans seeking to establish local Imagination Library programs in their communities. The organization has as its charge a statewide rollout through local, community-based nonprofit organizations, providing support, training, and resources to support these efforts.

To assist with local community program efforts, the General Assembly has appropriated funds needed to pay a portion of the operating expenses of the state organization and to provide a 50% match grant to cover half the monthly cost of providing the books to the local nonprofit



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organizations that offered the program to every child under the age of five in their communities. This book funding started for book shipments in November 2021.

We are pleased to share that as of the last day of SFY 2022-23, the Imagination Library of Colorado has 63 of Colorado's 64 counties with an Imagination Library program operational and enrolling children, and that statewide we are giving just over 52,000 young Colorado children the gift of reading. We anticipate once again doubling our enrollment and thus book bill over the next fiscal year.



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## PROGRAM OPERATION AND CASE FOR SUPPORT

The mission of the Imagination Library of Colorado (ILCO) is to increase literacy by ensuring all young children across the state may participate in Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library.

Our organization supports and helps fund local champions to launch and operate county-based affiliates in all Colorado communities so children all across Colorado can participate.

Imagination Library of Colorado’s vision is to be a champion of early childhood literacy in the Centennial State so that all children start school ready on day one.

The support from the State of Colorado serves as a funding catalyst for getting books into families’ homes, instilling a simple but effective long-term ripple effect increasing the culture of literacy within the household. We also know that the more books a child has in the home before beginning school increases kindergarten readiness which in turn promotes on-time high school graduation rates, reduces intergenerational poverty levels, and creates a more civically-engaged society.

If a child is enrolled at birth, they will own a 60-volume library when they start kindergarten. Having operated the program for 20 months and now entering their third state fiscal year, ILCO is still on track for their five-year goal to mail over 210,000 books per month to children living in Colorado. With the financial partnership of the Colorado Department of Education and the creation of our nonprofit organization to work with the Dollywood Foundation, Colorado became the 7th state to create an early literacy initiative focusing on strong home libraries. There are now 16 states with similar statewide programs, the most recent being California and Missouri.

### How It Works

Each affiliate is managed by independent nonprofit organizations, volunteers, and staff. While the spotlight on the state program has created a public awareness campaign to help increase enrollment.

Imagination Library programs are managed and funded by:

- Nonprofit Organizations
- School Districts
- Foundations
- Kiwanis
- Rotary Clubs
- Library Districts



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- Early Childhood Councils
- Health Departments
- United Way

Each affiliate is responsible for fundraising for their local program cost and enrollment of children.

All the backend framework, logistics, security, book selection and contract negotiations with Penguin Publishing, American Printing House, warehouse storage shipping costs are managed by The Dollywood Foundation, thus creating the simplest and most cost-effective book mailing program in the United States.

With the financial partnership of the Colorado Department of Education and creating a nonprofit organization to work with the Dollywood Foundation, Colorado is now in the company of several other states in creating an early literacy initiative investing in strong home libraries.

### The Importance of Early Childhood Literacy

Developing literacy begins at birth. Incredibly, a baby's brain develops rapidly in the first few years of life: 1 million connections per second! By age three a child's brain will be 85% of its adult size. By the time a child enters kindergarten, their brain is nearly fully formed. This "wiring" shapes infants and toddlers' ability to learn to read and think critically. Because of that fact, as early as age three, a child's vocabulary can predict third grade reading achievement. What is the best way to ensure a child is armed with the knowledge they need to succeed? Reading aloud to the child and giving her access to books.

Enter the Imagination Library of Colorado and the Colorado Department of Education. Through a partnership with Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, Imagination Library affiliates work to send every child in Colorado from birth to age five a new book each month. Research has shown that a child with just 25 books in their home completes an average of two additional years of schooling compared to their peers without books in their home. The goal is that every kindergartner begins school with 60 books in their home.

Salient statistics that inform the case for support:

- 85% of a person's intellect, personality, and social skills are developed by age 5.
- Over 95% of public investment in education occurs after age 5, when the most critical learning years have passed.



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- Children in middle- and high-income homes have an average of 13 books per child, whereas children living in poverty have an average of 1 book per 300 children.

Because of this, low-income preschoolers have fewer learning opportunities than children from high-income backgrounds, a significant factor as to why they lag behind in reading achievement throughout their school years.

The program is poised to affect these statistics. Education is the path out of the trap of generational poverty toward economic opportunity and a life with better mental and emotional health. The benefits of the Imagination Library program are a connection between children having more books and early language development to a child's literacy. Participants receiving books through the Imagination Library have been able to see this development in real time.

### Proficiency in Reading in Colorado

Young children whose parents read to them, tell stories, and sing songs become better readers and perform better in school. However, more than 60% of Colorado children start kindergarten unprepared, lagging their peers in critical language, math, and social-emotional skills. According to Annie E. Casey Foundation, only 40% of Colorado third graders are proficient in reading. Third grade is considered one of the most important milestones in a student's career in terms of reading proficiency; it correlates to whether a student will graduate from high school on time and enroll in post-secondary or apprenticeship education.

### Research Past and Present

The Imagination Library of Colorado's work with the University of Denver's Colorado Lab is underway. The project is a multi-year study to ascertain if the impact of Imagination Library program participation on children's kindergarten readiness can be modeled. The study is using data from the Dollywood Foundation and from the Colorado LINK system. This research on the has the potential to guide further literacy public policy decisions in Colorado.

Research findings from other states suggest:

- While the program is free to all demographics and does not have any income requirements, low-income families were less likely to enroll in the program in some geographies. In response to the research data, the Imagination Library of Colorado has sought out partnerships to remove online enrollment barriers. Examples include working with Comcast to inform families of the availability of free internet service so as to facilitate online enrollment, working with early childhood organizations, and promoting the program at childcare facilities in target areas. Local affiliates also work to



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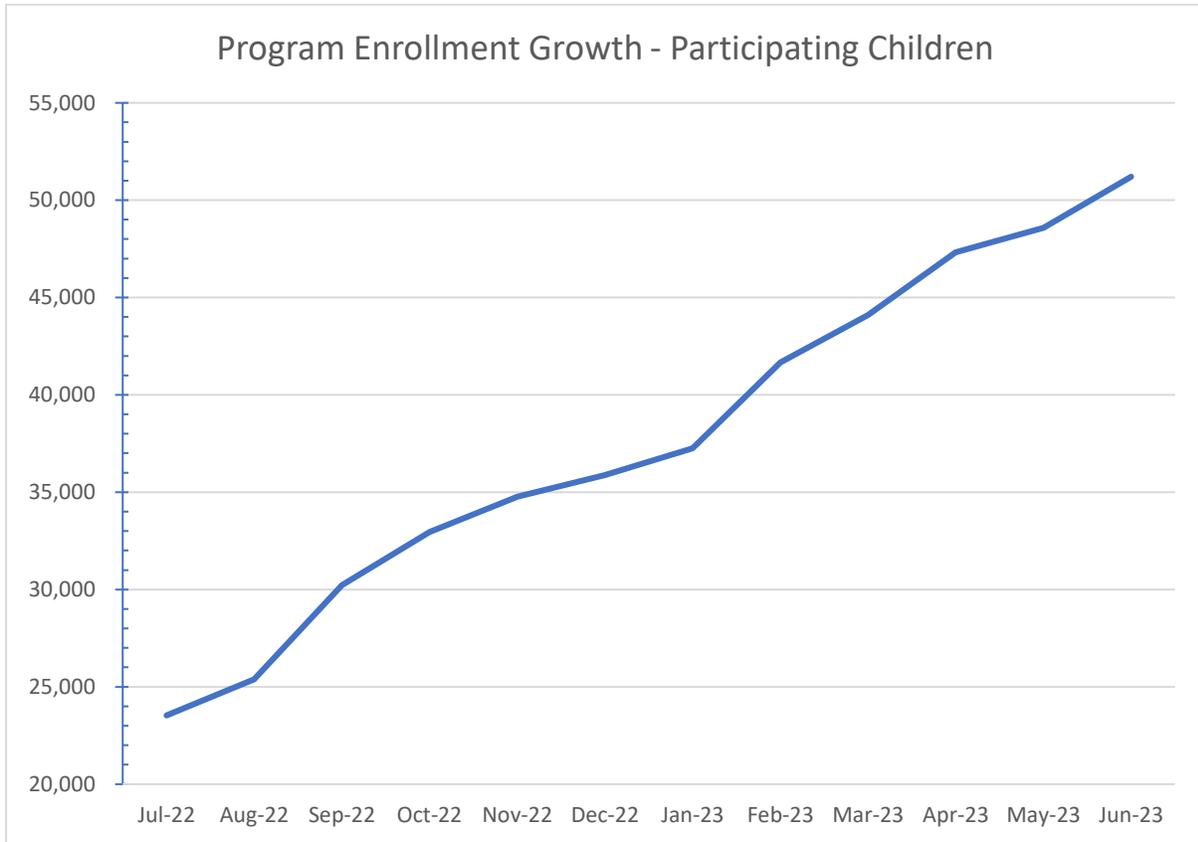
enroll families at food banks, preschools, and canvassing door to door and working with libraries and businesses to display enrollment materials and educating ambassadors to create a wider community knowledge base of the program.

- A Children’s Hospital in Ohio began their partnership with Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library in 2015 and has served 15,000 children. In evaluating the program, the program found that Kindergarten Readiness Assessments rose by 15.4% among participating children in just three years from 42.9% in the 2016-2017 cohort to 58.3% in 2018-2019 cohort.
- Tennessee found in 2014 that children who participated in the program scored significantly higher on Kindergarten Literacy Assessments than their non-participating peers and this trend continued into the third grade. Families who participated in the program reported reading together more as a family than families who did not receive books from the Imagination Library.
- In 2015, a research project funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) Program found that the Imagination Library program improved the overall literacy environment in homes, including more families reading books together one or more times every day and more children pretending to read books on their own. The project revealed two major results: 1) Increased parent-child literacy activities among parents with children born through age four, and 2) Improved oral language skills of children at 4 years of age.
- A study conducted by LeMoynes College confirmed the Imagination Library has benefits that support school readiness. Their 2015 study, supported by the Center for Urban and Applied Research, revealed that parents were more likely to read frequently to their children the longer they stayed enrolled in the Imagination Library program. When comparing those families enrolled for 4 months or less versus more than 4 months, they found that reading 3 times a week or more jumped from 59.7% to 85.2%. The percentage that read to their child daily doubled from 29% to 59.3%. With more advanced statistics, they found that each month a child is rolled increases the likelihood that they will be read to daily. Significantly, the study has positive impacts for children not born in the United States. These children are less likely to be read to on a daily basis. However, this research revealed that after a few months the native and non-native experiences were nearly identical. The non-native children were being read to as often as those children born in the United States.



## PROGRAM GROWTH AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

During the last twelve months of the program, enrollment has doubled, having surged past 51,000 young Colorado children.



The following table provides additional program performance detail, including the number of counties open to children of eligible age.

<b>Imagination Library Colorado Affiliates</b>	<b>SFY 21-22</b>	<b>SFY22-23</b>
Number of Counties Open to Enrollment (whole or in part)	50	63
Number of Colorado Nonprofit 501(c)(3) Affiliates	36	51
Total Children Enrolled (at book bill closing in last month of SFY)	22,518	51,205
Number of New Enrollments	12,858	37,192
Number of Children Graduated	4,790	8,505
Net Enrollment Gain over Previous Period	8,068	28,687
Enrollment Growth (%) From Previous Period	54.9%	127.4%



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Percentage of Eligible Population Children Enrolled*	6.8%	15.4%
Total Books Mailed in SFY**	182,344	452,898
Total Books Mailed in CO Since 2005	1,568,797	2,021,695
* ILCO estimates the eligible population of children <5 in CO to be 333,296		
** does not include ~ 4,000 books hand-delivered		

Finally, the organization wants to call attention to several qualitative accomplishments.

Since inception, Imagination Library of Colorado has focused on growth in the following areas of Colorado:

- Communities with historically underserved students and from low-income families.
- Small rural communities located on the eastern plains and southern sections of the state that do not have close access to a public library.
- Larger rural communities that have a disproportionate percentage of children living in poverty that have only one public library to serve their youth populations.

Furthermore, in the past 12 months we have initiated partnerships with other organizations to enhance our ability to serve Colorado’s highest need children.

- Through a partnership with the Colorado Dept of Early Childhood, we are enrolling Head Start children throughout the State with a goal of reaching out to and enrolling all Head Start children in Colorado, as well as their siblings. As part of this effort, the Imagination Library program was featured in the statewide Head Start April newsletter. In May alone, Colorado’s Imagination Library affiliates enrolled over 1,209 Head Start children.
- Having started working with the Education of Homeless Children and Youth Program and Migrant Education Program, we are just now getting books into the hands of some of Colorado’s highest need children in all 178 Colorado school districts.

We are delighted to note that the program is open to enrollment in all or part of 63 of 64 Colorado counties. We have accomplished this expansion by recruiting new affiliates and partners using a systematic approach. First, we secure catalyst grant funding for groups of similarly situated counties so as to be able to begin sending books to children and thus establish the program in a community. The Imagination Library of Colorado is then acting as a placeholder sponsoring organization. Then we connect with suitable nonprofits locally to take over the program as its benefits are now tangible and visible in their community. Additionally, we have been working with existing affiliates to expand into additional zip codes in their counties so as to cover them entirely.

There are also several activities, events, and milestones worthy of note:

- Imagination Library of Colorado staff held more than 150 informational meetings with local elected officials, school directors, librarians and library district personnel, Chamber



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of Commerce members, literacy and children’s welfare advocates, and various civic clubs to promote awareness and engagement of the program.

- All rural counties with limited access to libraries are now fully open to the Imagination Library program.
- Over the last 12 months, Imagination Library of Colorado and its affiliates have mailed 452,898 books, including over 6,000 with Spanish/English content. Since the Imagination Library began in November 2021, a total of 635,242 books have been mailed to children across the state of Colorado. The organization has more than doubled the previous year’s enrollment of 22,518 to 51,205 (15.4% of all eligible Colorado children) by the close of SFY 2022-23, a 127.4% increase over SFY 2021-22, and graduated 8,505 children into their next phase of learning, kindergarten.
- Imagination Library of Colorado now works with a wide variety of local champions as enrollment partners and funding partners in 63 of Colorado’s 64 counties including:
  - Early Childhood Councils serving 16 counties;
  - Public Libraries serving 15 counties/library districts;
  - Service Organization/Independent non-profits in 16 communities; and
  - United Way organizations serving 7 counties.
- Significant partners who assist in getting more books into the hands of Colorado children now include:
  - Colorado Department of Early Childhood - assists by underwriting the cost of books, provide resources for families statewide and assist in enrolling children in the Imagination Library in 28 rural counties and Head Start families across Colorado;
  - Migrant Education Program (MEP) - works in key regions of the state with high migrant population; MEP staff acts as data clerk to confidentially enroll children to receive books directly, or through a centralized location to pick books up; and,
  - Education of Homeless Children and Youth Program has been recently introduced and will be designed to mirror the successful model of the MEP.
- As part of its core mission, Imagination Library of Colorado staff supports affiliates throughout Colorado with:
  - Daily program and technical support as requested;
  - Quarterly video conference calls with like-type affiliates to share best practices and success stories;
  - Scholarships to statewide meetings and conferences relevant to the mission;
  - Grant writing support to assist local affiliates raise money locally, including the provision of sample grant proposals, and the review of submitted proposals;



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- Passthrough funding from Imagination Library of Colorado grant sources to assist with affiliate financial commitments;
- Hosting work sessions for affiliates on fundraising, end of year giving, and annual appeal templates usage; and
- Investing in marketing and promotional printed materials to be used for its mission as well as for affiliates in their enrollment and fundraising activities. 100% of Colorado affiliates have received and utilized these new tools for engagement in their libraries, community centers, day cares, and a variety of hosted free events offering resources to hard-to-reach communities.
- Imagination Library of Colorado held in April for its affiliates a Colorado conference meeting, called the Imagination Library Colorado Jamboree, to provide education, best practices, support and training opportunities to members of the affiliate organizations. Representatives from affiliates whose presence covers 56 counties were in attendance. Guest speakers covered topics ranging from fundraising strategies and program messaging to enrollment and community engagement.
- Governor Polis attended the Jamboree kick-off event welcoming to Denver the 44 non-profit organizations in attendance and thanking them for the hard work in the support of early literacy.
- Imagination Library of Colorado also held an Enrollment Week promotion in May, surpassing its goal of reaching 1,000 Head Start/hard to reach children across Colorado by 20.1% with 1,209 children. Momentum from Enrollment Week continued throughout the month resulting in 3,549 new children enrolled for the entire month.
- The Westminster 7:10 Rotary Foundation received our Inaugural *Affiliate of the Year Award* which is named the "Imagination Library Colorado 710 Award" in their honor as the first recipient in recognition of the date Governor Polis signed the Colorado Imagination Library legislation SB20-085, July 10, 2020.
- Announced is an increased marketing budget for upcoming fiscal year, with newly funded activities such as: social media targeted marketing, additional printed materials for program promotion suitable for distribution by both the state organization and local affiliates, matching funding for affiliate local marketing efforts, nonprofit bulk mailing permitting and associated postage, and consultants assisting with program outreach and graphic design.
- 60 of Colorado's 64 counties are fully open to the Imagination Library program and are enrolling children. In addition, certain parts of El Paso, Jefferson, and Arapahoe counties are open for enrollment. Statewide coverage is likely to begin in 1Q2024.
- The University of Denver's Colorado Lab began conducting research to ascertain if the impact of Imagination Library program participation on children's kindergarten



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readiness (Literacy domain of TS GOLD and/or Acadience) can be modeled and measured. The Colorado Lab has secured data from Dolly Parton Imagination Library and is gathering data from the Colorado LINK system. Preliminary results are anticipated in 2025.

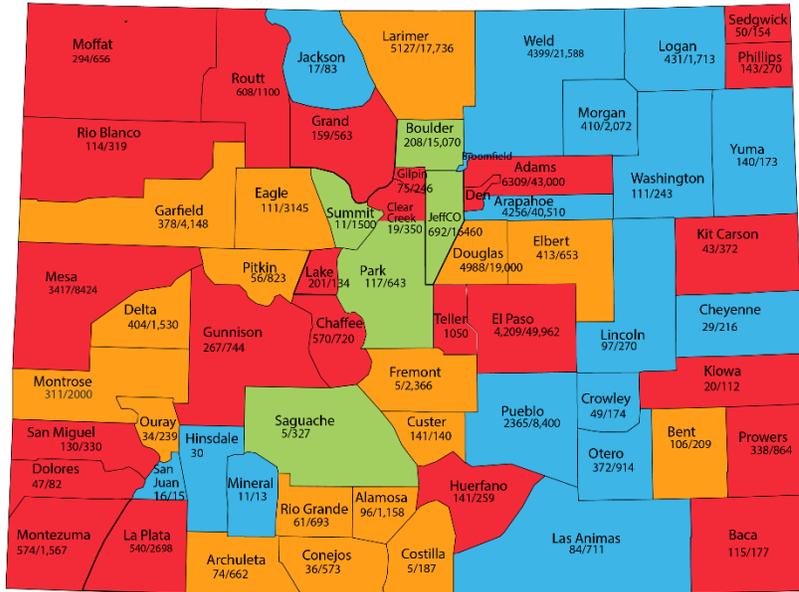
- Affiliates across ILCO distributed a parent satisfaction survey to families enrolled in the program midway through this fiscal year with the following results:
  - 86% of responders said they are reading more often to my child.
  - 87% said there is significant benefit to their child participating in the program.
  - 93% said that their child brings books to others and asks to be read to more often.



## PROGRAM DATA

State map illustrating program presence:

Imagination Library of Colorado Affiliate Map



Numbers:  
# of children enrolled/# of eligible children

- Affiliate (Pre-ILCO)
- Affiliate since ILCO Y1 (July 2021-June 2022)
- Affiliate since ILCO Y2 (July 2022-June 2023)
- Target for Y2 (July 2022-June 2023)

As of June 14, 2023 there are 52,616 children enrolled, up from 48,586 in May.

Other notes:  
Denver: 5207/41,000  
Migrant Education Program: 122 enrolled

Date: 6/14/2023

Table showing list of counties, estimated eligible population (young children ages 0-5) per county, and number of children currently enrolled in June 2023.

County	Est <5 Pop	Current Enrollment 6/30/2023	% Enrolled
<a href="#">Adams County</a>	36,678	6,088	17%
<a href="#">Alamosa County</a>	1,158	96	8%
<a href="#">Arapahoe County</a>	40,510	4,115	10%
<a href="#">Archuleta County</a>	579	74	13%
<a href="#">Baca County</a>	187	115	61%
<a href="#">Bent County</a>	209	106	51%
<a href="#">Boulder County</a>	15,070	190	1%
<a href="#">Chaffee County</a>	635	546	86%
<a href="#">Cheyenne County</a>	216	29	13%
<a href="#">City and County of Broomfield</a>	3,734	362	10%
<a href="#">City and County of Denver</a>	41,518	5,207	13%
<a href="#">Clear Creek County</a>	350	91	26%



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<a href="#"><u>Conejos County</u></a>	573	36	6%
<a href="#"><u>Costilla County</u></a>	139	5	4%
<a href="#"><u>Crowley County</u></a>	174	49	28%
<a href="#"><u>Custer County</u></a>	150	141	94%
<a href="#"><u>Delta County</u></a>	1,514	404	27%
<a href="#"><u>Dolores County</u></a>	83	47	57%
<a href="#"><u>Douglas County</u></a>	19,924	4,988	25%
<a href="#"><u>Eagle County</u></a>	3,145	111	4%
<a href="#"><u>El Paso County</u></a>	46,962	5,340	11%
<a href="#"><u>Elbert County</u></a>	1,086	413	38%
<a href="#"><u>Fremont County</u></a>	1,862	24	1%
<a href="#"><u>Garfield County</u></a>	4,016	378	9%
<a href="#"><u>Gilpin County</u></a>	246	75	30%
<a href="#"><u>Grand County</u></a>	563	78	14%
<a href="#"><u>Gunnison County</u></a>	744	243	33%
<a href="#"><u>Hinsdale County</u></a>	38	24	63%
<a href="#"><u>Huerfano County</u></a>	165	141	85%
<a href="#"><u>Jackson County</u></a>	83	17	20%
<a href="#"><u>Jefferson County</u></a>	29,991	707	2%
<a href="#"><u>Kiowa County</u></a>	153	29	19%
<a href="#"><u>Kit Carson County</u></a>	389	43	11%
<a href="#"><u>La Plata County</u></a>	2,845	540	19%
<a href="#"><u>Lake County</u></a>	324	201	62%
<a href="#"><u>Larimer County</u></a>	17,736	5,127	29%
<a href="#"><u>Las Animas County</u></a>	622	84	14%
<a href="#"><u>Lincoln County</u></a>	305	97	32%
<a href="#"><u>Logan County</u></a>	1,713	431	25%
<a href="#"><u>Mesa County</u></a>	8,723	3,417	39%
<a href="#"><u>Mineral County</u></a>	12	11	92%
<a href="#"><u>Moffat County</u></a>	840	294	35%
<a href="#"><u>Montezuma County</u></a>	1,524	575	38%
<a href="#"><u>Montrose County</u></a>	2,312	311	13%
<a href="#"><u>Morgan County</u></a>	2,072	410	20%
<a href="#"><u>Otero County</u></a>	1,095	372	34%
<a href="#"><u>Ouray County</u></a>	158	34	22%
<a href="#"><u>Park County</u></a>	827	117	14%
<a href="#"><u>Phillips County</u></a>	245	143	58%
<a href="#"><u>Pitkin County</u></a>	823	56	7%
<a href="#"><u>Prowers County</u></a>	811	302	37%



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<u>Pueblo County</u>	9,637	2,365	25%
<u>Rio Blanco County</u>	421	114	27%
<u>Rio Grande County</u>	693	61	9%
<u>Routt County</u>	1,054	608	58%
<u>Saguache County</u>	327	9	3%
<u>San Juan County</u>	20	16	80%
<u>San Miguel County</u>	320	130	41%
<u>Sedgwick County</u>	154	50	32%
<u>Summit County</u>	1,310	1	0%
<u>Teller County</u>	978	184	19%
<u>Washington County</u>	244	111	45%
<u>Weld County</u>	21,588	4,389	20%
<u>Yuma County</u>	773	140	18%

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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