

# Child care kudos

## Colorado among 10 best in nation

By Carol Kreck  
Denver Post Staff Writer

Colorado leads the pack in child care. This month, as in past years, Colorado was named one of 10 best states in the country for child care in Working Mother magazine. Others named were California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Vermont, Washington and Wisconsin. Idaho, Louisiana and Mississippi scored the lowest.

Along with that designation came an Aug. 4 cover story by U.S. News & World Report on "Dangerous Day Care," which highlighted Colorado in a piece titled "Fixing Day Care: One state tries to do it right."

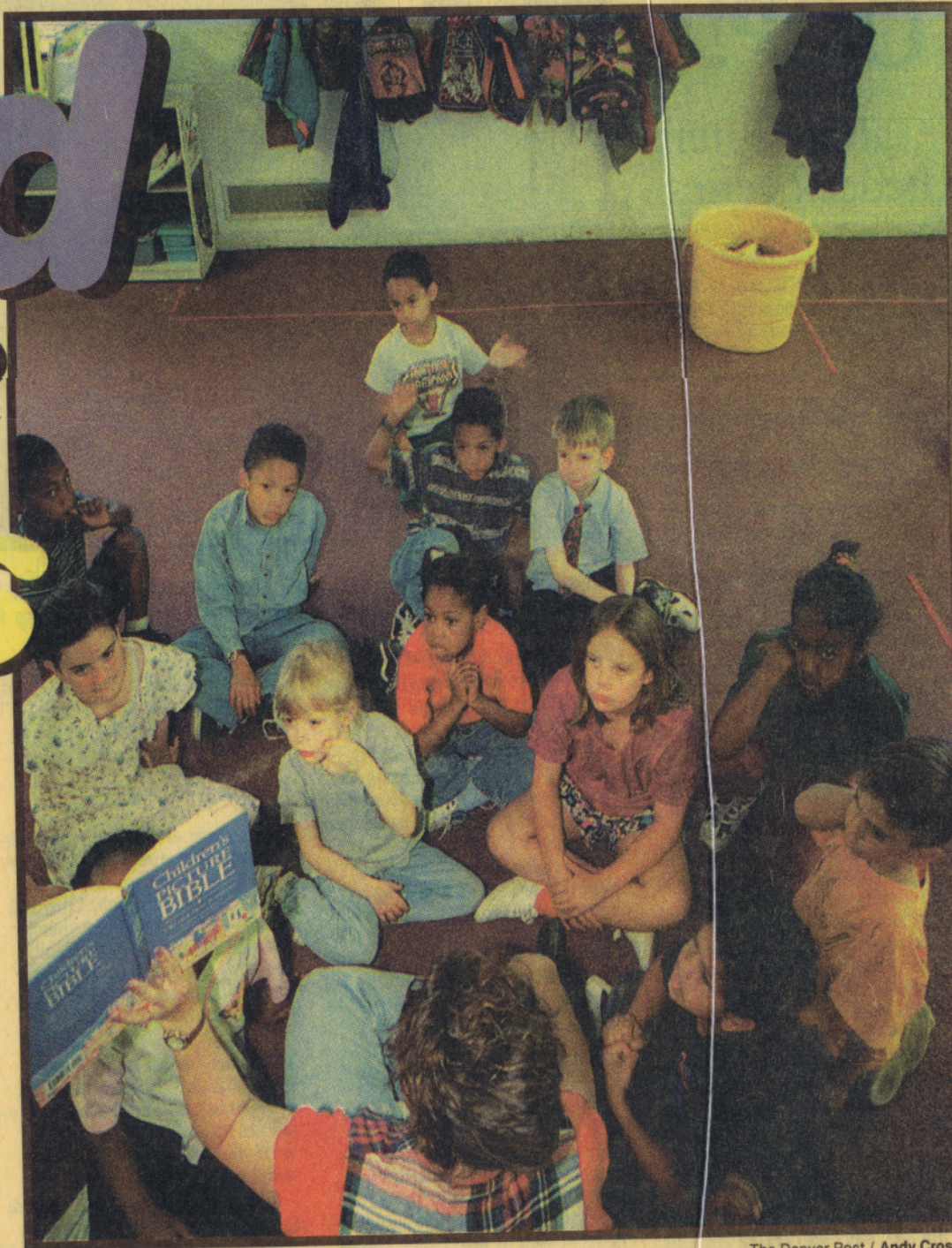
The news that this may be the best of all child-care worlds came as no surprise to Kristin Arnold of Brighton, whose 1½- and 3-year-olds "ask to go to Diane's every morning," the home of their child-care provider. Arnold said it seemed there were lots of services to help find licensed care, one of which she used to find drop-in care when her regular provider had to go out of town.

Another happy mom was Shannon Forgues of Thornton, whose children are at Child's Touch child-care center where, at the end of the day, they sometimes ask to stay because "they enjoy it so much."

Still, Forgues was surprised that Colorado offered the best child care. A former teacher, she visited many centers before settling on Child's Touch and found some less than ideal in terms of adult-child ratios and caring in general.

Cheri Davis of Highlands Ranch, whose two children are in part-time care, said she still worries. "I'm happy most of the time," she said. "What's good is they love to go.

"What makes me worry is it seems to be at times chaotic. You don't feel completely safe, I mean



The Denver Post / Andy Cross

Ariane Duggan, bottom center, reads to her class at Salvation Army child-care center in Aurora.

completely. How do they keep track of all those kids?"

A potent combination of public and private sector initiatives over recent years has made Colorado a model for the rest of the country, but that doesn't mean the state is ideal, says Karen Beye, managing director of the state Department of Human Services.

"We are not there," she says, because policy makers are not yet as willing to spend money on child care as they are on prisons.

So what is the state doing right?

■ Colorado's income-tax form includes a check-off that allows taxpayers to contribute to a Child Care Quality Improvement Fund for the first time

this year. A legislative initiative supported by business leaders, the fund attracted the support of 21,478 taxpayers for \$125,500 its first time out. The Colorado Children's campaign is making plans to accept grant request. Funds could go for a wide range of quality improvement from books to parenting classes.

■ Next month, there records of more than 7,000 of the state's licensed child-care centers will be computerized and available statewide.

Parents poised to make a child-care center decision will be able to check records at regional referral offices. Before, the records could only be ac-

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