



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Auraria Campus Breaks Ground on New Merage Early Learning Center

DENVER, CO. (June 5, 2026) – Auraria Campus leaders, community partners, donors, and families gathered yesterday to celebrate the groundbreaking of the new Merage Early Learning Center, a transformative investment in early childhood education that will expand childcare access and support student success for years to come.



The groundbreaking ceremony unveiled the facility's new name, the Merage Early Learning Center, in recognition of the David and Laura Merage Foundation's support and commitment to expanding opportunities for children and families. The new center will provide a modern, child-centered environment designed to meet the growing needs of campus families and the broader Denver community.

The new 25,000-square-foot center will expand childcare capacity by approximately 30 percent, helping address current waitlists while creating additional opportunities for parenting students, faculty, staff, and community members to access high-quality early childhood education.

"As Auraria Campus celebrates its 50th anniversary, today's groundbreaking represents far more than the start of construction on a new building, it reflects our continued commitment to investing in people and building a stronger campus community," said Colleen Walker, Chief Executive Officer of the Auraria Higher Education Center.

"The Merage Early Learning Center will help remove barriers to education, create opportunities for children to thrive, and support parents as they pursue their educational and professional goals. This investment will serve families and strengthen our community for generations to come."

The facility will feature research-informed learning spaces, outdoor play environments, and a welcoming design that supports children's development through exploration, creativity, and connection.

The project would not be successful without the generosity of the Anschutz Foundation, Metropolitan State University of Denver, the Boettcher Foundation, Gary Community Ventures, the Gates Family Foundation, and many others who understand the critical need for quality early education and the workforce pipeline of future educators.

The project reflects Auraria Campus's ongoing commitment to student success and family support. For many parents pursuing higher education, access to affordable, reliable childcare is essential to completing their academic journey.

The new Merage Early Learning Center is being constructed as part of a larger mixed-use development that will also include workforce housing. The overall project reflects a shared vision of creating greater access, opportunity, and support for the campus community.

"Early childhood education has been a cornerstone of our philanthropic work for nearly two decades," said David Merage, CEO of the David and Laura Merage Foundation. "This project reflects our deep commitment to ensuring that parents can focus on furthering their education, knowing their child is safe, cared for and learning in an enriching environment."

"In the heart of downtown Denver, on a campus shared by thousands of students working toward a better future, we are building something that will make our entire community stronger," said Laura Merage, Co-Founder of the David and Laura Merage Foundation.

Construction on the new center is expected to begin this summer, with the facility anticipated to open in 2028.



"Every child deserves a safe, inspiring place to learn, grow, and discover their potential," said Emily Nelson, Director of the Auraria Early Learning Center. "This new center will allow us to expand our impact, serve more families, and continue providing exceptional early childhood education in an environment designed specifically for children's success."



Project Webpage

aurariacampus.edu/buildingauraria/early-learning-center-workforce-housing_

Photos from the event HERE

About the Auraria Campus

The Auraria Campus is a dynamic and vibrant higher education community in downtown Denver. The 150-acre campus is shared by three separate and distinct institutions of higher learning: Community College of Denver, Metropolitan State University of Denver, and the University of Colorado Denver. The Auraria Campus is a separate state entity whose role is to provide and manage shared services, facilities, and property to support these prominent institutions in achieving their goals. The Auraria Campus is the largest collective college campus in Colorado, serving over 43,000 students, faculty, and staff.

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