



INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE: BUILDING EARLY LEARNING IN CALIFORNIA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM



To narrow achievement gaps and ensure stronger schools and better prepared students, California needs to improve and expand early education so that children can be happy, healthy, engaged learners by their first day of school and every day after.

California's early care and education (ECE) programs have been historically underfunded. Policymakers haven't viewed ECE as a system in the same way as K-12 and higher education. As a result, many children lack access, many teachers and providers are insufficiently trained and compensated, and quality is generally not what it should be.

Both the federal and state governments fund ECE programs. During the Great Recession, California ECE programs were cut by over \$1 billion between 2006 and 2013, with state funding cuts being particularly severe.

While the State Legislature has worked in recent years to make up part of this lost ground, ECE programs still haven't reached pre-recession funding levels (with inflation factored) and the programs could now face cuts under the Trump Administration.

STATE AND FEDERAL PUBLIC FUNDING FOR CALIFORNIA'S ECE PROGRAMS

FUNDERS OF CALIFORNIA'S ECE PUBLIC PROGRAMS	FUNDING AMOUNT
State of California	\$2 Billion
US Department of Health & Human Services	\$165 Million
US Department of Education	\$2.6 Billion
Total Funding	\$4.8 Billion

Source: Learning Policy Institute—June 2017 Research Brief

Eight Programs, Five Agencies

California has eight publicly funded ECE programs serving about 537,000 children. Five separate state agencies—the Departments of Education, Social Services, Public Health, and Developmental Services and First 5 California—administer the programs.

PARTICIPATION IN CALIFORNIA’S ECE PROGRAMS	
PUBLICLY FUNDED ECE PROGRAMS	# OF CHILDREN
California State Preschool Program	136,107
Head Start Programs	105,210
Alternative Payment Programs	83,311
Transitional Kindergarten (TK)	77,274
Special Education	68,689
Home Visiting	42,800
General Child Care and Development	23,656
District-Based Preschool	Unknown
Total Children Covered	537,047

Source: Learning Policy Institute

Big Unmet Need

Despite the number of children in these programs, hundreds of thousands of children and families go unserved. In the most critical developmental years of birth to age 3, only 14% of the eligible population is enrolled in subsidized ECE. From birth to age 5, the proportion served is just 33%, according to the Learning Policy Institute. Other estimates find that just 15% of all eligible children occupy funded slots, with 1.3 million lacking access due to lack of funding.

UNMET NEED BY AGE GROUP	
AGE OF CHILD	PORTION OF CALIFORNIA’S ELIGIBLE POPULATION ENROLLED IN SUBSIDIZED ECE
Birth to Age 3	14%
3-Year Olds	38%
4-Year Olds	69%
Birth to Age 5	33%

Source: Learning Policy Institute



Quality Improvements Needed

Early childhood programs can change the trajectory of children’s lives, but it is only those that are of high quality that result in improved outcomes for kids. Yet several studies point to widely varying quality.

Young learners thrive when they have secure, positive relationships with adults who know how to support their development and learning, and respond to their individual progress, according to national research on the early childhood workforce. Though they are helping create a foundation for future success, early childhood educators are undercompensated and lack critical training and professional development.



Short Case Study #1: Transitional Kindergarten

Established by the Legislature and Governor Schwarzenegger in 2010, Transitional Kindergarten (TK) is a year-long public school-based readiness program for 4-year olds with fall birthdays. Policymakers decided that these fall birthday children, who used to be eligible for kindergarten, would be better served by a year of TK with a credentialed teacher. All school districts are required to offer TK, which, like kindergarten, is an entitlement for eligible children, but participation is purely voluntary. TK currently serves about 77,000 children.

TK is a promising program that has both advantages and room for improvement. The fact that teachers are credentialed—required to hold a California Multiple Subject Teaching Credential—means that professionals are on the district salary schedule and paid on par with

their elementary school colleagues. Class sizes, however, are often larger than quality standards would recommend. Student teacher ratios should be brought, at minimum, to 1 to 10.

An extensive study on TK participation in California by the American Institutes for Research found “that students who attend the TK program are better prepared for kindergarten compared with students who attend a ‘business as usual’ prekindergarten program.” The researchers call out particular benefits for English learner children.

Short Case Study #2—Subsidized Child Care

Subsidized child care, which is provided either through centers or homes, is a critical part of the state’s economic infrastructure and is essential to the ability of many low-income parents to work.

An estimated 144,100 adults provide child care in California. Of this total, approximately 57,100 work in centers according to National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, and 87,000 work in family child care homes (i.e., 30,000 Licensed Family Child Care Providers, 42,000 Licensed Exempt, and 15,000 Assistants) according to estimates from SEIU California. In California, roughly 80 percent of young children ages birth to two and 40 percent of children ages birth to five are cared for by informal caregivers.

LICENSED CHILD CARE CENTERS AND HOMES IN CALIFORNIA (2014)

TYPE OF CALIFORNIA PROVIDER	# OF CENTERS OR HOMES	# OF SLOTS
Child Care Centers	14%	721,868
Family Child Care Homes	38%	312,277
Total	69%	1,034,145

Source: KidsData.org (Lucile Packard Foundation)

The problem of lack of access to early learning is particularly acute for some children of color. The unmet need is particularly large for Asian and Latino children, where respectively only 11% and 8% of children who are eligible participate in the ECE programs, compared to 32% for Black and 18% for white children.

Recent media accounts have brought needed attention to low wages paid to child care and preschool providers in California, with state-set rates falling further and further behind the cost of providing care, not to mention the cost of living in many parts of the state. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment reports a median hourly wage of \$11.61, and that 47% of child care providers in California rely on public assistance to make ends meet. Recent schedule changes to the minimum wage and state provider rate increases will help to raise these incomes over time, but the costs of running their operations continue to outpace inflation.