



PAY PARITY FOR PRESCHOOL TEACHERS

A CASE STUDY OF ELK GROVE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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INTRODUCTION

A strong body of research shows that participation in high-quality Early Learning programs can have both short- and long-term positive impacts on children's cognitive, academic, behavioral, and social-emotional outcomes. There is a growing understanding of the value of high-quality Early Learning programs amongst education advocates, researchers, and policymakers, and these groups are making efforts to improve the quality of California's Early Care and Education (ECE) system. The 2015 seminal report *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*, published by the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council of the National Academies, affirmed the vital role that a well-prepared and supported workforce plays in creating high-quality ECE experiences for young children.¹

Since the publication of that report, the ECE workforce has received a groundswell of attention around the areas of professional preparation, qualifications, and compensation. While some progress has been made in the areas of preparation and qualifications, compensation for the ECE workforce remains low compared to teachers in the Transitional Kindergarten² (TK)-12 system.

Poor compensation, and the resulting economic insecurity of the workforce, undermines efforts to improve ECE quality as it limits programs' ability to attract and retain highly-skilled and stable early educators.³ Research indicates that as many as 43% of preschool teachers rely on some type of public support, compared to only 21% of the U.S. workforce overall.⁴ Although many state preschool programs now require lead teachers to have a bachelor's degree, nationally, public-school preschool teachers with a bachelor's degree or higher can expect to make, on average, \$10,000 to \$13,000 less annually than a TK-12 teacher.⁵ Therefore, college-educated teachers may find more financially rewarding



employment prospects outside of early education, leading to high turnover and a revolving door of new, inexperienced teachers.

Elk Grove Unified School District is one of a limited number of districts in California that has achieved pay parity between its preschool and TK-12 teachers.⁶ This case study describes the various advocacy, programmatic, and funding approaches taken by Elk Grove Unified to ensure that its preschool teachers receive equitable compensation, young children receive high-quality programming, and that the district itself is able to sustain its preschool workforce within budget. This case study also analyzes the key drivers that enabled Elk Grove Unified to achieve pay parity for its preschool workforce, including strong support from district leadership, the availability and use of student outcome data, and the positive relationships held between Elk Grove Unified district leadership, its school board, and teacher's union. The lessons taken from Elk Grove Unified may be applicable to other similarly-sized school districts seeking opportunities to maximize their use of public funds while creating higher-quality school environments for young children, families, and their teachers.

ELK GROVE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT PROFILE

Located in Sacramento County, the Elk Grove Unified School District is the fifth largest school district in California, serving over 63,000 students during the 2017-2018 school year.⁷ The district lies in one of the most diverse areas of California and covers 320 miles. Elk Grove Unified operates 67 schools and offers several high-quality ECE programs for eligible 3- and 4-year-old children to ensure children are well-prepared to enter and succeed in kindergarten. Preschool programs are offered at 16 elementary school sites within the Elk Grove Unified School District.

ELK GROVE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT BOUNDARY



Fig. 1

ELK GROVE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

Elk Grove Unified offers part- and full-day Head Start classes, part-day California State Preschool Program classes, and part-day Title I classes for eligible families (see Figure 2.). Both Head Start and the California State Preschool Program (CSPP) have family income eligibility requirements, while Title I funded programs require that a family live within the boundaries of a Title I school. Although enrollment guidelines vary, Elk Grove Unified's programs focus on serving the children in greatest need, i.e. families who are income eligible for programs or live within the catchment area of a Title I school. The inclusion of Title I funded classes in the district's preschool program allows families who may not specifically meet the income eligibility requirements of Head Start or CSPP to participate.

ELK GROVE SCHOOL DISTRICT PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS

PROGRAM	DAYS	HOURS
Head Start	M – Th M – F	3.5 hours (AM and PM sessions) 6 hours (3 schools only)
California State Preschool Program	M – F	3 hours (AM or PM sessions; availability varies by site)
Title I	M – F	2.5 hours (PM sessions)

Fig. 2

ELK GROVE UNIFIED PRESCHOOL PROGRAM FUNDING SOURCES

Funding high-quality early education programs is costly, and no single source of funding adequately addresses California's demand for free public ECE programs. The preschool programs in Elk Grove Unified are funded by a combination of federal, state, and local dollars. Each funding source has specific requirements that families must meet to be eligible for placement into the district's preschool program, as previously discussed.

BRAIDED FUNDING

Funds from two or more funding sources are coordinated to support the total cost of services to individual children, but revenues are allocated, and expenditures are tracked by each funding source.

Since it began offering preschool, Elk Grove Unified has used **braided funding**⁸ to allow for flexibility in how it operates its programs. **Braiding funds allows Elk Grove Unified to create full-time positions that include benefits for its preschool teachers by combining classroom duties.** For example, preschool teachers may teach one CSPP class in the morning and a Title I preschool class in the afternoon as, shown in Figure 3.

SAMPLE PROGRAMMING SCHEDULE

TIME	HOURS
7:45 am	Start of contract day
8:00 am – 11:00 am	California State Preschool Program class (3 hours)
11:00 am – 11:10 am	Flexibility due to student pick-up transition
11:10 am – 11:50 am	Lunch
11:50 am – Noon	Flexibility due to student drop off transition
Noon – 2:30pm	Title I Preschool Program class (2.5 hours)
2:30 pm – 3:15 pm	Preparation time

Source: Elk Grove Unified School District and Elk Grove Education Association 2018 Preschool Programs MOU

Fig. 3

Elk Grove Unified currently funds 60% of preschool educators' salaries with either Head Start funds or CSSP funds, and 40% with Title I dollars. Because there is more flexibility in the manner in which Title I funds are used, this funding stream is also used to fund teacher professional development.

TWILIGHT PROGRAM

The idea for using resources flexibly to support Elk Grove Unified's preschool program was further cemented when preschool services became available as part of a full-family support program held at the district. The Twilight Program included after-school programs for children, and English as a Second Language (ESL) and citizenship classes for caregivers. To facilitate family participation in the Twilight Program, Elk Grove Unified offered preschool classes from 4-7pm, three days per week.

Because afternoon preschool classes aligned with the district's after-school program, the district was able to offer full-time positions to preschool teachers who taught regular daytime preschool classes as well as "Twilight" preschool classes. Elk Grove Unified licensed all kindergarten classrooms for preschool use, and evening preschool classes were held in daytime preschool and kindergarten classrooms, thereby

maximizing the use of space at no additional cost. This sharing of space also created greater articulation between preschool and K-6 since the Twilight Program Coordinator was responsible for the entire program, including preschool classes. While the Twilight Program no longer exists at Elk Grove Unified, the legacy of its coordination in programming and flexibility in the use of resources remains.





ELK GROVE UNIFIED PRESCHOOL PROGRAM TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS & UNION MEMBERSHIP

To be able to staff multiple ECE programs, thus allowing the district to braid Head Start and CSSP funds with Title I funds, **Elk Grove Unified requires that newly hired preschool teachers hold a valid California multiple subject teaching credential and either 12 units of Early Childhood Education (ECE), a Child Development Teacher Permit, or proof of a BA/BS in Child Development.** Preschool teachers are compensated on the same salary schedule as TK-12 teachers.

The credential requirement became effective in the 2001-02 school year. Prior to joining this union, preschool teachers were only required to have a minimum of a bachelor's degree in ECE or a related field, and a Child Development Teacher Permit. Preschool teachers with the district prior to the 2001-2002 schoolyear were grandfathered into the EGEA collective bargaining agreement and were not required to attain a state teaching credential.

Elk Grove Unified's preschool teacher qualifications serve several purposes:

1. Ensure that the requirements of the various ECE programs and funding sources are adequately met by setting a higher standard for overall preschool teacher qualifications.
2. Improves program quality and child outcomes as studies indicate that a bachelor's degree with specialized training in ECE is associated with high-quality early care and education.^{9,10,11}
3. Facilitate the inclusion of preschool teachers in the TK-12 collective bargaining process because qualifications are the same. This allows preschool teachers to be paid on the same salary schedule as TK-12 teachers and have access to all professional development learning in the district.
4. Create flexibility in teaching assignments in the event of a reduction in workforce. Since preschool teachers meet the TK-12 teaching requirements, they can be transferred or reassigned to grades where staffing needs exist.
5. Allow preschool teachers to see themselves as valued professionals on par with TK-12 teachers.

PAY PARITY IN THE ELK GROVE UNIFIED PRESCHOOL PROGRAM



Key Drivers

While the development of pay parity may involve many factors unique to a school district, Elk Grove Unified's success is linked to three key drivers. These include strong support for ECE from district leadership, the availability and use of student outcome data to make a district-specific case about the importance of high-quality ECE, and the fostering of positive relationships between Elk Grove Unified district leadership, its school board, and teacher's union.

LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

Key to Elk Grove Unified's success in achieving pay parity for its preschool workforce has been its long-standing commitment to ECE. Central to establishing and maintaining any well-functioning program or initiative is the buy-in and support of top leadership. In the case of a public school district, the school board, superintendent and relevant cabinet-level staff must possess an understanding of the importance of ECE, and also display a strong commitment to ECE. Elk Grove Unified's commitment to high-quality Early Learning extends to the 1990s when it independently and voluntarily established its own preschool standards, long before the California Preschool Learning Foundations were released in 2008.

In addition to setting standards, the district leadership's commitment to ECE and to the district's neediest students also led to innovative uses of school funding. Elk Grove Unified's strategy of braiding Head Start funds with Title I dollars for preschool expansion was spearheaded by then Director of State and Federal Programs, Elizabeth Pinkerton, with the support of then Superintendent, Dave Gordon. Pinkerton led efforts to inform decision-makers about

innovative uses of school funding and advocated for the use of Title I funds for preschool, before the Preschool for All movement gained traction in California. Pinkerton also established an afterschool program with a preschool component (Twilight Program) to Elk Grove Unified.



DATA

The availability and use of preschool student outcome data also helped create district buy-in and support for ECE programs. District leaders gathered preschool student outcome data to make a case to the school board for investments in Early Learning, and to ensure that preschool teachers were compensated equitably. Children attending preschool at Elk Grove Unified received an identification number that allowed them to be tracked through high school. Outcome data consistently showed that students in the Title I preschool program outperformed their peers into high school, inclusive of Head Start participants. The district used this key longitudinal data to support its decision to increase Title I funded preschool offerings to five days a week, and combine Head Start and Title I funds to create all-day preschool offerings.

Elk Grove Unified currently collects the following information about incoming kindergarten students:

- Whether the student attended a preschool program
- Whether the student attended an Elk Grove Unified preschool program and which one
- Whether the student attended a preschool program not run by Elk Grove Unified

This information allows the Elk Grove Unified to: (1) understand the impact of preschool programs overall; (2) track and compare the success of students in its different preschool programs, which may inform funding allocation decisions; and (3) compare the success of students who attended preschool outside of the district with those who attended Elk Grove Unified preschool programs. In terms of making a case for salary parity, the comparison of outcomes between non-Elk Grove Unified preschool students and Elk Grove Unified preschool students may be useful since it is likely that preschool teachers outside of Elk Grove Unified are not compensated at similar rates as those teaching in the district.

RELATIONSHIPS AND ADVOCACY

Elk Grove Unified leaders maintained relationships with key district actors, which aided in preserving support for ECE programs and facilitating pay parity. Gordon and Pinkerton's advocacy was instrumental in union negotiations that brought preschool teachers into the EGEA union. The presentation of district-level preschool student data by district staff, along with concerted efforts to educate the school board and EGEA union members about the benefits of ECE and the importance of aligning the ECE and TK-12 systems created a shared understanding of the value of preschool and preschool teachers. This understanding in turn allowed the school board and union to reach agreement in negotiations regarding preschool teachers.

Additionally, Elk Grove Unified cabinet members developed relationships with preschool teachers to involve them in advocacy efforts. District leaders also built relationships with school principals and educated them about the benefits of Early Learning and, as was the case then, how co-locating kindergarten and preschool classrooms could lead to better articulation and collaboration between preschool and kindergarten classes and teachers. As a result of strategic education and advocacy efforts, beginning in the 2001-02 school year, preschool teachers became members of the Elk Grove Education Association.¹²



RECOMMENDATIONS

Pay parity amongst preschool and TK-12 teachers in public school districts can help improve the quality of a district's ECE programs, yet achieving parity is a process that requires careful planning and implementation. For school districts looking to move towards pay parity, the following recommendations and considerations may be useful in establishing a thoughtful process.

- **Educate stakeholders on the benefits of ECE and the link between high-quality programs and a fairly and equitably compensated workforce.** To develop buy-in from decision-makers, utilize current and easy to digest research and data. Convene district leaders, school administration, teachers, unions, and families alike to presentations so that they may engage in discussions that create buy-in and full support for salary parity.
- **Include preschool students in student outcome data systems.** To create continued support for preschool programs and salary parity, districts should include preschool students in student outcome data systems. When funding is threatened, or if contract negotiations falter, it is important to have hard data from which decision-makers can make informed decisions. Particularly if a district has a strong cadre of advocates, data can often help overcome politically motivated decisions, or ones based on anecdotal evidence.
- **Engage a broad coalition of stakeholders in the decision-making and planning process.** To ensure successful implementation of changes to existing structures, the stakeholders outlined above as well as others, such as potential philanthropic funders, should engage in decision-making and planning around pay parity strategies. The inclusion of diverse perspectives can reveal previously unknown or misunderstood stakeholder needs that can help guide a mutually beneficial agenda. Discussions with multiple stakeholders can also generate innovative and flexible strategies for achieving agreed-upon goals.
- **Streamline teacher qualifications to meet higher standards and provide the workforce with adequate supports to attain them.** Higher qualification standards create maximum flexibility in teaching assignments and program funding, help eliminate silos by aligning the preschool and elementary school systems and allow ECE teachers to feel valued as professional educators. To ensure the developmental needs of preschoolers are met, districts should establish minimum ECE teacher requirements and standards that demonstrate foundational knowledge of ECE, while maintaining qualifications that are in line with what is required for teachers of older children.

RECOMMENDATIONS (CONT'D)

As new qualifications are enacted districts should include reasonable timelines and mechanisms to allow the existing workforce to meet new requirements. Districts can apportion resources that support the attainment of any additional education or certification that may be required.¹³ Alternatively, like Elk Grove Unified, some districts may choose to grandfather in existing preschool teachers that do not meet new requirements. To maintain program quality, these teachers should remain eligible for the same professional development opportunities offered to credentialed teachers.



Elk Grove Unified School District is one of a limited number of districts in California that has achieved pay parity between its Early Learning and TK-12 teachers. Central to this achievement was having the support of district leaders who understood the importance of Early Learning and were committed to providing high-quality programming to their neediest students. The use of preschool student data allowed districts leaders to make a strong case for high-quality Early Learning, which includes a highly-qualified and fairly compensated workforce. Given the district's evidence of preschool's effectiveness, district leaders were able to use their relationships with other school district actors to educate and advocate for continued support of ECE programs, pay parity, and the inclusion of preschool teachers in what had traditionally been the K-12 teacher's union. The tactics of advocacy, and innovation and flexibility in the use of resources employed by Elk Grove Unified can and should be applied to other school districts to create a more fair and equitable compensation system that benefits early educators and ultimately the children and families they serve.

END NOTES

¹ Institute of Medicine and National Research Council of the National Academies, “Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation” (Washington D.C.: National Academies Press, 2015).

² Transitional Kindergarten is a publicly funded program in California for 4-year-olds who turn 5 between September 2nd and December 2nd. TK uses a modified kindergarten curriculum designed to serve as a bridge between preschool and kindergarten.

³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education, “High-Quality Early Learning Settings Depend on a High-Quality Workforce: Low Compensation Undermines Quality,” June 2016.

⁴ Marcy Whitebook et al., “Early Childhood Workforce Index 2018” (Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California Berkeley, 2018).

⁵ Marcy Whitebook and Caitlin McLean, “In Pursuit of Pre-K Parity: A Proposed Framework for Understanding and Advancing Policy and Practice,” Pre-K Teacher Compensation Parity Series (Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley, 2017).

⁶ For the purposes of this case, parity is defined as equivalent starting salary, benefits, and salary schedules between Pre-Kindergarten and TK-12 teachers.

⁷ “Largest & Smallest Public School Districts - CalEdFacts,” California Department of Education, accessed December 12, 2018, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/ceflargesmalldist.asp>.

⁸ Margie Wallen and Angela Hubbard, “Blending and Braiding Early Childhood Program Funding Streams Toolkit: Enhancing Financing for High-Quality Early Learning Programs” (Ounce of Prevention Fund, November 2013), <https://www.theounce.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/NPT-Blended-Funding-Toolkit.pdf>.

⁹ Lea J E Austin et al., “Teaching the Teachers of Our Youngest Children: The State of Early Childhood Higher Education in California, 2015” (Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California Berkeley, 2015).

¹⁰ Institute of Medicine and National Research Council of the National Academies, Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation, 2015.

¹¹ Marcy Whitebook, “Early Education Quality: Higher Teacher Qualifications for Better Learning Environments – A Review of the Literature” (Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California Berkeley, 2003).

¹² Elk Grove Unified School District and Elk Grove Education Association, “Collective Bargaining Agreement 2016-17,” 2017, <http://www.egusd.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2017-4-14-FINAL-EGEA-Contract.pdf>.

¹³ When New Jersey established higher standards for its preschool workforce, policy leaders crafted a strategic 4-year timeline for full implementation of the new requirements, giving teachers time to meet the new mandates. They also appropriated funds to provide full tuition scholarships to existing preschool teachers attempting to meet the new requirements.

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