



The California Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five: Mixed Delivery Early Learning and Care System Strategic Plan

In December 2018, California secured a \$10.6 million award for the Preschool Development Grant (PDG) Birth Through Five program, funded by the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

As part of the award, California contracted with WestEd to create a Strategic Plan for Early Learning and Care. In December 2019, California received a renewal grant of \$40.2 million over three years to continue the work of building capacity, increasing parent voice and knowledge, developing a unified workforce professional development system, and increasing the supply and quality of Early Learning opportunities.

The Strategic Plan, which was approved and released this month by the federal government, presents guidance to expand and improve California's Early Learning system over a ten-year period. Recommendations are broken into three phases:

- Phase 1 (Years 1-3) Plan and Build Local Capacity
- Phase 2 (Years 4-6) Implement, Expand, and Improve
- Phase 3 (Years 7+) Sustain with Continuous Improvement

California's Master Plan for Early Learning and Care team has indicated that they will take the recommendations of the Strategic Plan into consideration when they draft a roadmap to fund and implement improvements to California's Early Learning System.

Some highlights from the Strategic Plan are listed below. For more detail, please view the full report: [California Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five: Mixed Delivery Early Learning and Care System Strategic Plan](#). For more information on the Preschool Development Grant and the Strategic Planning process, view the [Fact Sheet](#).

Workforce:

In line with previous recommendations, including Early Edge California's [Strengthening and Advancing California's Early Learning Workforce: Recommendations for the Master Plan](#), the Strategic Plan recommends that Early Learning teachers have increased access to and support for training and education and be paid fair wages. The Strategic Plan recommends that California:

- Align professional standards among settings and programs.
- Implement a career lattice with stackable credits culminating in a degree or certification.
- Expand professional development opportunities and ensure that colleges, universities, and other providers of professional development are aligning with quality expectations.
- Create a single tiered reimbursement system that includes compensation commensurate with education.

- Develop expectations for minimum salaries and provide benefits including paid time off, health benefits, and retirement. Ensure that salaries reflect pay parity with other positions requiring similar levels of training/education.
- Partner with State and local employment agencies and economic development departments to share information and promote careers in Early Learning to job seekers.

Quality:

The Strategic Plan notes that California does not have a consistent definition of “quality” for Early Learning settings and that participation in Quality Counts California is low. It recommends standardizing expectations across settings and increasing participation in quality-improvement initiatives via a single tiered reimbursement rate system and aligning requirements between different Early Learning settings. Recommendations include:

- Define, unify, and align program standards across Title 5, Title 22, State Preschool, and Head Start.
- Ensure that a unified definition of “quality” is reflected across Quality Counts California and other professional development funding.
- Implement a comprehensive data system.
- Create clear linkages to quality in a tiered reimbursement system.
- Establish supports for Early Learning teachers in all settings to improve education and competencies and provide positive incentives for achieving greater education or competency.
- Ensure that resources for families include information about program quality and characteristics of the program (whether the program serves special needs, DLLs, offers non-traditional hours, etc).

Access:

The Strategic Plan notes that many families are unable to access high-quality affordable care, while at the same time some subsidized childcare slots go unfilled. To address this, the Strategic Plan recommends:

- Implementing a statewide, integrated, and comprehensive eligibility system to allow families to search for and access available care.
- Expanding Paid Family Leave and home visiting programs to support families in caring for infants and toddlers.
- Increasing funding and providing additional placements for infant and toddlers with priority to areas with highest needs and most readiness for effective implementation.
- Revising policies to allow families to maintain their Early Learning provider when income or other eligibility markers change.
- Creating a plan to provide preschool to all four-year-olds, followed by all three-year-olds.
- Forming a workgroup to develop a plan that includes strategies to recruit, diversify, and maintain existing diversity of the ELC workforce.
- Providing training and professional development to Early Learning teachers and administrators that address the needs of children to successfully transition from preschool to kindergarten.
- Funding a comprehensive facilities needs assessment.

Dual Language Learners (DLLs):

DLLs make up 60% of California's young children. In order to serve this population, the Strategic Plan recommends:

- That program competence in serving DLLs be represented in rankings for Quality Counts California.
- That professional development funding and requirements reflect the need for teachers to have competency in serving DLLs.
- That families have information about quality and different options for care, including care that is supportive of DLLs.

Children with Special Needs

The Strategic Plan takes special care to address the needs to increase inclusiveness for children with special needs in Early Learning settings, noting that children with special needs make up 75% of suspensions or expulsions in Early Learning settings, even though they represent only 12% of the population. To improve access and quality for children with special needs, the Strategic Plan recommends:

- Aligning and expanding professional competencies to address inclusion of children with disabilities in all settings and activities.
- Ensuring that Quality Counts California and other quality initiatives incentivize and support inclusive access and the use of inclusion-based practices and evidenced-based models.
- Expanding and improving professional development opportunities to help Early Learning teachers develop skills in inclusively serving children with special needs.

Funding:

The Strategic Plan presents two strategies to fund the proposed initiatives. It recommends:

- Creating a multi-year cost model for this strategic plan as implementation parameters are defined.
- Creating a fiscal framework that provides specificity and options regarding the funding and revenue that will underwrite the costs identified in the cost model. The model should identify long-term revenue sources and an allocation structure that will support quality and access goals.
- Reviewing resources and making adjustments every 3-5 years.