



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

AN INCLUSIVE FRAMEWORK: Designing and Implementing Universal Prekindergarten in California

January 2022



Prepared by the
YMCA of San Diego County
Community Support Services

**WHOLE
CHILD.**

**WHOLE
FAMILY.**

**WHOLE
COMMUNITY.**

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FRAMEWORK EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In response to the way the COVID-19 pandemic has brought more light to the long-standing inequities in the education system, the State of California is making transformative and unprecedented investments in early learning and education. As part of the TK-12 Education Trailer Bill (AB 130), California is rolling out its Universal Transitional Kindergarten Program and providing significant funding for expanded learning, community schools, and other wraparound services and supports designed to address students' academic, social, and emotional well-being.

This funding opens the door to new possibilities as schools reimagine how they can better serve their community through a whole child, whole family, and whole community approach. Schools have a greater opportunity to serve as a vehicle to enrich and expand learning opportunities, connect key partners, and bring together various resources to support students and families. By partnering with community-based organizations and collaborating across sectors, school districts can support a full-day, full-year care infrastructure where families can equitably access the early care they need to stay employed and prepare their children for school.

It's critically important for school-based TK programs to be available during working hours for parents who work. When families can only access care during limited hours, like half-day care, they miss out on important opportunities to increase their earning potential and sustain wages that keep families strong. Incorporating Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) programs into a broader mixed delivery system inclusive of child care centers; family child care homes; family, friend, and neighbor care; Head Start; and public school classrooms offers working parents the flexibility to accommodate their schedule, and allows parents to choose the setting that best meets their needs – regardless of income level or geographic location.

With an influx of state funding and new requirements, school districts are in the process of deciding how they will provide these services and supports to create an innovative TK program that reflects the community's diverse needs and perspectives.

While high-quality early learning and care can and should occur in diverse settings, the following framework serves as a guide for school districts, policymakers, and community leaders to collaborate, design, and implement school-based TK programs that benefit and uplift the entire school community.

Please note, the recommendations outlined in this framework were developed prior to the State's 2022 budget and legislative season.

BACKGROUND

CHILD CARE CRISIS

Over the past two decades, the necessary costs of housing, education, health care, and child care have far outpaced growth in wages. As the income inequality gap continues to widen, California families face two hard truths: 1) having a job is far from enough to ensure financial stability, and 2) raising young children presents a constant series of challenging financial responsibilities, the greatest of which is the cost of early education and care. California’s high housing and child care costs create such a burden on working families that one in three households does not earn enough to cover their basic needs.¹

For too many parents, finding child care and early education programs that are high-quality, accessible, and affordable is a challenge. Families must make the difficult choice between spending a significant portion of their income on child care, finding cheaper but potentially lower-quality child care, or having one parent – typically the mother – leave the workforce altogether to become a full-time caregiver. The results of this loss has ripple effects for families, communities, and economic recovery. When families have access to quality child care, parents – and especially mothers – are more likely to obtain and maintain employment, and are better able to support their families and gain financial security.



The average California family with two young children spends

30%

of their income on child care every year.² That’s more than four times the definition of affordable child care.³

The lack of affordable, high-quality child care makes it difficult for parents, especially mothers, to remain in their jobs – contributing to the

26%

gender gap in workforce participation between mothers and fathers in California.⁴

Despite the skyrocketing price of child care, child care providers in California – who are disproportionately women of color – make

\$16.27 per hour

on average.⁵ The living wage in California for an individual without children is \$18.66, and with a child it jumps up to \$40.34.⁶

Stemming from a long-standing history of policies and practices rooted in racism and sexism, inequities in the child care and early education sector impact both the families accessing care and the employees providing it. Low-income families, and particularly families of color and immigrant families, face significant barriers in their search for child care, including barriers related to affordability, access, supply, schedule, culture, language, and quality of care. This often leads to disproportionate spending on child care and preschool.

A fully funded, integrated, mixed delivery child care and preschool system can help families overcome these barriers and allow them to select the setting which best meets the needs of their child and family.⁷

Furthermore, the child care system fails to support the people who care for, nurture, and educate our youngest children. Early childhood educators, who are disproportionately women of color, are paid unacceptably low wages with not enough access to resources and support. Recognizing that many parents struggle to afford child care, child care rates reflect what the market can bear rather than the true cost of quality care. This results in both a strain on parents and inequitable compensation for child care providers.² Increasing pay and benefits for child care workers will significantly reduce staff turnover, attract high-quality talent, and strengthen the existing child care infrastructure.

KEY TERMINOLOGY

Family Child Care Homes are licensed child care businesses operating out of the provider’s home where children are cared for in a family-like setting, in mixed age groups, and with day-to-day activities often mirroring those experienced in a child care center.

Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care is provided in the child’s or caregiver’s home by a person who is a relative, friend, neighbor, babysitter, or nanny.⁸

Child Care Centers are generally operated out of non-residential, commercial buildings with the ability to enroll more children, grouping them by age.

Early Head Start and Head Start is a federal program that promotes the school readiness of children from birth to age five from low-income families by providing a learning environment that supports children’s growth in many areas such as language, literacy, and social and emotional development.⁹

California State Preschool Program (CSPP) includes part-day age- and developmentally-appropriate programs designed to facilitate the transition to kindergarten for three- and four-year-old children in educational development, health services, social services, nutritional services, parent education and parent participation, evaluation, and staff development.¹⁰

Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies provide child care navigation services and support to all parents and child care providers. Services typically involve referrals to local child care providers, information on state licensing requirements, and information on where to get help paying for child care.

Child Care Alternative Payment Programs provide subsidies to pay for child care in a location of the parent’s choice while parents work or seek employment. These programs, administered by the California Department of Social Services, are state- and federally-funded.¹¹

Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) refers to the continuum of high-quality programs, including transitional kindergarten, state preschool, Head Start, general child care, and community-based early learning and care providers, that can be layered and wrapped to create rich early learning opportunities for all children during the year before kindergarten, regardless of income.¹²

Universal Transitional Kindergarten (TK) TK is designed as the first year of a two-year kindergarten program that uses a modified kindergarten curriculum that is age- and developmentally-appropriate. A child who completes one year in a TK program may continue in a kindergarten program for one additional year. Each unified school district must offer TK classes to all children eligible to attend.¹³

BACKGROUND

EDUCATION CRISIS



Inequities in Early Education

For so many children, their background, race, zip code, immigration status, or family income level determines their access to and quality of early childhood education. Although preschool attendance has increased in the past two decades, rates of access to early education vary widely across socioeconomic backgrounds. Black, Latino/a, and children from low-income families are less likely to attend a high-quality preschool program than white or more affluent peers.¹⁴ Universal access to high-quality early education in a variety of settings that parents can choose from can have a meaningful and lasting impact on children, and especially children of color and children who come from lower-income families.

Education Funding Crisis

The economic impacts of the pandemic, combined with declining enrollment, threatens California's public schools' ability to meet their educational goals and address the needs of students. With the educational funding formula tied strictly to attendance and the state's average daily attendance decreasing by 271,000 since 2014, school districts are increasingly worried as they plan for the future.¹⁵ While this decline has been an ongoing issue for years, it has been compounded by circumstances such as the pandemic and the high cost of living. Families are moving away from California or seeking alternative schooling options. Increasing financial support and adapting funding mechanisms to meet current needs are essential to improving the quality of public schools, the availability of high-quality early education, and California's vibrant economy.

Early education and care has become a significant strain for working families, where the average annual cost of preschool is

\$8,600

per year for three- and four-year-olds.⁴

While public programs like Head Start exist to help families access early care and education, only

15%

of three-to-five-year-old children in poverty receive subsidies.¹⁶

California public schools receive

58%

of their funding from the state.¹⁷



BACKGROUND

CALIFORNIA'S ADVANCEMENT OF TRANSITIONAL KINDERGARTEN



In an effort to ensure all children have equitable access to high-quality learning opportunities and care, California passed the TK-12 Education Trailer Bill (AB 130) in 2021. As part of the TK-12 Education Trailer Bill and Governor Newsom's California Comeback Plan, the State is making transformative and unprecedented investments in early learning, including a \$2.7 billion Universal Transitional Kindergarten Program that will be gradually phased in over the next five years.

The TK-12 Education Trailer Bill established the California Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation Grant Program, appropriating \$2.7 billion from the General Fund to the State Department of Education to create this new grade level within the next five years. The Universal Transitional Kindergarten Program will be implemented with the following features:

- There will be a phased approach to TK starting in the 2022-2023 school year and expanding annually until it is available to all of the state's four-year-olds by the 2025-2026 school year.
- Since individual instruction is a pillar of quality early education, the ratios for transitional kindergarten are expected to start at twelve students to one teacher and transition to ten students to one teacher by the 2025-2026 school year.
- Parents will be able to choose which early child care education program for their four-year-old best meets their family's needs, selecting between child care, transitional kindergarten, the California State Preschool Program, or Head Start (if eligible).
- California State Preschool Programs will be authorized to offer wraparound child care services.
- The State has earmarked \$490 million in the program's first year for schools to build new facilities and retrofit existing facilities to accommodate four-year-olds for full-day education and care.
- Currently, TK teachers must have a multiple-subject teaching credential, which is the same credential teachers need for elementary grades. By 2023, TK teachers must complete an additional 24 units of early childhood education coursework (or an equivalent) or hold a child-development permit.¹⁸



While policymakers argue that universal transitional kindergarten will reduce the financial burden on families and ensure all children are well-prepared for kindergarten, it is crucial to consider potential impacts to the child care sector, potential increased costs for infant and toddler care, and schools' readiness to receive our youngest learners. By aligning with the universal preschool program outlined in the Congressional Build Back Better Plan and incorporating UPK programs into a broader mixed delivery system, California can ensure programs provide high-quality, culturally-appropriate care that better serves children, families, and providers.

While high-quality early learning and care can happen in diverse settings such as child care centers; family child care homes; family, friend, and neighbor care; Head Start; or public school classrooms, the following framework outlines a recommended approach to best serve TK students and their families in a school-based setting with wraparound services.

"While transitional kindergarten is funded and provided through local educational agencies, the Administration encourages schools to consider partnering with community-based State Preschool providers and other community partners, as appropriate, to expand access to full-day preschool and care for their eligible students, to increase choice for parents, and to expand opportunities for the youngest learners to access a high-quality preschool program."

– California Governor Gavin Newsom



BACKGROUND EXPANDED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES PROGRAM

Working families with students in school-based TK settings will require full-day, full-year learning opportunities and care so parents can continue to work and advance in their careers. Expanded learning programs can provide the necessary wraparound support to offer full-day learning and enrichment opportunities while nurturing students' social-emotional well-being, building their resilience, and supporting their academic progress.²¹

California's Expanded learning Programs are often designed collaboratively with local education agencies and community-based organizations to provide students with safe, supportive, and engaging environments during the hours most parents or guardians are working. Activities are designed to meet the Quality Standards for Expanded Learning in California, and include active and engaged learning, skill building, and supporting youth voice and leadership to prepare students for successful pathways to higher education and meaningful careers.

A significant component of the TK-12 Education Trailer Bill provides \$753.1 million to establish an Expanded Learning Opportunities Program to distribute this funding to every eligible school district and charter school in the state.¹⁸ The Expanded Learning Opportunities Program encourages schools to reimagine the traditional school day and develop innovative approaches to

expand learning opportunities before school, after school, and during intercession periods to extend the school day and year.

As a condition of receiving funding through the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program, local education agencies must develop a program plan that is student-centered, results-driven, and reflects the needs of the community. The Expanded Learning Opportunity Program will address student needs by providing access to full-day, full-year learning opportunities to at least fifty percent of unduplicated students.

Local education agencies are encouraged to work collaboratively with community-based organizations and child care providers, especially those participating in state or federally subsidized child care programs, to maximize the number of expanded learning opportunities programs offered across their attendance areas. Many school districts already receive funding for the After School Education and Safety (ASES) Program, which should be leveraged with the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program to provide one comprehensive program to students and families.²⁰

With one of the most robust publicly funded expanded learning systems in the country, California is well-positioned to support school and expanded learning partnerships that can contribute significantly to rebuilding efforts.



KEY TERMINOLOGY

A **full school day** is defined as a nine-hour day, allowing parents to work full-time while their children are in school.

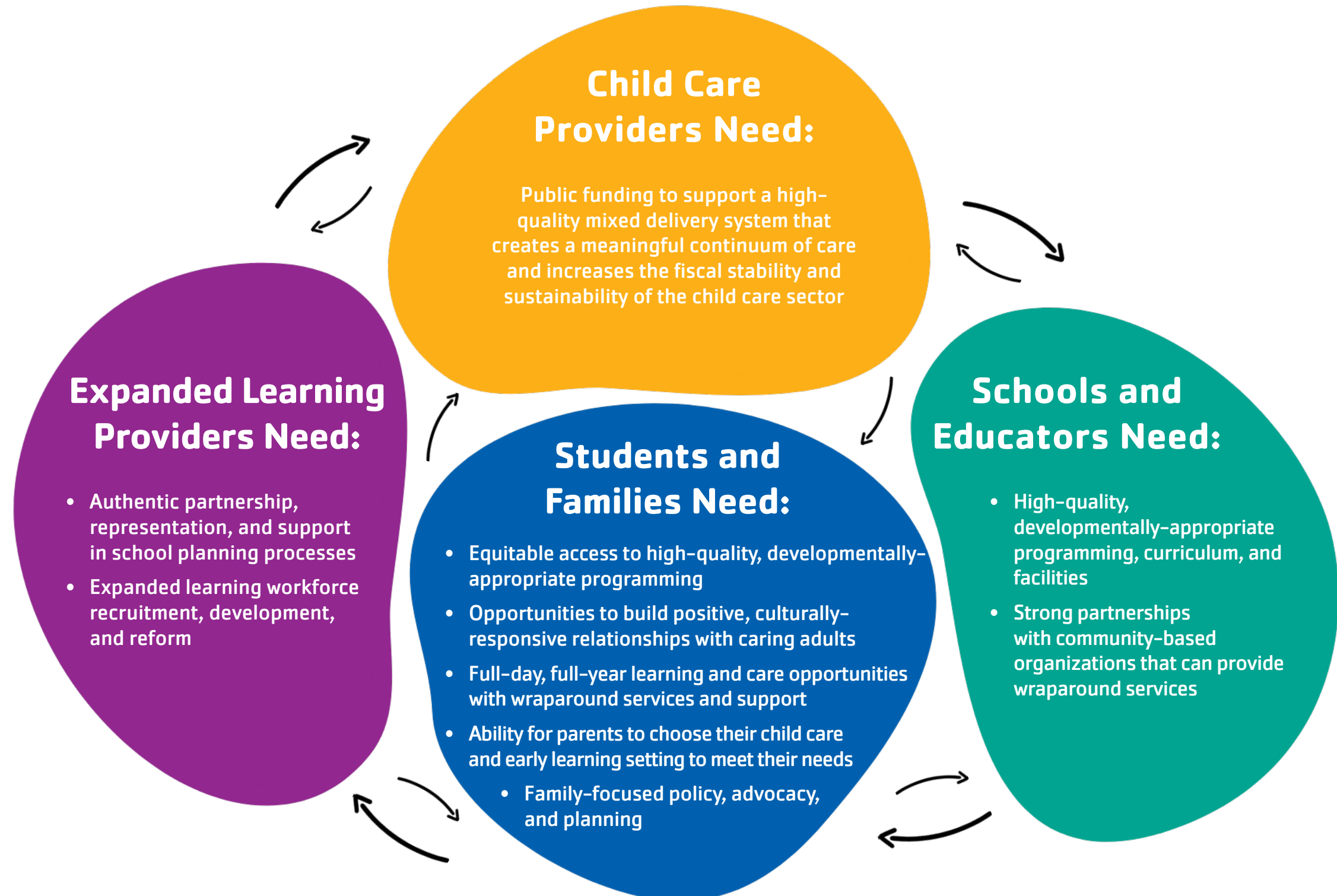
California defines **expanded learning** as before school and after school, summer, and intercession learning experiences that focus on developing students' academic, social, emotional, and physical needs and interests through hands-on, engaging learning experiences.¹⁹

Unduplicated students are students eligible for free or reduced school meals, English Language Learners, or foster youth. Student demographic trends are used to project potential needs and referred to when planning school and community services. An unduplicated count means that each student is counted only once, even if they meet more than one of these criteria.²⁰

OVERVIEW

THE DIVERSE NEEDS AND PERSPECTIVES OF THE COMMUNITY

While universal transitional kindergarten may reduce the financial burden on families and help ensure children are well-prepared for kindergarten, it's critically important for schools to implement a TK program that reflects the community's diverse needs and perspectives. TK programs must be developed with an equity lens and designed to address systemic barriers experienced by Black, Latino/a, Indigenous, and other communities of color. Furthermore, these programs should be an active partnership between school districts, community-based early care and education providers, child care resource and referral agencies, and subsidy payment providers to ensure working families have equitable access to high-quality, culturally-appropriate care. With an influx of state funding and new requirements, school districts are making many decisions around how they choose to provide these services and supports. By implementing a whole child, whole family, and whole community decision-making process, schools can and should leverage state funding and community partnerships to provide innovative and integrated wraparound services that benefit and uplift the entire school community.



MEETING THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

Families do not exist in isolation, and a network of relationships, structures, and systems must unite to ensure our youngest learners reach developmental milestones that prepare them for kindergarten and a successful life ahead. This need has been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, and is underscored by the historical lack of public investment in social influencers of health including: learning and care, housing, accessible mental and behavioral health services, and healthcare inequities. This has resulted in continued trends of poverty, increased ACEs scores, and endemic societal issues, especially across historically under-resourced communities. Through a whole child, whole family approach, schools can implement innovative TK programs with wraparound services and support that benefit and uplift both students and their families.

“As a working parent, wraparound support before and after the school day is the only way I am able to send my daughter to transitional kindergarten. It has also contributed so much to her enjoyment of her new school, which is a critical benefit as she forms her learner identity and beliefs about school.”

– Shelby Gomez, Parent of a TK student who attends a before- and after-school program

KEY TERMINOLOGY

Prenatal through Third Grade (P-3) initiatives strengthen and align supports for children and families starting at the critical prenatal period and extending through third grade. By building early, sustained, community-driven supports, the P-3 model generates a larger impact than standalone programs or services can. The goal is to improve outcomes for children by creating opportunities for the adults in their lives to work more closely together and to share knowledge of a child’s strengths and challenges. The California Department of Education’s P-3 alignment efforts focus on Prekindergarten to Third Grade, and stem from an understanding that gaps in children’s opportunities and learning outcomes demand system-level reform to disrupt inequities, address bias, and promote equitable opportunity. Successful P-3 alignment requires cross-sector work, joint administrator and teacher professional learning opportunities, aligned instructional tools and learning environments, data-driven decision making, engaged families, and continuity of pathways.²²

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are stressful or traumatic events that occur in childhood. These types of experiences can include abuse, neglect, divorce, separation, incarceration, mental illness, and substance misuse or dependence within the family. ACEs can lead to serious effects on one’s emotional and physical health with far-reaching and long-lasting consequences.



Equitable Access to High-Quality, Developmentally-Appropriate Programming

A child’s TK experience is a critical part of their foundation for learning, behavior, relationships, and physical and mental health throughout their lifetime. Quality in an early childhood education setting is measured by a statewide rating system and focuses on child development, school readiness, provider professional development, and environmental quality. The shift to a TK setting, where activities are structured and resemble an elementary school classroom, may be jarring for four-year-olds coming from a more free-form setting where their young brains benefited from play opportunities to learn and develop.²³





Recent research suggests that giving children space to learn, explore, and express themselves creatively is more important than crafting a particular curriculum.²⁴

Early care and learning settings can vary significantly, and high-quality is not always guaranteed. Children who attend high-quality early learning and care settings are set on a path of academic and future success, reducing the likelihood that they themselves will face poverty and economic scarcity. Ensuring that all TK programs offer children a high-quality educational experience is crucial to narrowing opportunity gaps and breaking cycles of intergenerational poverty.

“There is a lot of emphasis on preparing three- and four-year-olds to enter a school-based setting, and not enough emphasis on schools’ readiness to receive three- and four-year-olds.”

– Blake Hofstad, Parent Voices San Diego

Recommendations

- Agree upon an expansion of existing early care and learning systems, including the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), with Quality Counts California standards to establish high-quality standards to ensure children in TK are reaching the developmental milestones expected in their first five years and that they are cared for in a safe and nurturing setting that promotes physical and social-emotional health. 
- Nurture young minds by creating joyful, culturally-responsive, inclusive, and developmentally-appropriate curriculum with an emphasis on cognitive, social, and emotional development. 
- Support small student-to-teacher ratios, not to exceed ten children to one adult, to provide children the individualized attention and instruction they require. 
- Create supportive work environments for TK teachers and expanded learning staff by providing them with resources and professional support such as planning time, instructional tools, assessments, and training. 



Opportunities to Build Positive, Culturally-Responsive Relationships with Caring Adults






Positive, culturally-responsive relationships are critical to youth development and needed for children to feel safe, respected, and engaged during instruction. Evidence shows that relationships between children and their teachers are the essential ingredient to quality care. Relationally-responsive reactions and warm environments are key to calming stress and providing a climate essential to well-being, while culturally-responsive teaching fosters belonging, promotes equity and inclusion, engages students, and supports positive identity formation.

The connections children experience in TK settings take on added importance when children are exposed to ACEs and extreme poverty. Parents who face chronic stress,

trauma, financial struggles, substance use disorders, and mental health or ongoing physical health concerns may not be able to dedicate the time and emotional capacity to developing these bonds. As a result, the child misses opportunities to build and strengthen the neurological connections that lead to optimal development of communication and social skills. Similarly, structural barriers like low wages, lack of healthcare, and ratio mandates can add stress to a teacher or caregiver, impacting their own well-being and relationships with children in their care. Nurturing relationships with dedicated and caring adults help children build their interpersonal skills, expand their social capital, and increase their resilience and ability to thrive.

Recommendations

- Provide TK teachers and expanded learning staff opportunities to participate in professional development training on child development standards, social-emotional learning, and trauma-responsive care, and provide ongoing support through coaching. 
- Encourage TK teachers to be responsive to children’s need for a sense of belonging, including support for language, anti-racism, and diverse cultural needs in all settings. 
- Provide Early Childhood Mental Health Consultations and support for teachers, providers, and families. 
- Demonstrate effort toward strategies that maintain and expand a racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse workforce that reflects the school community. 
- Advocate for and invest in workforce development that honors and compensates teachers and providers who have lived experience in the communities they are teaching and working in. This lived experience is critical in helping teachers relate and connect on a deeper level with students. 



Full-Day, Full-Year Learning and Care Opportunities with Wraparound Services



Given the circumstances families face, opportunities for economic stability and mobility are paramount, and child care is fundamental to fostering those economic conditions. California is home to an array of working families, and since no two families are alike, early care and learning options for their children should also be varied. The education system must respond to the different circumstances of working families and children in terms of schedules, programming, and parent choice.

UPK settings must be available during working hours for families. This includes full-day, full-year programs that are open long enough to account for an eight-hour workday plus commute time. This need is more pronounced for families who work night shifts or multiple

jobs and require care outside mainstream working hours of 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. When families can only access education and care during limited hours, like half-day preschool and school-based TK programs, they miss out on important opportunities to increase their earning potential and sustain wages that keep families strong.

Community partners will be critical in helping schools address this need, as well as the disparate impacts of systemic inequities and learning gaps exacerbated by the pandemic. Community-based organizations have extensive experience structuring expanded learning programs and intersession models that offer opportunities for youth to accelerate learning and develop strong, trusting relationships that research shows can buffer the impacts of ACEs.

Recommendations

- Use the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program to develop site-level, full-day models of TK with before- and after-school services beyond the program’s core instructional hours. 
- Use the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program to partner with community-based providers to provide full-year on- and off- campus models of learning and enrichment options, including during traditional school breaks. 
- Collaborate with community partners to ensure care is available on campus for every student who needs it, including families paying with Alternative Payment Program vouchers, families enrolled in CSPP, and those who are paying out of pocket. 
- Intentionally partner with child care Alternative Payment Programs and Childcare Resource and Referral agencies to help families connect to financial resources and navigation to access options for care and education for their four-year-olds throughout the school year and summer in a setting that works best for them, including family child care homes. 
- If eligible, become a Community School to enrich and expand learning opportunities, connect key partners, and bring together various resources to support students and families. 



Ability for Parents to Choose Their Child Care and Early Learning Setting




Meeting the needs of students and families involves providing a variety of options and settings that give families the flexibility and agency to choose the care arrangement that works best for their current situation. As with elementary and high school arrangements that offer private, public, or charter settings, parents should be able to select the provider and program that best fits their cultural needs and preferences. This approach is known as a mixed delivery system. A mixed delivery system offers the flexibility to accommodate the schedules and cultural preferences of

working parents and the developmental needs of children. With adequate funding, a mixed delivery system can facilitate the existence of multiple affordable, high-quality early learning and care options in a variety of settings such as child care centers; family child care homes; family, friend, and neighbor care; Head Start; or public school classrooms. Choice also benefits children, ensuring they can experience the continuous care and bond-building opportunities with the same caring adults throughout the day and year.

“Parents and families are the experts of their own experiences and know their needs better than anyone else. The model of a mixed delivery system honors that fact.”

– Erin Hogeboom, San Diego for Every Child

Recommendations

- Align with the Universal Preschool Plan outlined in the Congressional Build Back Better Plan and create a publicly-funded state-wide mixed delivery system with equitable funding for TK slots among settings, including child care centers; family child care homes; family, friend, and neighbor care; Head Start; and public school classrooms, ensuring families can choose the setting that best meets their needs. 
- Offer a range of early care and learning options to meet families’ needs, including full-day and part-day programming, year-round programs, and a variety of culturally-responsive program options. 
- Use local Childcare Resource and Referral agencies to maintain relationships and data to support a state-wide navigation system that provides a clear and accessible way for families to navigate and select their preferred child care setting and apply for financial support as appropriate. 

For more on the mixed delivery system recommendations to meet the needs of child care providers, please refer to pages 28–29.

CASE STUDY

The **San Francisco Beacon Initiative** is a city-wide partnership launched by the Department of Children, Youth and Their Families, the San Francisco Unified School District, private funders, and local community-based organizations. The San Francisco Beacon Initiative’s mission is to work at the site- and systems-level to transform public schools into youth and family-centered places of learning. Grounded in the community schools framework, Beacon Centers are committed to a cohesive, comprehensive, and collaborative approach that creates pathways to lifelong learning and transformative experiences for youth through advocacy, leadership, networking, and program support.

The Beacon model rests on the assumption that by transforming public schools into safe spaces where children, youth, parents, and community members can engage in positive, educational, enriching, and healthy activities during extended hours, youth in the community will benefit. These activities not only supplement the school day, but nurture the skills necessary to be successful in life and school. They close the gap between schools and community needs, and broker strong partnerships through which more resources are available and services are better coordinated to achieve positive outcomes for youth, families, and communities.²⁵



Family-Focused Policy, Advocacy, and Planning



Community engagement and local control are often at the heart of education policy and reform. When families, communities, and schools work together to make decisions, students are more successful and the entire community benefits. While new policies and regulations are written at the state level, local education agencies and school districts are encouraged to tailor their TK programming

and expanded learning programs to meet the unique needs of each community. By using an inclusive and robust community engagement approach that centers the needs of children and their families, schools can make transparent decisions that accurately reflect the diverse needs and perspectives of the community.

Recommendations

- Apply an equity-centered, 2Gen approach to establish a decision-making table with all stakeholders to ensure plans reflect community voice and move families forward.
- Develop an inclusive community engagement process to determine community-specific needs for TK programming and expanded learning.
- Facilitate bold and broad conversations about systems-level change, equity, and family-focused advocacy.
- Rely on community input and data to drive decision-making and report back to the community how their input influenced the outcome, building trust and transparency in the process.



KEY TERMINOLOGY

Two-generation (2Gen) approaches build family well-being by intentionally and simultaneously working together with children and the adults in their lives to access new resources, solve problems, and sharpen existing skills.²⁶ 2Gen approaches focus on both the child and the caregiver, recognizing that their well-being is interconnected and interdependent. By integrating services and supports, this approach moves the whole family forward, benefiting both the child and the adult(s) in their lives.



CASE STUDY

Logan Memorial Education Complex is a San Diego-based Community School model providing a comprehensive prenatal through high school program for up to 900 students. Logan Memorial partnered with the Montessori Institute of San Diego, the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector, and First Five California to plan a “cradle-to-career” Montessori experience for students and families in Logan Heights, a historically under-resourced community in San Diego, California. The Montessori model recognizes birth to age six as an intense period of formative development with lasting cognitive, social, and emotional consequences.²⁷

Guided by a commitment to long-term, large-scale change for an entire community, cradle-to-career models bring residents, school staff, community leaders, and service providers together to coordinate their collective efforts and provide a pipeline of support from birth to early adulthood. Logan Memorial offers an assortment of services to meet the unique needs of the community, including after-school programs, English Language Learner resources and supports, and counseling services for children and their families.²⁸

MEETING THE NEEDS OF EXPANDED LEARNING PROVIDERS

Now more than ever, California schools and expanded learning providers have the challenge and opportunity to work together to mobilize their resources and expertise to support students and families. If schools are to reimagine ways to provide site-level, full-day models of TK with wraparound services, they should work closely with expanded learning providers to meaningfully partner, plan, and rebuild together.



Authentic Partnership, Representation, and Support








Meaningful partnerships between schools and expanded learning providers will lay the foundation for building stronger, more equitable support systems for children and their families. There is a significant need for schools and expanded learning partners to shift away from their traditionally transactional relationships and work towards building more authentic partnerships that uplift staff and the entire school community.

Cultivating sincere relationships with expanded learning providers can result in improved program quality, more efficient use

of resources, and better alignment of goals and curricula. For example, the *Massachusetts Afterschool Research Study* found that after-school programs with stronger relationships with school teachers and principals were more successful at improving students' homework completion, homework effort, positive behavior, and initiative.²⁹ As schools move to implement universal TK and expanded learning programs, a collaborative planning and decision-making process will foster better alignment of facilities, staff, data, and curriculum to support a shared vision for learning.



Recommendations

- Build authentic partnerships with expanded learning providers to plan together and align resources such as staff, data, and curriculum. 
- Collaborate closely with expanded learning providers to ensure accurate and authentic representation in school planning and decision-making processes. 
- Consider collaborative grant opportunities to explore and establish a community school to serve students and families in full-day, full-year care and learning. 
- Co-design programming that is intentionally tailored to students, school and district goals, and prospective community needs. 
- Ensure before- and after-school programs can operate in age- and size-appropriate campus facilities. 
- Create clear data-sharing processes and agreements to track and strengthen student performance and demonstrate the impact of these services.³⁰ 
- Create or join an existing local advisory cohort, inclusive of the child care mixed delivery system and expanded learning providers, to collectively discuss TK planning and implementation, continual education, early learning and care development, and thought partnership. 



A national report by the Afterschool Alliance found that

52%

of summer programs, many of which also run after-school programs, have waitlists due to staffing shortages created by the pandemic.³¹








Expanded Learning Workforce Recruitment, Development, and Reform

Despite increased funding and need, expanded learning providers are facing difficulties with workforce recruitment and retainment. Throughout the pandemic, expanded learning staff continued to support working families by providing in-person learning and enrichment opportunities. Staff continuously faced uncertainty around the risks of exposure caused by working in-person, as well as the increased working hours needed to staff a full-day program. As schools expand and implement TK programs while the national workforce crisis ensues, expanded learning providers will need support from schools to create more competitive and equitable opportunities to recruit and retain additional expanded learning staff.

Creating a safe, inclusive environment is key to uplifting students' academic and social-emotional well-being. Recruiting diverse, community-based expanded learning staff who reflect the student population and understand school-based relationships can provide a stabilizing force for youth facing transitions as they grow up. Educational experiences must seek to counteract the institutional and structural biases and related traumas that often drive inequitable outcomes for students. By hiring expanded learning staff with lived experience and encouraging staff to attend training and professional development opportunities, expanded learning programs can provide an experience that is emotionally safe, trauma- and culturally-responsive, and inclusive for all students.

Recommendations

- Enact contract provisions to ensure a living wage and full-time positions for expanded learning staff in an effort to facilitate recruitment and retain talent in the sector. 
- Enact contract provisions to provide expanded learning staff with opportunities to participate in professional development training on child development standards, social-emotional learning, and trauma-responsive care. 
- Create career pathways for more advanced positions within the sector, partnering agencies, and school districts. 
- Support expanded learning partners with staff recruitment by cross-promoting job opportunities through school district communication and distribution channels. 
- Encourage recruitment of diverse expanded learning staff members who reflect the school community. 

MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE CHILD CARE SECTOR



The legislated expansion has the potential to offer working families more care options than ever, but it should not do so at the expense of stability in the broader child care sector. An intentional implementation of the TK expansion policy should account for child care providers as entrepreneurs who need to sustain their businesses. Maintaining a mixed delivery system sustains the sector, ensuring child care can continue to exist in a variety of community settings and addressing the long-standing needs for quality, equity, and funding in the child care sector.

Sustaining the Child Care Sector with a Mixed Delivery System

While the TK expansion presents a valuable developmental opportunity for some of the youngest Californians, it also has the potential to destabilize an already fragile child care ecosystem that is grappling with shortages and prices that are out of reach for many families. Pulling students from their current child care arrangements will significantly reduce revenue for child care providers in home- and center-based settings. To stay financially viable, these private providers will need to raise their prices to a level that few families can afford to pay, and if providers cannot maintain their enrollment numbers, they will have no choice but to close their businesses.













From 2008 – 2016, California saw its home-based child care providers decrease by almost 30%, largely stemming from state-funded TK programs for four-year-olds.³²

The current TK expansion is expected to put additional pressure on child care providers. Many providers rely on the revenue of serving four- and five-year-olds to offset the higher costs to serve zero to three-year-olds. With the TK expansion, many parents will naturally opt for free care and learning. This significant loss of revenue, without a countervailing source of revenue, could result in additional closures. Analysis in California predicts that providers will raise prices by approximately 40% if four-year-olds are displaced from their current settings and into TK classrooms - an expense that falls onto already cost-burdened families.³² The lack of options and child care shortages for working parents has broader implications for local economies, as child care shortages impact employee availability and overall workforce productivity.

Additionally, there is a need to develop an equitable compensation structure between TK teachers in school-based settings and early childhood educators. While kindergarten teachers rank in the 61st compensation percentile, early educators are in the 2nd percentile, placing them at the bottom of the compensation scale among all occupations.³³ Intentional policies and strategies to rectify this pay disparity within the field will allow early educators to earn a living wage and strengthen our early education infrastructure with a sustainable workforce.

A mixed delivery system helps maintain stability for children in the continuity of caregiving, and facilitates the existence of multiple affordable care options in child care centers; family child care homes; family, friend, and neighbor care; Head Start; or public school classrooms so that every family can access care regardless of income level or geographic location. A mixed delivery system also benefits the community's small business infrastructure by sustaining an environment for child care as small businesses, which are often owned by women and women of color.³²

Recommendations

-  Invite multiple partners in planning and feedback processes to create a meaningful continuum of care and learning for working parents and their children. 
-  Invest in a mixed delivery system that is high-quality, equitable, and inclusive of child care centers; family child care homes; family, friend, and neighbor care; Head Start; and public school classrooms. 
-  Address pay parity between early educators, after-care providers, and teachers to eliminate under-resourcing and provide a living wage for the child care workforce. 
-  Develop an equitable system for child care subsidy vouchers that bases reimbursement on enrollment and not attendance. 
-  Engage in partnerships to increase capacity and access, including providers who accept vouchers for before and after-school care, licensed child care centers, and family child care providers. 
-  Create or join an existing local advisory cohort, inclusive of the child care mixed delivery system and expanded learning providers, to collectively discuss TK planning and implementation, continual education, early learning and care development, and thought partnership. 



CASE STUDY

The City of Boston, Massachusetts created a city-wide, mixed delivery system to guarantee every four-year-old in Boston a high-quality pre-K experience in a setting that works best for the child and their family. The City makes significant investments into a Quality Pre-K Fund to ensure equitable access to free, high-quality pre-K programs in a range of settings including center-based; preschool programs; family child care; out-of-school time programs; and Head Start/Early Head Start. What sets Boston apart from other pre-K models is its emphasis on quality. All pre-K programs, no matter the setting, are required to adhere to the following standards:

- All pre-K teachers have a degree in early childhood education, are prepared to teach in inclusive classroom settings to support students of all backgrounds, and earn the same starting salary as a Boston Public Schools teacher.
- Students learn from the Boston Public Schools Focus on K1 Curriculum and Building Blocks Curriculum, which are national models in early childhood education.
- All classroom environments are age-appropriate and culturally-responsive.
- The classroom ratio is two educators for twenty students.
- The program is accredited by a national early childhood accrediting body, and meets other accountability benchmarks.³⁴



CASE STUDY

The New Mexico Early Childhood Education and Care Department created a Pre-K Parity Program that provides funding to support pay parity between pre-K educators in community-based settings and pre-K teachers in public school settings in the state of New Mexico. This program is designed to recognize the lived experiences of pre-K educators and provide pay parity comparable to pre-K teachers working in a public school setting.

Pre-K educators can apply and receive an award equal to the difference between their current salary and a standard salary as defined by the state. The state defines standard salaries based on the individual's region and education level. If the individual holds a bachelor's degree or higher in early education and makes under the standard salary amount, the difference is then distributed to them on a monthly basis.³⁵

MEETING THE NEEDS OF SCHOOLS AND EDUCATORS



If the benefits of this monumental policy are to be fully realized, the needs of school districts and educators must also be considered and addressed. Successfully implementing universal TK surfaces the need to support school districts in providing the proper program curriculum, on-site facilities, and wraparound services necessary for high-quality early education programs that meet the needs of working parents.

As school districts prepare to welcome a wave of new three-and-four-year-old students with this expansion, they must have the staffing in place to meet the ratio mandates in the legislation. Small classroom ratios facilitate individualized attention, an important factor in program quality. When TK teachers can personalize their interactions and approaches, children have a richer learning experience and deepen bonds that foster optimal growth.








High-Quality, Developmentally-Appropriate Programming, Curriculum, and Facilities

Program curriculum that prioritizes free play provides an age-appropriate setting for four-year-olds to thrive. Free play fosters learning through a variety of experiences instead of focusing on printed material or instruction. For example, cooking activities or water play can be used to establish concepts of numbers, shapes, and literacy. However, many TK programs tend to adopt more structured learning settings, with a teacher talking in front of seated students for long stretches of time.

As a result, young children may struggle to adjust to an educational setting that is beyond their years.³⁶ Adopting a developmentally-appropriate program curriculum minimizes disruption to the child’s learning experience and facilitates a smooth transition to the new setting to optimize learning.

Similarly, school districts must account for a child’s physical needs as much as they consider intellectual needs. The funding set aside specifically for constructing or retrofitting school facilities for this TK expansion provides a valuable opportunity for school districts to ensure TK students have the proper care settings, such as access to bathrooms and appropriate play structures.³⁶

Recommendations

- Partner with established, multi-perspective local TK/UPK planning committees to advise on quality preschool initiative systems over time. 
- Work with local entities, such as Quality Counts California, to train contracted partner staff and maintain alignment with quality standards as defined by publicly-funded programs. 
- Create systems of evaluation and practice continuous quality improvement (CQI) by evaluating the impact of TK programs and the impact on the child care mixed delivery system, and adjusting programming accordingly to ensure funding is spent responsibly. 
- Use play-based learning to meet children where they are developmentally, encourage their inquisitive nature, build their confidence, increase their social-emotional skills, and develop cognitive skills. 
- Use grant and funding opportunities to ensure children have access to ample developmentally-appropriate play equipment, materials, and furniture. 
- Provide opportunity for tiered implementation based on priority, including those with greatest need and siblings of older students. 
- Build workforce capacity to rollout TK while addressing rate reform for the child care sector in order to maintain high-quality educators in a variety of care settings. 



Strong Partnerships With Community-Based Organizations Who Provide Wraparound Services



Community partners can serve as a valuable bridge to provide wraparound services that meet families' needs in a way that school districts may not have the resources to accomplish alone. For example, school districts can partner with community-based organizations to deliver full-day, full-year learning opportunities and care to minimize disruption to a parent's workday. Community-based organizations can also apply their expertise in providing resources and supportive services, such as mental and physical health programs, that ensures children have everything necessary for an optimal learning experience.

With a successful record of working with communities to design services that meet the needs of working families, community-based organizations have the expertise and institutional knowledge to advise on best practices for this transition and help districts maximize available resources for the TK expansion. Partnering with community-based organizations and collaborating across sectors means school districts can support a care infrastructure where families, regardless of income level, can access the early care they need to stay employed and prepare their children for school.

Recommendations

- Build community access to resources through intentional collaboration with local partners.
- Draw on existing community connections to support school districts in providing full-day, full-year opportunities, including expanded learning programs such as Expanded Learning Programs, Expanded Learning Opportunities Programs, Licensed Child Care programs, American Camp Association-approved day camps, family child care homes, and other similar before- and after-school or intersession programs.
- Provide full partner access to relevant on-site facilities rent-free to streamline service delivery and ensure continuity of programming for student benefit.
- Call upon community-based programs to meet the varied needs of families, such as shifting work schedules and children who prefer a single caregiving setting.
- Leverage strengths of community-based organizations to increase family access to referrals, including Child Care Resource and Referral agencies and local 211s.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The YMCA of San Diego County is dedicated to improving the quality of human life and helping all people realize their fullest potential. As San Diego's largest child care provider, including expanded learning programs, licensed child care, and day camps, as well as San Diego County's Child Care Resource and Referral Agency and Child Care Alternative Payment Provider, we are committed to ensuring access to affordable, quality early education.

This combined impact on parents, caregivers, and early care and education professionals ensures the youngest members of our community are surrounded by settings where they can thrive and begin on a path toward prosperity.

This work is only possible through radical collaboration. The YMCA of San Diego County would like to thank our partners who have championed our collective work towards a brighter, more equitable future for California's three- and four-year-olds.

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Imagine a California where young children, no matter their walk of life, have the opportunity to learn and build meaningful connections with their teachers and peers.

Imagine a California where working families, regardless of income level, can choose from a range of full-day, full-year early education and care settings to stay employed and prepare their children for school.

Imagine a California where community partners, students, and their families all have a seat at the table to build a better learning day.

Imagine a California where schools serve as a vehicle to enrich and expand learning opportunities, connect key partners, and bring together various resources to uplift the entire school community.

Imagine a California where child care providers are recognized and supported through a state-wide mixed delivery system that addresses the long-standing needs for quality, equity, and funding in the child care sector.

When we choose to pursue a better tomorrow together, we can create a California where our youngest learners reach their potential to thrive.



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