

IMPLEMENTING 15 ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR HIGH-QUALITY PRE-K: California

In 2008, the California State Preschool Program Act consolidated several early childhood initiatives into one funding stream, resulting in the California State Preschool Program (CSPP). CSPP encompasses: (1) the CSPP that began in 1965 and provided preschool services to children at risk for neglect, abuse, family violence, or who were receiving protective services; (2) the Prekindergarten and Family Literacy Program (PKFLP), which began in 2007 and added a literacy component to CSPP; and (3) General Child Care programs.

In addition to CSPP, California Transitional Kindergarten (TK) began during the 2012-2013 school year as a result of California’s Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010 which moved the kindergarten eligibility age from December 2 to September 1 so that all children would be 5 years old when entering kindergarten. TK was also authorized as part of California’s Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010 and is the first year of a two-year kindergarten program for children born between September 2 and December 2.

Essential Elements

Fifteen Essential Elements clustered in three categories—Enabling Environment, Support for Educators and Young Learners, and High-Quality Instruction—have been identified among exemplary pre-K programs (Minervino, 2014). Note that practice in the field may vary so as to be either better or worse than might be expected based on specific policy or guidance. Consistency or quality of practice across large-scale programs is more difficult to assess than policy.

California State Preschool Program (CSPP)

| Enabling Environment | | Rigorous, Articulated Early Learning Policies | | | | | | | | Strong Program Practices | | | | |
|----------------------|----------------|---|-------------------|------------|---------------|--------------|----------------------|------------|-------------|--------------------------|----|-------------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Political Will | Strong Leaders | BA + comp | Class size/ Ratio | Two Adults | Hours/ Dosage | EL Standards | Effective Curriculum | Special Ed | DLL support | HQ Teaching | PD | Child Assessments | Data Driven | Integrated System |
| ○ | ○ | ○ | – | – | – | ● | ○ | ● | ● | ND | – | – | ○ | ○ |

California Transitional Kindergarten (TK)

| Enabling Environment | | Rigorous, Articulated Early Learning Policies | | | | | | | | Strong Program Practices | | | | |
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| ○ | ○ | – | – | ● | – | ● | ○ | ● | ○ | ND | ● | ● | ○ | ○ |

Key: ● Fully Met ○ Partially Met – Not Met ND Not determined

Political will. Gov. Jerry Brown (D) currently in his fourth and last term as governor has not been supportive of pre-K, including a veto (CA AB 47 State Preschool Program Act of 2015) that would have granted children not enrolled in TK access to CSPP. Gov. Brown's approach has been to allow local counties and districts to take the lead at the local level rather than the state. Nevertheless, the CA education budget for 2015-2016 included an increase of \$34.3 million (\$30.9 million Proposition 98, \$3.5 million General Fund) to provide access to full-day State Preschool for an additional 7,030 children from low-income working families. In addition, \$145 million shifted from General Child Care to State Preschool to allow full-day State Preschool providers that are LEAs to access a single funding stream (Proposition 98) in their full-day State Preschool contracts. Proposition 98 is a voter-approved constitutional amendment that guarantees minimum funding levels for K-12 schools and community colleges. TK operates like a kindergarten program and follows kindergarten regulations, including universal enrollment and funding; students enrolled in TK are not regarded as being in pre-K by the state, but rather as in the first year of a two-year kindergarten program. As of fall 2016, 20% of the state's 4-year-olds were enrolled in TK.

Senate Bill 858 (Chapter 32, Statutes of 2014) authorized an annual allocation of \$50 million of Proposition 98 funds to be used for a QRIS Block Grant which supports CSPP participation in the QRIS system; building up the work started by the now complete Race to the Top: Early Learning Challenge federal grant. Participation is voluntary, but strongly encouraged. Strong legislative champions who have been advocating for universal pre-K include Assemblyman Kevin McCarty (D-Sacramento); Laura Friedman (D-Glendale); and Eduardo Garcia (D-Coachella).

The advocates have very strong voices in California, including First 5 California created by voters under Proposition 10 (1998), which added a tax on tobacco products to fund education, health, child care, and other services for children birth to 5 and their families. Other groups include Ch1ldren Now, the Advancement Project, Early Edge California (formerly Preschool California); and local business leaders.

Compelling vision and strong leadership. The California Department of Education (CDE)'s Early Education and Support Division (EESD) oversees CSPP and TK. EESD is one of seven divisions within the Teaching and Learning Support Branch. EESD has more than 100 staff members, 40% of whom are Education Program Consultants involved in offering training and technical assistance to CSPP. Consultants typically work within a program unit and may have statewide or regional program responsibility. EESD oversees programming for children birth through age 13; including serving as the administrator for the federal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). Both TK and CSPP have one FTE assigned at the state level who is responsible for program administration.

Education and compensation.

CSPP: The Child Development Associate Teacher permit is the minimum requirement for the lead teacher in the CSPP classroom, though California does not use the term "lead teacher," thus exceeding the requirement of a CDA, but not the BA. The permit requires 12 units in ECE or child development and 50 days of work experience in an instructional capacity.

There are no salary compensation parity requirements between the CSPP teachers and K-3 teachers. However, some school districts have been able to put their CSPP teachers on the same scale as the K-12 teachers.

TK: TK only operates in the public schools. Lead teachers are required to have a BA, early childhood education/child development specialization and/or credentials are encouraged, but elementary education specialization and K-8 credentials are permissible.

TK teachers and assistant teachers are on the same pay scale as public K-12 teachers and assistant teachers, respectively, which is locally determined. TK teachers work the same number of hours as K-3 teachers.

Adult-child ratio and two adults in the classroom.

CSPP: Although there is no limit to class size in CSPP, programs typically enroll 24 children in a class. CSPP requires a staff-child ratio of 1:8 for 3- and 4-year-old classrooms.

TK: TK's maximum class size is 33 with a ratio of 1:33.

Learning time.

CSPP: The CSPP operates two different program options. The part-day program is funded to operate at least three hours and less than 4 hours per day for a minimum of 175 days per year; and the full-day program is funded to operate for the number of hours needed to meet the needs of the community for a minimum of 246 days per year. In 2016-2017, about 30% of children were in a full-day program.

TK: TK programs are operated by school districts and must be of equal length to any kindergarten programs operated by the same school site and/or district; unless there is an approved State Board of Education waiver on file. Kindergarten is only required to be a part-day.

Age-appropriate learning standards. Used by both CSPP and TK, the California Preschool Learning Foundations (volumes 1, 2, 3) (Foundations) developed in 2008, focused on social emotional development, language and literacy, mathematics and English language development. A second volume, released in December 2011, also focused on visual and performing arts as well as health and physical development. In September 2013, science and history/social science were addressed in a third and final volume. The Foundations were last updated in 2015.

CDE provides many statewide, in-person trainings, certifications, online modules, and engaging professional web sites for early childhood professionals. CDE professional resources are aligned to the Foundations.

System that ensures effective curriculum. The CDE does not approve texts, materials, or any particular curriculum for either CSPP or TK. These are all local decisions. Instead, the state has developed the California Preschool Curriculum Frameworks (Frameworks) which provide guidance for using the foundations in program planning, instructional strategies and professional development. In addition, the California Preschool Instructional Network (CPIN) provides in-depth training on all nine domains of the Foundations and the Frameworks as well as on-site technical assistance. There is not a statewide system to ensure that curriculum is implemented with fidelity.

Support for students with special needs.

CSPP: In 2016-2017, 1.4% of CSPP children received special education services. Inclusion specialists are available to support preschool teachers and/or children and professional development is required for preschool teachers who serve children with special needs.

The child assessment required in CSPP, The Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) was developed with the goal of ensuring that all children, including those with special needs, have the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. In addition, the California Preschool Program Guidelines address the inclusion of children with disabilities or other special needs and the Frameworks provide guidance on ensuring that activities support the learning needs and abilities of all children.

TK: In 2016-2017, 8.8% of TK children received special education services. Inclusion specialists are available to support preschool teachers and/or children. The proportion of children with an IEP in each TK classroom is limited to 25% of total enrollment. The California Preschool Program Guidelines address the inclusion of children with disabilities or other special needs and the Frameworks provide guidance on ensuring that activities support the learning needs and abilities of all children.

Support for dual (English) language learners (DLL). The California English Language Development Standards describe what children typically demonstrate at three different levels of English-language development from Kindergarten through grade 12. CDE's Preschool Learning Foundations and Preschool Curriculum Framework feature the domain of English Language Development and the California Preschool Program Guidelines includes two chapters on supporting DLLs. Other policies to support DLLs differ between the two programs.

CSPP: Bilingual instruction is permitted and children are screened and assessed in their home language. In 2016-2017, 47% of CSPP students were DLLs, a higher percentage than the state's DLLs (44%). To support families, recruitment, enrollment, outreach information, and communication about the program or child is provided in the home language.

TK: LEAs are required to provide ELLs a Structured English Immersion language acquisition program, led by teachers who have a bilingual credential in the target language and an English learner authorization. In addition, LEAs may provide other language acquisition programs, including, but not limited to, dual language, transitional, and developmental programs. Parents of TK English learners may choose a language acquisition program that best suits their child's needs. The number of ELLs enrolled in 2016-2017 in TK is not able to be reported. To support families, recruitment, enrollment, outreach information, and communication about the program or child is provided in the home language.

High quality teaching. CLASS or ECERS assessments were not able to be reviewed for either program.

CSPP: CLASS and ECERS observations are components required within QRIS and conducted at the local level. The state does not collect the scores for programs that voluntarily participate in QRIS. Some local districts report scores, but it is not done systematically.

TK: The use of a structured classroom observation is determined locally in TK.

Professional development.

CSPP: CSPP classrooms have contractors who serve as coaches that develop and implement a staff development program that includes: identification of training needs; written job descriptions; an orientation plan for new employees; an annual written performance evaluation procedure unless a different frequency is specified in a collective bargaining unit agreement; staff development opportunities that include topics related to each employee's job; and an internal communication system that provides the information necessary to carry out assigned duties. In addition, CSPP teachers are required to complete 105 clock hours per 5 years for their Child Development Permit.

TK: PD requirements for TK teachers are determined locally as well as ongoing classroom-embedded support. The General Education Induction Consortium is an approved induction program to assist TK-12 beginning teachers, experienced teachers, and school site administrators to ensure beginning teacher success and retention through at least one hour per week of support and/or mentoring.

Child Assessments.

CSPP: As previously noted, CSPP requires DRDP, a formative assessment instrument developed by the CDE for young children and their families to be used to inform instruction and program development in CSPP. The DRDP aligns with the Foundations and is administered in natural settings through teacher observations, family observations, and examples of children's work. Ongoing documentation of children's knowledge and skills in everyday environments is a recommended practice for early childhood assessment. The Desired Results Training and Technical Assistance Project, administered by WestEd's Center for Child and Family Studies, provides training and technical assistance to CSPP. CDE's website provides information on DRDP.

TK: TK does not require the use of any child assessments.

Data-driven decision-making.

CSPP: Each CSPP contractor (coach) is required to develop and implement an annual plan for its program self-evaluation process. The ERS are used to measure the quality of the program environment in yearly program self-evaluation and used for the reviews conducted by CDE/EESD program staff. In addition, CSPP programs are required to conduct an annual parent survey. The results are included in the annual Program Self Evaluation. As previously mentioned, funding is available to support CSPP programs participation in QRIS at the local level, but participation is voluntary. There has not been a formal, third-party evaluation of CSPP.

TK: TK participates in the California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS), an annual data collection of schools and districts, as well as some aggregate data on students and staff. LEAs may be selected for an on-site or online monitoring every two years. Several factors, including compliance history, academic achievement, program size, and fiscal analysis are considered in identifying LEAs for reviews. Using these established selection criteria, approximately 120 LEAs are selected each school year for on-site or online monitoring. Any structured classroom observations used in TK classrooms are determined locally.

AIR conducted an evaluation of TK's implementation in 2013-2014 and 2014-2015. Findings suggest that students who attended TK have stronger mathematics and literacy skills at kindergarten entry and are more engaged in their learning than students who did not attend TK. TK provides advantages for all students, with particular benefits for ELLs and families with lower incomes. An additional evaluation of TK has been legislatively mandated and will be conducted by UCLA.

Integrated System. Components of California's early learning system are integrated. The Quality Continuum Framework, the basis for the QRIS, connects child development and school readiness (Foundations, Framework, DRDP), teachers and teachings (CDE competencies, professional growth plans, CLASS/ERS), and program environment (ERS, child care licensing, data). Strategies for using the ERS are included in Guidelines for Operating Preschool Programs. Each Preschool Learning Foundations (PLF) publication (volumes 1, 2, & 3) has a companion Preschool Curriculum Framework (PCF) publication (volumes 1, 2, & 3). The Foundations have been aligned to the Common Core State Standards, California Content Standards, Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework. However, the degree to which these elements are implemented varies due to decisions being made at the local level, including participation in QRIS.