

Ensuring Equitable Access to High Quality Universal Preschool in California:

Research and Recommendations for the California Universal Prekindergarten Mixed Delivery Quality and Access Workgroup

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I. Introduction

The purpose of this memo is to provide the California Universal Prekindergarten Mixed Delivery Quality and Access Workgroup (UPK Workgroup) with research and information on selected key components of quality in preschool programs to inform their decisions and recommendations. The UPK Workgroup is charged with providing recommendations in alignment with the California Master Plan for Early Learning and Care (Master Plan)¹ on best practices for increasing access to high quality preschool programs through a mixed delivery model. To inform our recommendations, we draw on data from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) State of Preschool 2022 Yearbook, national research, and state examples of lessons learned from implementing mixed delivery preschool programs. This memo builds on the memo and presentation produced by NIEER for the February 2023 UPK Workgroup meeting on lessons learned from the implementation of mixed delivery preschool nationally.²

In the remaining sections we briefly describe NIEER's State of Preschool Yearbook and quality benchmarks, including where California stands on the 2022 rankings. We then identify key components of quality and equitable access, discussing the research undergirding each component, where the California State Preschool Program stands on these rankings, and offer considerations for the UPK Workgroup to ensure children are experiencing high quality programs. We conclude with a call to action to align program standards to the highest quality benchmarks across all programs serving this population (e.g. CSPP, TK, and other programs) and provide a summary list of our recommendations to the UPK Workgroup.

II. State of Preschool Yearbook and Quality Standards

The State of Preschool Yearbook has annually tracked state-funded preschool program funding, access, and policies since the 2001-2002 school year. *The State of Preschool 2022* annual report covers the 2021-2022 school year and is NIEER's 20th report tracking preschool enrollment, funding, and policies

¹ California Master Plan for Early Learning and Care. Available at <https://www.chhs.ca.gov/home/master-plan-for-early-learning-and-care/> and California Educators Together: UPK Mixed Delivery Quality and Access workgroup <https://www.caeducatorstogether.org/groups/bzsgmy7y/upk-mixed-delivery-quality-and-access-workgroup>

² NIEER's March 2023 presentation and memo to the UPK Workgroup is available at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1dOOZreUGrlsYmx5-xqHnQP1GIXJxhE5D/view> and memo-https://drive.google.com/file/d/194sWMIqB7sPBdxHI2hqYzf_b76L67fDf/view

state-by-state. NIEER State of Preschool Yearbook collects data on state funded preschool programs, including mixed-delivery models. For the 2021-2022 school year, there were 62 state-funded preschool programs operating across 44 states and in Washington, DC and Guam, serving 32% of 4-year-olds and 6% of 3-year-olds nationally.

Quality Standards. The State of Preschool Yearbook tracks 10 State policies in critical areas related to quality. The ten quality standards benchmarks, and the requirements are as follows:

1. Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS)—comprehensive ELDS that include children’s physical well-being and motor development, social/emotional development, approaches toward learning, language development, cognition and general knowledge. The ELDS should be aligned to state standards for younger and older children and with any required child assessments and sensitive to children’s cultural and language backgrounds.
2. Curriculum support—must provide guidance or an approval process for selecting curricula and support for curricula implementation such as training or technical assistance.
3. Teacher Degree—must require that lead teachers in every classroom have at least a bachelor’s degree.
4. Teacher Specialized Training— must require lead teachers in every classroom to have the required specialized training in early childhood education and/or child development.
5. Assistant Teacher Degree— must require assistant teachers in every classroom to have a CDA or equivalent preparation based on coursework (9 ECE/CD credits).
6. Staff professional development—15 hours of annual in-service training, coaching, and individual professional development plans for assistant and lead teachers required.
7. Maximum class size- class size of no more than 20.
8. Staff-child ratio—staff-child ratio of 1:10.
9. Screening and Referrals—vision, health, and one other additional health screening required. Referrals to early intervention if necessary.
10. Continuous Quality Improvement System—data on classroom quality is systematically collected, local and state programs use the information to help improve policy and practice.

For each policy area, states receive a checkmark when they identify the policy in program documents and the policy meets or exceeds the related benchmark standard. In some cases, states may have more than one state funded preschool program and these are rated separately. It should be noted that the rating indicates only the presence of the policy, not the quality or comprehensiveness of implementation of the policy.³ Equally important to note is that the Quality Standards represent the minimum criteria to ensure the effectiveness of preschool education programs, especially when serving children who are at-risk for school failure. The quality standards are based on our interpretation of the best available research at the time. Although the checklist is not intended to be an exhaustive inventory of all the features of a high quality program, each of these research-based standards is essential for setting the groundwork for high quality experiences for children.⁴ Meeting all 10 standards does not necessarily guarantee that a program is of high quality, but no state’s preschool policies should be considered fully satisfactory unless all 10 benchmarks are met.

³ For further information on the State of Preschool Survey Methodology see https://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/YB2022_Methodology.pdf

⁴ See page 26-27 for the research evidence supporting each quality benchmark- https://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/YB2022_FullReport.pdf

Alabama, Hawaii, Michigan, Mississippi, and Rhode Island are the only five states to meet all 10 of NIEER’s benchmarks for minimum state preschool quality standards. However, of these 5 states, Michigan is the only state where state-funded preschool is universally available in the coming year.

III. Key Benchmarks of Quality: California Status and Recommendations for Improvement

This section describes the ten quality standards of high quality preschool drawing from the national and state data collected in the State of Preschool Yearbook. For each standard of quality, we briefly summarize the research undergirding the benchmark. We provide additional detail on where the California State Preschool Program (CSPP) stands on this benchmark according to NIEER’s State of Preschool 2022 report, and provide considerations for improvement, including examples of how other states have approached meeting the identified benchmark. In this section we discuss the 10 quality benchmarks grouped according to the three areas aligned with the focus of the UPK Workgroup. These are:

- Teacher and Assistant Teacher Qualifications and Supports (4 quality standards)
 - Teacher qualifications
 - Assistant teacher qualifications
 - Teacher specialized training.
 - Professional Development
- Child Centered Learning Environment (5 quality standards)
 - Early Learning and Development Standards
 - Curriculum Supports
 - Class Size and Staff-Child Ratio
 - Screening and Referrals
- Monitoring and Continuous Quality Improvement (1 standard)
 - Continuous Quality Improvement System

Where California Stands on Meeting Quality Benchmarks. The California State Preschool Program (CSSP) meets 6 of the 10 quality standards. The standards they meet are early learning and development standards, curriculum support, teacher specialized training, staff-child ratio, screening and referral, and continuous quality improvement system. The standards not met by CSPP are teacher degree, assistant teacher degree, staff professional development, and maximum class size. California’s Transitional Kindergarten (TK) program meets just 3 of the 10 quality standards. These are: early learning and development standards, curriculum support, and teacher qualifications. The remainder of this memo focuses primarily on the CSSP program as that is the scope of the UPK Workgroup.

Teacher and Assistant Teacher Qualifications and Supports

Why are Teacher Qualifications Important? Secure and responsive relationships with adults (and with other children), coupled with high quality, positive learning interactions and environments, are foundational for the healthy development of young children. Conversely, adults who are under informed, underprepared, or subject to chronic stress themselves may contribute to children’s experiences of adversity and stress and undermine their development and learning.⁵ Research indicates

⁵ Institute of Medicine (IOM) and National Research Council (NRC). 2015. Transforming the workforce for children birth through age 8: A unifying foundation. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

regular professional learning, including coaching, supports teaching practices related to high quality experiences for children. Individualized professional development focused on helping teachers improve in their own classrooms has been found to be more effective than traditional workshops and general professional development. Good teachers actively engage in learning and regular professional development, and there is some evidence for a 15-hour threshold.⁶

Where California Stands. The State of Preschool Yearbook identifies four separate benchmarks to determine high quality standards for teachers and assistant teachers. The benchmark requirement for teachers is for teachers to have a bachelor's degree. This benchmark is based on recommendations from multiple studies by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) and National Research Council (NRC) of the National Academy of Science recommending that preschool teachers have a BA with specialized knowledge and training in early childhood education.⁷ Their conclusions are supported by an analysis of what teachers are expected to know and do in order to be highly effective. Also, a comprehensive review finds that teachers with higher educational levels provide higher quality educational environments for young children.⁸

For Assistant teachers, the benchmark requirement is to have a CDA or equivalent (at least 9 credits in ECE or related field). The teacher specialized training benchmark requires that lead teachers have specialized training in early childhood education or child development. The staff professional development benchmark requires both teachers and assistant teachers to have at least 15 hours of annual in-service training. In addition, some professional development must be provided through coaching or similar ongoing classroom-embedded support. Lead and assistant teachers are also required to have annual written individualized professional development plans.

CSPP meets just one of the four benchmarks related to teacher qualifications as specialized training is required in early childhood education or child development. However, CSPP does not meet benchmarks related to teacher and assistant teacher qualifications and professional development. CSPP does not meet the State of Preschool BA degree benchmark as they require the Child Development Associate Teacher Permit which is issued for five years and is renewable once, for a total of two issuances. By the end of the ten-year period, the holder must meet the requirements for the Child Development Teacher Permit.⁹ The assistant teacher's educational requirement is a high school diploma and does not meet the benchmark. CSPP meets the benchmark for lead teacher specialized training in early childhood but does not meet the State of Preschool Staff Professional development benchmark as coaching is not currently a requirement. For State of Preschool benchmark purposes, the requirements for teacher qualifications would apply to state Preschool programs serving both 3 & 4-year-old classrooms. Alignment across program standards is a matter of equity for students and professionals.

⁶ Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Hodges, K. S., Garver, K. A., Weisenfeld, G., Gardiner, B. A., Jost, T. M. (2023). *The State of Preschool 2022: State Preschool Yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

⁷ Bowman et al. (2001). Institute of Medicine and National Research Council (2015). *Transforming the workforce for children, youth through age 8*. Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press.

⁸ Manning, M., Garvis, S., Fleming, C., & Wong, G. T. (2017). *The Relationship between Teacher Qualification and the Quality of the Early Childhood Care and Learning Environment: A Systematic Review*. Campbell collaboration. Downloaded August 15, 2017, from <https://www.campbellcollaboration.org/library/teacher-qualification-and-quality-of-early-childhood-careand-learning.htm>

⁹ *Commission on Teacher Credentialing*. (2023). [https://www.ctc.ca.gov/credentials/leaflets/child-development-permits-\(cl-797\)](https://www.ctc.ca.gov/credentials/leaflets/child-development-permits-(cl-797))

NIEER does not currently rank whether state funded preschool programs require salary parity, however we include it here because of the importance of considering compensation when discussing teacher qualifications. CSPP does not require salary parity and benefits. The average annual salary for teachers and assistants was not reported in the State of Preschool Yearbook. According to the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, in 2019 the California median wage for childcare workers was \$13.43, for preschool teachers the median wage was \$16.83 compared to the median wage for a Kindergarten teacher at \$41.86. California early educators with a bachelor's degree are paid 37.8 percent less than their colleagues in the K-8 system.¹⁰

Considerations to Ensure Teachers are Well-Qualified

Based on the research and where CSSP currently stands on the quality benchmarks for teacher and assistant teacher qualifications, we support all the recommendations identified in the Master Plan for increasing teacher and assistant teacher qualifications and supports. Teacher quality is a critical, necessary, component of high quality preschool and essential to achieving positive outcomes for children that are sustained in early elementary school.¹¹ Raising quality by increasing teacher requirements in the midst of nation-wide teacher shortages is challenging, however, a comprehensive and multi-pronged approach to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers is what young children deserve and is needed to ensure the promise of UPK is realized.¹² Some states, for example Alabama, require salary parity in all Preschool settings and provide funds to achieve this, while also requiring teachers to have degrees.¹³

Require Lead Teachers to Have a BA but allow for an extended timeframe to meet the requirement.

A recent report describes the lessons learned from implementing mixed delivery systems in Alabama, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, and West Virginia.¹⁴ Across LEA and non-LEA settings, all five case study states require a bachelor's degree with early childhood education (ECE) specialization for all lead teachers. In Alabama only lead teachers in LEA settings are required to hold a teaching credential. Similarly, in West Virginia teachers in non-LEA settings may be hired with a Community Program Permanent Authorization in lieu of a teaching credential if the provider is unable to find a fully certified teacher.¹⁵

We recommend creating a pathway for teachers in both LEA and non-LEA settings classrooms serving children aged 3 or 4 years with the Child Development Teacher Permit to achieve a BA degree. The

¹⁰ California. CSCCE. (2020). <https://csce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/states/california/>

¹¹ New Jersey Abbott Preschool Program Longitudinal Effects Study through Grade 10 (APPLES-10). Available at <https://nieer.org/policy-issue/fact-sheet-new-jersey-abbott-preschool-program-longitudinal-effects-study-through-grade-10-apples-10>

¹² Felix, A. (June 2022) Even incremental support for early ed teachers can help ease the childcare crisis. Available at <https://edsources.org/2022/even-incremental-support-for-early-ed-teachers-can-help-ease-the-child-care-crisis/674698> and Gold, E. et al (July 2019) Breaking the silence on early child care and education costs. Available at <https://csce.berkeley.edu/publications/report/breaking-the-silence-on-costs/>

¹³ Alabama First Class PreK one pager on salary parity. Available at https://csce.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/publications/Pre-K-Parity_Alabama.pdf

¹⁴ Garver, K., Weisenfeld, G. G., Connors-Tadros, L., Hodges, K., Melnick, H., & Plasencia, S. (2023). State preschool in a mixed delivery system: Lessons from five states. Learning Policy Institute.

¹⁵ Garver, K., Weisenfeld, G. G., Connors-Tadros, L., Hodges, K., Melnick, H., & Plasencia, S. (2023). State preschool in a mixed delivery system: Lessons from five states. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/387.446>

pathway could start with an apprenticeship model which would afford teachers the opportunity for field base credit while working in a preschool classroom, providing for support, coaching and observation and allowing credit for previously acquired training and education. The apprenticeship model should lead to transferable credits toward higher education degrees and could lead to teacher certification. An example of a current apprenticeship model in CA is the Early Care & Education Pathway to Success (ECEPTS). Since ECEPTS is offered in select CA counties, ensure teachers have access to these types of programs across the State. Louisiana conducted a study of the implementation challenges and barriers when all early childhood state funded teachers work toward an Early Childhood Ancillary Certificate. Based on this research and the barriers experienced by Louisiana teachers, they recommend that states consider strategies to decrease administrative hurdles, use data to track completion and target supports, ensure teachers understand the processes and remind them of next steps, rely on programs that have relationships and regular contact with teachers to shepherd them through the process, and embed financial supports.¹⁶

Implement the Preschool-grade 3 Credential. The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing created a PK-3 Early Childhood Specialist Instruction Credential, pending approval by the Office of Administrative Law; in order to meet the need for qualified teachers as UPK expands in California.¹⁷ The Master plan recommends that in 4-year-old classrooms, a CTC issued teaching credential with specialization in ECE, or the proposed PK-3 credential; and in 3-year-old classrooms and settings, an associate degree with an ECE specialization.¹⁸

Require Assistant Teachers to have a CDA but allow for an extended timeframe to meet the requirement. While many States do not meet the CDA or equivalent requirement for assistant teachers, some States have implemented a timeframe for obtaining a CDA. In the 2020-2021 school year, six programs (Delaware, Hawaii, Michigan's GSRP, New Mexico, Oregon Prekindergarten (OPK), and Pennsylvania's HSSAP) provide a defined time to meet the CDA or equivalent assistant teacher requirements. For example, Michigan's GSRP allows Intermediary School Districts (ISDs) the ability to monitor and sign-off on a plan for an individual who is not in compliance. The regulations allow preschool programs to hire an assistant teacher without the CDA or AA in ECE/CD, but the person must have completed at least one credit bearing course in child development to begin and complete the requirements within two years. Similarly, in New Mexico, assistant teachers in both public and nonpublic settings are expected to have an AA in ECE but may be hired without an AA with an approved professional development plan to complete at least six college credits annually toward the requirement.

Provide Supports for Professional Development and Coaching. The Master Plan calls for 3-year-old classrooms to have a robust system of ongoing professional development with coaching to support teacher practices, coaching and mentoring as part of career pathways, as well as expanding access to

¹⁶ Bellows, L., Miller-Bains, K., & Bassok, D. (2022, June). Professionalizing the childcare workforce: Understanding the low rates ... https://files.elfsightcdn.com/022b8cb9-839c-4bc2-992e-cefc8b8e877e/eea67e02-1659-4afd-9bc9-0fdd7d708be9/SEELA_ECAC-Barriers-3_Final.pdf

¹⁷ California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. Available at <https://www.ctc.ca.gov/educator-prep/pk-3-ece-specialist-instruction-credential> and California State University, PK-3 Early Childhood Education Specialist Instruction Credential, available at <https://www.calstate.edu/impact-of-the-csu/teacher-education/teacher-and-educator-degrees-credentials/Pages/early-childhood-education-specialist-credential.aspx>

¹⁸ Master Plan for Early Learning and Care. Available at <https://cdn-west-prod-chhs-01.dsh.ca.gov/chhs/uploads/2020/12/01104743/Master-Plan-for-Early-Learning-and-Care-Making-California-For-All-Kids-FINAL.pdf#page=52>, see pages 5, 10, 11.

on-site and virtual certified coaches trained in cultural and linguistic responsiveness and implicit bias.¹⁹ We recommend ensuring that both LEA and non-LEA providers in 3 or 4-year old classrooms and family child care settings receive ongoing support to offer and sustain high quality learning environments, including coaching and professional development that is embedded in a continuous quality improvement system.²⁰ In Alabama, coaches observe classrooms and give teachers feedback about once a month. New Jersey requires LEAs to hire at least one coach for every 20 classrooms, including in subcontracting non-LEAs. In Michigan, professional development and coaching are coordinated by the Intermediate School District, which provides coaching in each classroom at least monthly.²¹

Child-Centered Learning Environments

Why is a child-centered learning environment important? Research has indicated that the quality of teacher-child interactions, the quality of instruction, and the effective use of developmentally-appropriate curriculum and assessment practices have the greatest impact on children's outcomes during the preschool years.²² ²³ ²⁴ When the curriculum, instructional and assessment practices are aligned, developmentally appropriate, and implemented with fidelity the two practices can work together to support the growth and development of individual children and their needs.²⁵ These constellations of factors - teacher-child interaction, quality of instruction, and use of an evidence-based curriculum and assessment - when considered together as the focus of teacher preparation and professional development are most likely to result in improved child outcomes and ensure children have a positive experience.

Where California Stands. NIEER tracks policies for state funded preschool that support child-centered, developmentally appropriate practice. [Early Learning Guidelines](#) track whether states require preschool programs to utilize early learning guidelines that are comprehensive, addressing academic and social domains of development, are culturally sensitive, and aligned with guidelines for children birth to 3 and

¹⁹ <https://cdn-west-prod-chhs-01.dsh.ca.gov/chhs/uploads/2020/12/01104743/Master-Plan-for-Early-Learning-and-Care-Making-California-For-All-Kids-FINAL.pdf#page=52>, see pages 5, 10, 11.

²⁰ Garver, K., Weisenfeld, G. G., Connors-Tadros, L., Hodges, K., Melnick, H., & Plasencia, S. (2023). State preschool in a mixed delivery system: Lessons from five states. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/387.446>

²¹ Garver, K., Weisenfeld, G. G., Connors-Tadros, L., Hodges, K., Melnick, H., & Plasencia, S. (2023). State preschool in a mixed delivery system: Lessons from five states. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/387.446>

²² Yoshikawa, H., Weiland, C., Brooks-Gunn, J., Burchinal, M., Espinosa, L. M., Gormley, Jr., W. T., Ludwig, J., & et al. (2013). *Investing in our future: The evidence base on preschool education*. Ann Arbor, MI: Society for Research in Child Development. Available at

http://www.srcd.org/sites/default/files/documents/washington/mb_2013_10_16_investing_in_children.pdf .

²³ Burchinal, M., Vandergrift, N., Pianta, R., & Mashburn, A. (2010). Threshold analysis of association between childcare quality and child outcomes for low-income children in PreKindergarten programs. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 25, 166-176. Retrieved on 3/31/17:

http://www.learningcommunityds.org/files/1013/7029/9372/Study_EarlyChildhoodResearchQuarterly_BurchinalThresholdsofQualityforCLASS_101609.pdf

²⁴ Sabol, T. J., Hong, S. L., Pianta, R. C., & Burchinal, M. R. (2013, August). Can rating PreK programs predict children's learning? *Science*, 341, 845–846. Retrieved on 4/2/17:

<http://earlylearningtexas.org/media/24062/science-2013-sabol-845-6.pdf>

²⁵ Chen, J. Q., & McNamee, G. (2006). Strengthening early childhood teacher preparation: Integrating assessment, curriculum development, and instructional practice in student teaching. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 27(2), 109-128.

Schilder, D., & Carolan, M. (2014). State of the state's policy snapshot: State early childhood assessment policies.

older, K-3rd grade and associated assessments. Further, to meet this quality benchmark states must provide support for professional development and training to use the guidelines to inform instruction. According to the State of Preschool 2022 report²⁶, 60 of the 62 state-funded preschool programs tracked by NIEER, implemented comprehensive, aligned, supported, culturally sensitive early learning guidelines. Curriculum Supports tracks whether states provide guidance or an approval process for selecting curricula, and support for curriculum implementation, such as training or ongoing technical assistance to facilitate adequate implementation of the curriculum. In 2021-2022 school year, 56 of the 62 state-funded preschool programs reported on in the State of Preschool 2022 met the curriculum support benchmark providing an approval process for research-based curriculum and support for effective use in the classroom.

Maximum class size of 20 and staff child-ratio of 1:10 or better are addressed together as they are highly linked in policy and practice. Small class size and corresponding teacher-child ratios characterize the most effective programs, even though many studies find weak or no association between these features and effectiveness.²⁷ Yet, it seems clear that smaller classes and fewer children per teacher enable teachers to interact with each child more frequently, to work with smaller groups, and offer each child more individualized attention, which results in better outcomes. The smaller the class, the easier it is for a teacher to develop a good understanding of each child's interests, needs, and capabilities. Screening and referrals including vision, hearing, and health screenings provide teachers with more knowledge about how the child is developing. Providing child developmental screening and making referrals helps children access medical or early interventions to help children make gains at early ages.

CSPP meets the benchmarks of early learning guidelines and curriculum supports because the California Preschool Learning Foundations, Curriculum Frameworks and Desired Results Developmental Profile are stated in policy and required to be used in the California State Preschool Program.²⁸ The state also supports a Preschool Instructional Network with professional development resources to support quality practice and the effective use of curriculum and assessment. However, as noted above NIEER tracks whether a policy is in place, we do not have detailed data on the implementation of the policy especially at the scale and depth that would be needed to have a measurable impact on quality. Given the importance of implementing a comprehensive research-based curriculum, it would be necessary to review the curriculum frameworks and to collect site-based data on implementation of curriculum, especially since curricular resources are made available to California preschool programs but programs are not explicitly required to use them.

²⁶ https://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/YB2022_FullReport.pdf

²⁷ Bowman et al. (2001). National Association for the Education of Young Children (2005). NAEYC early childhood program standards and accreditation criteria. Washington, DC: Author. NICHD Early Childcare Research Network (1999). Child outcomes when childcare center classes meet recommended standards for quality. *American Journal of Public Health*, 89, 1072-1077. Perlman, M., Falenchuk, O., Fletcher, B., McMullen, E., Beyene, J., & Shah, P. S. (2016). A systematic review and meta-analysis of a measure of staff/child interaction quality (the classroom assessment scoring system) in early childhood education and care settings and child outcomes. *PloS One*, 11(12), e0167660. Reynolds, A. J., Hayakawa, M., Ou, S. R., Mondy, C. F., Englund, M. M., Candee, A. J., & Smerillo, N. E. (2017). Scaling and sustaining effective early childhood programs through school–family–university collaboration. *Child Development*, 88(5), 1453-1465.

²⁸ California Preschool Foundations. Available at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/psfoundations.asp>

CSPP meets the benchmark on staff-child ratio by requiring 1 teacher for 8 children, however the program does not meet the maximum class size ratio as there is none required in CSSP. CSPP also meets the Screening and Referral benchmarks by offering vision, hearing, health, and additional screenings.

Considerations to Ensure the Learning Environment is Child-Centered

Update and Align Early Learning Standards and Supports. We support the recommendations made in the Master Plan related to early learning guidelines, assessments and curricula for three- and four-year-olds.²⁹ The Master Plan recommends updating early learning guidelines to expand and integrate specific reference to young dual language learners and children with disabilities. Professional development to support the effective use of early learning guidelines is necessary to ensure teachers tailor instruction to the specific needs of children. For example, **Georgia** revised the Georgia Early Learning Standards (GELS) for birth to three and the Preschool Content Standards in 2010 to create a seamless system of standards in Georgia for birth to five. The Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS) are aligned with the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework, the CCGPS for K-12, and the Work Sampling System Assessment. The state developed a comprehensive system of support for use of the GELDS, including sample activities, lesson plans and other resources.³⁰

Require the Use of a Research-based Curriculum and provide support for implementation. Currently CSPP does not require the use of a research-based curriculum and thus programs are left on their own to use or not use a research-based curriculum. For example, in a recent study of early care and education programs in Indiana, we found that lower quality programs were more likely to report using “no curricula” and less than half of all programs surveyed used research-based programs.³¹ To address this gap in CSPP policy on curriculum implementation and use of aligned assessments, the Master Plan recommends for three-year-olds, the creation of a state-approved list of curricula with demonstrated impact on child outcomes; development of valid assessment options; updating the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) and refining the DRDP-K that aligns with K–3 state standards; and ensure alignment with approved curriculum that is relevant for all program settings, including family child care. For four-year-old classrooms, the Master Plan recommends requiring the adherence to state developed Transitional Kindergarten (TK) curriculum framework based on the Preschool Learning Foundations and the Common Core and assessment that aligns with K–3 standards and curriculum; for both three- and four-year olds, require support and provision of bilingual programs in areas with a high concentration of DLL children who share a common language.

For example, in Louisiana all publicly funded early care and education programs are required to use an approved curriculum that meets standards of research. Programs can access information on all curricula

²⁹ Master Plan for Early Learning and Care. Available at <https://cdn-west-prod-chhs-01.dsh.ca.gov/chhs/uploads/2020/12/01104743/Master-Plan-for-Early-Learning-and-Care-Making-California-For-All-Kids-FINAL.pdf#page=52>, see page 15

³⁰ Georgia Department of Early Learning and Care, Early Learning and Development Standards. Available at <https://www.decal.ga.gov/Prek/GELDS.aspx>

³¹ Nores, M., Harmeyer, E., Connors-Tadros, L., & Li, Z. (2023). Quality in Early Childhood Care & Education Programs in Indiana. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research. Available at https://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/ResearchBrief_Quality_Final.Revised-5.24.23.pdf

that have been reviewed and approved by the Louisiana Department of Education.³² The department has also negotiated vendor discounts so programs can purchase the curricula at reduced costs. The department provides resources on how the curricula are aligned to child assessment (e.g., Gold) and program quality measures (e.g., Classroom Assessment Scoring System). To support effective curriculum implementation in all settings Louisiana supports the cost of purchasing the curricula and training for childcare and family childcare programs from an approved list of research-based curricula that is appropriate for the age and setting served by the program.³³

Monitoring and Continuous Quality Improvement Systems

Why is a robust monitoring and continuous quality improvement (CQI) system important? To support program quality at scale, states need to develop quality assurance systems that ensure program quality standards are being met and supported by professional development and coaching to use data to inform instruction. Research shows that preschool initiatives are most effective when they have a data-driven system of continuous improvement that includes structured classroom observations.³⁴

Where California Stands. CSSP meets NIEER’s quality benchmark on continuous quality improvement systems as state policy requires the use of a structured observation instrument and the use of data for program improvement. California’s Quality Counts is a state-wide system of quality rating and improvement system.³⁵ Quality Counts is voluntary for CSPP programs and provides points to programs’ ratings for the use of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). Programs may also access coaching and professional development offered by the county, but it is not specifically required or provided by the state.

Considerations for Improving Monitoring and Continuous Quality Improvement

Redesign California’s Quality Rating and Improvement System. The Master Plan identifies key areas of improvement for California’s continuous quality improvement system, including collecting additional data to produce an annual report on children and families and redesigning the current county based QRIS system.³⁶ A number of states have redesigned their QRIS systems in recent years based on results of research and provider feedback. They are illustrative of the types of re-tooling that states are engaged in to increase access, incentivize specific practices, and provide more effective QIS support. For example, **The District of Columbia** significantly revised their QRIS, *Capital Quality*, in 2019, to focus more intentionally on continuous quality improvement, rather than a rating. It is an instructive example

³² Louisiana Department of Education, Classroom Resources and Initiatives. Available at <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/early-childhood/classroom-initiatives>

³³ Louisiana Department of Education, Childcare Curriculum Initiative Guidance. Available at https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/early-childhood/child-care-curriculum-initiative-packet.pdf?sfvrsn=a252891f_18

³⁴ Derrick-Mills, T., Sandstrom, H., Pettijohn, S., Fyffe, S., & Koulis, J. (2014). Data use for continuous quality improvement: What the Head Start field can learn from other disciplines, a literature review and conceptual framework [OPRE Report No. 2014-77]. Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Minervino, J. (2014). Lessons from research and the classroom: Implementing high quality PreK that makes a difference for young children. Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; Weiland, C. (2016). Launching preschool 2.0: A roadmap to high-quality public programs at scale. Behavioral Sciences & Policy, 2(1), 37–46. <https://doi.org/10.1353/bsp.2016.0005>

³⁵ California Quality Counts. Available at

³⁶ <https://qualitycountscalifornia.net/>

because stakeholders developed a multi-layer “theory of change” to advance and align quality standards across DC’s early care and education system.³⁷ Illinois’ QRIS, *ExceleRate* is unique in offering “Awards of Excellence” as part of their QRIS rating which allows the state to target and reward specific practices. For example, programs may choose to demonstrate additional criteria in order to achieve an Award of Excellence in one of the following areas: Preschool Teaching & Learning; Infant & Toddler Services; Family and Community Engagement; Inclusion of Children with Special Needs; and Linguistically and Culturally Appropriate Practice.³⁸ Louisiana’s redesign of their QRIS is perhaps the most transformative example of rethinking how to monitor and provide supports to programs to continually improve quality. Beginning in June 2015, Louisiana implemented a bold, totally new way of “rating programs” and providing support for improvement, through a unified statewide early childhood quality rating and improvement system. Each publicly funded childcare center, Head Start, and school serving children birth to five in Louisiana receives a *Performance Profile* that includes a rating based on rigorous classroom observations (e.g., Classroom Assessment Scoring System CLASS). Each network of providers within a community also receives a Performance Profile. Performance Profiles also include information on best practices, including use of ongoing assessment and a high quality curriculum, teacher credentials, and program investment in high levels of individual attention for children.³⁹

IV. Key Components of Equitable Access: California Status and Recommendations for Improvement

This section describes selected key components of equitable access from the national and state data collected in the State of Preschool Yearbook and the State(s) of Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education. NIEER collects data on the percent of 4-year-olds and the percent of 3-year-olds participating in the program (Access Ranking); state expenditures per child enrolled in the program (Resources Rankings – State Spending); and all reported expenditures per child enrolled in the program, including local and federal spending as well as state spending (Resources Rankings – All Reported Spending).

Why Is Equitable Access Important? Most states in the United States operate their public preschool programs in a mixed delivery system that serves children in local education agencies (LEAs) as well as non-LEA settings, such as Head Start agencies, childcare centers, private schools, and family childcare homes. As noted in our March 2023 memo to the UPK WG, “Close to half of State preschool programs *allow* for state preschool funding to go to FCC providers. In 2021, 29 of 62 programs in 24 states allowed for this method of State Preschool delivery. In a survey of state administrators of preschool programs, at least 17 states reported that children may have been served in FCC homes in 2019-2020, however only 10 states were able to report the number of children served in this setting.”

A mixed delivery system has many benefits, including adding valuable capacity—in terms of both workforce and facilities—to serve children; providing families with choice in the environment they prefer for their children; and supporting small businesses. A mixed delivery system can increase parents’ choice to select the type of environment they prefer for their children. Non-LEA programs established in the community often offer full-day, full-year care, which is beneficial for working families. They frequently provide wraparound care, often in the same classroom with the same teacher, providing a

³⁷ District of Columbia, Capital Quality (QRIS) <https://osse.dc.gov/page/capital-quality-qr>

³⁸ ExceleRate Illinois QRIS. <https://www.exceleRateillinoisproviders.com/resources/2-uncategorised/94-qr> apply

³⁹ Louisiana Department of Education, Early Childhood Performance Profiles. <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/early-childhood/performance-profiles>

continuous day and minimizing unnecessary transitions. Additionally, many non-LEA programs serve infants and toddlers. Situating state-funded preschool programs in these settings allows children to transition from infancy through preschool in the same program while also allowing families with multiple young children to receive the services they need in one location.⁴⁰

Including FCCs in pre-K typically adds a layer of quality improvement services that is not available through licensing alone. Often FCCs offering pre-K are required to be on a higher tier in the state QRIS system which affords them various quality supports. Most statewide QRIS have standards that apply to both centers and family childcare homes, sometimes with separate sets of standards for each program type. The standards are either in separate documents or in one document, with a clear delineation of which standards apply to centers and which apply to family childcare homes. While some standards such as family engagement might be appropriate for both centers and family childcare homes, other standards may vary by setting. For example, assessment tools and accreditation standards must be appropriate for the setting.⁴¹ A review of the effectiveness of these different supports finds that a comprehensive combination of in-home coaching, planned and coherent group training, attending professional conferences, and partnering with programs rated higher in quality rating systems such as Early Head Start were all paths to improvements. In San Francisco's Pre-K program which has a robust 17.72% of children served in FCC homes, initial quality as measured by CLASS was improved when a coaching system coupled with other supports was implemented.⁴²

Where California Stands. According to NIEER's State of Preschool 2022, California ranks 18th in Access for four-year-olds, 5th in state spending per child, and 5th in all reported spending per child including federal funds. The ranking is a state ranking and includes enrollment and spending for both CSPP and TK. CSPP provides part- and full-day preschool to 3- and 4-year-olds. In addition to meeting eligibility requirements for CSPP, families are prioritized for full-day services if they have established a need for services including at least one of the following: employment/seeking employment, education or vocational training, experiencing homelessness, seeking permanent housing, or parental incapacity. California TK began during the 2012-2013 school year when the kindergarten age eligibility shifted from December 2 to September 1. By the 2025-2026 school year, TK will be available to all 4-year-olds in the state. In the 2021-2022 school year, CSPP enrolled 92,445 students and California TK enrolled 89,169 students; the two preschool programs together enrolled 181,614 children, an increase of 24,508 from the prior year.⁴³

Considerations to Ensure Equitable Access

Continue to Build a Robust Integrated Data and Coordinated Eligibility System. California is using federal Preschool Development Grant-Renewal funds to implement new policies and structures to transform the birth to five system of early care and education. California's Health and Human Services

⁴⁰ Garver, K., Weisenfeld, G. G., Connors-Tadros, L., Hodges, K., Melnick, H., & Plasencia, S. (2023). State preschool in a mixed delivery system: Lessons from five states. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/387.446>

⁴¹ *QRIS Resource Guide*. Standards and Criteria. (2023). <https://ecquality.acf.hhs.gov/resource-guide/standards-and-criteria#:~:text=Most%20statewide%20QRIS%20have%20standards,standards%20for%20each%20program%20type.>

⁴² Weisenfeld, G., & Frede, E. (2021). Including family childcare in state and city-funded pre-k system: Opportunities and challenges. National Institute for Early Education Research.

⁴³ Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Hodges, K. S., Garver, K. A., Weisenfeld, G., Gardiner, B. A., Jost, T. M. (2023). The State of Preschool 2022: State Preschool Yearbook. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

Agency (HHS) is leveraging federal funds to continue to build a verification hub for HHS entitlement programs. Coordinated eligibility and enrollment systems can help ensure the equitable distribution of funding and the efficient use of available space, which are important considerations for providers who may see themselves as in competition with one another and suffer financially from fluctuations in enrollment. A coordinated system across agencies operating all programs for young children (i.e., LEAs and non-LEAs) can help ensure that families find available slots nearby that are undersubscribed. It can also help direct children who are eligible for means-tested programs to subsidized slots, saving more flexible local funding for children who do not qualify for means-tested programs.

With the inclusion of both LEA and non-LEA settings in California, coordination would also be necessary across State agencies to reduce duplication of efforts, coordinate enrollment, save costs, and streamline oversight and monitoring.⁴⁴ Alabama has a statewide coordinated enrollment system, asking LEAs and non-LEAs to recruit individually, but then including all locations in a statewide application process managed through an online registration platform that is accessed by prospective families. This system simplifies enrollment for families, although it does not guarantee equitable access. West Virginia mandates a highly coordinated enrollment system within each county. Each County Collaborative Early Childhood Core Team is required by legislation to develop an enrollment process that must be used universally throughout the county. The system must be made public and specify how applications are collected and how placements are determined to ensure that all eligible children are offered a placement.⁴⁵

California is also using federal funds to build out an integrated data system.⁴⁶ Enrollment data disaggregated by program setting and child demographics can shed light on the extent to which children with different abilities and from different racial and ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds are enrolling in different settings. These trends are important to analyze, as they might reveal systematic differences in who is able to access providers in different settings that need to be addressed. For example, analyses from Alabama showed that LEAs disproportionately serve preschoolers who are white, while non-LEA providers disproportionately serve children of color. In New York City, children of color are served disproportionately in programs with lower quality ratings.⁴⁷

Ensure Children with Special Needs and Dual Language Learners are Prioritized. CSPP meets the State of Preschool Yearbook benchmark for Screening and Referrals indicating there is a policy in place to identify preschool children who may need additional services. In 2023, NIEER released a report, *The State(s) of Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education: Looking at Equity*. It is the first equity-focused report to look state-by-state at the two federally funded programs for young children with disabilities. Based on the 2020-2021 school year, California enrolls 3% of 3-year-olds in Early

⁴⁴ Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Hodges, K. S., Garver, K. A., Weisenfeld, G., Gardiner, B. A., Jost, T. M. (2023). *The State of Preschool 2022: State Preschool Yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

⁴⁵ Garver, K., Weisenfeld, G. G., Connors-Tadros, L., Hodges, K., Melnick, H., & Plasencia, S. (2023). *State preschool in a mixed delivery system: Lessons from five states*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/387.446>

⁴⁶ California Master Plan, Supporting the Coordination of Early Learning and Care Data Systems Knowledge Brief, available at <https://californiaforallkids.chhs.ca.gov/assets/pdfs/CA%20For%20All%20Kids%20-%20Master%20Plan%20Knowledge%20Brief%20-%20Data.pdf>

⁴⁷ Garver, K., Weisenfeld, G. G., Connors-Tadros, L., Hodges, K., Melnick, H., & Plasencia, S. (2023). *State preschool in a mixed delivery system: Lessons from five states*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/387.446>

Childhood Special Education (ECSE), Nationally 4% of 3-year-olds are enrolled in ECSE. Five percent of 4-year-olds are enrolled in ECSE as compared to 7% nation-wide.⁴⁸

We support The Master Plan Strategy D goals to Ensure Equitable Treatment of all Children and Eliminate Bias through Practices and Training. Strategy D includes the following strategies to reach this goal: Proactively identify and report children's language status and special education needs; require specialized training and development to address dual language development, children with disabilities, and how to eliminate bias and inequitable practices; update early learning guidelines to expand and integrate throughout DLLs and children with disabilities; collect and use data to support DLL's and children with disabilities and address issues of equity; guarantee equitable access to learning and care for all. The Master Plan also includes requirements for bilingual teachers in programs with a high concentration of DLL children who speak a common home language. Comparable qualifications for Assistant and Associate Teachers.⁴⁹ Our recommendations would include ensuring instructional support, access to resources and continued professional development of teachers occurs in all publicly funded preschool programs to include non-LEA settings. That data be transparent and shared so that key performance indicators are tracked and measured.

Conduct Updated Cost-Study to Ensure Adequate and Equitable Funding. Funding should be adequate to support a high quality program, and all that entails- including funding to attract and retain knowledgeable teachers and provide them with training and educational supports, funding for instructional leadership and coaching, sufficient developmentally appropriate materials and other direct and in-direct costs.⁵⁰ This may be challenging in a state such as California given the cost of living but is necessary to ensure equitable access to programs.⁵¹ However, adequate funding levels will determine whether non-LEA programs will participate in expansion.

In the 2021-2022 school year, State spending for the two programs totaled \$2,129,230,104, with an additional \$91,647,019 in federal recovery funds to support the program, up \$74,622,274 (3%), adjusted for inflation since last year. State spending per child (including federal recovery funds) averaged \$12,229 in 2021-2022, down \$1,433 from 2020-2021, adjusted for inflation. In 2021-2022, state spending per child was \$13,585 (including federal recovery funds) for the California State Preschool Program (CSPP) and \$10,822 for the Transitional Kindergarten (TK) program.⁵² According to the 2019-2020 Local Control Accountability Plans, roughly 17% of districts with CSPP programs used Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) base or targeted dollars to support or expand access to preschool programs, and 37% of districts with CSPP programs used LCFF dollars to improve their preschool programs and services. At the TK level,

⁴⁸ Friedman-Krauss, A. H., & Barnett, W. S. (2023). The State(s) of Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education: Looking at Equity. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

⁴⁹ California Master Plan for Early Learning and Care, <https://cdn-west-prod-chhs-01.dsh.ca.gov/chhs/uploads/2020/12/01104743/Master-Plan-for-Early-Learning-and-Care-Making-California-For-All-Kids-FINAL.pdf#page=52>

⁵⁰ See the Cost of Preschool Quality and Revenue Calculator for further information on the costs associated with high quality preschool. Available at <https://nieer.org/research/research-instruments/cpqr>

⁵¹ CA is the fourth most expensive State to live in (preceded by HI, DC, MA). <https://meric.mo.gov/data/cost-living-data-series>

⁵² Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Hodges, K. S., Garver, K. A., Weisenfeld, G., Gardiner, B. A., Jost, T. M. (2023). The State of Preschool 2022: State Preschool Yearbook. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

only about 5% of districts with CSPP programs used LCFF base or targeted dollars to expand access to TK programs.⁵³

Provide adequate funding and leverage local funding to ensure non-LEA programs participate in expansion and that programs can meet high quality standards. Design a strategic plan to expand gradually based on a rigorous evaluation and integrated continuous improvement cycle that informs quality improvement supports as well as determining whether and how inclusion and expansion of FCCs in public pre-K can be cost-effective and lead to benefits for children. The study should be designed to determine under what conditions providing pre-K in FCCs is a cost-effective alternative taking into account savings such as reduced transportation costs and benefits to families.⁵⁴ Collect and track data to determine where children are being served and include race and ethnicity data collection to determine participation trends by the level of quality across settings. For example, Illinois conducted a funding equity mapping to gain greater insight into how funding was distributed across geography of the state relative to the need for services and poverty levels of families. This data is being used to ensure that public funding is going to the communities and families in greatest need.⁵⁵

V. Conclusion

California's early childhood leaders are embracing a bold path to improve access to high quality preschool. The UPK workgroup has engaged in a thorough and comprehensive process to engage parents, researchers, state and local leaders and others to inform the recommendations. This memo addresses just one piece – though standards are a fundamental piece- of a very complex puzzle to ensure equitable access to high quality preschool in mixed delivery settings. An aligned and coherent set of standards for all programs serving young children is necessary to ensure scale and sustainability of quality programs. Different standards for each program can create inequities in access and quality. Fundamentally, California would go a long way towards ensuring equitable access to high quality programs by ensuring that both CSPP and TK meet the minimum quality benchmarks outlined in this memo. Other support for implementation is needed, as well as strategies to address gaps and inequities. Many of these are outlined in the California Master Plan that impact both CSPP and other programs serving this population.

We based our review and recommendations on research-based, industry standards of quality preschool programs that have stood the test of time over 20 years to inform and influence state policy for high quality state funded preschool. Our recommendations offered in this memo are based on this data and our knowledge of the successes and challenges of scaling and sustaining state-wide quality standards to

⁵³ The Education Trust- West. (2021). Six Ways School Districts Can Leverage the Local Control Funding Formula for Equity In The Early Years. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED617648.pdf>

⁵⁴ Weisenfeld, G., & Frede, E. (2021). Including family childcare in state and city-funded pre-k system: Opportunities and challenges. National Institute for Early Education Research.

⁵⁵ Center for Early Learning Funding Equity, Mapping ECEC Funding Equity in Illinois. <https://celfe.org/our-approach/mapping-eccec-funding-equity/>

support young children's access to and experiences in preschool. The challenge is implementing these recommendations in a context of scarce resources, teacher shortages, and fragmented funding.

We conclude this memo with *a call to action* to the UPK workgroup to ensure all programs serving preschool children are aligned to the highest quality standards. California can do so by addressing the recommendations outlined in this memo.