



CHILDREN NOW



FIRST 5 ASSOCIATION OF CALIFORNIA



May 6, 2016

Dr. Michael Kirst
President, State Board of Education
1430 N Street, Suite 5111
Sacramento, CA 95814

Hon. Tom Torlakson
State Superintendent of Public Instruction
1430 N Street, Suite 5602
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: May 2016 Agenda Item #5, Update on Every Student Succeeds Act State Plan Development

Dear President Kirst and Superintendent Torlakson:

We represent policy, advocacy and education organizations concerned about improving public education for California’s young children and committed to promoting high-quality early learning for the state’s diverse child and student populations. We appreciate your thoughtful leadership in creating a coherent system of continuous improvement and working to align state and federal support in a manner that promotes local efforts to close achievement gaps, improves outcomes for children, and builds educator capacity to work effectively with California’s diverse population. New provisions in the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) explicitly recognize the value of early learning and call for evidence-based interventions as part of school improvement efforts. As you develop the state’s implementation plan for ESSA, we recommend that it reflect the import of high-quality early learning in furthering local efforts.¹

Investments in early learning are smart investments; decades of research show proven benefits of high-quality programs not only for children and their families, but also for communities, employers, and the nation. By supporting early childhood programs that serve at-risk children, the state can continue to narrow achievement gaps, reduce state spending on remedial education and criminal justice costs, and drive children’s success both as students and as self-sufficient and productive adults. ESSA sets a clear expectation that schools must raise the achievement of all their students, but California has substantial room for improvement on meeting this goal. Currently only 34 percent of the state’s African American 3rd graders read at grade level. This number is also low for Latino (33%) students, low-income children (33%), and English learners (18%).² By boosting children’s cognitive, linguistic and social-emotional skills, quality early learning is the scaffold to helping school districts fulfill their LCFF goals. Prioritizing investments in early education now will help children meet academic benchmarks later.

¹ “Pathways to New Accountability Through The Every Student Succeeds Act” available at https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Pathways_New-Accountability_Through_Every_Student_Succeeds_Act_04202016.pdf. The Learning Policy Institute.

² “Kindergarten Transition” available at <https://www.childrennow.org/issue-areas/education/kindergarten-transition/kindergarten-transition-cont/> (last accessed April 2016). Children Now.

We are writing to provide recommendations on how the state can use provisions in ESSA to improve coordination between the pre-kindergarten and K-12 systems. The recommendations are consistent with state and local priorities reflected in the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and in Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs). ESSA gives California an opportunity to drive greater emphasis on the importance of education in the early years and make progress in meeting school readiness goals, especially for children from low-income families, English learners and other designated LCFF subgroups.

Early learning is clearly acknowledged throughout ESSA and state and local agencies can, or are required to, incorporate early education programs in their implementation of key titles and provisions. We respectfully request that as you consider the important decisions before you on ESSA you initiate three practical steps:

1. Incorporate, where appropriate, early learning opportunities outlined in ESSA into the state's implementation plan;
2. Disseminate a Dear Colleague letter to Local Education Agencies (LEA) and early childhood providers to increase awareness of early learning opportunities in ESSA and how these opportunities can advance strategies that are aligned to district and county LCAP goals; and
3. Brief the California Practitioners Advisory Group (CPAG) on early learning opportunities in ESSA so that its members have the benefit of this information as they advise the Department of Education and the State Board on ways to proceed with the state plan.

As California develops its plan and conducts stakeholder sessions, as required by law and as critical to ensuring that key decisions are made collaboratively, we strongly encourage you to seek input from a diversity of early education stakeholders, including site directors, teachers, parents, Resource and Referral networks, First Five County Commissions, advocacy and research organizations, and civil rights, family, and community groups.

Below we outline our recommendations to promote early learning and strengthen the pre-kindergarten through grade 3 learning continuum. In addition, in the attached matrix we outline a number of ESSA early learning opportunities that would benefit LEAs, which we encourage you to include in a Dear Colleague letter.

Title I, Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged, Part A

Title I funding represents opportunities for greater local coordination with early childhood programs, for high-quality programs aligned with Head Start performance standards, and for smoothing school transitions for preschool students. Within Title I, we encourage the state to consider the following recommendations:

- Identify and disseminate information on promising practices of alignment of early childhood and K-12 systems, including family engagement, that are already occurring in California to help LEAs and early childhood education providers craft evidence-based programs tailored to local needs.
- Develop and disseminate regulations and/or guidance to help deepen districts' understanding of coordination requirements and the new Head Start performance standards.
- Support and strengthen data infrastructure and practices to enable transfer of children's information and school reports from early education programs to elementary programs, and coordinate with local programs enrolled in California's Quality Rating and Improvement System.
- Identify and include provisions for an early childhood accountability indicator in the state's accountability system.

Title II, Preparing, Training, and Recruiting High-Quality Teachers, Principals, and other School Leaders

Part A: Supporting Effective Instruction

Title II allows the inclusion of early educators and school leaders in state and local professional development plans, and ensures effective literacy instruction for young learners. State agencies may also use Title II funds to update certification and licensing systems. California has provided significant resources to LEAs to support K-12 educator effectiveness and capacity building. However, support for professional development that includes preschool and other pre-kindergarten staff lacks similar support. As a result, efforts are inconsistent and do not have a sustained source of funding. As plans for the use of Title II are crafted, we encourage the state to address opportunities and resources for early learning efforts and to consider the following recommendations:

- Facilitate sharing research-based, effective professional development practices that bring pre-kindergarten through grade 3 teachers, principals, staff, and program leaders together for joint professional learning and collaboration.
- Update and align certification and licensing standards for early childhood educators, including administrators, working with young children from pre-kindergarten through grade 3.
- Direct the maximum allowable grant under the Literacy for All program toward boosting opportunities for literacy for the state's young learners.

Title III, Language Instruction for English Learners and Immigrant Students

Early education provisions in Title III focus on improving school readiness and school transitions for English learners (ELL) and immigrant students, including from early childhood programs to elementary school. Within Title III, we encourage the state to consider the following recommendations:

- Identify the models and best practices to support high-quality early childhood programs for ELLs, including family and community engagement strategies.
- Identify the models and best practices to support ELL transitions from preschool to elementary school, and invest in promising programs at both the state and local levels.

Title IV, 21st Century Schools, Place-Based Early Learning

Title IV includes opportunities to improve the state's early education system through subgrants focused on place-based early learning services and includes a provision targeted to charter schools. Within Title IV, we encourage the state to consider the following recommendations:

- Use the charter school provisions of Title IV to target investments to schools that serve early childhood and elementary school students.
- Support local efforts to invest in evidence-based community learning programs that serve young children and their families, including Promise Neighborhoods and Full-Service Community Schools.

Title IX, Preschool Development Grant

Title IX authorizes \$250 million each fiscal year from 2017 to 2020; representing new opportunities to support strategic planning for high-quality early learning; encourage partnerships to deliver Head Start programs; and to maximize parental choice. In the event that funding becomes available, **we urge the administration to apply for this critical grant to improve the quality of early education programs across the state, and so that California will be eligible for a subsequent renewal grant.**

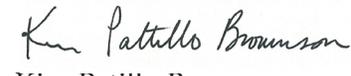
ESSA provides many exciting opportunities for state and LEAs to support systemic improvements to preparing children for success in school and beyond, goals that are also embodied in LCFF.

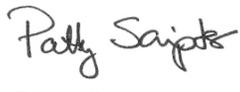
We look forward to continuing this dialogue and working with you to create bright futures for the state's young learners. Thank you for your commitment and leadership in this work.

Sincerely,

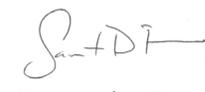

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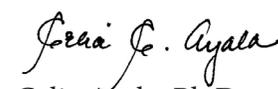

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Attachment to Letter to SBE & SSPI on May 2016 Agenda Item #5. Matrix of Early Learning Opportunities in ESSA

ESSA Title	Early Learning Opportunities the Department of Education should take advantage of	Early Learning Opportunities that should be highlighted for Local Education Agencies
<p>Title I - Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged</p> <p>Part A, Section 1013, Coordination Requirements</p> <p>Part A, Section 1111, State Accountability</p> <p>Part A, Section 1112, Local Educational Agency Title I Plans</p> <p>Part A, Section 1113, Title I Eligible School Attendance Areas</p>	<p>Title I funding represents opportunities for greater local coordination with early childhood programs, to implement and ensure Head Start performance standards are being met, and to smooth school transitions for preschool students.</p> <p>We encourage the state to support and strengthen data infrastructure to enable transfer of children’s information and school reports from early education programs to elementary programs; and coordinate with local programs enrolled in California’s Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS).</p> <p>Title I represents new possibilities for preschool through third grade accountability measures. We encourage the state to identify and include provisions for an early education accountability indicator.¹</p> <p>Not all Local Education Agencies operate Head Start programs and we encourage the state to develop and disseminate regulations and guidance to deepen districts’ understanding of coordination requirements and the new Head Start performance standards.</p> <p>We encourage the state to identify and disseminate information on promising practices on alignment of early childhood and K-12 systems to</p>	<p>Local Education Agencies are required to coordinate with Head Start and may coordinate with other early education programs in order to support and integrate services, including planning for children’s transition to elementary school.</p> <p>Local Education Agencies may reserve funds to invest in early education programs, and must ensure that services comply with Head Start performance standards.</p>

¹ For more information, refer to Elliot Regenstein, Maia Connors and Rio Romero-Jurado, “Valuing the Early Years in State Accountability Systems Under the Every Student Succeeds Act” (Chicago: Ounce of Prevention Fund, 2016)

<p>Part A, Section 1114, Schoolwide Title I Program Plans</p> <p>Part A, Section 1115, Title I Targeted Assistance Schools</p> <p>Part A, Section 1116, Parent and Family Engagement</p>	<p>help Local Education Agencies craft programs tailored to local needs.</p>	<p>School-level programs may reserve a portion of funds to assist preschool children in the transition from early childhood education programs to elementary school programs. (Part A, Section 1114; Part A, Section 1115)</p> <p>Local Education Agencies may also invest in parent and family engagement, including in joint professional development for early educators, parents, and school leaders. (Part A, Section 1116, Parent and Family Engagement)</p>
<p>Teachers and Leaders Title II - Preparing, Training, and Recruiting High-Quality Teachers, Principals, and other School Leaders</p> <p>Part A, Section 2103, Local Uses of Funds</p> <p>Part A, Section 2101, Formula Grants to States</p>	<p>Title II represents new opportunities to include early educators and school leaders in state and local professional development plans, and ensure effective literacy instruction for young learners.</p> <p>We recommend the state facilitate sharing research-based, effective professional development practices that bring pre-kindergarten through grade 3 teachers, principals, staff, and program leaders together for joint professional learning and collaboration.</p> <p>Funds can be used to reform teacher, principal, or other school leader certification and licensing systems to ensure teachers have the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities to be effective. As California currently has no specific licensing standards for teachers and school leaders working with young children pre-K through grade 3, we recommend the state</p>	<p>Local Education Agency professional development plans (Part A, Section 2103) may include early grade teachers, principals, and early care and education staff. Professional development plans can include improving the ability of school leaders to support children through age 8; improving instructional knowledge in the early grades; and joint learning opportunities for early educators to address children’s transition to elementary school, including issues related to school readiness.</p>

<p>Part A, Section 3131, National Professional Development Project</p>	<p>for ELLs through grants to develop and implement effective educational programs, including early childhood programs. Grants are designed to increase English proficiency of ELLs, provide effective professional development to classroom teachers, and engage families of ELLs in children’s learning. We encourage the state to identify the models and best practices to support high-quality early childhood programs for ELLs, including family and community engagement strategies. In addition, we recommend identifying best practices to support ELL transitions from preschool to elementary school, and investing in promising programs at both the state the local levels.</p>	<p>state. Local entities may receive subgrants from the state (Part A, Section 3115) to help ELLs increase their English language proficiency, including coordinating activities with local Head Start, Early Head Start agencies, and other early childhood education providers.</p> <p>Title III includes provisions for states to improve professional development for educators working with ELLs through a new competitive grant program, the <i>National Professional Development Project (Part A, Section 3131)</i>. Federal funding flows from the state’s formula grant to higher education or public-private entities that work with state and local education consortia. Funding may be used to promote school readiness for ELLs and their transition from early childhood programs to elementary school programs.</p>
<p>Title IV - 21st Century Schools</p> <p>Part B, 21st Century Community Learning Centers</p> <p>Part C, Expanding Opportunity Through Quality Charter Schools</p>	<p>Title IV includes opportunities to improve the state’s early education system through subgrants focused on place-based early learning services.</p> <p>Part B authorizes funds for states to establish or expand Community Learning Centers that offer comprehensive after-school academic enrichment programs.</p> <p>The state may support charter schools that serve early childhood and elementary students, for example through contributions to startup charter schools, helping charter schools renovate facilities, and</p>	

Section 9212, Preschool Development Grants

Preschool development grants are awarded to states on a competitive basis. We urge the administration to apply for this critical grant to improve the quality of early education programs across the state, and so that California will be eligible for a subsequent renewal grant.

California must describe how the grant will increase participation of children from low-income and disadvantaged families in high-quality early childhood education and preschool programs, as well as plans to provide statewide technical assistance and disseminate best practices. This could provide an opportunity to coordinate with California's existing state-level network of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS).

The preschool development grant would also afford California the opportunity to conduct a statewide needs assessment of the availability and quality of existing early childhood programs, helping to identify gaps in service and work towards a stronger system of early learning

For more information please contact:

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