



CHILDREN NOW



February 19, 2016

Michael Cohen  
California Department of Finance  
915 L Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Early Education Block Grant

Dear: Mr. Cohen

In order to continue our successful early learning system in a way that optimally serves California’s families and young children, we need to make significant investments in three fundamentally linked priority areas: access, affordability, and quality. We applaud the recent efforts that have been made, including the preschool expansion promise; however, the early learning system is still reeling from the \$1 billion in cuts during the great recession.

Increased Rates as a Priority

Regardless of how our new early learning system is improved and revised, it will be necessary to increase the current state rates. The 2016-17 budget must include per-child funding increases to the Regional Market Rate (RMR) and Standard Reimbursement Rate (SRR) to ensure that services to children are fully funded.

System Reforms Should be Addressed through Policy not Budget Process

We would like to thank the Governor for his willingness to engage in a conversation about improving our early learning and child care system. We welcome the opportunity to have this important conversation. However, we believe the complexities of our early learning and child care system are so great that we cannot improve and revise our system within the short window before the 2016-17 budget is adopted.

Improvements to Planning Process

We do not believe the budget process is the right platform for vetting major system reforms as outlined in the January Budget. We request a truly robust, transparent, and public process that identifies and addresses the barriers LEAs and community based organization face in providing high quality preschool as part of our state’s mixed-delivery child care system.

We recommend the Governor expand the child care planning process outlined in the January Budget to address our comprehensive early learning system for children ages 0-5, and require the Governor's State Advisory Council to develop a multi-year plan to revise our early education system to achieve the principles below. We also recommend adding relevant early education and K-12 representation to the State Advisory Council for this purpose. This process tracks with the comprehensive stakeholder vetting process the Governor used for the Local Control Funding Formula and the Adult Education Block Grant.

Under this process the Governor's State Advisory Council should consider the following principles:

#### PRINCIPLES

- 1) Access must expand: Promote access to high quality pre-kindergarten programs for children the year before they enter kindergarten that address California's diverse population with priority for children from low-income families, dual language learners, and children with exceptional needs, as committed to in the Preschool Promise.
- 2) Recognize and prioritize the developmental needs of 4 years olds by ensuring developmentally appropriate practices are integrated into Transitional Kindergarten programs across the state. Transitional Kindergarten must continue as the first year of a two-year kindergarten program, as an LEA entitlement, with ADA funding, and universal access to this program across the state. Relinquishing state ADA-based funding for this program and limiting access for children to public school programs is a move in the wrong direction.
- 3) Provide a stable and meaningful level of per-child funding to support high quality programs through the state's mixed delivery system that includes LEA and community-based providers, as well as full-day and part-day programs.
- 4) Address resource barriers for LEAs and community based organizations to expanding or launching pre-kindergarten access, including facility and professional preparation, development, and compensation costs.
- 5) Strengthen our state's birth through five quality infrastructure to support expanded early education opportunities, including building on our current investments in Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) and other quality improvement efforts that are inclusive of all providers and care settings; expanding and linking data systems; and aligning our Transitional Kindergarten and pre-kindergarten workforce requirements, while utilizing the current talent in our workforce.
- 6) Address the facilities needs of LEAs and community based organizations and resolve conflicts between Transitional Kindergarten and preschool facilities.
- 7) Create new efficiencies for cross coordination between our mixed delivery system components.
- 8) Address inefficiencies, redundancies, and conflict between state and federal pre-kindergarten funding streams to align high quality standards and allow more effective local-level fund braiding.
- 9) Improve and revise our early learning and care systems through a comprehensive age 0 to 5 approach.
- 10) Develop a strategic transition plan in order to avoid confusion, reduction in services and a decrease in access to children and families. A transition plan with carefully developed timelines

recognizes the realities of implementation on the ground and allows for communication between providers, their families and the communities they serve.

In a time of economic prosperity, it behooves the state to build up the eroded early care and education system and invest in working families and the workforce dedicated to preparing young children for success. The foundation must be fixed before we take on significant restructuring.

Sincerely,

Cc: Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Sub. 1 on Education  
Assembly Budget Sub. 2 on Education Finance  
Senate Budget Sub. 3 on Health & Human Services  
Assembly Budget Sub. 1 on Health & Human Services