



August 22, 2017

CA Assembly Blue Ribbon Commission
on Early Childhood Education
State Capitol, Room 219
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Co-Chairs Garcia and McCarty:

On behalf of First 5, we are pleased to provide our recommendations to guide the California Assembly Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Education (BRC)'s work to improve the early learning system for California's youngest children and their families.

We are encouraged by the creation and convening of the BRC and the opportunity to lay out a long-term, holistic vision for a high-quality early care and education (ECE) system in California. We encourage this Commission to be bold and visionary in building a comprehensive ECE system that meets the diverse needs of our state's infants, preschoolers, and school-age children as well as working parents.

With this task before you, First 5 is ready to partner and support your work. In that spirit, we recommend a set of core principles that your Commission should consider when creating a concrete vision of a comprehensive child care and expanded learning system. These principles promote a child-centered approach to care that prioritizes three critical, fundamentally linked areas: access, affordability, and quality.

Core Principles:

Develop a family access vision that addresses California's diverse population:

- Design a scaffolded plan of action to achieve the goal of increased access.
- Protect and enhance a mixed delivery system that includes Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) and community-based providers to meet the needs of working families.

Address affordability issues for both families and providers:

- Provide a stable and meaningful level of per child funding tied to the market rate of care so it is affordable to families and providers can continue to stay in business. This is critical since child care providers are often small business owners. In addition, ECE programs provide critical economic value to the state by allowing parents to stay in the workforce and benefitting employers because of reduced employee absenteeism.

Protect and encourage quality that maximizes the P-12 system potential:

- Create a system with a comprehensive age scope consisting of infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age children. In line with this goal, the system should protect and maximize the Average Daily Attendance (ADA) funding generated by Transitional Kindergarten (TK) and Expanded Transitional Kindergarten (ETK).
- Recognize quality as a key pillar of ECE to address school readiness and the opportunity gaps that emerge in early childhood and utilize an educational equity lens to target the most vulnerable students.

Recognize the critical role of family engagement in child development:

- Encourage parent participation in all early learning environments. Provide opportunities for regular communication between child care providers and parents regarding a child's developmental, social-emotional, and family strengthening needs.
- Align and link ECE programs with comprehensive child and family support systems, especially to Medi-Cal funded services essential to a child's healthy development.
- Coordinate care and leverage existing child and family support services to ensure scarce resources for ECE are spent wisely and to meet the needs of the "whole-child".

In line with the core principles, we identified the following model components of a high quality early learning system:

Expanded access to ensure a system that works efficiently for children, families and providers:

- Streamlined child care eligibility requirements across all ECE programs to simplify the process for families seeking care, with a "No Wrong Door System" for family intake.
- A statewide consumer education database that includes an integrated child care data system which links together the Centralized Eligibility List (CEL), child-level data, and quality of care information.
- Business tax incentives and other mechanisms to support small ECE business owners and to help reduce the cost burden on providers and families, especially since the majority of CA families, including working and middle-class, pay a high percentage of their take home pay on child care.

Build and develop the ECE workforce pipeline:

- ECE career pathways, professional development opportunities, and adequate compensation.
- Articulation and coordination between the ECE system and K-12 education.
- Streamlined quality standards incorporating Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) elements and a requirement for ECE programs, including TK, to offer age and developmentally appropriate activities.

Improve affordability for families and providers:

- Rate reform that provides adequate funding per child served. The rate reform proposal will also have embedded protections during economic downturns as well as funding growth tied to the cost of care, the unmet need for care, and the regional cost of living across California.
- Optimized public/private partnerships to lower costs and to afford families the flexibility to choose among a wide range of child care providers and services. This enables parents working non-traditional hours access to care.
- Financial incentives across ECE provider settings for participation in the QRIS and achieving and maintaining high QRIS ratings.

Address the needs of the whole child:

- Accountability measures to determine child learning outcomes.
- Adequate supports for the special needs of at-risk populations, including foster care youth, child welfare youth, and Dual Language Learners.
- Linkages between ECE programs and necessary health (developmental, mental, oral, and other health services) and family strengthening systems (home visiting, evidenced-based parent education, etc.).
- Continued trauma-informed training for child care professionals to support the diverse and complex needs of children and families.

We look forward to working with you as the BRC puts a plan forward for a long-term, holistic vision for a high-quality early learning and care system in California. We encourage your visionary leadership in this process to ensure that our youngest children and working families have access to quality, affordable early care and education opportunities.

Sincerely,



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