



AGENDA ITEM: 6

DATE OF MEETING: October 24, 2013

ACTION: _____

INFORMATION: X

TRANSITIONAL KINDERGARTEN EVALUATION

SUMMARY

First 5 California has been approached by the Heising-Simmons and Packard Foundations to partner in the co-funding of an evaluation of California's implementation of Transitional Kindergarten (TK). This evaluation shares similarities with First 5 California's Child Signature Program by proposing to measure the impact of quality in early learning environments on child outcomes.

BACKGROUND

The Kindergarten Readiness Act (SB 1381, Simitian), signed into law by Governor Schwarzenegger in 2010, changes the entry age for Kindergarten from December 2 to September 1 so that children enter Kindergarten at age 5. The law phases in the new age requirement by moving the cut-off date one month each year for three years, beginning in 2011. The law also established Transitional Kindergarten (TK), the first year of a two-year Kindergarten program that is a developmentally appropriate grade to serve younger schoolchildren with birthdays between September and December.

Each year, approximately 120,000 children in California may attend Transitional Kindergarten – if they attend Kindergarten; in California, Kindergarten is not required. For evaluation purposes, these two groups of children n those attending TK and those attending traditional Kindergarten – can be considered cohorts experiencing differential exposure to years of schooling with potentially different effects on their outcomes as students.

A proposal discussed by the Heising-Simons Foundation, Packard Foundation, and First 5 California outlines the possibility of evaluating approximately 40 school districts throughout the state, encompassing more than 160 schools and 3,300 students. The evaluation is envisioned to focus on three sets of research questions:

Short-Term Impacts of TK

- Does TK participation improve Kindergarten readiness in the domains of early literacy/language, mathematics, and social emotional skills?
- Are impacts of TK sustained through the end of Kindergarten?

- Does the impact of TK differ across cohorts?
- Do student outcomes vary by child characteristics, such as gender, English learner status, or poverty status?
- Do student outcomes vary by district characteristics?

Quality of TK and Relationship to Student Outcomes

- How do TK programs fare on measures of classroom quality?
- Does TK quality change across cohorts?
- How do student outcomes vary with TK classroom quality?
- How do student outcomes vary by program structure, such as stand-alone versus combination classrooms?

Longer-Term Impacts of TK

- Are the impacts of TK sustained through the early elementary school years? (This is a possible later phase of the study.)

Benefits of First 5 California's Participation

Results of this evaluation will:

- Help to bridge early education and care with the K-12 system in California.
- Inform the Administration, Legislature, California Department of Education, First 5 California, and First 5 county commissions, school districts, and the early learning and care field about Transitional Kindergarten's benefits, challenges, and alignment with early education and care efforts.
- Inform future federal, state, and local program efforts.

The study is proposed for four years at a cost of \$7.4 million. Heising-Simons would be the major funder, with Packard and First 5 California participating as secondary funders. Heising-Simons Foundation, Packard Foundation, and First 5 California continue to discuss the scope and cost of this evaluation.

Staff proposes to bring this item back to the Commission in January 2014 for action.