



AGENDA ITEM: 6

DATE OF MEETING: January 23, 2014

ACTION: X

INFORMATION: _____

TRANSITIONAL KINDERGARTEN STUDY

SUMMARY

First 5 California staff requests Commission approval of \$1.5 million to fund a co-partnered evaluation of California's implementation of Transitional Kindergarten (TK) during the three-year period, January 2014 through December 2016.

First 5 California has been invited by the Heising-Simons Foundation to partner in the funding of an evaluation of California's implementation of TK. The Packard Foundation also will partner with Heising-Simons for this evaluation. 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 proposed evaluation supports developments in TK that are the focus of recent legislative activity:

- 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 the 2012-13 school year. The law also established TK, the first year of a two-year kindergarten program that is a developmentally appropriate grade to serve younger schoolchildren whose fifth birthday is between October 2 and December 2 for the 2013-14 school year, and September 2 and December 2 for the 2014-15 school year and thereafter.
- On January 6, 2014, Senate Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg introduced the Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2014 (SB 837, Steinberg). If passed into law, over a five-year period, access to TK will be expanded to include all four-year-olds in California.

Benefits of First 5 California's participation include:

- Addressing the relationship between quality of teacher-child interaction with outcomes for young children in the domains of language, math, and social-

emotional development. These are the same themes addressed by the Child Signature Program.

- Helping to bridge early care and education with the K-12 system in California by informing 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 TK's benefits, challenges, and alignment with early education and care efforts.
- Informing future federal, state, and local program efforts.

Under the current Kindergarten Readiness Act, up to 120,000 children in California may attend Transitional Kindergarten – if they attend kindergarten; in California, kindergarten is not required.

The study is proposed for three years at an approximate cost of \$7.4 million. Heising-Simons will be the major funder contributing up to \$4.4 million, with Packard and First 5 California participating as secondary funders at \$1.5 million each.

EVALUATION DESIGN

The evaluation 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 design is based on following cohorts of children. Two groups of children – those attending TK and those attending traditional kindergarten – will experience differential exposure to years of schooling with potentially different effects on their outcomes as students. Each cohort of children entering school will include a treatment group (i.e., TK attendees) and a control group (i.e., traditional kindergarten attendees).

Key aspects of the evaluation plan include the following:

- Data collected for each cohort will include classroom observations, child assessments, parent surveys, and teacher surveys.
- Data collection instruments will include validated instruments to assess classroom quality and child outcomes in the domains of language, math, and social-emotional development.
- The entire research protocol will be submitted by the evaluation contractor to an Institutional Review Board for approval.
- Final reports by the evaluation contractor will be made available to the public.

The evaluation will focus on three sets of research questions:

(1) 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?

(2) 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?

(3) Longer-Term Impacts of TK

- Are the impacts of TK sustained through the early elementary school years? (This question may be addressed in a possible later phase of the study.)

FISCAL SUMMARY

The Heising-Simons Foundation and Packard Foundation recently awarded contracts to the American Institutes of Research (AIR) for this evaluation. AIR is experienced with evaluation related to early care and education in California. Under contract with the California Department of Education, AIR provided a meta-analysis of the state of early care and education in California in support of a comprehensive early learning plan (AIR 2012). In December, 2013, the California Department of Education awarded AIR the contract for evaluation of the Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS), 2012-2015.

Because a contractor has already been identified by the project's funding partners, it is possible that First 5 California will pursue a non-competitive contract with AIR, subject to approval by the Department of General Services. However, the means of expending First

5 California funds for this project may change depending on determinations of the Department of General Services. First 5 California will collaborate with the Heising-Simons Foundation and Packard Foundation to identify and fund portions of the evaluation that are permissible under state government contracting rules. Letters from both foundations, inviting partnership in the funding of this evaluation, are included as attachments to this agenda item.

FISCAL IMPACT

Pending commissioner approval, and identification of appropriate expenditure methods, First 5 California expects to contribute \$500,000 during each calendar year of this project (2014, 2015, and 2016). However, actual expenditures for this project each calendar year, within the total of \$1.5 million, may depend on coordination with the Heising-Simons Foundation and Packard Foundation.

The expenditure of these funds will be allocated to the Research and Development account.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

First 5 California staff recommends the Commission authorize \$1.5 million in funding for the proposed TK evaluation during the three-year period, January 2014 through December 2016, according to the evaluation plans and co-funding partnerships described herein.

REFERENCES

AIR. 2012. *Condition of Children Birth to Age Five and Status of Early Childhood Services in California: Synthesis of Recent Research*. Prepared for the California Department of Education, Child Development Division, by the American Institutes for Research: URL:

http://www.earlylearningsystems.org/files/2069_CCELP_Meta_Analysis_Report.pdf

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Heising-Simons Foundation: Letter of January 2, 2014
- B. Packard Foundation: Letter of January 10, 2014



January 2, 2014

Ms. Camille Maben
Executive Director
First 5 California
California Children & Families Commission
2389 Gateway Oaks Drive, Suite 260
Sacramento, CA 95833

Dear Camille:

In late November 2013, our Board approved a grant for partial support of a statewide evaluation of California's transitional kindergarten program, to be conducted by the American Institutes for Research (AIR). As you know, the Heising-Simons Foundation, with the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, supported the evaluation of the first year of implementation of transitional kindergarten in California, but this new grant represents a commitment toward an evaluation of the program that will look at how transitional kindergarten is benefiting children (i.e., an evaluation of the outcomes of transitional kindergarten, not just its implementation). I am writing both to tell you about our commitment to this evaluation and to invite your partnership and support.

We believe that this forthcoming evaluation is very important. With approval of the Kindergarten Readiness Act (SB 1381), California created a new year of public education for those four-year-olds with fall birthdays – a very large change in our public education system. Transitional kindergarten may serve as an important bridge for preschool-age children progressing to the K-12 education system. But it is important to make sure that the program is being implemented well and that children are indeed benefiting both academically and social-emotionally. And that is exactly what the AIR evaluation will tell us.

AIR has designed a methodologically rigorous evaluation of the transitional kindergarten program. As such, it will be able to answer questions about the quality of services as well as the benefits to children. It will suggest what additional support services, if any, are needed to address challenges in implementation. It also will lay the foundation for long-term evaluation of transitional kindergarten, such that we will be able to trace the effects of participation in transitional kindergarten on children's long-term school achievement, should we choose to do so. Finally, it will represent one of the first rigorous studies of a statewide early childhood education intervention in California – which

should have implications both for California and for the nation. AIR will disseminate results of its evaluation widely, via full reports and issue briefs.

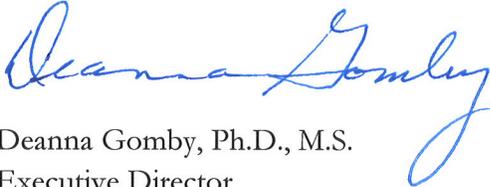
Our Board has approved \$1.5 million for the first year of the planned 3-year evaluation, and we will invite AIR to submit proposals in each of the next two years (2014 and 2015), so that, if our Board approves each of those subsequent grant requests, our commitment to the outcome evaluation will total \$4 million.

AIR's proposed evaluation budget over the planned 3-year evaluation is approximately \$7.4 million, so our Foundation cannot cover the entire cost itself. We are therefore inviting partners to join in supporting the evaluation. We understand that the David and Lucile Packard Foundation will be considering support for the evaluation in early 2014. We would be honored if First 5 California also would consider supporting the evaluation.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about the Foundation's commitment to this evaluation or the evaluation itself.

Best wishes for a wonderful holiday season and a very happy 2014.

Sincerely,



Deanna Gomby, Ph.D., M.S.
Executive Director

The David and Lucile Packard Foundation

January 10, 2014

Camille Maben
Executive Director
First 5 California
California Children & Families Commission
2389 Gateway Oaks Drive, Suite 260
Sacramento, CA 95833

Dear Camille:

As you know, California's Transitional Kindergarten (TK) program created a new year of public education for the state's youngest kindergarteners and serves as an important bridge from preschool to K-12. In 2012, along with the Heising-Simons Foundation, we supported the evaluation of the first year of implementation of TK, conducted by American Institutes for Research (AIR).

Following AIR's initial study, we plan to join the Heising-Simons Foundation in supporting the second phase of AIR's work, which is to conduct the quality and outcomes study of California's TK program. This study will be very important as it is one of the first rigorous evaluations in the state to assess the quality of TK and its impacts on student learning. We will all learn a tremendous amount from this evaluation that could potentially inform future support of and investments in early learning in the state.

We have recommended \$550,000 to our Foundation Board for the TK evaluation for this year, and plan to recommend an additional \$500,000 for each of the following two years, for a total recommendation of \$1,550,000.

As Deanna Gomby outlined the specifics in her letter, this study is quite large in cost and size, and its success could only be achieved through partnerships. We invite you to join the Packard Foundation and the Heising-Simons Foundation in supporting this significant work.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about our commitment to this evaluation.

Best regards,



Meera Mani
Director
Children, Families, and Communities