



CHILDREN NOW



July 8, 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: State Board of Education Meeting July 2016 Agenda Items #2 and #4

Dear President Kirst and Superintendent Torlakson:

Thank you for your continued leadership in development of a coherent system of local, state and federal accountability and continuous improvement. Your work is laying the foundation for a system that will build capacity and support California's students, educators, parents and other stakeholders in addressing gaps in achievement and promoting opportunity for students. The issues before you reflect the intersection of key implementation and planning decisions related to the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) evaluation rubrics and the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). We are writing to urge you to take this opportunity to promote systemic approaches to early learning and the prekindergarten through grade 3 continuum and to recognize a place for this conversation to be included as the foundation of the state system is established.

Early learning as part of California's coherent system of accountability and continuous improvement

The holistic approach of the evaluation rubrics¹ is echoed in provisions of ESSA calling for accountability measures to include qualitative elements as well as academic measures of student performance.² Early childhood education programs have deep experience and focus on children's development in areas of social-emotional, physical development, linguistic, cognitive and executive function.³ Prekindergarten programs also have longstanding experience engaging parents as partners in their children's development and learning. This experience can inform and benefit school, district and county efforts to prevent/narrow persistent achievement gaps and equip children with skills, knowledge and capacity for success in elementary school and beyond.

¹ California Education Code Section 52064.5.

² ESSA, Section 1111(c)(4)(B) (School Quality Indicator)

³ For example, see the elements of California's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) and the domains identified in the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP), used by California state preschool programs (Management Bulletin 16-06. CDE Early Education and Support Division).

Achievement gaps begin early; high quality early learning experiences can play a significant role in reducing or preventing these gaps as children enter elementary school. The boost to children's development and school readiness will be sustained through better alignment of PreK – grade 3 teaching and learning. Your decisions on the evaluation rubrics and elements of the ESSA state plan will set the platform for conversations and efforts at the local level that will improve coordination, alignment and quality of early childhood experiences for California's children. Although state assessments begin at grade 3 and the LCFF evaluation rubrics identify grade 3 English Language Arts and Mathematics as state indicators,⁴ efforts to ensure children are learning and on the path for success must begin before they reach 3rd grade.

We urge you to take this opportunity to develop policies, practices and tools that will promote high quality early learning experiences for children. A prime way to do this is to use the LCFF evaluation rubrics and the state plan for ESSA to create and encourage platforms for local conversations, planning and investment of resources to strengthen early learning and better align PreK – grade 3 efforts. Your leadership in this space will help address the disconnect between early childhood and K12 systems and equip districts with key considerations to more effectively leverage early learning to improve student outcomes.

Below we offer specific recommendations on July Agenda Items on the LCFF evaluation rubrics and the ESSA state plan.

Recommendations on Item 2: LCFF Evaluation Rubrics

Early learning practices, measures and the experience of early childhood educators are applicable and can meaningfully inform your decisions on LCFF Evaluation Rubrics as they relate to State Priorities of Pupil Achievement (Priority 4), Pupil Engagement (Priority 5), School Climate (Priority 6), and Parent Engagement (Priority 3).⁵ In brief:

- Pupil achievement: Compelling research shows that high quality early learning can boost children's readiness for and success as they enter elementary school. Although the LCFF indicator and the ESSA element focus on 3rd grade English Language Arts and Mathematics, schools and districts will need to examine what is happening before children are in 3rd grade to meaningfully determine what changes to make. The evaluation rubrics and model practice materials should encourage such examination.
- Pupil Engagement: Research has shown that attendance and chronic absence in PreK and kindergarten can impact attendance patterns in later grades and impact children's social-emotional development and achievement.⁶
- School climate: As described in the agenda materials, school climate will include examination of children's social emotional development. This is an area in which PreK programs have deep experience.
- Parent Engagement: PreK programs engage with parents as partners in children's learning and can build a foundation for continued parent engagement as children enter elementary school.

⁴ "State indicators" were previously described as "key indicators." State Board of Education July Agenda Item 2, p 1.

⁵ Children Now (2013). Making the case for early childhood. Available at http://www.childrennow.org/files/4414/2567/6393/CN_ELD-LCFF-Primer_2014.pdf

⁶ See for example, CEELo, Pre-K Attendance – Why It's Important and How to Support It (2016) http://ceelo.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/ceelo_fastfact_state_ece_attendance_2016_02_01_final_for_web.pdf; and Attendance Works, Attendance in the Early Grades: Why it Matters for Reading. <http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Attendance-in-the-Early-Grades.pdf> (2013); and Absences Add Up: How School Attendance Influences Student Success (2014). http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Absences-Add-Up_September-3rd-2014.pdf

Model practices and the Selected Research and Evidence-Based Resources should include explicit references and examples that encompass efforts at PreK and those aimed at strengthening the PreK - grade 3 learning continuum.

- For example, in the section on Priority 4, Pupil Achievement Indicators for Grades 3 - 8 English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics, we encourage additional statements and links to resources that address model practices for looking at students work before grade 3 and alignment of teaching and learning expectations.
- The model practices should promote considerations and understanding of what tools are used and/or available to assess children's kindergarten readiness, language acquisition, healthy development, and other areas of interest such as family involvement and transitions to kindergarten and transitional kindergarten.⁷

The Workgroup on the school climate indicator that is being formed by CDE and the California Comprehensive Center at WestEd should include practitioners, academics and other experts who have worked in early childhood education.⁸

Recommendations on Item 4: ESSA State Plan

We have attached a copy of the May 6, 2016 letter outlining numerous elements throughout ESSA in Titles I, II, III, IV and IX that recognize early learning and recommendations on steps the state can take to address these.

In addition, here we note that along with providing guidance on possible options, the state plan must describe how the state will support local educational agencies and schools that choose to use Title I funds to support early childhood programs and must provide information on effective parent and family engagement strategies.⁹ We recommend that the Board and the Superintendent begin now to engage early childhood leaders, experts and practitioners to identify and develop effective support for local educational agencies and to create linkages with the support that state entities and county offices of education will offer as part of their work with districts and schools. Without an effective system of supports and resources LEAs may further shy away from using Title I funds for early childhood programs, which has been the trend in California.

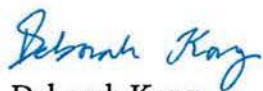
Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to continuing this dialogue and working with you to create bright futures for the state's young learners.

⁷ Preparing All Students for College Career, Life and Leadership in the 21st Century. Superintendent's Advisory Task Force on Accountability and Continuous Improvement. Appendix A. Early Learning: The First Step in A Continuously Improving System. pp. 35 – 40. (May 2016).

⁸ Memorandum to Members of the State Board of Education from State Superintendent, on Process to Identify Options for School Climate Surveys and a Measure of English Learner Proficiency for the Local, State and Federal Accountability and Continuous Improvement System. June 27, 2016. Attachment 1, pp 1 to 3. (June 27, 2016).

⁹ Title I Sec. 111(g)(1)(A) and (g)(2)(F). For a list of ESSA Early Childhood Policy Mandates for state plans see ESSA and Early Childhood Education Opportunities for State Leadership from the Council of Chief State School Officers. Available at http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/2016/ESSA/CCSSO_ESSA_ECE_Guide.pdf

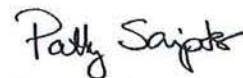
Sincerely,



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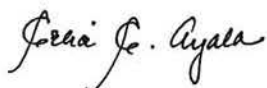
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