

TO: California State Advisory Council on Early Learning and Care  
FROM: California Comprehensive Early Learning Plan Planning Team  
RE: Status of California Comprehensive Early Learning Plan  
DATE: January 14, 2013

This memorandum includes a draft Summary Outline of the California Comprehensive Early Learning Plan (CCELP). This draft is intended to provide a basis for discussion at the State Advisory Council meeting on January 30, and to allow for the continued solicitation of feedback from stakeholders around the state.

The Summary Outline draws heavily on a stakeholder engagement process that included key informant interviews, surveys, four regional stakeholder workshops, and more than 50 locally and virtually organized meetings. Almost a thousand stakeholders responded to the surveys, and more than 1400 stakeholders participated in the regional workshops and meetings. A complete summary of the stakeholder engagement process is provided at <http://www.glenpricegroup.com/ccelp/mainreport>

The stakeholder engagement process was substantially informed by an American Institutes for Research (AIR) report released in August 2012 entitled *Condition of Children Birth to Age Five and Status of Early Childhood Services in California: Synthesis of Recent Research*. This meta-analysis, prepared as part of the CCELP process, draws on and organizes the extensive base of research and policy analyses conducted in California in recent years.

At the January 30 Council meeting, it is our hope that the Council and attending stakeholders will provide feedback on this draft Plan - particularly on the policy directions and action steps it recommends. We will also solicit feedback on-line about this draft, and welcome all public input. Based on that input, we plan to produce a near-complete first draft by the end of February or early March, which will then itself be available for public comment. We then plan to produce an updated full draft based on those public comments for consideration by the Council in late April. We also welcome the Council's feedback and public input on this proposed schedule.

An overview of the Stakeholder Engagement report and process, and the AIR meta-analysis is included for reference.

## California Comprehensive Early Learning Plan: Draft Summary Outline

### I. The Purpose of the Plan

The primary purpose of the plan is to propose a design for a high-quality birth-to-five system in California that provides all children with the knowledge and skills they need to achieve long-term success. This is not about closing the achievement gap; this is about preventing the achievement gap from ever occurring. The plan identifies some critical policy areas that the state needs to address, articulates a long-term vision that ties together the work in those areas, and provides a set of practical recommendations for achieving that long-term vision. In doing so, the plan must fulfill the requirements of the federal Head Start Act, which details certain issues on which the Council must make recommendations.

Another major purpose of the plan is to bring the California early learning community together around a common agenda. That process already has begun through the stakeholder engagement process, and hopefully will continue in the response to the draft report and ultimately in implementing the final report.

The report will be submitted to the federal government in the spring of 2013, an opportune time for early learning in California. There is growing understanding within the California early learning community that it is time to move into a next-generation system that leads to better outcomes for children - particularly those children least likely to succeed in school without a high-quality early learning experience. This Plan is designed to help stakeholders understand what that system could look like and what steps should be considered.

### II. Why This Plan Matters

#### A. *The Importance of Early Learning*

Significant research shows that the first three years of life are critical to long-term brain development, and that the quality of a child's environment has a meaningful impact on brain development.

The achievement gap does not suddenly materialize as children continue through school (California Early Learning Quality System Advisory Committee 2010). Rather, disparities in early vocabulary growth between children from low socioeconomic status (SES) and high SES families can manifest themselves in children as early as 16 months of age (Hart & Risley 1995). Differences in language, social, and pre-mathematics skills are already apparent when children enter kindergarten, and the children who start behind tend to stay behind (Cannon & Karoly 2007). This early achievement gap is a critical issue for educators, as language proficiency and early literacy development are strong indicators for later school success. And the gap is not just about content knowledge; it is also about mastering the skills needed for long-term school success.

The child's family is and always should be the most important contributor to his or her development. But families often need support, both in mastering the art of raising a child at home and in choosing a rich and affordable environment for their children when those children are cared for out of the home. In California, at least three-quarters of preschool age children and just under half of infants and toddlers are already in some form of out-of-home care (Anthony and Muenchow 2010), and ultimately, all of these children will enter the K-12 education system. Early learning programs should be designed with that future in mind. Further, families should not have to choose between their need to work and their child's need to learn and grow.

For the state to receive the best return on its investment in early learning, it should take better account of what children will ultimately need to succeed in school and beyond - a system that meets the dual goals of support for children's learning and families' self-sufficiency. Research shows that investing in low-quality programs does not lead to improved long-term outcomes.

### *B. The Educational Trajectory of California's Children*

In 2010, California was home to approximately 2.77 million children aged birth to five. Approximately 1.2 million of those children lived in families with a family income less than 200% of the federal poverty level. By 2020, the California Department of Finance projects that the state will have a total birth-to-five population of 3.24 million - roughly a 17% increase.

Between 35% and 55% of California's second and third graders are not achieving grade-level proficiency in core subjects, with even larger gaps for socioeconomically disadvantaged groups, including Latinos and African-Americans, dual language learners, students whose parents have less than a postsecondary education, and students with low family incomes (CDE 2013). These achievement differences have early roots. Kindergartners who enter school behind are likely to remain behind as they move through the education system (Cannon and Karoly 2007). Early gaps in school readiness that are evident in kindergarten are mirrored in third grade standardized test results (Annie E. Casey Foundation).

### *C. Existing Early Learning Programs*

California already provides a wide array of services for children and their families prior to school entry. This report focuses on early education and care programs, consistent with the federal statutory mission of the State Advisory Council. California has a more diverse mix of preschool and child care programs than most states, and many of its programs have struggled with both access and quality.

Even before the budget cuts of the last few years, California preschool and child care programs were not reaching many eligible children, particularly infants and toddlers. Prior to the budget cuts in 2008, subsidized programs served 34% of the eligible 3 year olds, 65% of eligible 4 year olds, and just 8% of eligible infants and toddlers (Karoly

2012). While most infants and toddlers in center-based care are in programs with a developmental focus, very few are in center-based or licensed care of any type (Anthony and Muenchow 2010). With regard to quality, based on measures of teacher-child interaction and the instructional quality in the program, only 13% of preschool children from low-income families are enrolled in early learning programs of sufficient quality to promote the kind of thinking skills associated with school readiness (Karoly 2009).

California's licensing standards are designed to protect children's health and safety, not to promote school readiness or child development (LAO 2007). Moreover, the state's licensing standards and enforcement of requirements are among the weakest in the nation (NACCRRRA 2011). California's Title 5 standards for state-contracted programs do focus on quality and are considerably more stringent than the basic licensing requirements, but still rank lower than preschool standards in many other states, especially in the area of teacher educational qualifications. California's voucher-based programs permit the greatest range possible in parental choice but do not link to quality standards to the extent of many other states (Anthony & Muenchow 2010).

The deficiencies in state standards, and the lack of resources on a statewide basis to support improvements, has led to a series of programmatic efforts to augment the quality of state-contracted programs - thereby improving quality for portions of the population in certain parts of the state. Evaluations of some of these overlay initiatives, such as the First 5 California Power of Preschool (now Child Signature) Programs, have shown that these initiatives have been quite successful. In many instances, adopting these overlays - e.g., higher program standards accompanied by relatively modest supplemental resources system-wide - could substantially improve California's national standing in having high-quality program standards.

Each of California's preschool and child care funding streams were designed for different specific purposes and have some strengths to build upon, but stakeholders have questioned the need to have so many funding streams with different requirements. Stakeholders are frustrated with the incoherence of California's early learning system, including the lack of coordination and consistency at the state level. In a state where local decision-making is a deeply held value, the state could serve its communities well by creating greater system-wide quality and consistency among its early learning programs - which could make it much easier for local communities to implement programs in ways that maximize the benefits to children and families. Done correctly, a state system empowers local decision-making rather than stifling it.

It is also important to emphasize the role of the federally funded Head Start program. Head Start serves more than 100,000 children in California, and Head Start leaders and providers play a critical role in early childhood policy at the state and local level. While Head Start is independent of the state, it is an essential partner to the work of the Plan. Head Start partners with the state through the Head Start Collaboration Office at the California Department of Education, and improved state systems will

have a positive impact on Head Start providers and the children they serve. For example, Head Start and Early Head Start are one of the primary building blocks for the First 5 Power of Preschool/Child Signature Programs, among the only programs in California that meet nationally recommended standards for early learning and care of sufficient quality to affect the trajectory of disadvantaged children.

#### *D. California's Diverse Population*

Ultimately, the California early learning system must recognize that all children and families have different needs and resources, so that the system can provide the right kinds of opportunities for all children rather than trying to make one size fit all.

Research shows and stakeholders recognize that certain children need more help than others, or require specialized help to address a particular need. Beyond the needs of children whose families have low incomes, other specialized needs include:

- *Infants and Toddlers.* California's youngest learners are its most underserved, and it is generally more expensive to provide quality services to them than to older preschoolers. However, the research is clear that quality services for these children make the greatest long-term impact (Heckman 2007).
- *Dual Language Learners.* In 2010, 36% of California's kindergarteners were classified as Dual Language Learners, living in homes where the primary language spoken is not English. These bilingual children represent a huge asset to the state in today's global economy, but cultivating their growth in two (or more) languages requires specialized expertise in the early childhood workforce that is not always available.
- *Children with Special Needs.* One of the major benefits early childhood education can provide is a reduction in long-term special education expenses. Those benefits are maximized when the special needs of children are both identified and addressed as early as possible - which, again, requires expertise and resources that are not always made available to families.

#### *E. California's Part in the National Early Learning Movement*

Roughly 13% of the young children in the United States live in California, and California accordingly plays a critical role in the national effort to provide high-quality early childhood education. Its statewide efforts play out against a larger backdrop that includes substantial federal and local funding.

At the federal level, the 2007 reauthorization of Head Start made an explicit recognition of the leading role that states play in supporting early learning, by requiring states to maintain state advisory councils. More recently, the Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge competition has provided unprecedented support to states - including California - that are committed to advancing early learning policy in several key respects, including through the improvement of program quality. California is now one of 14 states working to improve policy through the Challenge, and was one of nine Phase I winners. California's size gives it real power to influence

federal-level policy, so that if its state-level goals require federal-level policy change, it has a better chance than any other state of driving that change.

### III. The Needs of Children and Families

#### A. *Supporting Family Choice*

Family choice is a deeply held value in the California early learning system. For family choice to truly lead to good outcomes for children, however, families need (1) good information about what each choice entails, and (2) more than one high-quality choice that actually meets children's needs. The state plays a critical role in ensuring that parents have information about their choices and that they have good choices available.

Families are not thinking about a statewide system or funding streams or regulatory agencies; they are thinking about their own children and the programs that serve them directly. They need access to high-quality settings that meet the needs of children in building their knowledge and skill base - programs that build on the strengths of children and families. Family options should include a variety of settings, including school-based, center-based, and home-based; different communities and different families have different needs, and the system should acknowledge that fact and be built on it. Both home- and center-based programs also need to be culturally and linguistically responsive to the needs of all families and children.

Families also need information to evaluate their options. Many parents may be unaware of the opportunities for them and their children and better and accessible information on the attributes and quality of the programs is a key to informing parental decision-making. Given that families participate in early childhood programs and services voluntarily, informing parents is one of the best ways to ensure that they take advantage of these services.

#### B. *The Services Families Need*

To meet the needs of families will require a suite of services, some of which currently exist and some of which do not. Participants in the public engagement process emphasized the importance of a coherent system, one integrated appropriately with K-12 education. Stakeholders also articulate a high value on both access and quality, recognizing that they should be pursued in tandem rather than as competing goals.

Two major needs of families are (1) for their children to enter kindergarten ready to succeed, and (2) for their children to have sufficient hours of care while adults are working. California's existing array of programs includes multiple programs designed to help meet each of those needs, but no system-wide effort to meet both needs at the same time.

Some specific needs that have been identified include:

- For expectant mothers, high-quality pre-natal care.
- For infants and toddlers, high-quality home visiting and Early Head Start or Early Head Start-like programs, along with better child care (in a variety of settings) that is more than just care but also assists with knowledge and skill-building.
- For 3-5 year olds, a high-quality preschool that provides a strong educational experience, and sufficient hours of high-quality care to meet the needs of working families.
- Wraparound family and health supports that connect to early education and care programs.
- Transitional kindergarten, kindergarten, and early elementary programs that build on the practices of the best early learning providers (including attention to the full range of child needs).

No program should be just a place or a person to whom children can be handed off; families should be partners, actively engaged with the program about what is best for their children. Both providers and parents highlighted this need in the stakeholder engagement process. They want personnel to be strong partners with families, which may require training and support.

In addition, families desire policies that acknowledge the reality of the employment market. California's landmark Paid Family Leave legislation has helped parents of babies bond with their newborns, lengthen the period of breastfeeding, and postpone the use of expensive care (Zigler, Muenchow, and Ruhm 2012). However, many families are still unaware of California's leave program, and with better information would take more advantage of the program - having a positive impact on children without requiring additional state budget appropriations. Another critical policy area for families is the frequency of program eligibility determinations based on income; for the many families where adult employment situations change frequently, children are often churned in and out of programs, creating administrative burdens for the state and significant disruptions in service and learning opportunities for vulnerable children.

#### **IV. The Infrastructure of the System**

Rather than focus on the needs or design of any individual programs, the Plan focuses on the attributes of a successful system, comprised of quality programs. Where existing programs do not contribute to achieving the goals of the system, they should be replaced or redesigned in a manner that allows them to contribute. The Plan identifies some of the critical elements of a successful system, adapted from the organization used in the meta-analysis and stakeholder engagement process. There is widespread recognition that all of these pieces ultimately must fit together, and that alignment and coordination among programs is critical. The Planning Team has divided these elements into *Key System Drivers* and *Essential Elements*.

A. *Key System Drivers*

The Plan describes four key system drivers, which are broad areas of change that have ripple effects on all other elements of the system. The key system drivers are (1) Access to Quality Early Learning and Care, (2) Program-Level Continuous Improvement, (3) A Great Early Childhood Workforce, and (4) Family Engagement. These four elements are interrelated. After all, access to quality early learning and care means access to a quality program - and quality programs are those that are continuously improving their ability to meet the needs of children and families. The most important element of a successful program is great people, and those people work closely with families as partners in the child's learning and development.

1. Access to Quality Early Learning and Care

The stakeholder engagement process identified access as its top overall value and one of California's greatest weaknesses. Stakeholders also emphasize the importance of access to *quality* programs, recognizing that existing programs should be improved in quality.

The Council is required by federal law to address access:

- [THE COUNCIL SHALL] CONDUCT A PERIODIC STATEWIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT CONCERNING THE QUALITY AND AVAILABILITY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES FOR CHILDREN FROM BIRTH TO SCHOOL ENTRY, INCLUDING AN ASSESSMENT OF THE AVAILABILITY OF HIGH-QUALITY PRE-KINDERGARTEN SERVICES FOR LOW-INCOME CHILDREN IN THE STATE.<sup>1</sup>
- [THE COUNCIL SHALL] DEVELOP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCREASING THE OVERALL PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN IN EXISTING FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL CHILD CARE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMS, INCLUDING OUTREACH TO UNDERREPRESENTED AND SPECIAL POPULATIONS.

The approach taken in this Plan to assess needs was to look at the actual needs of families, children, and communities, and to recommend changes to how California funds early learning that will better meet the needs of families and children.

- [THE COUNCIL SHALL] MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS IN STATE EARLY LEARNING STANDARDS AND UNDERTAKE EFFORTS TO DEVELOP HIGH-QUALITY COMPREHENSIVE EARLY LEARNING STANDARDS, AS APPROPRIATE.

California's early learning standards (known in the early learning field as Foundations) are highly regarded, and in the Early Learning Challenge, California's narrative about its standards scored higher than any other state's. Stakeholders identify this as the greatest strength of California's system. However, the implementation of these standards system-wide is uneven and weak, and improving that implementation will be a major element of improving access to quality.

Another key element of access to quality is facilities, which were identified as a significant weakness for the state in the stakeholder engagement process. Recent

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<sup>1</sup> Text in small caps is taken directly from 42 U.S.C. 9837b(b)(1)(D), which itemizes the responsibilities of all state advisory councils.

studies have shown that facility construction quality and design is critical to healthy development) and that common characteristics of California's aging early learning facilities threaten children's health and should be addressed (Procio, Sussman & Gilman 2004; Children's Investment Fund 2011; Bradman 2012). Stakeholders recommend including early learning in statewide facilities bonds as a strategy for ensuring that more children are in quality environments for their early learning experience.

## 2. Program-Level Continuous Improvement

Improving program quality is not a one-time or static event. Instead, it is a process of continuous improvement in which all programs must engage. Fortunately, California has undertaken major work focused on creating a process of continuous quality improvement. The 2010 *Dream Big* report prepared by the statutorily mandated California Early Learning Quality Improvement System Advisory Committee and the California Department of Education proposed a statewide framework for continuous quality improvement. More recently, California's Early Learning Challenge grant is supporting regional consortia that are developing Quality Rating and Improvement Systems with evidence-based common elements from a Quality Continuum Framework.

California is committed to a regional approach to continuous quality improvement. Ultimately, all early learning programs should be required to participate in a continuous improvement process - one that has benchmarked tiers of quality rating and action plans for improvement, with resources tied to improvement plans. Progress on improvements to program quality and related child outcomes needs to be measurable. The Challenge consortia are drawing lessons from multiple programs (including Head Start and First 5's Power of Preschool) and focusing on quality elements like ratios and group size, teaching and learning practices, family involvement, staff education and training, and program leadership. The comprehensive planning process surfaced other potential elements of a quality rating system, and the implementation of the Challenge grants undoubtedly will yield new lessons.

California's local continuous improvement efforts provide a framework for a statewide continuous improvement effort. The lessons from Early Learning Challenge implementation - and other local quality improvement efforts - can inform the use of state funding streams, so that they are designed to support improved quality at the local level. Already common themes have emerged among local quality rating efforts that could inform a state-level analysis of funding streams, based on evolving experiences and research at both the state and local level.

## 3. A Great Early Childhood Workforce

Research shows that early education teachers with higher levels of education and training (and appropriate compensation) provide higher-quality classroom environments that support child outcomes, in both center- and home-based care (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns 2001; Barnett 2004; Loeb, Fuller, Kagan, & Carroll 2004;

Bueno, Darling-Hammond, & Gonzalez 2010). Because of its impact on child outcomes, this area was the second priority of stakeholders after increasing access. Both preparation and ongoing professional development sustain an excellent teaching force and are issues that the Council is required to address:

- [THE COUNCIL SHALL] ASSESS THE CAPACITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS.
- [THE COUNCIL SHALL] DEVELOP RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING STATEWIDE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS.

The primary needs of the workforce can be summarized by five “C’s”<sup>2</sup>:

- Competencies
- Career Pathways
- Curricula (for preparation and training)
- Credentials
- Compensation

First, California has created a strong foundation through the creation of Early Childhood Educator Competencies. The Competencies need to be continually updated to reflect best practices in the field and evolutions in the Foundations, but the initial work provides a strong base.

Second and third, work is already underway to develop career pathways based on the competencies, with aligned curricula. Stakeholders support the use of the Competencies to define a clear career pathway with aligned credentials, and there is consensus in the field that existing efforts are heading in the right direction. Federal funds are being used for the Competencies Integration Project, which will integrate the Competencies into higher education coursework and professional development.

Fourth, credentials and staff educational qualifications need to be aligned to the Competencies and reflect mastery of those competencies. Moreover, different parts of the early care and learning system currently require different staff qualifications, and standardization across programs could improve the consistency of quality service. There has not yet been a systematic effort to ensure that providers in fact have mastered the Competencies - and many current professional providers in the field have simply not had adequate access to higher education and professional development. Teacher preparation programs are obviously implicated in these efforts.

Finally, stakeholders in the CCELP public engagement process - many of whom are early childhood administrators and teachers - support providing adequate resources for providers to retain their best teachers. Early childhood professionals with comparable degrees to K-12 teachers earn only about half of what K-12 teachers earn (U.S. Department of Labor 2009), leading to very high turnover (Phillips 2010).

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<sup>2</sup> The first four “C’s” were identified by Lynn Karoly in *A Golden Opportunity: Advancing the Professional Development System for California’s Early Care and Education Workforce* (Rand, 2012).

#### 4. Family Engagement

Stakeholders feel strongly that family engagement is critical to program success. On a systems level, engagement requires providing families with good information about the range of quality of services available to them, including for infants and toddlers. At the program level, the key is to ensure that family engagement is a key workforce competency in which the workforce is specifically trained, with programs designed to facilitate that engagement. Families are the primary drivers of child outcomes, so a true partnership between providers and families is the only way to maximize the impact on child outcomes. The next few years should yield valuable information about effective strategies for family engagement, which are embedded in the quality improvement efforts of the Early Learning Challenge. This is also an area where the best practices of early learning likely could be continued into the K-12 system.

##### *B. Essential Elements*

Beyond the four key drivers, the meta-analysis and stakeholder engagement process focused primarily on six additional elements that are necessary for the system to succeed. All of these must be part of the state's own continuous improvement process. They are Assessing and Meeting the Needs of Children, Supporting Dual Language Learners, Effective Data Practices, Food and Nutrition, Kindergarten Transition, and Finance and Governance.

##### 1. Assessing and Meeting the Needs of Children

Individual educators should be using developmental screening, observation tools, and assessments consistently to determine the needs of children - and when specific needs are identified, there should be systems in place to ensure that those needs are met. Stakeholders support assessment use for this purpose, so long as the results of assessments are used appropriately, and sufficient time is provided for training, administration, and analysis. Critical to the success of assessments is for the workforce to be provided adequate training in both how to administer assessments and how to subsequently take appropriate action based on the results. This includes training for early elementary educators on how to use the results from kindergarteners' assessments to improve their instruction.

The meta-analysis and stakeholders also raise significant concerns about the availability of follow-up services when needs are identified through screening. Some existing initiatives - the Department of Public Health's Project LAUNCH and the Help Me Grow initiative - are focused on addressing this issue. However, stakeholders identify early childhood mental health supports as a significant weakness of California's system.

##### 2. Supporting Dual Language Learners

With California's large and growing population of young dual language learners, California must be a national leader in providing high-quality services to these children. Given the importance of the first five years to language development,

supports for young children who are dual language learners will be critical to help these children achieve successful long-term outcomes. Research has shown that dual language learners especially can benefit from a center-based program during the year before kindergarten, but at least a third of such children in California do not attend such a program (Cannon, Jackowitz & Karoly 2012). Outreach can make families aware of available opportunities.

To ensure that programs can meet the needs of dual language learners, teachers must be specially trained to work with them - an idea with strong stakeholder support. Federal funds are being used to define best practices for teachers working with children with different home languages, and attention is being paid to cultural diversity. The next step could be to ensure that teachers are trained in these best practices and that programs are supported to implement them.

### 3. Effective Data Practices

The use of data is an issue the Council is required to address:

- [THE COUNCIL SHALL] DEVELOP RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A UNIFIED DATA COLLECTION SYSTEM FOR PUBLIC EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES.

The key for California is a commitment to best practices in data usage; California is already collecting a great deal of data, but has not fully tapped into its power. State early learning communities around the country have focused their efforts on first identifying the key policy and practice questions that they would like to be able to answer, and what data would allow them to answer those questions. Ultimately, their goal is to change behavior at both the policy and practice levels in ways that draws on the new data available. The comprehensive Plan will go a long way toward identifying key questions for California, which must reflect the information needs of local leaders and practitioners.

Once key questions have been identified, the state should map what existing data would help to answer those questions; this will give the state the chance to identify places where it might better leverage work it is already doing. If gaps remain, the state should develop a plan for working with communities to plug those gaps. Additionally, professionals working with children could be trained in the use of data, so that they can use information effectively to serve children.

### 4. Food and Nutrition

Food, nutrition, and exercise are important elements of child health, and early care and education programs play an essential role in improving child outcomes in this area. Stakeholders believe that early care and education providers (including child care providers) need better training in nutrition and in supporting physical activities. Stakeholders also note that the requirements of the Child and Adult Care Food Program are too complicated, leading to underutilization; the state could do more to work with the federal government to make this program more accessible to providers.

## 5. Kindergarten Transition

A successful transition from pre-kindergarten to kindergarten requires support from both the kindergarten teacher and pre-kindergarten teacher. Ideally, these professionals would receive some collaborative professional development to learn best practices together and then actively engage each other to support the child's learning. More broadly, stakeholders support the notion of "ready schools" that are equipped to address the full range of child needs, including skills development and executive function. This can be supported by ensuring that learning standards are aligned across years and systems, including learning standards focused on social and emotional development. Successful transition also could be supported by strengthening training for elementary school principals on the role of early learning, an initiative already underway in other states.

Successful kindergarten transition also benefits from the active engagement of families. Families desire better information about this transition and what to expect in kindergarten, and they need teachers and school systems to partner with them in managing the transition.

At this time the successful implementation of Transitional Kindergarten (TK) is an important immediate priority, and one that substantially impacts the quality of many children's transition into kindergarten. Stakeholders are strongly in favor of providing the supports needed for districts to implement TK successfully. Some districts are going beyond implementing TK to create full-fledged "P-3" initiatives that align practice across preschool and the early elementary years; these initiatives may offer some lessons that can be applied more broadly.

## 6. Finance and Governance

While many stakeholders argue that California should increase the amount of money it invests in early learning, there was also recognition that the state could stand to change its approach to spending. Every dollar spent should be focused on an early learning system that supports a child's development and learning. There is widespread acknowledgment that California's system of finance and governance is needlessly complex and inefficient; stakeholders identify this as the greatest weakness of the system. An increased focus on quality is clearly desired across programs.

In addition to the needs assessment and recommendations to increase access, the Council must address system coherence:

- [THE COUNCIL SHALL] IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES FOR, AND BARRIERS TO, COLLABORATION AND COORDINATION AMONG FEDERALLY-FUNDED AND STATE-FUNDED CHILD DEVELOPMENT, CHILD CARE, AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND SERVICES, INCLUDING COLLABORATION AND COORDINATION AMONG STATE AGENCIES RESPONSIBLE FOR ADMINISTERING SUCH PROGRAMS.

Stakeholders strongly support early learning and care being part of a comprehensive education reform initiative that includes birth through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, with a specific

focus on P-3 integration. This could be part of a broader effort to bring coherence among federal, state, and local programs, with each playing a role that builds on their unique institutional strengths. One key area of need is California's child care governance system, which stakeholders widely recognize as sub-optimal. They desire a system-wide focus on quality to dramatically improve outcomes, with increased per-child funding to pay the real cost of delivering quality service, and a corresponding increase in accountability for actually delivering quality service.

Stakeholders support funding tied to quality and recognize that when funds are limited, they must be focused on the places where they have the greatest impact. Research shows that the greatest impact of early education is on children with the most risk factors or financial need (NIEER, 2008), and on infants and toddlers. In prioritizing funding, California could first prioritize those children who are most at risk. Beyond that, the state might consider moving to place-based strategies, serving communities where the need is greatest (an approach that has been used in other states) and where all children who live in an identified neighborhood would be allowed to participate.

## **V. Conclusion**

Research and evidence show that an investment in high-quality early learning is likely to be one with a significant long-term payoff. The State Advisory Council initiated the Comprehensive Plan process in order to design a high-quality birth-to-five system for California. With this draft Plan, the Council has prepared a roadmap for early learning in California that is based on significant input from the field and fulfills the Council's federal obligations.