

California's Prekindergarten through Third Grade Vision

Vision: California will provide a strong and early start to education for all children with high-quality, joyful, developmentally informed, inclusive, and rigorous prekindergarten (pre-K) through third grade (P-3) learning opportunities—beginning with equitable access to universal prekindergarten (UPK).

Why?

Early education matters. There is undeniable evidence on the profound benefits of high-quality pre-K experiences on children's brain development and key school readiness skills. Yet racially and historically marginalized, low-income, and multilingual children and children with disabilities have had the fewest opportunities to access effective and inclusive early education. This opportunity gap leads to the achievement gap that already exists when children enter kindergarten and too often persists throughout school.

Sustaining the pre-K boost through effective transitions and alignment across the early grades also matters. Effective pre-K helps prepare children for kindergarten, but is only one piece of the puzzle. The transition to, and quality of, the early elementary grades is also critical and must reflect developmental science so students maintain their passion for asking questions, searching for answers, and challenging their minds. Schools that embrace rigorous, standards-based instruction **and** child-initiated and playful learning, and that align curriculum, assessments, and teachers' professional learning will nurture students' skills and knowledge, strengthen their foundation for learning, and ensure they reach their full potential.

Why Now?

We know more now than ever before about the science of early brain development in the first eight years and the cost of ineffective or insufficient early investments. With careful planning, extensive engagement, partnerships across agencies, and a historic commitment to the early years, California will:

- Build on the *Master Plan for Early Learning and Care* to include the education system (school districts and charter schools) and ensure education policymakers, leaders, teachers, and staff are equipped to enact the state's early learning goals in inclusive and culturally and linguistically affirming ways for students.
- Leverage the state's historic investments in UPK for all four-year-old children, including transitional kindergarten (TK), expansion of the California State Preschool Program (CSPP) for three-year-old children, and new partnerships with Head Start and other preschool programs.

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- Accelerate the education system's response to the tumult of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic by fueling local communities' capacity to support students and their families, build upon their inherent assets, and better address the needs of the whole child.
- Solidify collaborations between the state agencies and offices that oversee P-3 programs to simplify and streamline programs and services administered at the state level in support of better collaboration between districts and the agencies, organizations, and programs that serve children from infancy through the early elementary grades.

How?

By engaging and supporting educational communities and families across the state, California will provide access to effective and inclusive learning opportunities to address long-standing inequities in education and give all students the opportunity to reach their full potential. California will:

- **Give Children a Strong and Early Start.** California will support equitable access to effective early education programs, with a focus on inclusive, and culturally and linguistically affirming UPK for all four-year-old children, and a second year of preschool for at-promise three-year-old children, through a menu of preschool learning experiences that families can choose from to meet their needs.
- **Focus on pre-K through Third Grade Educators.** California will ensure schools, teachers, and staff are prepared and supported to guide every student's social, emotional, and academic development through inclusive, and culturally and linguistically affirming programs from pre-K through third grade.
- **Equip Education Leaders at the County, District, and School Level.** California will equip education leaders with a deep knowledge and understanding of early education and organizational strategies that support meaningful alignment of curriculum, assessments, teaching practices, and overall classroom environments to ensure smooth transitions and robust learning experiences from pre-K through third grade.
- **Empower and Support Families.** California will engage families as children's first and most important teachers, bolster resources and opportunities for families in community programs and schools, and empower families as valued, supported, and well-informed partners in their children's development and learning in and outside of the classroom.