

California's Pre-K Expansion Package

Policies to improve the quality and access of Early Childhood
Education Services

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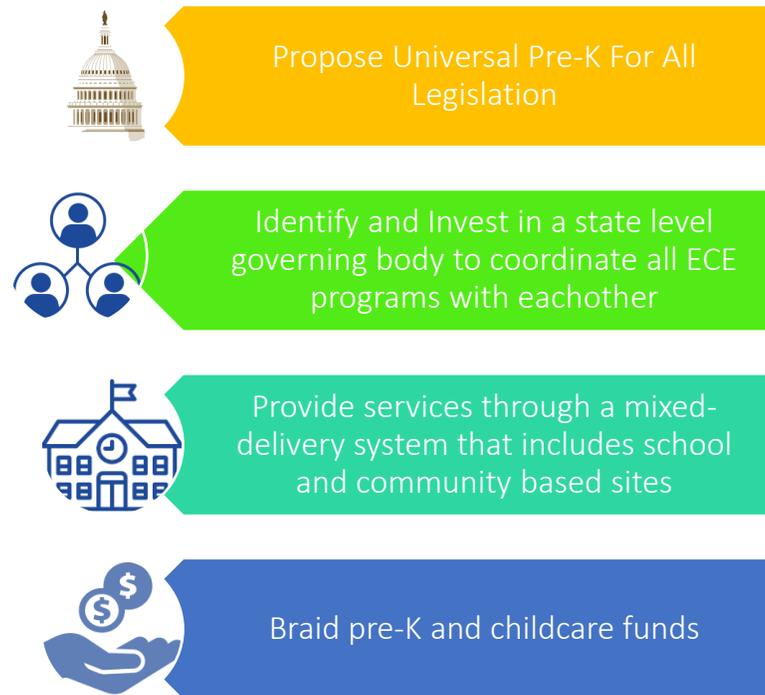
Executive Summary

As a state with the sixth largest economy in the world, California lags behind many states in providing high quality Early Childhood Education (ECE) to its preschool population.

California's ECE system does not have the capacity to serve all children who qualify for its state funded program; the state spends approximately \$1 billion annually to serve 170,000 4-year olds, while one in five eligible 4-year olds lack access to state provided pre-K. The struggle to find high quality and affordable services resonate with families across the socio-economic spectrum. The reality is within California's existing early education and care system, too many children are without high quality ECE services at a critical time in their life when the most cognitive development is taking place. ECE services have to be of high quality in order to rake in the benefits of improved cognitive development for children; as the system stands, lack of adequate and reliable funding, eligibility requirements, and uncoordinated program delivery methods create barriers for ensuring equitable access and program quality for California's children.

Common Sense Media should work with California State Assembly members to compose and implement a pre-K expansion package that transforms the state's fractured and uncoordinated ECE sector into an all-inclusive plan that improves access and quality of services for all families, children, and stakeholders. I provide a set of policy recommendations that aim to expand the capacity of California's ECE programs to serve all 4-year olds, improve the quality and coordination between ECE programs and services, increase low-income and working families' access to services, and promote a working partnership between community-based and school-based pre-K providers.

Figure 1 California's Pre-K Expansion Program



Recommendation to Increase Political Feasibility of Passing Universal Pre-K

Common Sense Media and State Legislatures should adopt a pre-K expansion package that includes every 4-year old in the state by eliminating income eligibility requirements and expanding the pool of recipients who will benefit from a Universal Pre-K measure. A \$3 billion Universal Pre-K program will require maximum support and enthusiasm from a broad coalition of stakeholders across the socioeconomic spectrum with political capital to pass, implement, and provide services for all 4-year olds.

Recommendation for Implementation

California should identify and invest in a state level governing body with the authority and expertise to coordinate all ECE programs with each other and with federal and local initiatives such as Head Start and FCC providers. The state should house the governing body

for children’s services under a new or existing agency, or create a cabinet level department that works across agencies.

Services should be provided through a mixed delivery system that enhances the relationship between schools and community-based childcare and Head Start pre-K providers and improves the flexibility for working families accessing services. In order for pre-K expansion to positively impact childcare quality and supply, I recommend coordinating and braiding pre-K and childcare funds to eliminate the competitive rivalry between pre-K and childcare providers and unite the two parties as integral players in the ECE field.

Figure 2 Recommendations and Outcomes Chart

