

BRIEFING Universal Prekindergarten in California: Progress and Opportunities





association of california school administrators



Wednesday, March 19, 2025

## Welcome

## Join the conversation

Submit questions for Q&A by writing your questions on the index card provided.

Raise your hand, and someone will come by to collect the card.





## Agenda

- Opening remarks
- Research presentation
- Panel and Q&A
- Closing remarks



## **Opening Remarks**

Al Muratsuchi | California Assemblymember, District 66

## **Parent Perspective**

#### Lissete Frausto | Parent Organizer, Kidango

## **Research Presentation**

Hanna Melnick | Senior Policy Advisor and Director of Early Learning Policy, Learning Policy Institute

## **Research Overview**

#### LPI data sources:

- UPK Planning & Implementation Survey:
   2022–23 and 2023–24 school years
   1,506 LEAs (98% of districts and 69% of charters)
- Family Survey: Preliminary Analysis
   Survey with RAPID EC of >2,400 families statewide

LEARNING POLICY INSTITUTE OCTOBER 2024
Progressing Toward
Universal Prekindergarten
in California



Hanna Melnick and Emma García

#### Summary

California recently committed to making prekindergrafen (Prek) universal through the expansion of transitional kindergrafent (R) and other state-funded programs. Betteren 2021-22-and 2023-24. TK enrollment doubled, from about 75.000 to over 151.000 children. Approximately 59% of eligible 4-year-dots enrolled in TK in 2023-24. Across publicly funded Prek programs—TK, the California State Prechool Program. And Head Start—California went from serving about 34% of all year-oids to 50% of between 2019-20 and 2023-24. Enrollment of 4-year-oids climbed from about 37% to 55% using that time when also condinging subsidized roll care. These data are promising both in abouta three and relative to transis in other states, abbough more information is needed to understand whether programs are high quality rank cares is equilable.

#### Introduction

California began a major expansion of Prek in 2021, part of the stark Universal Perkindegraten initiative. One important investment was expanding state funding for TA, a school-based Prek program. to all 4-year-olds by 2028-26. At the same time, the legislature committed to maintaining other federally and state-funded Prek options for income-eligible families, including the California State Prescolo Program (CSPP) and Head Start, as well as subsidiated hid care. This brief examines the impact of these substantial investments by calculating how many eligible children have enrolled to date.

#### How Many Children Have Enrolled in Transitional Kindergarten?

TK enrollment has increased substantially in recent years. When TK was created in 2010, TK eligibility was limited to older 4-year-olds with birthdays between September 2 and December 2. Starting in the 2022–23 school year, eligibility was expanded by adding months of birthdays each year until all 4-yearolds were eligible in 2025–26. (See Table 1.)

## **California's UPK Programs**

	Age	Eligibility	Setting
Transitional Kindergarten	4	All	LEAs
California State Preschool Program	2-5	Income-eligible Special needs	LEAs Community-based organization
Head Start	3-5	Income-eligible	LEAs Community-based organization
Subsidized Child Care	0-12	Income- and work-eligible	Private centers Family child care Friend, family, neighbor

## How Is TK Implementation Going?

## TK will be universal by 2025–26...

TK ELIGIBILITY (MUST TURN 5 BETWEEN DATES)

2021-22	Sept 2 to Dec 2
2022-23	Sept 2 to Feb 2
2023-24	Sept 2 to April 2
→ 2024-25	Sept 2 to June 2
2025-26	All 4-year-olds

### ...and enrollment is increasing rapidly.



LEARNING POLICY INSTITUTE Source: Melnick & Garcia (2024). Learning Policy Institute.

## Almost all LEAs offered TK in 2023-24

#### Most LEAs (94%) offered TK in 2023-24:

- 96% of school districts
- 91% of charters

#### Top reasons for not offering TK:

- 1. Low/no TK enrollment
- 2. Lack of space
- 3. TK not included in charter
- 4. No funding (basic aid districts)

## More LEAs are offering TK at all school sites



LEARNING POLICY INSTITUTE Source: CDE. (2024). UPK Planning and Implementation Grant Survey.

## Most LEAs are offering TK for a "full" day...



Note: "Part day" is defined as 3 to 4 hours. "Full day" is defined as more than 4 hours. Data are for 2023–24.

LEARNING POLICY INSTITUTE Source: CDE. (2024). UPK Planning and Implementation Grant Survey.

# ...and most offer expanded learning options to extend the TK day.



Note: LEAs could select more than one option. Data are for 2023–24.

LEARNING POLICY INSTITUTE Source: CDE. (2024). UPK Planning and Implementation Grant Survey.

## **Reasons families did not select TK**

- 1. Not offered at our elementary school
- 2. Don't want my child in school yet
- 3. No before/after care
- 4. Not potty-trained
- 5. Did not know my child was eligible

## **TK Staffing**

#### **Current Requirements**

- 12:1 adult-child ratio
- Lead teachers must hold a Multiple Subject or PK-3 ECE credential
- Assistant teachers do not need to meet ECE-specific requirements

#### New Requirements (2025–26)

- 10:1 adult-child ratio
- Lead teachers must *also* have 24 units of ECE, a Child Development Teacher Permit, or equivalent experience, as determined by the LEA

# LEAs are hiring more TK lead teachers and have fewer vacancies



LEARNING POLICY INSTITUTE Source: CDE. (2023 & 2024). UPK Planning and Implementation Grant Survey.

# LEAs anticipate that most TK lead teachers will meet new requirements in 2025–26

**91%** LEAs report that in 2023–24, their staff were already "fully qualified" because they have, in addition to a teaching credential:

- 24 units of ECE (52%)
- LEA-determined professional experience (51%)
- Child Development Teacher Permit or higher (38%)
- Taught TK prior to 2015 (29%)

Note: Respondents could select more than one option.

# TK assistant teacher staffing is also growing and beginning to stabilize...



LEARNING POLICY INSTITUTE Source: CDE. (2023 & 2024). UPK Planning and Implementation Grant Survey.

# ...but staffing is still a challenge.

We continue to welcome new teachers each year who may have limited or no experience with early learning. Training and preparing these teachers to effectively manage and teach in a TK classroom is crucial but can be demanding given the unique developmental needs of TK students. Ensuring consistency in instructional quality despite this turnover remains an ongoing effort.

--Survey respondent from a small, rural school district

## Many LEAs updated their UPK facilities...

Do you expect to have sufficient classroom space by 2025-26?



...but sufficient, appropriate space remains a top challenge.

There is no money (that we qualify for) to build new UPK classrooms or build bathrooms in existing classrooms. Therefore, we are having to displace Kindergarten classrooms with bathrooms to make room for TK.

- Survey respondent from a medium-sized school district

## **Districts want technical assistance to support:**

- Modifying classrooms (56%)
- Coaching and mentoring (52%)
- Site leaders' ECE knowledge (50%)
- UPK enrollment and parents' awareness of programs (49%)
- Purposeful play and social interaction (48%)
- Literacy and language development (47%)
- Math and science development (47%)

## What Do We Know About UPK Programs Beyond TK?

## **3- and 4-year-old enrollment in public PreK is increasing**



LEARNING POLICY INSTITUTE Source: LPI analysis of data from CDE, CDSS, and PIR; Melnick & Garcia (2024).

## LEAs offer many preschool options beyond TK



Note: "Other early learning" includes CSPP, Head Start, and locally funded preschool classrooms. Data are for 2023–24.

## **PreK providers are facing enrollment shifts**

Average enrollment in centers declined from 2020 to 2024, especially among 3- and 4-year-olds.

Most center directors plan to enroll more 3-year-olds (67%).

Teachers of 4-year-olds might be willing to teach 3-yearolds (57%) or TK (45%) but not infant/toddlers (20%).

# LEAs face higher staff vacancies in CSPP and Head Start than in TK



LEARNING POLICY INSTITUTE Source: CDE. (2023 & 2024). UPK Planning and Implementation Grant Survey.

## CSPP and Head Start staffing challenges may be partly driven by low pay

Annual Median Wage for Teachers with a B.A. (2020)



LEARNING POLICY INSTITUTE Source: Powell et. al. (2022). Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, U.C. Berkeley

## Takeaways

- TK expansion is progressing quickly.
- TK staffing and facilities appear to be less of a challenge this year than last, although LEAs still need support.
- Site leaders and teachers need professional development.

- California is serving a larger portion of PreK students than ever.
- PreK programs will have to adapt to maintain staffing and enrollment as TK expands.

## Panel and Q&A

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- Patricia Lozano | Executive Director, Early Edge California (moderator)
- Dianna J. Ballesteros | Director of Early Learning, Alum Rock Union School District
- Dora Jacildo | Executive Director, Child Lane
- Sonia P. Jaramillo | Former Senior Director, Early Learning Program, Monterey County Office of Education
- Paula Merrigan | Transitional Kindergarten Teacher, Castro Valley Unified School District

## **Closing Remarks**

**Diana Vu |** Legislative Advocate, Association of California School Administrators

## **Closing Remarks**

Corey Jackson | California Assemblymember, District 60





#### Universal Prekindergarten Expansion in California

Progress and Opportunities

Victoria Wang, Melanie Leung-Gagné, Hanna Melnick, and Marjorie E. Wechsler



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## **Thank You!**



Find event information and related research by scanning the QR code or visit bit.ly/43nSBSE

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