

EVERY STUDENTS SUCCEEDS ACT

A Vision to Address the Needs of California's Youngest Learners



By: Araceli Sandoval-Gonzalez

BACKGROUND

In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the nation's K-12 education law. **ESSA includes several policy changes, including funding preschool and optimizing children's developmental and academic trajectories by supporting the alignment of early learning programs and the K-12 system. ESSA declares that K-12 funding, such as Title I, II, III, can be used to fund preschool and early learning initiatives.**

The California State Board of Education (SBE) and the California Department of Education (CDE) have the task of developing California's ESSA state plan, which will explain how California will meet the federal statutory requirements under ESSA while aligning with the goals of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). **The final California ESSA plan is due on September 18, 2017 to the U.S. Department of Education.**

Stakeholder input is required before the California ESSA plan is finalized. **Given the greater emphasis of early learning in ESSA statute language, California has an opportunity to give thoughtful consideration to the alignment between the early learning and transitional kindergarten (TK) systems.** Furthermore, a parallel opportunity emerged in November 2016, when California voters overwhelmingly (73.5%)¹ passed Proposition 58, a state ballot initiative that creates more opportunities for students to become bilingual and biliterate. This new state policy context and the opportunities it provides are important to embed into the ESSA state plan, particularly from an early childhood and a DLL lens. Therefore, the purpose of this brief is to provide policy recommendations for the ESSA State Plan that addresses the needs of our youngest learners.



PROCESS: LIFTING UP THE ECE COMMUNITY VOICE

The recommendations in this policy brief are based on input by a variety of stakeholders. The initial set of reviewed recommendations consisted of ideas previously submitted by ECE stakeholders to CDE and the State Board of Education on ESSA.² In May 2017, Advancement Project California (APCA) and Californians Together, hosted a Birth to Five Water Cooler convening in Sacramento of nearly 100 of the state's leaders for ECE policy, advocacy, practice, and nonprofit involvement. Advancement Project has hosted "Water Cooler" conferences for a decade, with the goal of improving and expanding ECE and TK-12 public education for the state's most vulnerable children. By unifying diverse stakeholders, the Water Cooler creates the space to build consensus for policy solutions that support the needs of children from birth to 12th grade. The recurring meetings have built consensus between education allies by identifying common interests and providing a space to prevent and resolve potential conflicts.

The May 2017 Birth to Five Water Cooler meeting hosted experts who discussed the most recent research around Dual Language Learners (DLLs), as well as strategies to bridge the early care and education (ECE) and TK-12 systems. Following the presentations, workgroups were assembled to facilitate a process for participants to review and provide additional recommendations for the ESSA State Plan.

The recommendations listed below are informed from the input generated at the Water Cooler convening by ECE stakeholders across California. **These recommendations can serve as a resource for the California Department of Education and the State Board of Education as they continue to refine the ESSA State Plan, as well as provide information for education leaders as they consider their input and recommendation to the state.**

EARLY CHILDHOOD AND CALIFORNIA'S DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Dual Language Learners/English Learners are 22% of California's K-12 population and represent 57% of children age birth to five. ESSA lifts the needs of English language learners (ELLs) in Title III; research over the past two decades continues to prove that the human brain is capable of successfully learning and managing two or more languages starting at birth and that bilingual language development provides cognitive and social benefits. Neuroscience shows the brain is most receptive to language learning in the earliest years of life and that a child's home language is central to socio-emotional development, the development of English proficiency, and overall academic achievement.³ In February 2017, this research was confirmed by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine.⁴

Additionally, research findings document the academic success of all students enrolled in dual language programs, including English Learners; unfortunately, state policies and practices have fallen behind the research findings. Furthermore, California is home to the nation's largest population of children who are learning English in addition to their home language (English Learners), making up about 1.4 million in our K-12 system and nearly **60% of children birth to five. Resolving the achievement gap will require transformative leadership from the State Board of Education that envisions a public education system with a core value of investing in our most vulnerable young Dual Language Learners (DLLs)/English Learners (ELs) through ECE.**

ECE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ESSA STATE PLAN

The Every Student Succeeds Act extends the flexibility for states to focus on teaching and learning and to use federal dollars more efficiently to target students who need it most. It is also worth noting that the ESSA specifically calls for the coordination of programs like Head Start in Section 1005, and therefore it is recommended that the California ESSA plan be identified as the **P-12 California ESSA Plan**. Coordinating and aligning the two state learning systems is key to maximizing the opportunity to shape the developing brains of young children and to support school readiness and the transition from ECE programs for English learners sooner rather than later. Unfortunately, the current state plan does not include ECE and the lack of details signals the opportunity to focus towards aligning ECE and K-12 systems. Several states are thoughtfully embedding ECE into their state plans. Below are few examples of possibilities being adopted by states:⁵

- *Michigan identifies preschool and early learning goals;*
- *New Hampshire has an early childhood advisory team;*
- *North Carolina developed B-8 (birth to age eight) strategies to incorporate into plan;*
- *Tennessee listed increased funding for programs birth to age four as one of its priorities;*
- *Washington State created an Early Childhood Education Workgroup tasked with the development of recommendations; and*
- *Vermont's recommendation focuses on technical assistance to support local educational agencies on a number of issues such as braided funding.*

California has the opportunity to be innovative and to build a school system aligned with existing research, to create a more efficient transition process between ECE to early elementary, to address the social-emotional and development needs of DLLs, and to leverage TK in order to bridge the ECE and TK-12 systems. The recommendations are outlined by the four specific title components (Title I – Title IV) as outlined within current draft of the ESSA State Plan. The recommendations garnered from the stakeholder engagement process in May 2017 strongly support the inclusion of early care and education and Dual Language Learners into the final California Every Student Succeeds Act.



“The State Board of Education has a window of opportunity to take advantage of the rapid brain development that transpires during the first-five-years of life by prominently including early care and education and English Language Learners into the California Every Student Succeeds Act State Plan”.

– **Shelly Spiegel-Coleman**
Executive Director,
Californians Together



TITLE I

IMPROVING THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF THE DISADVANTAGED

BACKGROUND

Title I provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards. Fifteen billion dollars in annual funding is earmarked for public schools to serve students living in poverty.

Funds can be used for preschool programming, including coordination with local early childhood programs. Under Title I, preschool curriculum needs to be in alignment with the Head Start Performance Standards, which also have very explicit guidelines relative to Dual Language Learners.

TITLE I: RECOMMENDATIONS TO CONSIDER

1. **Ensure that preschool children are identified and assessed** using authentic measures that capture both first and second language development.
2. **Create a roadmap and flexibility for LEAs to partner with neighborhood preschool providers** to extend professional development opportunities for supporting children's education transition between programs and to invest in the P-12 workforce.
3. **Section 1013, Coordination Requirements:** Support and strengthen data systems and practices to enable the transfer of children's information, using transitional kindergarten (TK) as the alignment bridge between early education programs and elementary programs; coordinate with local programs enrolled in California's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) and other program models aligned with the preschool learning foundations.
4. **Identify and disseminate information on promising practices of alignment of early childhood and TK-12 systems,** including family engagement, that are already occurring in California to help LEAs and early childhood education providers craft evidence-based programs tailored to local needs.
5. **Section 1111, State Accountability:** Identify and include provision for an early childhood indicator in the state's accountability plan.
6. **Provide focused assistance to LEAs and early childhood providers** that supports ongoing research-based pedagogical practice designed for DLLs.
7. **Section 1114, Schoolwide Title I Program Plans and Section 1115 Targeted Assistance to Schools:** Ensure that preschool children are identified and assessed using measures that capture both first and second language development. Create a roadmap and flexibility for LEAs to partner with neighborhood preschool providers to extend professional development opportunities for supporting children's education transition between programs.
8. **Section 1116, Parent and Family Engagement:** Encourage the use of funds for professional development for staff that advances parent and family engagement with respect to serving DLL families, which should include examining the best engagement practices related to family literacy models, and family album and writing workshops of early childhood education providers.



“ESSA offers California an important opportunity to support the early childhood years as foundational to the long-term educational success of all children. For young DLLs, who benefit at greater rates from their participation in high quality early childhood programs, it is imperative that state policymakers include explicit language within the ESSA state plan that highlights early childhood programming.”

– *Marlene Zepeda, PhD, Professor Emeritus, Department of Child and Family Studies, California State University, Los Angeles*

TITLE II

PREPARING, TRAINING AND RECRUITING HIGH-QUALITY TEACHERS, PRINCIPALS AND OTHER SCHOOL LEADERS SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION

BACKGROUND

Title II provides grants to educational agencies for higher education, as well as to eligible partnerships, to increase academic achievement through strategies such as improving teacher and principal quality and increasing the number of highly qualified teachers. Two-and-a-half billion dollars in yearly funding is earmarked for states and school districts to support educators.

Through understanding research-based curricular approaches and practices that are conducive to the academic performance of DLLs, Title II provides a platform for leadership at both the school district and local school levels to advance best practices for DLLs and their families.

TITLE II: RECOMMENDATIONS TO CONSIDER

1. **Section 2103, Local Uses of Funds:** Facilitate sharing research-based, effective professional development practices that bring prekindergarten through grade 3 teachers, principals, staff, and program leaders together for joint professional learning and collaboration and include center-based providers and school administrators to emphasize the social-emotional developmental and educational needs of young learners.
2. **Section 2101, Formula Grants to States:** Support the language certification of teachers to align with Proposition 58 workforce needs; update and align certification and licensing standards for early childhood educators, which can provide higher education grants to support immediate workforce needs.
3. **Support the continuum of learning** by providing a Birth to 3rd grade (B-3) credential to ECE and elementary school teachers.
4. **Part B, Subpart 2, Literacy for All, Results for the Nation:** Consider using funding directed to early childhood services under “Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation” to align curricular goals and objectives and enhance educational opportunities for young DLLs.

TITLE III

LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS AND IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

BACKGROUND

Title III focuses on the needs of children who come from homes where English is not the primary language. Seven-hundred-thirty-million dollars is earmarked yearly for educating English learners.

TITLE III: RECOMMENDATIONS TO CONSIDER

1. **Section 3115, Subgrants to Eligible Entities:** Identify and disseminate information to LEAs and preschool providers about models and best practices to support ELL transitions from preschool to elementary school, and invest in promising practices at both the state and local levels, including dual immersion programs and family and community engagement strategies.
2. **Invest in both pre-service and in-service for P-3rd grade teacher education** that advances the knowledge, pedagogical best practice, and retention of DLL teachers and paraprofessionals.
3. **Allot funds that specifically support best practices** for the transition of DLLs from preschool to elementary school; earmark a portion of funds to support the transition practices of preschool providers.
4. **Create a toolkit** to distribute to preschool and K-12 that outline strategies for communicating with families about the benefits and value of the home language, with clearly defined child outcomes; include an outline of existing language program approaches to support providers and teachers in explaining programmatic options and differences to families and students.

TITLE IV

21ST CENTURY SCHOOLS, PLACE-BASED EARLY LEARNING

BACKGROUND

Title IV provides opportunities to improve the state's early learning system through place-based focused strategies and the development of school-community partnerships such as Full-Service Community Schools and Promise Neighborhoods. Providing a full continuum of services requires consistent collaboration with community stakeholders to address resource gaps to help improve student outcomes, while supporting the comprehensive needs of young children and the community.

TITLE IV: RECOMMENDATIONS TO CONSIDER

1. **Support local efforts to invest in evidence-based community learning programs** that serve young children and their families, including Promise Neighborhoods and Full-Service Community Schools. By providing guidance to districts on how to include early learning within a continuum that spans the ages 0-8, California will effectively support cross-sector collaboration that promotes child development, as well as transitions, across several interdependent settings. Fostering coherence across early childhood programs and elementary schools is, therefore, a promising pathway for school improvement and a key building block for broadly defined child and community outcomes.⁶



“We can build a strong foundation for long-term academic success for California students by intentionally integrating language in the ESSA State Plan that supports the alignment of early childhood and K-12, optimizes research of early language development, and builds on our state’s cultural and linguistic diversity.”

– **Vickie Ramos Harris**, Associate Director,
Education Policy, Advancement Project California

TITLE IX PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT GRANT

BACKGROUND

The Title IX references a competitive grant program that focuses on quality within the preschool sector and collaboration between early learning providers and effective transition from PK to elementary school.

TITLE IX: RECOMMENDATIONS TO CONSIDER

1. **Section 9212, Preschool Development Grants:** Encourage the state to apply for the \$250 million grant for each fiscal year from 2017 to 2020.

CALIFORNIA PRACTITIONERS ADVISORY GROUP

BACKGROUND

The final regulations on the ESSA Accountability and State Plan include a stipulation that early childhood educators are to be included in the list of mandatory stakeholders with whom the state should consult regarding its plans.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CONSIDER

1. **As previously stated, DLLs /ELLs are 22% of California’s K-12 population and represent 57% of children age birth to five.** Therefore, it is recommended that a representative in early childhood education and Dual Language Learner education who understands the differing perspectives for early education and K-12 be included as a member of the California Practitioners Advisory Group.

1 California Secretary of State. General Election Results. Retrieved from: <http://elections.cdn.sos.ca.gov/sov/2016-general/ssov/ballot-measures-summary-by-county.pdf>.

2 California Department of Education. May 10-11, 2017 SBE Meeting. Retrieved from: <https://cde.app.box.com/v/may2017sbe/file/167931573727> and May, 2016.SBE Letter. Update on Every Student Succeeds Act State Plan

3 Kuhl, P.K. (2011). Early language learning and literacy: neuroscience implications for education. *Mind, Brains and Education*, 5 (3), 128-142. HHS (2015) *Presentation Summary for Supporting Children with Disabilities who are also Dual Language Learners*. Retrieved from: <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/practice/docs/dd-webinar-05-2015-Followup.pdf>.

4 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine. (2017). Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures.

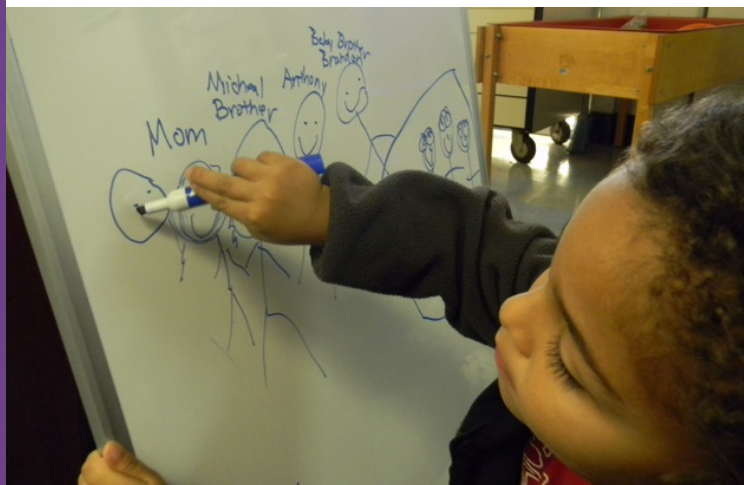
5 <http://ceelo.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ESSAStateScan.pdf>

6 *Early Childhood Community School Linkages: Advancing a Theory of Change*. <http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/ECCSLinkagesTOCReport.pdf>

CONCLUSION

The ESSA State Plan is our opportunity to shape a thoughtful P-12 system. Aligning policies to facilitate systemic transition practices between ECE and TK-12 will enhance opportunities to address the readiness gap in the early years instead of attempting to close the costly achievement gap as it widens.

Taking time to hear and garner support from ECE stakeholders was valuable to the Advancement Project and Californians Together for informing the final set of ESSA recommendations and to ensure our youngest learners receive an equitable P-12th grade public education. **We encourage all stakeholders to use this policy brief as an informative tool to guide the engagement with the State Board of Education prior to the adoption of the ESSA State Plan.**



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