

Summary. California's Governor Jerry Brown proposed a \$1.6 billion Early Education Block Grant as a part of his 2016-2017 January proposed budget. The Block Grant is intended to give districts more flexibility in how they allocate existing early education funds. The Governor's May Revision details an implementation plan which directs school districts to administer early education programs; county offices of education to provide technical support; the development of regional early learning plans to enhance PreK-3 alignment; and locally based quality rating systems to define the minimum standards for Pre-K programs.

PACE's new report, *"PreK-3 Alignment in California's Education System: Obstacles and Opportunities"* by Rachel Valentino and Deborah J. Stipek, reviews the opportunities and challenges that must be addressed to better align PreK-3 education in California. The report describes policies and practices that districts have implemented to strengthen alignment; and identifies the main barriers that districts and schools encounter when attempting to align preschool and the elementary grades.

Introduction. There has been much recent attention and advocacy around "PreK-3 Alignment," both in California and

nationwide. This push for alignment is driven in part by a growing body of research documenting the benefits of attending high quality preschool, along with concerns about the fading benefits of preschool by third grade. Most education leaders agree that continuity in policies and practices across grade levels has value, but there is variability in how practitioners and policy makers define alignment, and in which components of alignment they consider most important.

The report is based on interviews with individuals who play key roles in early childhood education (ECE) in California, including foundation representatives and state-, county-, and district-level personnel. Participants defined PreK-3 alignment as a "continuum" with "shared goals and expectations" across grades.

Best Practices across Districts. The full report includes case studies of Fresno Unified School District (FUSD) and Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) because of their noteworthy practices to support ECE and PreK-3 alignment. Looking across all of the interviews, four best practices implemented by districts contributed to their success: (1) continuous parent involvement; (2) joint professional development between Pre-K, Head Start, Child Care, TK, and K-3 teachers; (3) strong

leadership commitment and training for principals; and (4) efforts to create a uniform and continuous district assessments and longitudinal data system.

Policy Implications. The districts in this study have taken significant steps to align PreK-3 education, but their efforts remain the exception rather than the norm, and even as exceptions there is still much room for improvement. Policy changes in state, district and teacher preparation could assist districts achieve aligned, cohesive and continuous improvement across ECE grades.

State Policy Implications

- ✓ Funding is the most substantial barrier to creating better PreK-3 alignment in California.
- ✓ State licensing requirements should be revised to attend more to children's educational learning and outcomes, not just compliance with safety regulations.
- ✓ California preschool teacher certification needs to be revised to substantially increase the level of training required.
- ✓ Establishing quality ECE programs requires a data system that tracks longitudinal academic performance on a common assessment metric.

District Policy Implications

- ✓ Districts should be informed that they can use LCFF dollars to fund Pre-K, and encouraged to do so by the state.

- ✓ Districts need technical assistance and support from the state and counties to implement quality preschool programs.
- ✓ Districts need to create mechanisms to ensure that data is productively used to improve instruction.
- ✓ District leaders and principals must be trained on the qualities of an effective preschool education.
- ✓ Districts should promote PreK-3 alignment as a priority in their contract negotiations.

Implications for Teacher Preparation

- ✓ PreK-3 and elementary-teacher preparation programs need to move towards an integrated system.
- ✓ Pre-K teacher preparation programs need to be improved to include pedagogical skills.

Conclusion. California's Governor Jerry Brown has proposed changes that would strengthen alignment in California's education system. This report helps to identify the policy choices that would have to be made to produce long-term improvement in the educational opportunities that California provides for its youngest students.

[Download the full PACE report:

<http://edpolicyinca.org/publications/prek-3-alignment-californias-education-system-obstacles-and-opportunities>]