

What Comes Next:

The Master Plan for Early for Learning and Care,
Head Start, and the Road Ahead



Executive Summary

The Master Plan for Early for Learning and Care: Making California For All Kids is a comprehensive vision that will affect the entire early childhood mixed delivery system. Head Start directors reviewed the Master Plan through a series of written feedback and live conversations between March 1 and April 23, 2021. The Head Start perspective is and ought to be a critical concern for implementing the Master Plan because Head Start: 1) serves over 100,000 of the lowest income children and families in California; 2) is already integrated into the system; and 3) brings over one billion federal dollars into California annually.

Our intent is to shine a spotlight on the most important and urgent elements of the plan. The full report identifies 13 areas organized into four themes that we believe should drive the work of the Master Plan going forward. Of these, the following four should be achieved first because they will accelerate California's capacity to achieve many parts of the plan.



- 1. Increase workforce compensation** with secure stable, permanent, dedicated funding by increasing per-child reimbursement rates. The core problem of attracting and retaining qualified and effective teachers is compensation. A decades-long under-investment in the early learning and care profession has led to a critical teacher shortage. The entire mixed delivery system is struggling to find, hire and retain qualified staff. This is the first most important challenge to California's mixed delivery system serving children aged 0-5 and addressing it should be the top priority in implementing the Master Plan.
- 2. Complete the universal eligibility portal.** This will greatly benefit families' ability to find and choose services *if* it will identify all services for which they qualify, and all providers from which they may choose – making it a truly viable parent choice option as indicated in the Master Plan and by the Governor. This is especially true for the most at-risk families, who are most likely to benefit from programs that offer comprehensive services.
- 3. Engage and incentivize California's mixed delivery system.** The Master Plan calls for access for all 4-year-olds to have access to preschool, but not all 4-year-olds to enroll in state-funded programs. We need to co-create a strong and equitable mixed delivery system, not replace or duplicate it. We need to build upon and expand the current system and make improvements, offering programs that support the needs of families.
- 4. Fund Facilities Development.** Facilities funding is desperately needed. In addition to renovation and new construction, facilities funding is needed to fund facility assessments and address immediate health and safety needs. Eligibility for facilities grants should be equitable and prioritize programs providing both state- and federal-subsidized care.

Introduction

The *Master Plan for Early for Learning and Care: Making California For All Kids (Master Plan)* is a comprehensive document more than a year in the making. Head Start California (HSC) recognizes the tremendous effort behind the report and holds great respect for the process and contributors. Our mixed delivery system of early care and education have many stakeholders, and each is interested in and will be impacted by the Master Plan as it moves forward. HSC, representing almost 150 grantees with over 2,000 sites in California—reviewed the Master Plan through a series of written feedback and conversations with program directors between March 1 - April 23, 2021. It is our hope that HSC has the opportunity to work collaboratively with state and local partners moving forward, and we present here our recommendations for consideration. The Head Start perspective is and ought to be a critical concern for implementing the Master Plan **for three reasons**:

- 1. Head Start programs serve over 100,000 of the lowest income children and families in California.** As equity is a central theme in the Master Plan, the achievement of the population served by Head Start is critical to measure the true success of the plan.
- 2. Head Start is already integrated into the mixed delivery system.** 60% of agencies offering Head Start programs also have state contracts to provide CCTR or CSPP programming. Together state and federal funding has provided a full day, full year of early learning and care programs coupled with the social-emotional and health supports and a full range of other supports that families sometimes want or need. Therefore, when one of the funding options or requirements changes, they are both affected.
- 3. Head Start brings significant federal funding.** Head Start programs bring over one billion dollars into California annually. The CA Assembly Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Education Report (BRC Report) recommends the state maximize Head Start funding. This recommendation is absent in the Master Plan.

We have not commented on every plan element, and this does not imply that we consider these elements unimportant. The Master Plan contains a wide range of goals that have the potential to improve the system. Generally, Head Start California fully supports many of these elements and Head Start programs already engage in some of the goals and can be a partner in supporting the Master Plan and local implementation, **including**:

- Strengthening learning and care opportunities for infants, toddlers, & other young children
- Providing more 3- and 4-year-olds access to high-quality preschool
- Ensuring equitable treatment of all children
- An equitably compensated and supported workforce for early learning and care
- A competency-based model for ensuring program quality
- Streamlining and centralizing family eligibility for early learning and care
- Aligning and simplifying program requirements and systems in ways that support family choice and reduce unnecessary administrative burden
- Developing an integrated data system



Our intent is to shine a spotlight on the most important and urgent elements of the plan. Our mixed delivery system is both complex and inter-connected. Making changes to any part of the system affects the entire system. Therefore, we recommend prioritizing changes that: 1) strengthen the entire system, and 2) minimize unintended negative consequences to any one part of the system. Head Start California believes the following recommendations meet that standard, and should be pursued and achieved first because they will accelerate California's capacity to achieve other parts of the plan. Our recommendations are organized into four themes.

Part 1: Equity

1.1 Increase workforce compensation with secure stable, permanent, dedicated funding by increasing per-child reimbursement rates. Quality begins with equity. We believe the first, most important component of quality is the teacher. Without a teacher, no standards, no classroom, no professional development plan, no coaching, and no curriculum will ever create the environment for our youngest children that they deserve. The core problem of attracting and retaining qualified and effective teachers is compensation. A decades-long under-investment in the early learning and care profession has led to a critical teacher shortage. The entire mixed delivery system is struggling to find and retain qualified staff. This is the first most important challenge to the entire system serving children aged 0-5 and addressing it should be the top priority in implementing the Master Plan.

This is a core equity issue. Given the amount of education required, compensation for early learning and care workers is appalling. It is a serious detriment to staff recruitment and retention. The disparity in salaries between ECE and K-3 teachers is significant. Further, most early educators are women, many of whom are women of color. They should be compensated the same as any K-12 teacher with the same or similar qualifications. Raising compensation is critical to 1) sustain and increase the workforce to replace natural attrition and, 2) improve a teacher's ability to earn a living so they can work in the profession they love, but in which they cannot afford to stay.

1.2. Preparation requirements should be.

- *Funded.* Support the required preparation. ECE providers do not earn enough money to pay the costs associated with taking on debt.
- *Delayed.* Increasing or complicating preparation requirements before raising wages will only further diminish the applicant pool. An increase in teacher requirements must be preceded by increases in salaries, training and support.

Part 2. What Families and Children Need

2.1. A universal eligibility portal will greatly benefit families' ability to find and choose services if it will identify all services for which they qualify, and all providers from which they may choose. This is especially true for the most at-risk families, who are most likely to benefit from programs that offer comprehensive wrap-around services. So those programs and services—like Head Start—need to be fully included in the portal. Families need a customer-friendly process that: 1) eliminates the need for families to apply for multiple programs, and 2) fully explains their relative eligibility and out-of-pocket cost for all available services.

The portal should also align eligibility. Head Start already has categorical and extended eligibility. California should adopt Head Start categorical eligibility practices in state-subsidized programs to align and simplify our mixed delivery system. Aligning eligibility with other support programs for low-income families would also help, including MediCal, CalFresh, and others.

2.2. Developmentally appropriate and inclusive care. Children need developmentally appropriate settings and practices that support the whole child. CA Preschool Foundations / Guidelines align with Head Start's Early Learning Outcomes Framework and more developmentally appropriate for 3- and 4 -year-olds than the current K-3 standards. Programs must be inclusive—actively including infants and toddlers with disabilities or delays in group care settings, with appropriate accommodation and support.

2.3. Comprehensive services for our most at-risk children and families. Many families need more than school district-based programs can provide. They need extended hours of care and comprehensive services and support that integrates school readiness, child health and nutrition, family engagement, and assistance connecting with the community-based network of supportive services. This includes continuity of care—children should not be transitioning to different programs during the day if one program meets the child/family needs.

2.4. A simplified system of family contributions will alleviate the administrative burden on providers so they can focus on serving families. Head Start California supports changes to reimbursement rates that lead to greater access for families, equitable support for programs, and more simplicity in our system. We support restructuring family contribution rates as described in the Master Plan.



Part 3: Leveraging the System We Have

3.1. Engage and incentivize the whole mixed delivery system. The Master Plan calls for access for all 4-year-olds to have access to preschool, but not all 4-year-olds to enroll in state-funded programs. We need to strengthen the entire system, not replace or duplicate it. The current system allows children and families to have their individual needs met through a variety of options including state-funded programs, private childcare and voucher programs and Head Start. Especially for families who need full-day, full-year services, support for all types of providers that meet the minimum standards is essential. We need to expand the system equitably, and that requires the full, appropriate, and equitable participation of all the mixed-delivery stakeholders.

3.2. Simplify contracts in ways that maintain or improve flexibility for providers and moving from attendance-based to enrollment-based contracts will dramatically decrease administrative burden and improve the entire system. The administration of infant/toddler services in CDSS and preschool in CDE could make it more difficult for providers serving both age groups. Both CDE and CDSS will need tight collaboration to ensure this change does not increase the administrative burden to providers.

3.3. Simplify professional competencies. Competencies already exist for early educators. We do not need to reinvent this wheel. The system of providers need collaboration with community colleges and universities, the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) and employers—including Head Start, state contracted, and private providers—to work together to implement and ensure alignment among the systems. Consider piloting degree pathways for incumbent members of the workforce wherein they receive credit toward a degree for demonstrating competencies. Competency for credit could be approved by qualified coaching staff.



Partner Opportunity

Apprenticeships work — they support both the existing and entry-level workforce and provide the needed supports for people to complete degrees. California should incentivize and support programs that have built successful apprenticeship models. Head Start has several examples.

The Child Development Permit (CDP) is overly complicated. Simplifying it would benefit the entire system. It must allow a variety of entry points supporting diverse career pathways. It should also require courses that ensure equity—including classes on inclusion, diversity, trauma-informed care and working with high-risk student populations including: Children with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES), challenging student behavior, and working with dual language learners.

3.4. Build the data system with stakeholders. All Head Start programs (not only Head Start Tribal Child Care mentioned in the Master Plan) collect significantly more diverse data sets than the average state-funded childcare program. California serves the largest number of Head Start children nationwide, and a significant number of providers blend Head Start and State Preschool programming to fully serve families. For these reasons, Head Start must be included as a key stakeholder and have equitable representation in the data governance body.

Part 4: Costs, Funding and Strategic Investments

4.1. Fund facilities development. Facilities grants are desperately needed. In addition to renovation and new construction, these grants should cover the costs of facility assessments and address immediate health and safety needs. Eligibility for facilities grants should prioritize programs providing state- and federal-subsidized care. California can partner with Head Start by providing state-funded matching grants to Head Start grantees to leverage federally funded facility development.

4.2. Establish sufficient, stable, and dedicated funding in the state budget for early childhood learning and care. Children aged 0-5 are no less deserving of guaranteed support than children in grades K-12.

4.3. Leverage federal funding. California must consider all funding streams flowing into the state directly or through other programs serving the same population to create an aligned system of care and truly determine the need for services in different communities. The Blue-Ribbon Commission Report (BRC) specifically recommended that California maximize Head Start funding. This recommendation is absent in the Master Plan. This would include: 1) assisting with recruitment and enrollment of eligible families and, 2) a state investment to make Head Start services available to more families. California should provide matching grants for Head Start programs to provide services to more children with a proven model of full family support.

The Conversation Forward

Head Start California is excited about the opportunity to work with Governor Newsom, the Legislature, advocates, and providers in moving the Master Plan forward as a partner. We are committed to ensuring that California's mixed delivery system is built on equity, improves access to quality early learning and care for more families, engages in supporting health and wellness overall and supports activities and goals resulting in school readiness.

