



# GETTING DOWN — TO FACTS II —

RESEARCH BRIEF | SEPTEMBER 2018

## Early Childhood Education in California

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**About:** The Getting Down to Facts project seeks to create a common evidence base for understanding the current state of California school systems and lay the foundation for substantive conversations about what education policies should be sustained and what might be improved to ensure increased opportunity and success for all students in California in the decades ahead. *Getting Down to Facts II* follows approximately a decade after the first Getting Down to Facts effort in 2007. This research brief is one of 19 that summarize 36 research studies that cover four main areas related to state education policy: student success, governance, personnel, and funding.

This brief summarizes findings from **Early Childhood Education in California** (September 2018), an extensive, multipart report examining the overall landscape of early childhood education (ECE) in California. For each topic listed below, the brief summarizes key findings and their implications for California policies related to young children and their families:

**The Early Learning Landscape**

Deborah Stipek and Peggy Pizzo

**Early Learning for Children with Disabilities**

Nancy Hunt

**Preparation and Training for Professionals in Early Childhood Education**

Deborah Stipek

**Strengthening California’s Early Childhood Education Workforce**

Lea J. E. Austin, Marcy Whitebook, and Raúl Chávez

**Program Quality Monitoring and Improvement**

Deborah Stipek and Sarah Ruskin Bardack

**PreK-3 Alignment**

Deborah Stipek

**Early Child Care Data Systems**

Deborah Stipek and Madhuvanti Anantharajan

These and all GDTEII studies can be found at [www.gettingdowntofacts.com](http://www.gettingdowntofacts.com).

## Introduction

More than 24 million children ages 5 and younger live in the United States, and about one in eight of them—a little over 3 million—lives in California. Compared to the rest of the country, California has about twice as many children ages 5 and under who are first- or second-generation immigrants and live in families in which the adults are not fluent in English. About one in five of all children ages 5 and younger in California live in poverty, and nearly half of California’s children live in households that are at or near the poverty level. While their parents are at work or in school, about 1.2 million of California’s young children are cared for by relatives or attend preschool, a child-care center, family home care, Head Start, or a combination thereof.

Given the rapid brain development during a child’s first five years of life, which lays the foundation for all future learning, California has a compelling interest and responsibility to ensure that these programs provide a safe, socially supportive, and effective educational environment for young children. Considerable research shows that children attending high-quality preschool programs receive significant benefits. California has many good providers; but for a state that once led the nation in early childhood education, ECE today is marked by diminished investments in quality, low wages, and highly fractured oversight.

## KEY FINDINGS

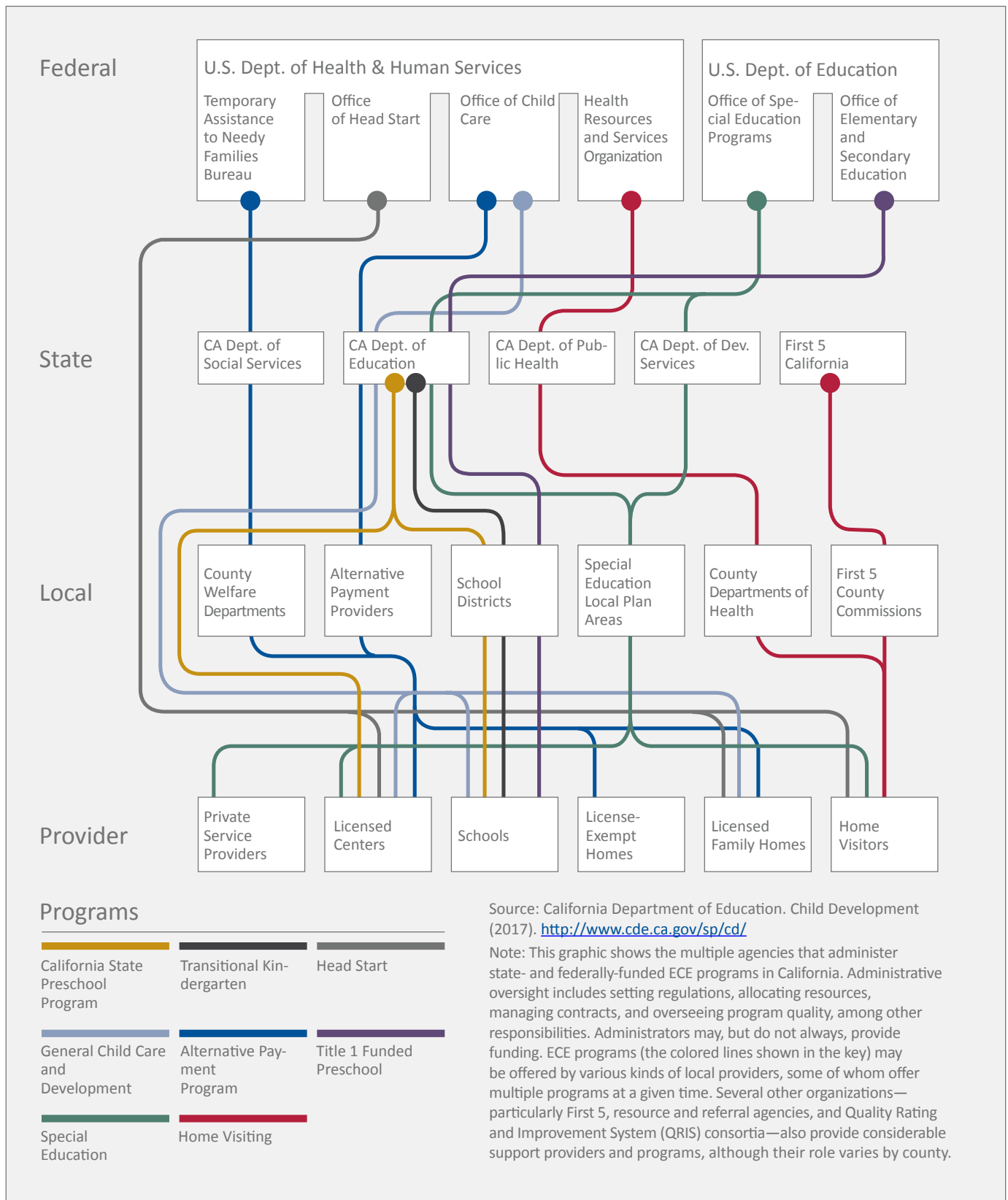
- Early childhood education in California is a dizzying array of programs, funding sources, and regulations.
- Children attending high-quality preschool do better in school and in life.
- Child care is prohibitively expensive for many families and does not meet the needs of nonstandard work schedules.
- California has a large proportion of children in care with no standards.
- California has a poor record of identifying young children with disabilities and providing them with needed services.
- Wages are so low that nearly 60% of child-care workers rely on some form of public assistance.
- California has low and uneven teacher-training requirements for early childhood education programs.
- The process for monitoring quality and improvement is fragmented, inconsistent, and insufficient.
- The state has no centralized data collection system, limiting the ability to evaluate improvement efforts.

## Summary of Key Findings

### Early childhood education in California is a dizzying array of programs, funding sources, and regulations

Early childhood education in California is a fragmented system of many federal, state, and local agencies that administer, license, regulate, and fund the various programs. As Figure 1 illustrates, California oversees state-funded preschool and child care programs for low-income families. The federal government administers Head Start; local school districts provide some preschool programs as well as transitional kindergarten (TK), a state program for children who will turn 5 within three months of the age cutoff date for kindergarten each school year; for-profit and nonprofit organizations run private centers; and individuals offer care in family child care homes (FCCH). There is little coordination among the agencies, significant variations in funding, and no standardized licensing or educational requirements for staff. Even within programs overseen by the state, 4-year-olds experience significantly different standards, depending on whether they are enrolled in a TK class, state preschool, or a subsidized day care program.

**Figure 1: Control of California’s Early Childhood Education Programs**



Source: Learning Policy Institute, June 2017.

Note: QRIS stands for Quality Rating and Improvement System.

In the 2017-18 budget year, California allocated a little more than \$4 billion in state and federal funds to about a dozen subsidized programs (see Table 1), serving more than 437,000 children, including transitional kindergartners. Funding for each program depends on which department oversees it. As a result, similar programs may receive vastly different allocations.

**Table 1: Child Care and Preschool Budget (Dollars in Millions)**

	2015-16 Revised	2016-17 Revised	2017-18 Enacted	Change from 2016-17	
				Amount	Percent
<b>Expenditures</b>					
<b>CalWORKs Child Care</b>					
Stage 1	\$334	\$418	\$361	-\$57	-14%
Stage 2	\$419	\$445	\$519	\$74	17%
Stage 3	\$257	\$284	\$306	\$21	8%
<b>Subtotals</b>	<b>(\$1,010)</b>	<b>(\$1,147)</b>	<b>(\$1,185)</b>	<b>(\$38)</b>	<b>(3%)</b>
<b>Non-CalWORKs Child Care</b>					
General Child Care	\$305	\$308	\$360	\$52	17%
Alternative Payment Program	\$251	\$283	\$292	\$10	3%
Migrant Child Care	\$29	\$31	\$35	\$4	12%
Bridge Program for Foster Children	\$0	\$0	\$19	\$19	—
Care for Children with Severe Disabilities	\$2	\$2	\$2	\$0	12%
Infant and Toddler QRIS Grant (one-time)	\$24	\$0	\$0	\$0	0%
<b>Subtotals</b>	<b>(\$611)</b>	<b>(\$623)</b>	<b>(\$708)</b>	<b>(\$85)</b>	<b>(14%)</b>
<b>Preschool Programs</b>					
State Preschool—part day	\$425	\$447	\$503	\$55	12%
State Preschool—full day	\$555	\$627	\$738	\$111	18%
Transitional Kindergarten	\$691	\$739	\$755	\$17	2%
Preschool QRIS Grant	\$50	\$50	\$50	\$0	0%
<b>Subtotals</b>	<b>(\$1,721)</b>	<b>(\$1,863)</b>	<b>(\$2,046)</b>	<b>(\$183)</b>	<b>(10%)</b>
<b>Support Programs</b>	<b>\$76</b>	<b>\$89</b>	<b>\$93</b>	<b>\$4</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$3,418</b>	<b>\$3,722</b>	<b>\$4,032</b>	<b>\$310</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>Funding</b>					
Proposition 98 General Fund	\$1,576	\$1,713	\$1,878	\$164	10%
Non-Proposition 98 General Fund	\$885	\$984	\$1,088	\$104	11%
Federal CCDF	\$573	\$639	\$635	-\$4	-1%
Federal TANF	\$385	\$385	\$427	\$42	11%
Federal Title IV-E	\$0	\$0	\$4	\$4	—

Data: California Legislative Analyst's Office.

Note: QRIS stands for Quality Rating and Improvement System.

## Children attending high-quality preschool do better in school and in life

High-quality ECE experiences play a critical role in reducing the gaps seen when children start kindergarten. For example, children who attend high-quality preschools are less likely to be retained in a grade or placed in a special education setting. They are also less likely to become involved in crime and more likely to graduate from high school, go to college, and achieve higher earnings.

Some forms of professional development are also associated with better quality. A study conducted in Santa Clara County found that the amount of time preschool teachers spent in professional training consistently predicted children's scores on a kindergarten readiness assessment.

In addition to promoting positive child outcomes, making reliable, high-quality child care accessible to parents can have immediate effects on the economic well-being of the state. One study estimated an economic return of \$2 to \$4 for every dollar invested in quality programs when viewed from the societal perspective.

## Child care is prohibitively expensive for many families and does not meet the needs of nonstandard work schedules

In 2014, the average cost of full-time early care for 3- and 4-year-olds in the state was \$7,850 a year in licensed family child care homes and \$9,106 for center care. For infants 0-2 years, the average annual cost was \$8,462 for family child care and \$13,327 for center care. According to a Child Care Aware report, in 2016 California was one of the 10 least affordable states for infant care, costing on average 51% of the median income of a single parent and 15% of the median income of two parents. The cost is a likely reason that in 2008 (the most recent data available), fewer than 4% of infants and toddlers in the state were in licensed centers and only another about 8% were in licensed family child care homes (FCCHs). Even FCCHs for preschoolers, typically the least costly form of child care, required a substantial proportion of family income—31% of the median income of a single parent and 10% for a couple, on average.

A large proportion of early education programs in California are part-day. Even a so-called full-day, six-hour program does not meet the needs of working families. And for parents who work nonregular hours—typically in low-wage jobs—a full-day program that assumes a regular work day does not meet their needs.

Many young children do not participate in any program. In 2014, 39.6% of children ages 3-5 years were not enrolled in preschool or kindergarten. Participation rates vary by age and race/ethnicity, as seen in Table 2. These data predate transitional kindergarten, which began in 2014-15. In 2016, 18% of the state's 4-year-olds were enrolled in TK, so the current proportion of 4-year-olds who are not enrolled in preschool or kindergarten is lower than indicated in Table 2 on the following page from 2014.

**Table 2: Percentage of Children Ages 3-5 Not Enrolled in Preschool or Kindergarten in 2014**

	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds
California	64.9	39.4	11.9
U.S.	66.1	39.8	14.0

	African American/Black	Asian American	Hispanic/Latino	White
California	39.3	33.7	44.8	33.7
U.S.	36.4	34.9	45.2	39.2

Data: Kidsdata.org (2015).

In 2011–2015, 3- to 4-year-olds who were dual language learners were less likely to be enrolled in preschool (56.6%) than non-DLL children (47.9%).

### California has a large proportion of children in programs with no standards

Researchers Sean Reardon and Christopher Doss, authors of the *Getting Down to Facts II* report on educational outcomes in California, found that the relatively large achievement gap compared with other states is present when children enter kindergarten. The gap is partly a result of children from low-income families having fewer high-quality early childhood educational opportunities. Low-income children disproportionately attend license-exempt childcare programs (which are not required to meet any standards); more than 90% of children in unlicensed care are in CalWORKs, a state-funded program for low-income families. California ranks 11th in the nation for having the highest percentage of children in license-exempt care.

### California has a poor record of identifying young children with disabilities and providing them with needed services

Congress passed the landmark Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1975, requiring that children with disabilities receive free and appropriate public education. It would be another 11 years, in the 1986 reauthorization of IDEA, before the law mandated services to preschool-age children and expanded to include infants and toddlers. Preschool is mandated in all states by IDEA, but services for infants and toddlers from birth to 3-years-old are voluntary.

In order to qualify for federal funds for infants and toddlers, states must provide an early intervention system to identify children with disabilities and coordinate services and publicize these services so families know where to turn for help. California responded by creating the Early Start program, which served 41,000 infants and toddlers in 2015-16. Compared with other states, however, California lags in meeting the required deadlines and child outcomes, and is below the national average for every ethnic group in the percentage of students served (see Table 3, on the following page).

**Table 3: Percentage of Population Served Under IDEA**

	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	African American/ Black	Hispanic/ Latino	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White	Two or More Races
<b>Percentage of the Population Birth Through Age 2 Served Under IDEA, Part C, for Each Racial/Ethnic Group, Cumulatively During the 12-Month Reporting Period, by State: 2014-15</b>							
All States	5.5	4.6	5.3	5.7	7.1	6.1	4.2
California	2.9	3.8	4.9	4.5	2.2	3.9	1.3
<b>Percentage of the Population Ages 3 Through 5 Served Under IDEA, Part B, for Each Racial/Ethnic Group: Fall 2015</b>							
All States	8.4	4.7	6.2	5.7	7.6	6.7	5.3
California	5.6	4.3	5.5	5.5	3.7	5.0	5.7

Data: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs, 2018.

California has no centralized, systematic screening program, which might allow greater numbers of infants and toddlers to be identified and brought into services earlier. For example, relatively small numbers of 2-year-olds diagnosed with autism were enrolled in publicly funded programs in 2016-17. The number jumped to nearly 5,000 for 3-year-olds, who could have benefited from earlier diagnosis and services and potentially saved funds for the state over time.

Providing services for young children with disabilities is complicated by the fact that two different agencies administer them—the Department of Developmental Services and the Department of Education. Coordination between the two agencies is not efficient.

Due to a shortage of spaces for children with special needs in regular preschool programs, California’s preschoolers with disabilities are more likely to be served in segregated settings than children in other states, giving them little opportunity to interact with their nondisabled peers.

Finding qualified teachers is also challenging. Even though California requires public preschool teachers to have the education specialist instruction credential in Early Childhood Special Education, a shortage of teachers forces the state to issue intern credentials.



Wages are so low that nearly 60% of child-care workers rely on some form of public assistance

More than 100,000 Californians work in child care and preschool, where they are responsible for the safety and healthy development of the state’s youngest children. Yet, as Table 4 illustrates, many of them barely earn a livable wage. In 2017, the median wage for child-care workers in California was \$12.29 an hour, and preschool teachers typically earn much less than kindergarten teachers. ECE educators seldom receive benefits, such as paid sick days, holiday/vacation days, or subsidized health insurance; and 58% of child-care workers earn so little that they qualify for public assistance. These conditions make it difficult to recruit and retain teachers, which in turn undermines the relationships that are vital to children’s healthy development.

**Table 4: Earnings per Hour by Occupation in California**

Occupation	Median Wage
Child-Care Worker	\$12.29
Preschool Teacher	\$16.19
Center Director	\$23.91
Kindergarten Teacher	\$38.33
Elementary Teacher	\$45.17
All Workers	\$19.70

**Earnings by Occupation**

- In 2017, the median wage for child-care workers was \$12.29, a **3% increase since 2015**.
- For preschool teachers, the median wage was \$16.19, a **3% increase since 2015**.
- For preschool or child-care center directors, the median wage was \$23.91, a **6% decrease since 2015**.

Data: Early Childhood Workforce Index 2018, California Profile.

California has low and uneven teacher-training requirements for early childhood education programs

Requirements for early childhood education permits are too low at every level, are uneven, and do not give enough attention to practice, such as through student teaching.

Although elementary school teachers in California, including transitional kindergarten teachers, need a bachelor’s degree followed by a year-long teacher preparation program that includes supervised practice teaching, training requirements for state preschool teachers are among the lowest in the country. Differences in requirements to teach similar children are tied to the funding source. California programs under Title 5 have modest training requirements (see Table 5, following page); teachers in programs under Title 22 are required to have only 12 postsecondary units in early childhood education. License-exempt providers have no training requirements.

**Table 5: Requirements for Staff in Title 5 Settings**

Position	Authorizes the Child Development Permit (CDP) Holder to:	Minimum Requirements	Experience Requirement
<b>Assistant Teacher</b>	Care for and assist in the development and instruction of children in a child-care and development program under the supervision of a Child Development Permit (CDP) Associate Teacher, CDP Teacher, CDP Master Teacher, CDP Site Supervisor, or CDP Program Director.	6 units of college-level work in ECE	None
<b>Associate Teacher</b>	Provide service in the care, development, and instruction of children in a child-care and development program, and supervise a CDP Assistant and an aide.	12 units of college-level work in ECE, including designated core courses	50 days of 3+ hours per day within 2 years
<b>Teacher</b>	Provide service in the care, development, and instruction of children in a child-care and development program and supervise a CDP Associate Teacher, a CDP Assistant, and an aide.	24 units of college-level work in ECE, including designated core courses (Child, Family, and Community; Child Development; and Curriculum) and 16 general education units	175 days of 3+ hours per day within 4 years
<b>Master Teacher</b>	Provide service in the care, development, and instruction of children in a child-care and development program, and supervise a CDP Teacher, CDP Associate Teacher, CDP Assistant, and an aide. The permit also authorizes the holder to serve as a coordinator of curriculum and staff development in a child-care and development program.	Same as Teacher, plus 2 units of adult supervision and 6 specialization units	350 days of 3+ hours per day within 4 years
<b>Site Supervisor</b>	Supervise a child-care and development program operating at a single site; provide service in the care, development, and instruction of children in a child-care and development program; serve as a coordinator of curriculum and staff development in a child-care and development program.	AA (or 60 units) with 24 ECE/CD units (incl. core) + 6 units administration + 2 units adult supervision	350 days of 3+ hours per day within 4 years, including at least 100 days of supervising adults
<b>Program Director</b>	Supervise a child-care and development program operated in a single site or multiple sites; provide service in the care, development, and instruction of children in a child-care and development program; and serve as coordinator of curriculum and staff development in a child-care and development program.	BA with 24 ECE/CD units + 6 units administration + 2 units adult supervision	Site supervisor status and one program year of site supervisor experience

Source: California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

The degree or other certification alone is not the only concern; also important is *what* is taught in the training programs and schools. For example, bachelor's degrees are increasingly required for teaching preschool in other states. But the early childhood education programs in California's four-year colleges do not usually reside in education departments, but rather in departments where the focus is on foundational knowledge about child development, not on preparing teachers for practice. Increased degree requirements must include requirements that prepare professionals to support children's learning and development, and higher education programs need to develop the infrastructure to prepare students for practice.

Elementary school principals—who are increasingly overseeing preschool programs in California—are not required to have any training in supervising ECE programs and teachers of young children. Those principals need specific training in early childhood education.

### The process for monitoring quality and improvement is fragmented, inconsistent, and insufficient

When it comes to assessing the quality of programs and teachers, California again falls short. Licensed programs are not well monitored. California created a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) to help programs assess and improve quality. However, participation in QRIS is voluntary, and information is not typically made available to parents. Out of 12,246 licensed daycare and infant centers in the state as of September 2017, just 28.7% participated. Among the 29,348 license-exempt programs, 6.8% participated. Unlike most states, which provide financial incentives for participation in QRIS and improved quality ratings, California does not.

California's quality improvement initiative supports strategies such as coaching or mentoring and incentives for teachers and administrators to complete credit-bearing college courses that are funded through federal and state sources. The initiative also supports a number of professional development programs administered through local agencies. With the exception of sustained coaching, however, research has found limited evidence that the strategies used improve outcomes for children. California does not clearly advertise quality ratings and does not provide differential funding for higher quality programs as other states have done, with some demonstrated positive effects.

### The state has no centralized data collection system, limiting the ability to evaluate improvement efforts

California currently has no system for tracking data on staffing, children, or programs. Most data collection is left to local communities, which is inefficient and fails to provide statewide information.

Because of its fragmentation, it is impossible to determine accurately the qualifications and characteristics of the people caring for children, where California's young children receive care, how many attend each type of program, and how many are enrolled in more than one program. As a consequence of the lack of data on ECE staff, there is no way to assess the qualities of effective teacher preparation, whether strengthening teacher preparation requirements will lead to better student outcomes, or if increasing requirements will instead force people out of the profession because they can't afford college tuition.

A comprehensive, longitudinal data system providing information about the children, families, and teachers in early childhood education is needed to make sound policy decisions. The national Early Childhood Data

Collaborative identified fundamental questions that states need to answer in order to use resources effectively and efficiently. They include:

- Are children birth to age 5 on track to succeed when they enter school and beyond?
- Is the quality of programs improving?
- What are the characteristics of programs that support positive child outcomes?
- What policies and investments lead to a skilled and stable early care and education workforce?

A number of states have experimented with models of data systems that California could learn from in developing its own system.

## Conclusion

We know what to do to improve early childhood education. There is strong evidence that early intervention can be done at scale with long-term benefits—both for the participating children and for society. And research in other states has found that better coordination of services and standards is essential to improving outcomes for young children. An integrated data system that combines data from health, social, and educational sectors could be used to identify and address problems before they become unmanageable and expensive to remedy and, more broadly, to guide policy decisions about how to use resources effectively and efficiently to support children and families. There are many models of data systems that California can explore to determine what is the best fit for the state.

Analyses conducted within the state can also guide policy decisions. For example, California has already conducted a comprehensive study of early childhood special education. A 2015 report by the State Special Education Task Force recommends unifying special education and general education and placing all the systems under the auspices of the state Department of Education to create a more coherent and efficient system of services. Similarly, a panel established by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing recommended specific changes to enhance the preparation of early childhood professionals. And many other analyses have reached similar conclusions about the kinds of investments California needs to make in early childhood education.

If early education programs are to meet parents' needs to participate in the workplace and to prepare California's children for academic success—and if any progress is to be made on reducing the unacceptably large achievement gap—the state needs a workforce that is prepared, supported, and fairly compensated for this complex work in a system of early childhood education that supports families and puts children on positive developmental trajectories.

## Author Biography

*Deborah Stipek is the Judy Koch Professor of Education and the Peter E. Haas Faculty Director of the Haas Center for Public Service. She currently chairs the Heising-Simons Development and Research on Early Math Education Network. Stipek had previously served for 11 years as the I. James Quillen Dean of the Graduate School of Education at Stanford University. She was also a faculty member at the University of California, Los Angeles, for 23 years, serving 10 of those years as director of the Corinne Seeds University Elementary School.*