



Support Head Start in the TK Transition

Talking points for Head Start Directors

Introduction

Head Start California has been actively educating lawmakers to ensure they understand that the expansion of transitional kindergarten for all 4 year olds is not the *only* solution for California's children.

California's parents will be best supported through a mixed-delivery system of childcare which includes Head Start, and we need to make sure that members of the legislature know how integral Head Start programs are to our kids and families.

1. Head Start is a vital resource for California's most vulnerable families and children.

- We have nearly 150 Head Start agencies across California operating over 1,700 sites across California
- We serve over 100,000 children and their families annual
- We employ over 25,000 teachers and staff statewide.
- Head Start takes a comprehensive approach to meeting the needs of young children, with 4 major components: education, health, parental involvement, and social services
- Head Start programs are nationally recognized for high quality, whole-child, whole-family approach, and a foundation of increasing racial and economic equity.

2. The expansion of Transitional Kindergarten (TK) alone does not address what at-risk children need.

- TK is a one-size fits all approach to a very diverse challenge of caring for our most vulnerable and at-risk children.
- Many four-year-old children are not developmentally ready to be in a more traditional elementary school setting or program which would cause multiple transitions and disruptions during the day to move them to other programs to meet the full day care needs of their families.
- Children this age need consistency, attachment and a nurturing environment to best support not only their early learning, but also their social and emotional development and basic self-regulation skills. To be blunt, these children need naps and care.

3. The expansion of TK alone does not address what parents need - especially our most vulnerable families.

- Family work schedules in California are just as diverse as our population.
- Traditional TK programs are geared towards higher income families that do not have the unique needs of Head Start families.
- Working parents need childcare options that are flexible and convenient to meet their needs.
- Overnight grocery store workers will need a different schedule than those who work in offices or retail stores – none of these schedules that include nights, weekends and 10-hour workdays align with the typical ‘K-12 school’ day.

4. This shift is complicated and expensive.

- Four-year olds constitute nearly 60% of Head Start funding in California, putting a large percentage of a federal \$1 billion dollar investment at risk.
- Head Start programs cannot easily or quickly shift their funding to serve more 0-3 year-olds. It involves a re-application of Early Head Start grant funding and an approval process by the federal Office of Head Start.
- As TK is expanded, the change in the population of children served requires planning, technical assistance, and additional funding for Head Start programs.
- Without state funding equitable to the support provided to other parts of the early childhood system, the ability of Head Start programs to accommodate this change will be jeopardized and access could be reduced.

5. California must support the capacity of Head Start to make this transition.

- Without state funding equitable to the support for other parts of the early childhood system, the ability of Head Start programs to accommodate this change will be jeopardized and access could be reduced.
- \$50 million appropriation for agency grants in the 2021-22 budget will allow local Head Start programs:
 - build agency capacity.
 - recruit and retain the workforce.
 - identify more Head Start eligible families.
 - expand services to serve more children and families.
 - provide expanded, non-traditional hours of care.