

BUILDING A COHERENT P-12 EDUCATION SYSTEM IN CALIFORNIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

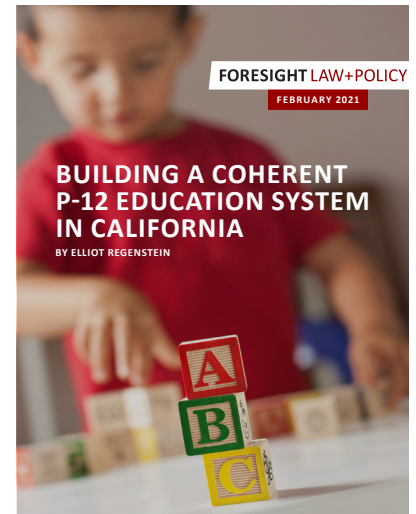
Fewer than half of California high school students are considered “prepared” for college or career success. But in most school districts, children average at least a year’s worth of progress from third grade on. The primary reason California high school students are behind isn’t their elementary and secondary schools; it’s a system that doesn’t provide children the educational support they need before they get to third grade – and indeed, before they get to kindergarten. This systemic failure ends up having a disproportionately negative impact on Black and Latinx children.

California’s education system is set up to focus on the later years, not the earlier years. District and school accountability focuses on third grade and up. The state’s investments in pre-kindergarten education are inadequate and unfocused. Information about how children are doing in the early years is scattershot and not well understood. Teachers and principals aren’t well trained in child development, and aren’t supported to build real partnerships across age spans. In too many communities TK-12 and early childhood leaders work in separate silos, which makes the system harder to navigate for children and families.

As the state contemplates its post-pandemic policy landscape in both K-12 and early learning, there is tremendous opportunity to do better. State and local leaders can come together to identify best practices in family and community engagement, which can then inform state-level supports. California’s education accountability system can take better account of the years before federally-mandated tests begin in third grade. New approaches to early childhood funding can support better coherence and higher quality – and indeed, the state’s new Master Plan for Early Learning and Care lays out a plan to do exactly that. Leading districts can work with the state to define improved assessment practices, and the state can continue its efforts to improve the capacity of teachers and instructional leaders. By generating better information and using it more effectively, the state and its districts can accelerate the process of improving the relationship between K-12 and early learning.

The disconnects between the early years and TK-12 have taken decades to emerge and can’t be fixed overnight. But better policy can support a new mindset and improved practices. Improving the experience of children and families in those years will require fresh thinking about California’s TK-12 policies, and the way the state distributes resources. Accordingly, the state should:

- Align system incentives, supports, and accountability to incentivize a focus on high quality, coherent educational experiences across early education and the early elementary years, so that success in these years will set children up for success throughout the rest of their educational experiences
- Work collaboratively to develop a framework for community partnerships
- Engage partners — including schools, child care-providers, and families — to identify best practices in family engagement, and develop supports for districts and communities



- Define best practices for English Learners — and then provide continuous supports to early childhood providers and districts to implement these practices
- Consider incorporating goals related to early childhood and the early elementary grades into the LCAP template
- Disaggregate TK-2 chronic absenteeism and suspension rate data on the School Dashboard
- Develop a template of local early childhood indicators for districts
- Provide all 3- and 4-year-olds with a high-quality preschool experience
- Work toward a coherent approach to early childhood governance at the state level
- Build the capacity needed to use data effectively at the state level
- Lead the development of a framework for assessment use — preschool through second grade
- Strengthen teacher preparation programs, including consideration of new credentials focused on the early years
- Consider requiring early childhood content for superintendent and principal credentialing
- Build the capacity of professional development systems to improve practice in the early childhood and early elementary years

Many of these recommendations build on the proposals in the Master Plan — taking the policy trajectory it articulates and applying its ideas to a broader context that includes K-12 schools.

While state leadership is needed, there are important actions that can already be taken at the local level. School districts should:

- Consider children’s educational experiences from birth to second grade as a critical factor for their long-term success, with the understanding that it’s better to start out ahead than to have to catch up from third grade onward
- Consider the potential benefits of partnerships with non-school early learning and care providers, and seek to establish them where they would be helpful
- Evaluate practices in family engagement, and identify areas where collaboration with early-childhood providers might be beneficial to families
- Identify existing approaches to serving Dual Language Learners and English Learners and improve communication with early childhood providers to develop shared practices that support warm handoffs for families and coherence for children
- Include early childhood as part of their LCAP process, engaging early childhood stakeholders and then addressing early childhood in their plans
- Experiment with early childhood-focused dashboard indicators to track progress in early childhood and the early elementary grades
- Review existing practices for assessing the learning and development of young children to identify areas for improvement, including in the use of results

**[CLICK TO DOWNLOAD
THE COMPLETE REPORT](#)**

www.flpadvisors.com

800 Maine Avenue, SW, Suite 200
(p) 202.499.6996 (f) 202.644.9779
Washington, D.C. 20024
Foresight@FLPAdvisors.com

Author: Elliot Regenstein
Elliot.Regenstein@flpadvisors.com