



Early Childhood Policy Council Annual Report

Introduction

This is the first annual report of the Early Childhood Policy Council (Council). The Council's inaugural year has been uniquely challenging: the global pandemic wreaked havoc on lives and livelihoods around the world and in California. Its impact on vulnerable families and early learning and care providers has been particularly devastating. The pandemic further laid bare racial inequality and institutional racism, as did the racial violence and injustices experienced by African Americans across the country. Finally, the year was wrought with political turmoil, culminating in a federal election that brings the hope of a federal partnership supportive of California's policies for young families and early childhood education (ECE) providers.

Within this context, the Council convened remotely for seven meetings in 2020 to elevate the needs of young children and their families and to advise the Governor, Legislature, and the Superintendent of Public Instruction on statewide early learning, care, and child development. The Council's two advisory committees—the Parent Advisory Committee and Workforce Advisory Committee—also each convened two times to give voice to these two essential constituency groups. All meetings were well-attended: an average of 400 members of the public registered for each meeting, many of whom provided public comment. Summaries and materials related to each meeting can be found on the [Early Childhood Policy Council web page](#).

This year, the Council aligned its work with the development of the Master Plan for Early Learning and Care—providing recommendations to inform the plan before its submission to State leaders in December. This report presents these recommendations, after some brief background information about the Council.

Background

The Early Childhood Policy Council was established in law via Senate Bill 75 (Chapter 51, Statutes of 2019). The purpose of the Council is to advise the Governor, the Legislature, and the Superintendent of Public Instruction on statewide early learning and care policy, including the planning for and the implementation and evaluation of, the State's Master Plan for Early Learning and Care and the 2019 California Assembly Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Education Final Report.



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Specifically, the Council's role is to

- advise the Governor and perform activities required pursuant to Section 9837b of Title 42 of the United States Code;
- prepare a formal public annual report on the work of the council; and
- provide specific recommendations directly to the Governor, the Legislature, and the Superintendent on all aspects of the state's early childhood education system, including on the following topics:
 - Equity, with consideration for demographic, geographic, and economic diversity, and with a focus on family-centered, two-generation approaches
 - Opportunities to incorporate a support model of accountability, as opposed to a compliance model of accountability, into the state's early childhood education system
 - Ways that the State's Master Plan for Early Learning and Care and the 2019 California Assembly Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Education Final Report can be updated and improved

The Council currently includes 25 members who have been appointed as follows:

- Fourteen members appointed by the Governor, including those required pursuant to Section 9837b of Title 42 of the United States Code. One of the Governor's appointees is the chairperson of the council.
- Four members appointed by the Speaker of the Assembly.
- Four members appointed by the Senate Committee on Rules.
- One member appointed by the Superintendent.
- Two members of the Workforce Advisory Committee, appointed by that committee.

Two seats on the Council remain vacant; these will be appointed by the Parent Advisory Committee once this committee is fully seated. Members of the Council serve terms of three years, and no member may serve more than two terms.

Members of the Council include stakeholder representatives reflecting the comprehensive childcare system; the ethnic, racial, and language diversity of the state; and the geographic diversity and those communities separated from opportunity due to poverty, racial bias, language, geographic isolation, disability, and other factors.

Council Recommendations

The following sections describe council recommendations on (1) all aspects of the state's early childhood system, including equity, with consideration for demographic, geographic, and economic diversity, focusing on family-centered, two-generation approaches; (2) opportunities to incorporate a support model of accountability, as opposed to a compliance model of accountability, into the state's early childhood education system; and (3) ways that the State's Master Plan for Early Learning and Care and the 2019 California



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Assembly Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Education Final Report can be updated and improved.

Recommendations are supported by quotes to illustrate themes that emerged throughout the year.

Equity, with consideration for demographic, geographic, and economic diversity, focusing on family-centered two-generation approaches

Equity-driven strategies that comprehensively support the needs of children and families were a high priority and at the forefront of Council discussions. Council members elevated the need to systemically and intentionally address the diverse needs of children and families. Members reaffirmed their stance on the need for a family-centered approach supported by authentic partnerships with families and cross-sector strategies to address the systemic inequities impacting children, families, and providers. Equity-driven efforts must be intentional, supported by funding allocations to advance equity-driven work, and result in policies and practices informed by data to support the needs of the whole child and whole family:

- “Looking forward to continued partnership to strengthen whole family approaches to those households you identified [and those families who] may be participating in multiple programs and [are] most in need of resources.”
- “Equitable whole child and whole family system” entails “a comprehensive plan to fund what California's children, families, and child care providers need to survive and thrive.”

Whole Child Coordination Systems

When envisioning an ECE system that attends to the multi-generational needs of children and families, Council members emphasized the need for comprehensive services that apply a strength-based and family-centered approach. The Council highlighted the need to create systemic and structural changes that support vulnerable families.

Comprehensively supporting the diverse needs of children and families requires a coordinated system that meets families where they are and limits their burden through accessible points of entry. The system must be sensitive to cultural and linguistic differences and be compassionate to the experiences of children and families.

Systems-level enhancements must be driven by authentic engagement that considers the diverse needs of families by being culturally and linguistically responsive. The Council also elevated the importance of dispelling any implication of shame for families seeking services, particularly because notions of who is or is not deserving often reflect and perpetuate racism, classism, sexism, and xenophobia:



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- “The ‘system’ assumes parents/families don't know what's best, nor want what's best for their families...[This notion] is based in historical anti-Black racist policies that have persisted to apply to all families struggling to make ends meet.”
- “Meet families where they are, not where we want them (or expect them) to be.”

Throughout the year, Council members consistently prioritized the urgency to address the immediate needs of families and children in light of the COVID–19 pandemic. The needs of families and children were compounded by the strain in social welfare services as more families relied on these services. Members voiced support for additional flexibility or even suspension of family fees to better address the economic challenges families are experiencing due to the pandemic.

The Council also emphasized the importance of linking family and child needs to systemic inequities. Members emphasized intersectional disparities (e.g., “Parents of color with disproportionate exposure to trauma and poverty.”) and the number of families who navigate through multiple social welfare systems (e.g., “foster care, CPS/At-Risk [Child Protective Services], CalWORKS [California Work Opportunity and Responsibility for Kids], homelessness, and SSI [Supplemental Security Income]”). Dual language learners and special education students were consistently identified as populations that must be prioritized, along with the need for sensitivity to cultural and linguistic norms.

Additional populations prioritized by the Council are described in the following section. These populations are categorized by demographics, geography, and economic status.

Demographics

Children with special needs and/or children of parents with special needs

- The system must consider families in which a “parent has mental health or other challenges” including “maternal depression, drug addiction,” and “developmental disabilities.”
- “Parents with a developmental disability who have young children may be a subgroup... these parents don't always have support to ensure access to child care which can be very important for the development of their child.”

Children and parents in the child welfare system, including the foster care system

- Foster parents who are caregivers for children with special needs.
- Children who are informally in foster care (sent to live with a family member).
- Young parents who are transitioning out of foster care and “have been touched by the dependency system—by the child welfare system.”

African American children

African American children and families must be included on the list of vulnerable populations due to “the multiple layers” of vulnerabilities that are uniquely experienced by this population, such as preschool expulsion rates and family trauma.



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Children of parents escaping violence and other challenges

The system must consider children of parents who are escaping domestic violence and often face housing insecurity and homelessness, as well as the challenges associated with being raised by a single parent (e.g., “struggle with picking up the children,” “[having] no other resource” [in terms of child care support]).

Children who are neglected and/or lack relational support from their families

The COVID–19 pandemic created an extra “layer of pressure on really at-risk families” who have had their relational support cutoff due to social distancing.

Families with mixed-immigration status

“[There are] families moving across the border because they cannot afford rent. It takes those families up to three hours to come to work. Many are opting to keep their children with a friend or family member.”

Expecting mothers

“We need to increase support and services in prenatal mental health and postpartum.”

Geography

- Children living in communities with concentrated poverty
- Families living in rural areas who are unable to access WiFi or need additional support to use technology

Economic status

- Families experiencing poverty
- Tribal families, particularly those experiencing poverty
- Families facing housing insecurity or homelessness

Opportunities to incorporate a support model of accountability, as opposed to a compliance model of accountability, into the state’s early childhood education system

Addressing systemic racism and inequities within the early childhood education system

The Council underscored the importance of attending to the needs of providers and incorporating a supportive model of accountability that could ensure providers have the resources necessary to serve children and families. Providers must be viewed as experts and authentically engaged to help elevate the needs of families in their communities, as they often have shared experiences with the families they serve. Partnership with



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providers throughout the state is a critical and essential component in determining what state and local supports are needed: “Meeting the diverse workforce where they are and supporting them to have the resources they need to effectively support children and families can help us meet children and families where they are since so many educators, particularly home-based educators, are very similar to the children and families they serve.”

Council members described the current early childhood system of accountability as punitive, riddled with confusing administrative policies and unclear expectations. These challenges in accountability often occur against a backdrop of systemic racism that drives inconsistencies of support, resource allocation, and compensation.

Members highlighted that women of color are often paid the least, even though they are the most represented in the field, pointing to the way racism is interwoven into the issues of pay equity. This creates a type of ripple effect in how inequity in pay “negatively and disproportionately impacts” women of color who are in the ECE field, women of color who rely on affordable high-quality child care, and families who may not be able to afford to pay for quality child care out of pocket.

The Council expressed the need to address the inadequacy of compensation and the inequity of pay with respect to (1) comparable professions, and (2) the level of experience and educational attainment of a given provider. The system must reinforce and support existing professional pathways and ensure early childhood educators are viewed with respect and dignity. Pay equity was highlighted as an essential first step in strengthening professional pathways, recruiting and retaining the workforce, and supporting their professional growth and capacity to provide high-quality education and care. Members recommend that the workforce be engaged and supported in informing plans and actions related to these issues:

- “Ensuring equity requires access to [both] higher education systems that were not historically created for the diverse women who comprise the existing ECE workforce and varied supports that create pathways into and through many different professional learning opportunities.”
- “Family child care providers still do not earn a livable wage or wages that are equitable to the work that we do. There is a problem...100% rooted in system racist policies.”
- “While career development and professional learning and support are needed, neither of those matters if the compensation is not enough to keep educators in the field. Compensation needs to come first.”
- “Compensation is of the utmost importance. In order to have quality care we need to be able to retain and recruit care providers. People need to be able to live and not work multiple jobs to afford to live.”



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Aligning supports with the needs and experiences of providers

Fully supporting the early childhood workforce requires a systemic approach that aligns professional development, economic, social service, and community-based supports. Council recommendations to comprehensively support providers along with examples and quotes from Council members are described below.

Provide financial assistance and awards as an alternative to changes in salary.

Examples include

- offering provider scholarship opportunities; and
- offering loan forgiveness programs for providers pursuing training and degrees.

Provide state and local supports to strengthen providers' business management.

Examples include

- providing training to enhance home-based providers' competency in accounting, human resources, etc.; and
- supporting a shared-services model that providers could draw on collectively for business-related skills.

Enhance access to mental health services for providers. Illustrative quotes from the Council include the following:

- "We need to make sure our child care providers are getting their mental health needs met as well during this pandemic."
- "When we are talking about trauma-informed care and practices we must also remember we have a workforce that has experienced generational trauma as well. Our educators need support for mental wellness too."

Connect providers with community resources to better support families:

- Connecting providers to community services, resources, and information could help ensure they are informed and can better help the families they serve.
- Establish a network of local support to connect providers with information regarding social safety net programs and health practitioners.
- Ensure supports are available in a variety of formats for providers, considering that some providers may not feel comfortable with networking via a computer and others may prefer a house meeting.
- Ensure information is provided in the provider's preferred language and is culturally sensitive.



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Training, support, and reducing administrative burden for case managers

Throughout the year, the Council elevated the importance of case workers in providing a baseline service in which they listen to all families and are well-trained in trauma-informed care and implicit bias. Caseworkers need support in serving parents with “sensitivity and empathy,” which may be gained through training, targeted technical assistance, and accountability:

- “More training to improve quality in case management, reflective practice supervision, and lower caseloads.”
- “Case managers are fraught with having to abide by being ‘compliance driven’ yet there is no measure on how they support the family overall.”
- “Reduce caseloads for case managers to spur case managers to see themselves as supporting families versus having to check boxes or collect signatures.”

Coordinating comprehensive services and streamlining services and data

Streamlining services at the state level must be supported by an integrated data system that connects services across the state and at the local level. Technology has the potential to help streamline and support families’ access to social services and community resources via smart phones or computers. However, existing statutes and regulations, such as HIPAA, make it difficult for health information to be shared. The need to identify and remove procedural barriers to facilitate the accessibility of services was frequently discussed by the Council.

Members agreed that the State must strive for a coordinated system that meets families where they are and limits their burden through accessible points of entry. There was agreement in seeing the potential of a common data system in reducing administrative burden by minimizing data duplication, avoiding the re-traumatization of parents as they recount their needs at different agencies, and simplifying and ensuring information that families receive:

- “Making sure that we can have that transparency between agencies where there's communication and information shared” can help reduce misinformation and keep families from “bouncing back and forth” between agencies.
- “Navigators (Case Managers) should help families navigate other systems such as health, food insecurity, homelessness, etc. Therefore, there is no wrong door or a single door for families.”

Building state-level agency partnerships and streamlining funds to support families

The Council consistently reiterated the challenges families have in asking for help and navigating resources and supports, particularly when the family is navigating through



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multiple systems and services. Members strongly recommended aligning funding streams as a way to create a more equitable, accessible system:

- “Families are having a difficult time navigating through the CalWORKs system to access child care for our most vulnerable and youngest children, especially with housing and child care access from county to county.”
- “[It is] important that we have better alignment between all of the types of contracts and funding streams. It is not equitable for programs and families when the funding and State contracts do not align well.”

Ways that the State’s Master Plan for Early Learning and Care and the 2019 California Assembly Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Education Final Report can be updated and improved

One of the most prominent themes in regard to the Master Plan for Early Learning and Care and the 2019 California Assembly Blue Ribbon Commission (BRC) on Early Childhood Education is to ensure stakeholder voices are included. Voices from the field were described as vital, as they provide first-hand accounts and insight in terms of implementation of any policy. The Council emphasized the need to further include family child care providers in data collection activities and activities related to the Master Plan:

- “Conversations with the field (providers, parents, and IHE faculty) is imperative for policy makers to understand the realities of this most important work.”
- “Local planning is critical if State and federal child care investments are to improve the lives of children and working families in our diverse state, especially during times of crisis such as the current COVID-19 pandemic.”

In regard to the BRC, the Council recommended incorporating input from stakeholders at institutions of higher education. It was also recommended to involve the First 5 Commission and the Commission on Teacher Credentialing:

- “Remember and integrate BRC recommendations for higher education faculty and students across ECE/Child Development community college, baccalaureate, and graduate programs, so that preparation, counseling, and care of our ECE students is robust across their preparation and ongoing professional development. BRC recommendations include financial supports to students and to IHE programs to provide strong competency-based and practice-based learning experiences to students.”
- “...[I]t will be critical to build on the BRC’s recommendation to leverage the capacity and proven role of the local First 5 Commissions as the Early Childhood Policy Council ‘glue’ across local programs and services that promote optimal early childhood development.”



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Early Childhood Policy Council Members

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Tonia McMillian, Kiddie Depot Family Childcare;

Miren Algorri, Algorri Family Childcare

Parent Advisory Committee

Mary Ignatius, Chair, Parent Voices Statewide Organizer;

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