



CHILDREN NOW



May 29, 2015

The Honorable Mark Leno
State Capitol, Room 5100
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Shirley Weber
State Capitol, Room 6026
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Ricardo Lara
State Capitol, Room 5050
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Richard Bloom
State Capitol, Room 2003
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Jim Nielsen
State Capitol, Room 2068
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Melissa Melendez
State Capitol, Room 6031
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Invest in Quality Early Education Funding in the 2015-2016 Budget

Dear Honorable Leno, Lara, Nielsen, Weber, Bloom and Melendez:

Our organizations – representing a partnership of key statewide and regional early childhood education advocacy organizations – thank you for your efforts to ensure early care and education is a priority in the budget proposals put forth by both the Assembly and the Senate. We respectfully call on you to continue to stand for the state’s youngest learners and their families. Please send Governor Brown a budget that reflects the Legislative Women’s Caucus and the Assembly Democrats’ call for no less than a \$600 million increase in quality early childhood education across three fundamentally linked priority areas: **access, affordability, and quality**. We also support the Senate’s proposal to move early learning programs back under Proposition 98 funding, which affirms that early care and education is fundamental to the success of the K-12 system, and deserves a share of the overall restoration. In particular we request you to:

1. *Expand access to quality early learning for low-income young children and their families*

Quality preschool for 4-year olds

As the Assembly proposal acknowledges, this budget should contain a significant step toward last year’s promise to provide full-day, full-year quality preschool opportunities to all low-income 4-year olds. As such, we propose that you adopt the Assembly’s action to:

- Expand the California State Preschool Program by 10,500 full-day, full-year slots and streamline funding by placing all preschool funding under Proposition 98 with a corresponding rebenching of the minimum guarantee

Quality child care for babies and toddlers

Given the great need for families to have access to quality care for babies and toddlers in all settings, we propose the final budget mirror the Assembly and Senate proposals to:

- Expand Child Care and Alternative Payment Programs by no less than 10,500 slots with priority for infants and toddlers, and support the Senate’s recommendation to move early learning programs back under Proposition 98 with a corresponding rebenching of the minimum guarantee

Maintain eligibility for more families

Ensuring more working families are able to maintain eligibility for child care supports family economic self-sufficiency and continuity of care for children

- Increase the State Median Income (SMI) level to 100% of the current SMI as detailed in the Assembly proposal

2. *Increase rates and cost of living adjustment so low-income families can afford a wide range of programs and child care/early education providers can continue to provide services*

Given the need to continue quality improvements and address the continuous cost pressure to maintain operations, including the recent increase in state minimum wage and significant regional increases, we strongly urge you to increase rates this year because they are foundational to improving access and quality. We urge you to adopt the Assembly plan to:

- Increase the Standard Reimbursement Rate by 20% as well as the Center Adjustment Factor for infants and toddlers
- Increase the Regional Market Rate ceiling to the 85th Percentile of the 2014 Survey with a 10% deficit factor

3. *Continue to focus on increasing quality in all early learning settings*

Although California has successful local efforts and various initiatives to support quality, *the state still needs a consistent, system-wide focus* on quality and continuous improvement to ensure families throughout the state have equal access to quality child care and preschool. We urge you to adopt the Assembly's \$80 million investment to build, improve and maintain quality early care and education throughout the state. This includes foundational one-time and on-going Proposition 98 investments to:

- Establish the Community College Early Childhood Education Professional Development Consortium;
- Expand the on-going Quality Rating and Improvement System block grant to include infant and toddler providers;
- Provide professional development funds for state preschool and other subsidized child care programs.

The research is crystal clear—early childhood education is one of the best investments we can make to not only provide our youngest and most vulnerable children with the quality early learning experiences they need to thrive in school and in life, but to give their working families the opportunity to participate and succeed in our recovering economy. We respectfully ask you to seize this critical opportunity to impact children and families, and our collective futures.

Sincerely,

Advancement Project; Bay Area Council; Children Now; Early Edge California; First 5 California; First 5 Los Angeles; Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce; Los Angeles Universal Preschool; First 5 Association of California; MamásConPoder; MomsRising; United Ways of California; and ZERO TO THREE Western Office

CC: Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr.
Senate President pro Tempore Kevin de León
Speaker Toni Atkins
Members, Legislative Women's Caucus
Michael Cohen, Department of Finance