



# Getting Down to **FACTS**



## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION Section 2: Staff Preparation & Support

**Deborah Stipek**  
Stanford University

**Beth Meloy**  
Child and Family Advisory Collaborative

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**Deborah Stipek**, *Stanford University*

**Beth Meloy**, *Child and Family Advisory Collaborative*

Teachers determine the quality of children’s experience and the long-term effects of early childhood education (ECE) more than any other factor. To be effective, teachers of young children need a range of knowledge and skills to support children’s social-emotional, academic, and physical development. They need to be able to establish safe, caring, and positive relationships with all children, including dual language learners and those with special needs, and help children develop foundational skills in language, literacy, and math. Teachers also need to develop positive relationships with young children’s families and develop an understanding of the culture and needs of individual children.

Teacher preparation programs are designed to create the foundation for effective teaching. But no preparation program can fully prepare new teachers to be an expert in all of the demands of their job. On-the-job resources, leadership support, and professional learning opportunities are also important. Accordingly, this section examines both pre-service and ongoing support for teachers of young children.

The section begins with a summary of the major policy changes that California has made in the last decade related to the preparation of ECE teachers, including changes proposed for the child development permit matrix, the new PK-3 Early Childhood Education Specialist Instruction Credential, and the accompanying Teaching Professional Expectations and Teaching Performance Assessments. The final section focuses on efforts to develop teachers’ skills after they enter the field of ECE.

In brief, this section addresses the following questions:

1. What are the current preparation requirements for ECE teachers and how have they changed in the last few years? How do California requirements compare to other states?
2. What recent initiatives have been created to guide and support high-quality ECE teacher preparation?

3. What assessments are required for an ECE Teaching Permit or Credential?
4. What policies and supports are available in the state to support teachers and school leaders after they have completed their preparation?

For each of these questions, this section makes recommendations for the future and provides examples of programs in both California and other states that might be implemented or expanded to support high quality ECE teaching.

## Teacher Preparation Requirements

California has three sets of teacher preparation requirements for the three types of programs described in Section 1. Requirements for all programs managed by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) are under Title 22. Requirements for California state preschool (CSPP) and General Child Care and Development programs, contracted and funded by the Department of Education (CDE), must meet Title 22 requirements but also Title 5 regulations. Transitional Kindergarten, also managed by the CDE, has its own set of teacher credential requirements. Requirements for Head Start programs are determined by the Federal Office of Head Start, and thus not under state control.

## Title 22 Requirements for Programs Managed by the CDSS

Title 22 regulations for the preparation of ECE teacher- and director roles are summarized in the table below.

**Title 22 Requirements for Caregiver Staff<sup>1</sup>**

<b>License-Exempt Provider</b>	None
<b>Family Child Care Home Provider</b>	15 hours health and safety training
<b>Teacher in Title 22 Child Care Center</b>	12 postsecondary semester units (fully qualified), including four specified courses in early childhood education from an accredited college, and 6 months of work experience in a licensed childcare center or similar program; or a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential
<b>Director</b> Responsible for the operation of the center, including compliance with regulations, and communications with the Department of Social Services	<p>a) High school graduation or GED and 15 semester units at an accredited college, including 12 specified child development course units <i>and</i> 3 units in administration or staff relations <i>and</i> 4 years of teaching experience in a licensed center or comparable group childcare program, <b>or</b></p> <p>b) AA degree with a major in child development <i>and</i> 3 units in administration or staff relations <i>and</i> 2 years of teaching experience in a licensed center or comparable group childcare program, <b>or</b></p> <p>c) BA degree with a major in child development and 3 units in administration or staff relations <i>and</i> 1 year of teaching experience in a licensed center or comparable group childcare program, <b>or</b></p> <p>c) A Child Development Site Supervisor Permit or a Child Development Program Director Permit issued by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing</p>

Programs in California under Title 22 are roughly in line with other states’ requirements for individuals who serve as childcare providers. As of 2024, state minimum requirements for childcare

<sup>1</sup><https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/letters-regulations/legislation-and-regulations/community-care-licensing-regulations/child-care>  
<https://t22.caqualityearlylearning.org/continuing-requirements/teacher-qualifications-and-duties?utm>

licensing are shown in the table below.<sup>2</sup> In some states additional qualifications are required for larger settings.

**Minimum Qualification in Child Care Licensing in U.S. States and DC, 2024**

	Family Home Care Provider	Center Teacher	Center Director
None	16	9	2
CDA or equivalent	6	10	16
High school diploma/GED	7	10	4
Some higher ed; < CDA or equivalent	20	16	11
Some higher ed; > CDA or equivalent, <AA	0	3	13
AA	0	3	3
BA or above	0	0	2

## Title 5 Requirements for Programs Contracted with the Department of Education

A new permit matrix for ECE levels was approved by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) in 2025, the first revision in 32 years. The permit regulations are expected to be submitted to CTC in December of 2025, and if approved will be submitted to the Office of Administrative Law. Thus, the proposed matrix has some way to go to final approval. After it is approved, those who hold existing permits will be able to remain in their job roles.

One potential complication is a contradiction between the current Title 5 regulations and the proposed matrix requirements for a classroom teacher of record. According to Title 5 regulations, an associate teacher with 12 units in ECE (the equivalent of an ECE 1 in the proposed matrix) is allowed to be the primary teacher in a classroom. The proposed Child Development Permit matrix requires the

<sup>2</sup> McLean, C., Austin, L.J.E., Whitebook, M., & Olson, K.L. (2021). Early Childhood Workforce Index – 2024. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved from <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2024/the-early-childhood-educator-workforce/about-the-early-childhood-workforce/>

primary teacher in the classroom to be an ECE 2, with an associate degree in early childhood education or child development or an associate degree in another field and 24 units in ECE. For the proposed matrix to apply to lead teacher requirements, Title 5 regulations will need to be changed.

We describe below the proposed matrix approved by CTC. Although it has not achieved final approval and implementation, it reflects where California appears to be headed with regard to teacher preparation requirements for Title 5 programs.

### Proposed Child Development Permit Matrix

Position	Authorizes the Child Development Permit (CDP) holder to:	Minimum Requirements	Terms and Renewals
<b>ECE 1 (Associate Teacher)</b>	Authorizes the holder to assist in the care, development, and instruction of children under the guidance and supervision of an ECE 2 or higher.	<b>Education:</b> 12 specified units in Early Childhood Education or Child Development	<b>Term:</b> 5 years <b>Renewal:</b> 105 hours of professional development
<b>ECE 2 (Teacher)</b>	Authorizes the holder to be the teacher of record and provide guidance and supervision to an ECE 1.	<b>Education:</b> AA in Early Childhood Education, Child Development or a degree program that includes 24 units in ECE/CD. Two semester units of coursework in adult supervision. <b>Supervised Clinical Field Experience:</b> Three semester units (minimum of 100 hours)	<b>Term:</b> 5 Years for the ECE 2 <b>Renewal:</b> 105 hours of professional development
<b>ECE 3 (Master Teacher)</b>	Provide care, development, and instruction of children in an early learning child development program and provide guidance, mentoring, and supervision to ECE 1 and 2 Permit	<b>Education:</b> BA in early childhood education, Child Development or a related field. Two semester units of coursework in adult supervision. <b>Supervised Clinical Field</b>	<b>Term:</b> 5 Years <b>Renewal:</b> 105 hours of professional development

Position	Authorizes the Child Development Permit (CDP) holder to:	Minimum Requirements	Terms and Renewals
	holders. The holder may also serve as coordinator of curriculum, and staff development at a site or program level, and provide mentorship under the supervision of an Early Childhood Administrator 2	<b>Experience:</b> Three or more semester units (minimum of 100 hours)	
<b>Early Childhood Administrator 1 (Site Supervisor)</b>	Authorizes the holder to supervise an early learning and child development program at a single site to provide guidance and supervision to ECE 1, 2, and ECE 3 staff serving in the role of the teacher of record at that single program site.	<b>Education:</b> AA in Early Childhood Education or Child Development or a related field. Three semester units of supervised clinical (field) experience. Two semester units of coursework in adult supervision and six semester units in ECE administration. <b>Field Experience:</b> One year of full-time teaching experience with students ages 0-8 while holding a credential or permit and 100 days of supervisory experience with students ages 0-8 within the last four years.	<b>Term:</b> 5 Years <b>Renewal:</b> 105 hours of professional development
<b>Early Childhood Administrator 2 (Program Director)</b>	Authorizes the holder to supervise a program operating at multiple sites and to provide guidance and supervision to ECE 1, 2, 3, and ECA Administrator 1 staff.	<b>Education:</b> BA in early childhood education or child development or a related field. Three semester units of supervised clinical (field) experience or equivalent.	<b>Term:</b> 5 Years <b>Renewal:</b> 105 hours of professional development

Position	Authorizes the Child Development Permit (CDP) holder to:	Minimum Requirements	Terms and Renewals
		Two semester units of coursework in adult supervision or equivalent. Six semester units in ECE administration or equivalent. <b>Field Experience:</b> One year of full-time teaching experience with students ages 0-8 while holding a credential or permit and 100 days of supervisory experience with students ages 0-8 within the last four years.	

Several noteworthy changes were proposed. First, a previous entry level of Assistant Teacher, which required only six units of college level work in EC, was eliminated. The entry level position (ECE 1) now required 12 units. A second change required lead teachers (ECE 2) to have an AA degree, which includes the 24 units of ECE previously required.<sup>3</sup> A third change was to require supervised teaching experience for all levels at or above ECE 2. Currently, lead teachers are not required to have any supervised field experience. CTC is also considering adding Areas of Emphasis in dual language learners, infant and toddler care, special education, and expanded (school age) learning, each requiring six additional units, to the Child Development Permit Matrix for individuals desiring more preparation for the children they serve.

Even with the somewhat more rigorous requirements, California would have lower education requirements than most states for state preschool. As of 2023, a BA was required in 43 states for a lead

<sup>3</sup> Current Title 5 requirements for a classroom teacher do not yet align with the levels outlined in the revised Child Development Permit matrix. While the new matrix designates the ECE 2 as the teacher of record for new permit holders, existing Title 5 regulations continue to allow individuals holding the current equivalent of an ECE 1-level permit to serve as the primary classroom teacher.

state preschool teacher in public schools and in 22 states in nonpublic schools.<sup>4</sup> In those states that do not have a BA requirement, an AA is required in three states for public schools and nine states for nonpublic schools. A few states require a mixture. For example, Ohio requires 50% of lead teachers to have a BA and the other 50% an AA. Arkansas requires one BA for every three classrooms and an AA for the other two. Two states (Nevada and New Mexico) allow a person to teach preschool while working toward their degrees. Only four states, including California, require less than an AA. Of those four, two require a CDA and two require only a high school diploma (only for nonpublic settings in one of these two states).

## Transitional Kindergarten Teachers Requirements

Teachers assigned to a TK classroom must have a Multiple Subject or a PK-3 Early Childhood Education Specialist Instruction credential (described below). Education Code (EC) section 48000(g) specifies that Local Education Agencies (LEAs) are only eligible for funding (apportionment) for TK teaching assignments if the multiple subject credential holder completes an additional 24 units of ECE coursework (or the equivalent as deemed by their employer) or holds a Child Development Teacher level permit.<sup>5</sup> Given districts discretion in judging TK teachers' preparation for teaching young children, it will be important to examine what they judge to be equivalent to 24 units.

## Analysis

The current teacher requirements raise concerns about the variability associated with funding sources and the overall low level of requirements. These concerns are discussed below.

### **Variability**

Three- to four-year old children eligible for preschool could find themselves in programs managed by either of two different California agencies, CDSS or CDE, which view their responsibilities

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<sup>4</sup> Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Hodges, K. S., Garver, K. A., Jost, T., Weisenfeld, G., & Duer, J. (2024). The State of Preschool 2023: State Preschool Yearbook. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research. [https://nieer.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/2023\\_nieer\\_yearbook\\_8-9-24.pdf](https://nieer.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/2023_nieer_yearbook_8-9-24.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> AB-130 Education finance: education omnibus budget trailer bill (2021-2022). [https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billCompareClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=202120220AB130&showamends=false](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billCompareClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220AB130&showamends=false)

differently. The primary goal of CDSS programs is to provide childcare that offers a safe environment for children and allows parents to work. Consistent with this purpose, these programs only require teachers to have health and safety training, and for teachers in a Center, to have 12 postsecondary units of preparation. Although all CDE-managed programs must meet the same Title 22 regulations that CDSS-managed programs must meet, CDE focuses on education, and consequently requires teachers to have more training in supporting children’s learning and development. Given these differences, children of the same age can have teachers with widely varying levels of training. The difference is especially large for 4 year olds who might be in TK with a teacher who has both a BA and a teaching credential, or in a childcare center with a teacher who has only 12 units of preparation, or in family childcare with a teacher who has no training in early childhood education. All of these settings receive public funding.

In brief, the training required of teachers in California depends on the source of funding, not on children’s needs. The distinction between *preschool* (suggesting an education function) and *childcare* is an anachronism. Traditionally, preschool was an education-focused half-day program that did not meet working parents’ childcare needs. Most parents now need childcare and all young children need support for their learning and development.

California might consider basing training requirements on the age of children rather than on the funding source. Teachers of children aged 3-4 years, whatever program they are in, should receive some preparation to prepare children appropriately and effectively for kindergarten. Requiring all early childhood caregivers to have more training in early childhood education is not realistic given current pay. Childcare, however, can be combined with educational programs (acknowledging that children are learning, even in programs that are not expressly designed for education). The state has already made considerable progress in this direction. All four-year-old children in California currently have access to TK with a highly educated teacher, and many 3- and 4 year olds have access to state preschool or Head Start, with teachers who have specific training in supporting children’s learning and development. Moreover, many of these programs provide wrap-around childcare.

Many 3- and 4 year olds, however, are cared for in home-based care, and although some home-based caregivers have considerable training in early childhood education, training is not required, and many do not have it. A worthy goal would be to ensure that all 3 year olds have access to

at least a part-day education program with a teacher trained in early childhood education and childcare that meets the needs of working parents. Expanding home childcare providers' opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills related to children's learning and development would also be valuable.

### ***Level of Requirements***

In every state there is tension between meeting early childhood program staffing needs and requiring sufficient preparation to ensure high quality. Like many states, California has a staffing shortage, and increasing requirements without significant increases in pay could exacerbate the shortages. There is also a great need in California for teachers who represent the cultural and language diversity of its children--a group that is relatively disadvantaged economically and thus under-represented in higher education.

Although the tension applies to all states, California preparation requirements are particularly low, even for preschool programs designed specifically to support young children's education. As mentioned above, under the proposed child development permit matrix teachers responsible for a classroom of children in California are expected to be required to have an AA. The current Title 5 regulations allow an associate teacher with only 12 units of ECE to serve as lead teacher. Both are below the majority of other states, which require a BA for lead teachers in their state preschools.

Unfortunately research on teacher preparation provides only modest guidance on what level of education is needed to be an effective ECE teacher. There is a fair amount of evidence supporting the value of a BA, but it is not consistent.<sup>6</sup> It is, nevertheless, highly unlikely that 12 units of coursework prepares people effectively to support the learning and development of young children, including dual language learners and children with special needs.

The content of preparation – how focused it is on child development and effective educational practice – and the quality and amount of supervised field experiences candidates receive, is most likely just as important as the number of courses. There is not a lot of detailed evidence, but research does support training that focuses on practice.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Stipek, D. (2020). Can QRIS Predict Child Outcomes? Stanford University: Policy Analysis for California Education. Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED609260.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Schachner, A., Wang, V., Yun, C., Plasencia, S., Mauerman, C., McJunkins, C., & Stipek, D. (2025). *Preparing early childhood teachers: State credentialing and preparation program design*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/ece-credentialing-preparation-programs-four-states-report>

Practical preservice training for ECE in both AA and BA programs is limited in California. Although community college programs are typically more focused on practice than BA programs, they have a very brief amount of time to prepare ECE teachers.<sup>8</sup> The limitation comes mostly from the state's goal to facilitate transfer from 2- to 4-year colleges. The CSU system implemented the [California General Education Transfer Curriculum \(Cal-GETC\)](#) to ensure that an AA degree is fully transferable to a BA program. The transfer curriculum requires that the majority (34) of the 60 units required for an AA degree meet general course requirements (roughly the equivalent of the first two years of a four-year college).<sup>9</sup> To be aligned with this decision of the California State University system, the current teacher level and the proposed teacher (ECE 2) permits do not require more than 24 units in child development or early childhood education. A system that facilitates transfer from a 2- to a 4-year college has clear benefits. But people who intend to work with young children would be better prepared for that work if more units related to their professional goal could count toward the 60 units required for their AA.

Students attending four-year colleges have more time to take courses related to child development and ECE. More than half (56%) of center-based lead teachers in California have a BA and the majority of those (58%) majored in child development or early childhood education.<sup>10</sup> Their courses in a 4-year college more than meet the current and proposed child development permit requirements for a teacher (ECE 2). BA programs in California, however, are typically not designed to provide practical preparation for a particular profession. Courses related to child development and education in BA programs tend to focus less on practice than ECE courses in Community Colleges. In California, teaching *practice* is normally covered in post-BA teacher-credential programs. Consequently, although a student who is planning to work in the field of early childhood education can get a strong background in child

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National Academy of Education. (2024). Evaluating and Improving Teacher Preparation Programs. K. M. Zeichner, L. Darling-Hammond, A. I. Berman, D. Dong, & G. Sykes (Eds.). National Academy of Education.

<sup>8</sup> Austin, L. J. E., Whitebook, M., Kipnis, F., Sakai, L., Abbasi, F., & Amanta, F. (2015). *Teaching the teachers of our youngest children: The state of early childhood higher education in California, 2015*. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved from <http://twb8-ca.net/wpcontent/uploads/2016/05/Teaching-the-Teachers-of-Our-Youngest-Children.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> The Intersegmental Committee of the Academic Senates University of California, California State University, California Community Colleges (2023) Cal-GETC STANDARDS Version 1.0.

<sup>10</sup> Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (2021). Profiles of the California Early Care and Education Workforce, 2020 Child Care Center Teaching Staff. [https://cscce.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/CSCCE-California-ECE-Profiles-CenterTeachingStaff\\_10-19-22.pdf](https://cscce.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/CSCCE-California-ECE-Profiles-CenterTeachingStaff_10-19-22.pdf)

development in most BA programs, they are not necessarily prepared to practice as early childhood educators. If the proposed requirements in the Child Development Permit Matrix for supervised clinical field experiences are implemented, they should improve students' opportunities to develop practical skills in BA programs.

In the future, some of the teachers in UPK programs will presumably possess the new PK-3 teacher credential, discussed next, although it (or a multiple-subject credential) are not required for any ECE program aside from TK. Some California State Universities have developed Integrated Teacher Preparation Programs, which allow students to complete the PK-3 or the multiple credential with their BA. As of June 2025 two California State Universities (CSUs) have had PK-3 ITEP programs approved. These new programs have the potential for increasing opportunities for BA students who aspire to a child development teacher permit (not a PK-3 credential) to take more practice-oriented courses. San Francisco State University, for example, developed a major in "Early Childhood Studies: Pre-K to 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade," along with their new PK-3 Credential Program. The major includes courses in: child development; children, families and community; principles and practices in ECE; early language and literacy; early math; curriculum, neurodiversity, and applied advanced development science. The degree is designed to support students to gain knowledge in child development and subject matter areas and apply that knowledge through a practicum. Some students who complete this major will also complete a PK-3 or multiple subjects teaching credential. But the courses can also be used to meet the proposed requirement of an ECE 2 (teacher) Permit.

All four-year higher education programs that offer courses that meet the requirements for Child Development Permits should be encouraged to support students' practical skills related to early childhood education. Encouragement could come in the form of grants for programs to do a thorough review of their course offering and make adjustments to ensure their value for students who intend to enter the ECE field with their BA. Surveys in which graduates who became early childhood educators evaluate how well the program prepared them for practice could guide such adjustments. Professional development for higher education faculty to help them update and deepen their knowledge of effective practice would also be useful.

## New Initiatives in ECE Teacher Preparation

The most significant initiative in California related to ECE teacher preparation is the new PK-3 ECE Specialist Instructional Credential. To accompany the new credential, the state also created PK-3 Teaching Performance Expectations. These initiatives are described next.

### PK-3 ECE Specialist Instructional Credential

The regulations for the PK-3 Credential were approved in February of 2024 and became effective in April, 2024. The credential offers practice-focused preparation for teaching young children, authorizing holders to teach all subjects in preschool through grade three.

#### ***Rationale***

Goal 2 of the Master Plan released in 2020 identified steps to establish a competency-based system of preparation and licensure that supports a well-prepared workforce.<sup>11</sup> The need to expand the number of educators who were competent to support young children’s education and development was intensified by the 2021 state budget expansion of Transitional Kindergarten to all four-year-olds. The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) at UC Berkeley estimated that implementing UPK would create a need for between 8,000 and 11,000 new teachers in a TK-12 system that was already struggling with teacher shortages.<sup>12</sup> There was a pressing need for additional qualified teachers for the expanded TK access as well as creative, flexible, and feasible credentialing options.

The expansion of TK also put in clear relief the inadequacies of the multiple subjects (MS) credential for preparing teachers to teach children as young as four years. The MS credential authorizes the holder to teach all subjects in a self-contained classroom in grades preschool, K–12, or in classes organized primarily for adults.<sup>13</sup> Although most holders of the multiple subject credential teach elementary school grades K-5/6, they need to be prepared to teach children much older, and nearly a

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<sup>11</sup> Master Plan for Early Learning and Care, December 2020, p. 17; EPC 2A-2 September 2021 Goal 2; <https://californiaforallkids.chhs.ca.gov/goals>

<sup>12</sup> Williams, A., Montoya, E., Kim, Y., & Austin, L.J.E. (2021). New Data Shows Early Educators Equipped to Teach TK. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. <https://csce.berkeley.edu/early-educators-equipped-to-teach-tk/>

<sup>13</sup> Multiple Subject Teaching Credential (CL-561C). [https://www.ctc.ca.gov/credentials/leaflets/multiple-subject-teaching-credential-\(cl-561c\)](https://www.ctc.ca.gov/credentials/leaflets/multiple-subject-teaching-credential-(cl-561c))

third teach middle school grades. This is a huge age-span, which includes children at very different developmental levels and with very different educational needs. In a one-year credential program teachers cannot become well prepared to teach all subjects to children as young as four and as old as 13 or older. Recognizing the limitations of the multiple subjects credential, the state required an additional 24 units focused on ECE for MS holders to teach TK. This adds a substantial burden to MS holders who have already had at least five years of college and it does not address the particular needs of young children in the early elementary grades.

The PK-3 ECE Specialist Instructional Credential was created to increase the number of pathways to teaching TK as well as an opportunity for teachers to develop strong expertise related to the teaching of children in the early grades. Most (45) states and the District of Columbia have an early childhood teacher credential, encompassing varying ages.<sup>14</sup> The most common age spans are birth through third grade and preschool through third grade. Out of the 46 stand-alone early childhood credentials, 43 are complemented by an elementary credential that overlaps one to four grades with their early childhood credential, but does not go below kindergarten.

In addition to preparing teachers specifically to teach young children, the PK-3 credential facilitates P-3 continuity. Preschool teachers obtaining a Child Development Permit receive their preparation in programs that are very different from the preparation programs of teachers who obtain their multiple subjects credential to teach in the early elementary grades. This difference reinforces a disconnect between preschool and elementary school and a lack of continuity for children as they move through those levels. The PK-3 credential offers teachers from preschool through third grade a shared learning experience that they can use to create a more seamless educational experience for children.

## **Programs**

To be accredited to offer a PK-3 ECE Specialist Instructional Credential organizations go through a review process in which they must demonstrate alignment with all of the Program Standards. As of February 2026, 16 programs have been approved; 12 are in IHEs (8 CSUs, including two ITEP programs, and 4 privates), four are in Country Offices of education. Twelve offer traditional programs and eight

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<sup>14</sup> Schachner, A., Wang, V., Yun, C., Plasencia, S., Mauerman, C., McJunkins, C., & Stipek, D. (2025). *Preparing early childhood teachers: State credentialing and preparation program design*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/ece-credentialing-preparation-programs-four-states-report>

offer intern programs.<sup>15</sup> The programs are clustered so far in northern and southern California, but three of the programs are online and two are hybrid.

The programs are too new to judge their success in either recruiting or preparing students. Most are just beginning recruitment.

## ***Analysis***

The question now becomes: What can the state do to ensure the effectiveness of the PK-3 credential programs? With this new credential California took a significant step toward establishing an infrastructure that prepares teachers well to support the development and learning of young children and creates more coherent educational experiences for children over the early grades. A new teacher credential program is a major undertaking for the state's colleges and universities. Additional state support for both program development and faculty capacity, as described below, could contribute to the quality of the programs.

***Program Development Support.*** The success of the new credential depends substantially on the ability of IHEs to create and sustain effective programs. This is no easy or inexpensive task. It requires program planning, student recruitment, new faculty, and increased resources to support the counseling and oversight of the clinical field experiences that are required of a credential program. It also requires developing collaborations with community colleges, where many PK-3 credential candidates will complete the first two years of their college degree.

Some funding was made available to support planning for the new PK-3 credential programs from the Integrated Undergraduate Teacher Preparation Grants Program, which had been authorized to support the development or expansion of four-year integrated programs of teacher preparation. But the funding was very limited (\$20M), and no additional funding was provided to IHE's to support ongoing costs of the new credential. Given the significant costs of preparing educators for practice and the likely need to hire additional faculty with specific expertise in the education of young children, additional state funding would help ensure the quality of these new programs.

Guidance for developing PK-3 credential programs was initially offered, but has become more limited. The Commission on Teacher Credentialing offered repeated and thorough opportunities for IHEs to become well informed of the new PK-3 credential, and the California State University

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<sup>15</sup> Commission on Teacher Credentialing, Approved Institutions and Programs.  
<https://www.ctc.ca.gov/commission/reports/data/approved-institutions-and-programs>

Chancellor’s office offered day-long workshops for its faculty on preparing teachers of young children in literacy and math. CTC currently offers regular opportunities on zoom for IHE staff to discuss efforts and challenges related to preparing ECE teachers. Similar regular zoom meetings focused specifically on the development of PK-3 programs would be valuable. Other informal collaborations might also be considered, including subject-matter groups and groups addressing specific issues, such as supervised field practicum.

**Faculty Capacity Building.** The expertise of teacher educators in the state to prepare teachers of young children is also of concern. Some new PK-3 credential programs will not be able to hire faculty who have specific training in early childhood education, and even if there was more funding available, faculty with strong ECE backgrounds who also have expertise in preparing teachers for grades 1-3, especially in academic subject matter, are in short supply. Many PK-3 credential courses are taught by faculty from the multiple subjects credential program, who do not always have a strong background in early childhood education.<sup>16</sup> The state could provide opportunities for current faculty to expand their knowledge related to teaching young children.

The [Early Math in Higher Education](#) program is a promising, and relatively inexpensive example of a program designed to build capacity in higher education teacher-education faculty. The program built a network of 110 early childhood teacher educators by engaging five cohorts of California community- and state-college faculty. Each year-long cohort began with a 2-day institute to deepen participant's understanding of important early math ideas, with four 1.5-hour follow-up sessions to provide continued community around uptake and implementation of early math resources in college coursework and professional development. A variety of virtual and in-person networking opportunities continued for two years to sustain engagement of network individuals and to connect this network to other statewide efforts. This program was funded through philanthropy. The state could fund similar programs to develop PK-3 credential program faculty capacity.

A second issue, in addition to ensuring quality, is for what roles the PK-3 credential should be required. This question is discussed next.

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<sup>16</sup> Leanne Elliott, Heather Quick, Karen Manship (2024). How Teacher Preparation Programs Can Support Transitional Kindergarten Expansion in California. <https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/How-Teacher-Prep-Programs-Support-Transitional-Kindergarten-Expansion-March-2024.pdf>

**What ECE roles should require the PK-3 credential?** More than a third (19) of states require an early childhood teaching credential comparable to California’s PK-3 credential to serve as a lead teacher in public state preschools. It is not practical for California to require a PK-3 credential for CCSP teachers in the near future because staff shortages would be exacerbated by more rigorous requirements. If more rigorous standards were considered, they would need to be accompanied by substantial support to help people, including current staff, meet them, as was done in many other states. And the increased education requirement would need to be accompanied by a commensurate increase in pay. New Jersey serves as an example. When the state required PreK-3 certification for lead public preschool teachers, the court mandated pay parity with K–12 lead teachers.<sup>17</sup>

California might consider requiring a PK-3 credential for TK and possibly for kindergarten in the future. Fifteen states currently require their early childhood credential for kindergarten.<sup>18</sup> The credential is too new to be required in the short term. But given the benefits of being specifically trained to support the learning of young children, requiring a PK-3 credential should be considered when there are sufficient numbers of teachers with this credential. District and school administrators may prefer the flexibility of hiring teachers with a multiple subject credential to teach the youngest grades, but the benefits of the stronger training could outweigh the benefits of the flexibility.

## Teaching Performance Expectations

To accompany both the proposed Child Development Permit and the PK-3 Specialist Instructional Credential, the CTC created Teaching Performance Expectations (TPEs), which credential programs are required to include in their coursework. Because the TPE’s for the PK-3 credential focus on the educational needs of children from preschool through third grade, they overlap with both the ECE- and the Multiple Subject credential TPE’s.

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<sup>17</sup> Schachner, A., Wang, V., Yun, C., Plasencia, S., Mauerman, C., McJunkins, C., & Stipek, D. (2025). *Preparing early childhood teachers: State credentialing and preparation program design*. Learning Policy Institute.

<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/ece-credentialing-preparation-programs-four-states-report>

<sup>18</sup> Schachner, A., Wang, V., Yun, C., Plasencia, S., Mauerman, C., McJunkins, C., & Stipek, D. (2025).

<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/ece-credentialing-preparation-programs-four-states-report>

## Analysis

The Teaching Performance Expectations for both ECE (preschool) and the PK-3 Credential are extensive and aspirational. Preparation programs cannot meaningfully address every expectation included. Even the more rigorous lead teacher (ECE 2) requirements of the proposed permit include only 24 units of early childhood education, and although the PK-3 program is the equivalent of a full year of college, it cannot fully prepare candidates to meet all of the expectations. Although programs are required to cover all of the TPEs, realistically programs must choose which to include meaningfully, and those choices depend as much on faculty expertise and resources as on what is most important for beginning teachers. The TPEs would be more effective as a guide to programs and new teachers if they were pared down to focus on a realistic set of essential skills or if the most essential skills were highlighted.

## Assessments Required for a Teaching Credential

Teaching Performance Expectations delineate what ECE teachers *should* know and be able to do. Competency assessments are designed to assess what they *do* know and *can* do. All states have some strategy for assessing teacher candidates' preparedness. Most of these assessments are in the form of multiple-choice tests of basic skills in reading, writing, and math; content knowledge in specific fields; or pedagogical knowledge. Performance assessments designed to capture candidates' ability to teach in a classroom setting have become increasingly common.

A new Early Childhood Education California Formative Teaching Performance Assessment (ECE CalFTPAs) was released in 2021 for the current preschool teacher permit level to help ECE teacher educators organize their programs for the teacher permit around a common set of statewide competency expectations. Programs and students are encouraged but not required to use it as a formative assessment of students' progress toward meeting the performance expectations. As of August 2025, four programs were using it, three community colleges and one CSU.

For the PK-3 credential, there is no basic skills requirement; the BA is considered sufficient. The subject-matter proficiency requirement can be met by having 24 units in ECE/Child Development or a BA or above in one of nine specific majors related to child development and early childhood education. The courses and degree substitute for a separate assessment of subject matter knowledge.

In California PK-3 candidates need to pass a performance assessment, the PK-3 TPA, which was developed and released in 2025. The PK-3-TPA is typically a two-semester-long project involving lesson plans, classroom videos, and follow-up reports designed to address key elements of the TPEs.<sup>19</sup> It is designed to be embedded within the field placement of a teacher preparation program so that the candidate may draw on authentic evidence of teaching skills and student learning experiences during clinical practice. PK-3 TPA includes two instructional cycles with a focus on content-specific instructional planning and assessment. Instructional Cycle 1 is on “Learning about Students and Planning Instruction” and Cycle 2 is a “Literacy Performance Assessment”. Each instructional cycle reflects four iterative steps commonly used in teaching: (1) plan, (2) teach and assess, (3) reflect, and (4) apply.

Candidates must also demonstrate skills related to the teaching of reading, either the Foundations of Reading examination, adopted by CTC in 2024, or the Literacy Performance Assessment (LPA), the new Cycle 2 of the TPA.

### **Analysis**

Competency assessments for teacher licenses are ubiquitous despite mixed evidence on associations between performance on them and student achievement.<sup>20</sup> The additional money and time investment inherent in performance assessments may also create an additional barrier to entry that exacerbates teacher shortages. A recent national study of edTPA, which compared the number of graduates from teacher preparation programs before and after TPAs were implemented, found that the introduction of edTPA was associated with a reduction in the number of teacher graduates, especially minority candidates in less-selective or minority-concentrated universities.<sup>21</sup> The implementation of edTPA was not associated with improved student test scores for the new teachers. Another study found that although edTPAs appeared to eliminate candidates who would be ineffective teachers, they also

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<sup>19</sup> California Teaching Performance Assessment: Performance Assessment Overview. Overview of Instructional Cycles and Rubrics Version 07. [https://www.ctcexams.nesinc.com/Content/Docs/CalTPA\\_Assessment\\_Overview.pdf](https://www.ctcexams.nesinc.com/Content/Docs/CalTPA_Assessment_Overview.pdf)

<sup>20</sup>Buddin, R., Zamarro, G. (2008). Teacher Quality, Teacher Licensure Tests, and Student Achievement. Rand Working Paper, Prepared for the Institute of Education Sciences (WR-555-IES). [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/working\\_papers/2008/RAND\\_WR555.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/working_papers/2008/RAND_WR555.pdf)

Angrist, J., Guryan, J., 2003. Does Teacher Testing Raise Teacher Quality? Evidence from State Certification Requirements, NBER working paper 9545. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0272775707000842>

<sup>21</sup> Chung, Bobby W., and Jian Zou. (2023). Teacher Licensing, Teacher Supply, and Student Achievement: Nationwide Implementation of edTPA. (EdWorkingPaper: 21-440). Retrieved from Annenberg Institute at Brown University: <https://doi.org/10.26300/ppz4-gv19>

eliminated some candidates, disproportionately people of color, who were likely to be effective.<sup>22</sup> Critics argue, accordingly, that the cost of the assessments, their effects on teacher shortages, and the lower pass rate of students of color undermines their value. Some preparation faculty, furthermore, complain that the assessment is time-consuming for them, as well as for students.

In response to pressure from the California Teachers Association, in 2024 Senate Bill 1263 required the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) to convene a workgroup to assess current design and implementation of the teaching performance assessment (TPA) and report recommendations to the Legislature. In June of 2025 the workgroup did not recommend eliminating the TPA, but it did submit a detailed list of recommendations for changes. The recommendations are currently being reviewed by the CTC staff.

The state could reduce the burden on students by providing financial support to cover the cost. Absent clear evidence that passing the test is associated with better student achievement, close attention should be given to survey data assessing program faculty and candidates' views of the usefulness of the assessment in supporting the development of teaching skills. This information could be useful in guiding adjustments to the content and the process of the assessment.

Passing rates on performance assessments should also be an important consideration in evaluating preparation programs for any teacher credential. A recent study by the Learning Policy Institute found significantly lower first-time pass rates for individuals applying for a credential through an internship program (67%) than those who were completing a preservice program (77%).<sup>23</sup> First-time passing rates also varied hugely among preparation programs, from below 30% to 100%. Some programs had abysmal passing rates. Nine programs had eventual passing rates below 80% and in five programs fewer than two-thirds of their candidates passed a TPA across all attempts. These five programs were all small programs run by private institutions of higher education--one preservice program and four internship programs. Among programs with passing rates above 90%, there were no statistically significant differences in passing rates associated with race and ethnicity. Disparities were larger, however, among programs with lower overall passing rates. Low pass rates on the performance

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<sup>22</sup> Goldhaber, Dan, "Everyone's doing it, but what does teacher testing tell us about teacher effectiveness?," *Journal of human Resources*, 2007, 42 (4), 765–794.

<sup>23</sup> Patrick, S. K. (2024) How preparation predicts teaching performance assessment results in California. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/544.849>.

assessment should result in demands for remediation for the program or potentially loss of accreditation.

## Professional Development

Understanding that preparation, however effective, is insufficient to ensure high-quality ECE teaching, states have increasingly invested in professional development (PD) for early childhood educators. The 2014 reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant, the 2016 Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge, and the expansion of Quality Improvement and Rating Systems nationwide have provided additional incentives and infrastructure to expand professional development funding and opportunities for teachers. Currently nearly all states have renewal requirements for ECE credentials that include professional development. In this section we discuss research evidence on the effectiveness of PD and summarize California’s strategies for providing PD to teachers of young children. We also consider the need to develop elementary school principals’ knowledge of early childhood education.

### Effectiveness

Studies find that PD is a useful tool for improving the quality of ECE programs. A meta-analysis of extant studies of the effects of in-service PD in center-based ECE programs showed that PD significantly improved ECE program quality and child development when program quality improved substantially.<sup>24</sup> Programs with a duration of 45 to 60 hours appeared to be most effective in changing classroom practice. A meta-analysis evaluating the effects of language- and literacy-focused PD found, similarly, that PD increased the quality of instruction, with stronger effects on educators working in preschools serving children at risk due to poverty than on educators serving more affluent children.<sup>25</sup> PD had a statistically significant effect, not just on the quality of teaching, but also on children’s

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<sup>24</sup> Egert, F., Fukkink, R., & Eckhardt, A. (2018). Impact of In-Service Professional Development Programs for Early Childhood Teachers on Quality Ratings and Child Outcomes: A Meta- Analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 88(3),401–433. DOI: 10.3102/0034654317751918

<sup>25</sup> Markussen-Brown, J., Juhl, C. B., Piasta, S. B., Bleses, D., Højen, A., & Justice, L. M. (2017). The effects of language- and literacy-focused professional development on early educators and children: A best-evidence meta-analysis. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 38, 97–115.

learning, specifically phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge. Analyses that examined the association between improved instruction and improved student achievement suggested that improvements in student achievement required substantial improvements in instruction.

Studies of professional development do not provide definitive evidence on the necessary components of effective PD. But extant research evidence and experience has led to a growing consensus that effective PD programs share several critical features, including: 1) job-embedded practice, 2) intense and sustained duration, 3) specific and articulated objectives with a focus on discrete skill sets, 4) active learning, 5) collective participation of teachers from the same schools who can form learning communities, 6) opportunities for practice, research and reflection, and 6) preparation for conducting child assessments and interpreting their results.<sup>26</sup>

Coaching has the strongest evidence base, presumably because it typically includes these characteristics of effective PD.<sup>27</sup> For example, in the meta-analysis on language and literacy mentioned above, coaching was associated with larger effects than courses on both teaching and child outcomes, with more coaching intensity showing stronger effects.<sup>20</sup> Coaching was found to have the largest effect on child outcomes in another meta-analysis of ECE PD that was designed to support children’s cognitive, academic, motor, or health and social-emotional-behavioral functioning.<sup>28</sup>

Research on the effects of coaching dosage is inconsistent, suggesting that the quality and focus of coaching may be more important than the number of contact hours, and the optimal amount may

<sup>26</sup> Desimone, L. M., & Garet, M. S. (2015). Best practices in teachers’ professional development in the United States. *Psychology, Society and Education, 7*, 252–263.

Darling-Hammond, L., Wei, R. C., Andree, A., Richardson, N., & Orphanos, S. (2009). *Professional learning in the learning profession: A status report on teacher development in the United States and abroad*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University, National Staff Development Council and The School Redesign Network.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, *Toward the Identification of Features of Effective Professional Development for Early Childhood Educators*, Literature Review. Washington, D.C., 2010. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED527140.pdf>

Effective Professional Development: What the Research Says. (2006). InPraxis Group Inc. School Improvement Branch, Basic Learning, Alberta Education. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED494706.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Schachner, A., Yun, C., Melnick, H., & Barajas, J. (2024). Coaching at scale: A strategy for strengthening the early learning workforce. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/984.909>. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/coaching-at-scale>.

<sup>28</sup> Brunsek, A. et al. (2020). A meta-analysis and systematic review of the associations between professional development of early childhood educators and children’s outcomes. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 53*. 217-248.

differ depending on the scope of the coaching and the other support teachers receive.<sup>29</sup> One meta-analysis of coaching studies found that pairing coaching with group training was the most effective approach for improving both teachers' instruction and students' achievement, followed by pairing coaching with instructional resources and materials (e.g., curriculum).<sup>30</sup> A recent review of research on coaching in early childhood education and adult learning proposed the following elements of effective coaching: 1) strong partnership between the coaches and people being coached, 2) reflection and feedback, 3) focused observations, 4) intentional coaching plans, 5) job embedded, and 6) skills in coaching as well as knowledge of early childhood development.<sup>31</sup> Most of the research on coaching has focused on in-person modes of delivery, although since COVID virtual modes have become increasingly common.<sup>32</sup>

In brief, there is strong evidence for the potential effects of particular kinds of professional development for teachers, which, when effective, can improve student learning gains. We summarize California's strategies to help ECE teachers improve their teaching.

## Support for EC Educators

California EC educators have access to many professional development resources, programs and supports. For example, the Preschool/TK Early Learning Foundations (PTKLF) summarize the learning standards for children aged 3-5. The California Preschool Curriculum Frameworks articulate research-based guiding principles for early childhood professionals on environments, interactions and teaching approaches that optimize learning and development. The California Preschool Instructional

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<sup>29</sup> Schachner, A., Yun, C., Melnick, H., & Barajas, J. (2024). Coaching at scale: A strategy for strengthening the early learning workforce. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/984.909>.  
<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/coaching-at-scale>.

<sup>30</sup> Kraft, M., Blazar, D., & Hogan, D. (2018). The Effect of Teacher Coaching on Instruction and Achievement: A Meta-Analysis of the Causal Evidence. *Review of Educational Research*, 88(4), 547–588. DOI: 10.3102/0034654318759268

<sup>31</sup> Schachner, A., Yun, C., Melnick, H., & Barajas, J. (2024). Coaching at scale: A strategy for strengthening the early learning workforce. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/984.909>.  
<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/coaching-at-scale>.

<sup>32</sup> Lloyd, C. M., Carlson, J., & Ulmen, K. (2021). Virtual coaching to support early care and education programs during COVID-19. *Child Trends*. <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/virtual-coaching-support-early-care-education-Programs-during-covid-19>

Network (CPIN) offers workshops on a variety of topics related to teaching young children. California also contracts with County Offices of Education and other organizations, such as WestEd, to offer trainings on particular topics, including on using the DRDP (a formative assessment for ECE), addressing the needs of multilingual learners, and training infant/toddler caregivers (Program for Infant Toddler Care, PITC). WestEd recently launched an online course specifically for coaches in early education.<sup>33</sup> California Early Childhood Online (CECO) modules also include topics related to ECE. And the California Collaborative on the Social and Emotional Foundations in Early Learning (CA CSEFEL) offers workshops on topics related to social-emotional development.

When UPK was implemented, several grant programs offered funds that could be used to support professional development for ECE teachers.<sup>34</sup> In 2021 the UPK Planning and Implementation (P&I) Grant Program allocated \$500 million to LEAs and County Offices of Education to support planning and implementation of Pre-Kindergarten programs. Allowable costs included staff training and professional development. The funding ends in June of 2028. One hundred million dollars was allocated for Early Education Teacher Development (EETD) grants to expand the number and competencies of teachers in CSPP, TK and kindergarten. A large portion of the EETD grants was used to provide tuition stipends to recruit teachers, but some was used for professional development. The UPK Mixed Delivery Grant was created to fund local planning councils (LPCs), Resource and Referral (R&R) agencies, and First 5 county commissions to “enhance and uplift the UPK Mixed Delivery System.” A total of \$18.3M was allocated for each year from 2022-23 to 2024-25, to be spent by 2028.

The state also funded Fresno County in 2018 to lead the California Statewide Early Math Initiative. The Fresno COE provides professional development, communications, and online resources designed to improve mathematics achievement outcomes for children in early childhood. Professional development primarily comes in the form of 2-hour online and half-day symposia. Since it began the initiative expanded to include science, was renamed “Count, Play, Explore,” and created material online for parents, caregivers and EC teachers. They also offer grants to organizations—including COEs and

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<sup>33</sup> <https://www.wested.org/event/california-early-childhood-educator-competencies-course/>

<sup>34</sup> Other funds, such as through Workforce Development Grants, are designed primarily to offer opportunities for people in the EC field to gain education that will move them up in the ECE continuum (e.g., from ECE 1 to ECE 2). This funding is described in Section 3 on the workforce.

LEAs--to provide technical assistance, professional development, coaching, or other capacity-building initiatives for the ECE workforce. One study of 329 educators from 23 of 25 agencies reported a decrease in negative feelings about math, and confidence in their knowledge of children’s early math development after participating in professional learning and coaching in 2023-24.<sup>35</sup> Educators who participated in more (7+) hours of PL reported a greater increase in their confidence in knowledge of children’s math development and were more likely to report that they integrated what they learned in CPE with their curriculum. In addition, educators who participated in coaching perceived a greater impact on their teaching abilities than did educators who did not participate in coaching.

## Principals

Studies have shown that principals have profound effects on student achievement.<sup>36</sup> Elementary schools in California are now serving younger children; most children come to school for TK at the age of four years. Furthermore, preschools serving children as young as three years old are increasingly connected to elementary schools, sometimes under the principal’s leadership. District and school leaders need to make decisions for TK and in some cases about affiliated preschool programs’ curriculum, assessment, instruction, and teacher professional development.

Instructional leadership for ECE is a relatively new responsibility for elementary school principals, and research in California has shown that many do not feel competent to oversee the education of preschool-aged children. When they receive some training related to ECE, however, studies show that they take more responsibility for the youngest children and provide more instructional leadership.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Frechette, E. M., Coyle, E., Escobar, L., Aurora, M., Zur, O., & Marcella-Burdett, J. (2025). Count Play Explore evaluation brief: Building educator capacity to promote children’s early math development. Fresno County Superintendent of Schools. [https://wested2024.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/06104442/CPE-Evaluation-Brief-EDUCATOR\\_2025.07.17.pdf](https://wested2024.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/06104442/CPE-Evaluation-Brief-EDUCATOR_2025.07.17.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> Grissom, Jason A., Anna J. Egalite, and Constance A. Lindsay. 2021. “How Principals Affect Students and Schools: A Systematic Synthesis of Two Decades of Research.” New York: The Wallace Foundation. Available at <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/principal-synthesis>. <https://doi.org/10.59656/EL-SB1065.001>

<sup>37</sup> Koppich, J., & Stipek, D. (2020). PreK–3 Alignment Challenges and Opportunities in California. Stanford University: Policy Analysis for California Education. <https://edpolicyinca.org/publications/prek-3-alignment>

Stipek, D., Borsato, G. & Coburn, C., (2024). School Leaders are Key to Bringing Early Childhood Education into Elementary School. Development and Research in Early Math Education.

Illinois is the only state that includes any type of ECE background in its principal licensure and accreditation standards. As in most other states, California does not require any training in early childhood education to obtain the Administrator Services Credential that is required to serve as principal of an elementary school.

In the absence of ECE requirements, elementary school administrators rely on principal professional development and support networks. For example, national organizations, such as the [National P-3 Center](#) at the University of Denver, offer support to states and districts endeavoring to improve the quality and coherence of early childhood education in elementary schools. The National Association of Elementary School Principals has a [P-3 Leadership Academy](#), and publishes a guide for principals.<sup>38</sup> But there is no state-supported mechanism in California to make sure principals have access to and take advantage of these kinds of resources.

As part of the roll-out of TK, California funded a Universal Transitional Kindergarten Leadership Initiative to prepare leaders to "lead for equity." In 2021 an award was made to the California's 21st Century School Leadership Academy (21CSLA) headquartered at The University of California (UC) Berkeley. It involves UC Berkeley and UCLA, the California Subject Matter Projects, and seven 21CSLA Regional Academies (mostly Country Office of Education) who provide resources and professional learning events supported by 21CSLA. [21CSLA](#) was created to offer a free professional learning program that is designed for site-, teacher-, and central-office leaders implementing TK in California school districts. A certificate program is offered to students who are currently enrolled in the Preliminary Administrative Services Credential or Clear Administrative Services Credential program.

To support leaders who already possess a clear credential, as well as teacher, site, district, and county leaders, individual Regional Academy trainers lead their own professional learning series using eight modules developed by the UTK State Center Team. The regional hubs (a combination of several counties) offer [professional leadership academies](#) and leadership network meetings. Since 2020, when the initiative started, until June of 2025, over 1200 participants have engaged in the professional

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[https://dreme.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/dreme\\_policy\\_brief\\_school\\_leaders\\_are\\_key\\_to\\_bringing\\_early\\_childhood\\_education\\_into\\_elementary\\_school.pdf](https://dreme.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/dreme_policy_brief_school_leaders_are_key_to_bringing_early_childhood_education_into_elementary_school.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> National Association of Elementary School Principal, *Leading Learning Communities: A Principal's Guide to Early Learning and the Early Grades (Pre-K–3rd Grade)*. <https://www.naesp.org/resources/publications/leading-pre-k-3-learning-communities/>

learning. Of those, over 300 reported serving as site leaders. Ninety three people with Preliminary Administrative Service Credentials have gone through the certificate program.

## Analysis

California’s approach to professional development for ECE teachers and school leaders is fragmented and most of it is not designed to provide the kind of job-embedded, sustained approaches that have been found in research to be effective. Much of what is offered is in the form of short-term workshops or trainings that are disconnected from the setting in which teachers and leaders work. The lack of evaluation of the various offerings makes it impossible to identify which approaches are effective in improving teaching and student learning and which are not.

Efforts to provide support to ECE teachers in El Dorado County illustrate the fragmentation and instability of professional support. The County pieced together funding from eight sources (a grant from First 5 El Dorado, a QRIS local Consortia and Partnerships grant, a grant from the QRIS Regional Hub, State Preschool Program funding, a Head Start Federal grant, Local County Library funds, and a State Library grant) to offer coaching to 91 programs.<sup>39</sup> Compare this approach to Alabama’s state PreK (First Class Pre-K) centralized and coherent statewide coaching system, which is led by the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education’s Office of School Readiness and covers eight regions. Coaching is implemented statewide through a regional model for state-funded PreK classrooms. Alabama’s early learning coaching system is funded by the state with an approximately 8% set-aside for coaching of the money invested in state PreK. Alabama also funds planning and reflection time in program schedules to give educators time to participate in coaching.<sup>40</sup>

Although there are resources for school leaders, we do not know how many school leaders take advantage of any of them or their impact on their practice. And the funding for the more robust program for school leaders, 21CSLA, is scheduled to end in June of 2026. Given the importance of these

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<sup>39</sup> Schachner, A., Yun, C., Melnick, H., & Barajas, J. (2024). Coaching at scale: A strategy for strengthening the early learning workforce. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/984.909>.  
<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/coaching-at-scale>.

<sup>40</sup> Schachner, A., Yun, C., Melnick, H., & Barajas, J. (2024). Coaching at scale: A strategy for strengthening the early learning workforce. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/984.909>.  
<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/coaching-at-scale>.

early years and the lack of experience and knowledge that most school administrators have in ECE, California should consider requiring early childhood content in programs offering administrative credentials and some additional hours of ECE training for license renewal. The Illinois requirement could serve as a model.<sup>41</sup> At the very least, some mention should be made of knowledge related to early childhood education in the California Administrative Services Credential Program Standards when it is next reviewed, which is anticipated to be in 2026. The Standards were last revised in 2018, nearly a decade ago, and they do not reflect the substantial change in principals' responsibilities.<sup>42</sup>

California could substantially improve the efficiency and quality of professional learning opportunities for teachers and administrators in several ways, as described next. Whatever initiatives are undertaken should be thoroughly evaluated to ensure that the state is using its resources effectively and efficiently to improve teaching.

### ***Sustained Support for PD***

The ineffective form of most PD for teachers and administrators is partly a consequence of how it is funded. Currently funding for professional development in California comes primarily in the form of grants that end within 1-3 years. Counties and other organizations cannot hire experts to provide PD with short-term funding, which means that they often need to rely on staff who may not have the expertise required to address specific needs. The short-term funding for very particular purposes also favors one-off workshops and trainings that are not supported by research. A coherent and sustained approach would require a significant change in the way the state funds PD for ECE.

If COEs continued to be the primary source of professional development for educators, the state should make it clear that this is part of COEs mandate and provide sustained support specifically for that purpose. Support for PD is particularly important for small- and rural districts that do not have the personnel or expertise to create their own in-house PD or the resources to purchase meaningful, sustained support for teachers.

Tulare COE offers an example of a sustained approach. The COE developed a team of knowledgeable, professional development and district support specialists who have built long-term

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<sup>41</sup> Lieberman, A. (2019). *Preparing Principals for Pre-K in Illinois: The Prairie State's Story of Reform and Implementation*. New America. Retrieved from: <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/preparing-principals-pre-k-illinois/>

<sup>42</sup> California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. Administrative Services Credential Program Standards. <https://www.ctc.ca.gov/docs/default-source/educator-prep/standards/asc-admin-handbook.pdf>

relationships with districts. They provide on-going, contracted support, including coaching, for which the district pays. They also built PD modules that reach multiple districts (both those with and without contracts). And because the staff are stable, they can keep track of policy changes that are coming up in the state and prepare to provide relevant support to districts.

A combination of sustained, dependable state-funded and fee-for-service approaches (for those districts that have sufficient resources) could allow COEs to maintain a stable and strong staff of instructional experts. This would allow districts to do “one stop shopping” rather than having to choose among PD offerings of varying and often dubious quality that haphazardly come their way.

In addition to supporting COEs to offer PD, the state could expand programs in California that reflect research on effective PD. A few examples are described below.

An extant program to support TK teachers, but not in other UPK contexts, is Teacher Induction. California has a two-tiered credentialing system for teachers. Preliminary programs prepare candidates to obtain an initial teaching credential through successful completion of required coursework, fieldwork, and a performance demonstration of their knowledge, skills, and abilities. To achieve a clear credential, all new teachers in California must either be certified by the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards or participate in a two-year job-embedded, individualized induction program offered by a school district or county office of education accredited by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing. Candidates develop individual learning plans that address topics within the California Standards for Teachers. Induction programs have focused on K-12 teacher, but are beginning to be expanded to include TK teachers.

Something like the California Early Childhood Mentor Program (CECMP) could be created to support beginning ECE teachers that are not eligible for the Teacher Induction program. The current program, funded by the Department of Social Service (CDSS), supports mentors for community college students doing their teaching practicum. Mentors are selected from among teachers who have worked at least two years in a child-care center or family child-care home, who have completed a college ECE training program that includes a supervised teaching course, and who are eligible for the Master Teacher level or above in the current California Child Development Permit. The Mentors provide leadership and guidance to students doing their student teaching in childcare centers, State Preschools and Head Start programs. The program could be expanded to support early childhood educators in

their first year in the field.

Another program, the California Subject Matter Project (CSMP), was authorized by California statute in 1988 and reauthorized in 2011 as a network of nine state-authorized projects tasked with deepening teachers' understanding of K-12 content areas and supporting student achievement. CSMP receives funds from the state and federal sources, supplemented with grants from various sources. The network has grown to include 90 regional sites at college campuses. Each campus partners with faculty advisors, teacher leaders, institutional sponsors and educational leaders to support local K-12 districts, schools and teachers. They also collaborate with local schools and districts to tailor professional learning to meet the needs of educators and students. All programs are aligned with California's subject matter Frameworks. CSMP has had a K-12 focus, although some PD offerings currently include TK. California could build on CSMPU by incentivizing professional development that includes TK. One shortcoming of CSMP as an approach to providing PD to teachers of young children is that subject matter is chunked in discrete units, and some important domains, such as social-emotional development are not included. A holistic, integrative approach is needed for teaching young children. One option would be to create the equivalent of a CSMP that focuses on developmentally appropriate instruction in all domains for the early grades.

### ***Creating Capacity***

The programs described above all have promise for providing research-based professional development. But they all need more people than are currently available who are knowledgeable of young children's development, developmentally appropriate pedagogy, and effective strategies for supporting teachers. Most experts in the developmental needs of young children do not have backgrounds in subject-matter teaching and most experts in subject-matter teaching do not have backgrounds in the development of young children. There are too few people in California who possess the needed expertise to support teachers of young children and their administrators.

Criteria for effective strategies for building teaching skills apply to these educational experts as well. Programs to "train the trainers" should involve job-embedded practice, intense and sustained opportunities to develop their skills, specific and articulated objectives with a focus on discrete skill sets, and involve active learning.

These qualities are present in a program that provided research-based professional

development for people who support early childhood educators. The [California Math Project EC Fellows Initiative](#) was created to build the capacity of teacher leaders in early math teaching. The program engaged a cohort of 35 PD facilitators from the California Mathematics Project statewide network to build capacity around early math. Most were already working with teachers in a variety of roles, such as coaching and professional development. But they did not have strong backgrounds in teaching math to young children. Fellows worked together for 4.5 days in person and in six 1.5-hr virtual meetings over a 16-month period. Project leadership designed and provided ongoing engagement around a new repository of early math resources. Fellows used these resources to design and implement their own professional development through their local Math Project sites, with opportunities to share, revise and refine their PD, and develop new PD in collaboration with other fellows. This strategy could be used for other subject areas, such as literacy and social-emotional development. State Subject Matter Projects could also be employed to develop subject-matter experts to work in or with COEs.

Fostering communication among experts through conferences and other convenings could also improve coherence and ensure that the state vision, instantiated in the Frameworks, is core to the work they do. The 2024 Mathematics Professional Learning Partnership ([MPLP](#)) Grant is an example of this kind of support. Through this program, the lead county office of education (COE) grantee and its grant partners must partner with the [California Mathematics Project \(CMP\)](#) to support high-quality mathematics instruction, as described in the [2023 Mathematics Framework](#), to kindergarten through grade twelve (K–12). The program could be extended to include TK. But it is funded for only \$20 million, which represents a small investment given the size of the state and the desperate need to improve math teaching and student achievement.

### ***Systems Approach***

Although professional development typically focuses on teachers directly, it is critically important to recognize the importance of situating professional development within the larger system. Teachers retire and leave and are replaced. Building the district system to provide support to every teacher is the only way to stay ahead of the curve. Moreover, district structures and culture that surround the school as well as alignment of PD with other elements in the system--assessment, curriculum, and administrative support--play a significant role in determining whether effective

teaching strategies are implemented in classrooms.<sup>43</sup> According to one analysis, the development of collaborative learning environments is the single most important factor in ensuring that professional development experiences are effective.<sup>44</sup>

California's efforts to support teacher and school leader learning therefore need to be accompanied by efforts to help districts align their learning with other policies and to create a culture of collegiality, collaboration, and continual improvement. Investing in district- and school-leader capacity to create conditions that support teacher development are more effective than offering workshops to individual teachers, although workshops could serve as a resource to districts that plan to integrate them into broader instructional improvement efforts. Such an approach requires district leaders' active participation.

When the local control funding formula (LCFF) was created in 2013, California created the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE) to advise and assist LEAs to achieve the goals and objectives in their Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs). CCEE provides technical assistance and guidance to districts, especially those that are failing to meet certain LCAP goals. There is no clear theory of action and the type of supports is hugely variable—from convenings, to resource development, to coaching district leaders. The primary involvement with UPK was to develop a tool to help districts blend different sources of funding. A careful analysis of the effects of CCEE would be useful for guiding its work and for determining the value of the state's investment. And if the state wants to incentivize districts' attention to ECE it needs to require the inclusion of performance information related to ECE on the Dashboard.

A more comprehensive strategy was developed with foundation funding by California Education Partners. For the [PK-3 Coherence Collaboration](#) (P3CC) Ed Partners staff work for three years with cohorts of small- and medium-sized districts, helping them develop coordinated and aligned systems that support high-quality teaching and student learning in mathematics from preK through grade 3. The approach is designed to build district capacity so that continuous improvement efforts are sustained beyond the three years of collaboration. The design involves teams from each district that include

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<sup>43</sup> Richardson, V. (2003). The Dilemmas of Professional Development: Towards High-quality Teaching and Learning." *Phi Delta Kappan* 84(5), 401–406.

<sup>44</sup> Schmoker, Mike. "Tipping Point: From Feckless Reform to Substantive Instructional Improvement." *Phi Delta Kappan* 85, 6 (2004), pp. 424–432.

district and school leaders and teachers from all of the early grades. The intervention involves three yearly 1½ day convenings of the teams in each cohort of districts, twice yearly superintendent convenings, monthly coaching to the team lead, and professional development on effective math teaching practices for all teachers in the district. The approach is bottom up and top down, in the sense that sessions on effective teaching are offered to teachers while district leaders are supported to: 1) align their curriculum and assessments to support effective instruction and to create continuity across grade levels, 2) develop strategies to develop administrator and teacher capacity, and 3) promote a culture of learning and collegiality in schools and the district.

Another example of a program that engages districts as a system is SEAL (Sobrato Early Academic Language), which is designed to help districts offer high-quality education to Dual Language Learners (DLLs) and English Learners in preschool through third grade. SEAL is a model of comprehensive teacher development and school change that includes curriculum redesign, instructional change, systems change (leadership development and alignment across preschool through third grade), and school-family engagement. They provide professional development and support (including coaching) to district leaders, school principals and other site leaders, and to teachers. The program is also sustained. They have a two-year teacher training cycle, and they provide professional development and technical assistance via their Summer Bridge Program, convenings, instructional rounds, and informal check-ins with instructional and administrative school personnel. In 2023-24 SEAL worked with 34 California Preschool LEAs, District and County Offices.

Research provides evidence that without sustained district-capacity development the fragmented, short-term, teacher-direct approaches on which California currently spends millions of dollars will have minimal effects. Most effective is a combination of improvement efforts targeting district policies and practices with embedded professional development directed at teachers.<sup>45</sup> A state-wide infrastructure is necessary to do this equitably and sustainably. COEs provide a regional infrastructure but they engage primarily in direct teacher PD and most do not view working with the districts as a system as part of their mission. A significant change in mission and culture would be

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<sup>45</sup> Cohen D. K., Hill H. C. (2001). *Learning policy: When state education reform works*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.  
Hargreaves, A., & Fullan, M. (2012). *Professional capital: Transforming teaching in every school*. Teachers College Press.  
Hopkins, D., Stringfield, S., Harris, A., Stoll, L., & Mackay, T. (2014). School and system improvement: A narrative state-of-the-art review. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 25(2), 257–281.

required, along with additional resources and capacity building. Whether COEs or some other kind of infrastructure serves this role, the current approach is not as effective as it could be and likely wasteful.

### ***Comprehensive State Approach***

Alabama offers an example of the kind of coherent, comprehensive state-wide approach that is necessary to move the needle in student achievement. It was the only state in the country where 2024 math scores showed improvement over pre-pandemic levels. From 2019 to 2024 Alabama 4<sup>th</sup> grade math scores on the NAEP increased by 7 points, compared to the nation, in which scores decreased by 3 points, and California (already low compared to most other states), which decreased by 2 points.<sup>46</sup>

Following on significant success in DeKalb County’s effort to improve math instruction and student achievement, the state passed the Alabama Numeracy Act (ANA) in 2022 to create a comprehensive system of improvements designed to support educators in all aspects of instructing students in math and it funded a comprehensive evaluation of the implementation of the ANA.<sup>47</sup> The act established an Elementary Mathematics Task force and an Office of Mathematics Improvement, which were tasked with creating assessments, intervention services, summer programs, and developing mathematics coaches. At the outset of the implementation of the ANA, schools among the lowest performing 5% were identified as “full-support schools” and those performing in the bottom 6% to 25% were identified as “limited-support” schools. While both sets of schools receive support under the ANA, full-support schools receive more intensive support. A pool of mathematics coaches was created to support schools in improving numeracy in Grades K-12, with the goal of placing one mathematics coach for every 500 students before the 2027-2028 school year. Coaches were provided with tools to help teachers improve their math instruction, curricular supports, and assessments to monitor student performance outcomes.

Alabama’s approach represents a comprehensive system of improvements designed to support educators in all aspects of instructing students in math. Focusing substantially on the development and support of coaches, the approach is much more aligned with what is known about improving

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<sup>46</sup> National Assessment of Education Progress (2024). Interactive: Explore national, state, and district pandemic-era score changes. <https://www.nagb.gov/powered-by-naep/interactive-tool.html>

<sup>47</sup> Alabama SB171 (2022). <file:///C:/Users/stipek/Dropbox/GDTE%203/Staff%20Preparation/Alabama%20Numeracy%20Bill.pdf>

instruction than the disconnected and fragmented approach California has taken to improve student math learning and achievement.

## A More Centralized Approach for California

California invests substantial funds with the goal of improving ECE teaching quality. But the work is highly decentralized with few quality controls. It is a large and populous state, and some regional variation and local control is appropriate. But efficiency and quality could be improved by the state providing stronger leadership and developing a more centralized approach to instructional improvement than it currently takes. To see meaningful improvement in teaching and learning the state would need to design a new system of supports.

Some of that leadership could come in the approaches described above, such as by developing state-wide capacity building. Counties and districts have made increasing use of coaches, but there is not a sufficient supply of effective ECE coaches to meet the needs and the state does not offer clear quality criteria or certification to ensure the effectiveness of people who serve as coaches. Some states (such as New York and Oregon) have developed coach competency frameworks,<sup>48</sup> and a few (such as Florida) have created certification programs for coaching.<sup>49</sup> Alabama has created a clearly articulated model of “reflective coaching” that is used to guide ECE coaching throughout the state.<sup>50</sup>

There are advantages to building on some of the discrete programs mentioned above, but that doesn’t reduce the need for a more coherent, systemic approach. The various opportunities offered to increase the quality of teaching need to be based on a clearly articulated vision of effective pedagogy, with state oversight and quality control. The oversight can be flexible enough to allow regional and local adaptations, but focused enough to make sure that efforts to improve teaching are consistent

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<sup>48</sup> New York Association for the Education of Young Children. (2015). New York State Training and Technical Assistance Professional Credential: Coach competencies. <https://nyaeyc.org/wp-content/uploads/TTAP-CoachCompetencies-9.18.2017.pdf> 51. Oregon State University, Hallie E. Ford Center, & Oregon Department of Education, Early Learning Division. (2022). Oregon coaching competencies: Early Learning System Initiative. <https://health.oregonstate.edu/elsi/coaching/competencies/oregon>.

<sup>49</sup> University of Florida, Lastinger Center for Learning. Coaching Certification Program. <https://lastinger.center.ufl.edu/work/early-learning/flamingo-early-learning/early-learning-ccp>

<sup>50</sup> Schachner, A., Yun, C., Melnick, H., & Barajas, J. (2024). Coaching at scale: A strategy for strengthening the early learning workforce. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/984.909>. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/coaching-at-scale>.

with state standards and frameworks. Whatever regional distribution is used or created, the state needs to play a more central role than it currently plays and to assess approaches to learn which are effective.