
**Preschool Issues Concerning
English Language Learners and Immigrant Children:**

The Importance of Family Engagement

A Preschool Issue Brief

**CHILDREN
NOW**
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Acknowledgements

Author: Sandra Naughton

Research: Sandra Naughton, Kara Dukakis and Sarah Grossman-Swenson

Editorial assistance: Kara Dukakis, Alexandra Céspedes-Kent, Ronald Pineda and Catherine Teare

Design: Dennis Johnson, Dennis Johnson Design

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For more information about this paper, contact Children Now at **510-763-2444** or visit the Children Now Website at **www.childrennow.org**.

Executive Summary

IN CALIFORNIA, MOMENTUM IS BUILDING for a voluntary, high-quality, publicly-funded preschool for all system for three- and-four-year-old children. Many advocates believe legislation or a ballot initiative in the near future will bring California closer to the goal of preschool for all. Recent polling also shows that most California voters support publicly-funded universal preschool, and several communities have developed preschool for all programs at the local level.¹

A high-quality preschool for all system in California must be designed to meet the needs of the state's ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse child population. Of the estimated 1.1 million children who are 3- to 5-years-old and not yet in kindergarten, about 39 percent would most likely be designated as English language learners (ELLs).² This issue brief aims to inform discussions related to building a preschool for all system in California, with specific regard to how such a system can meet the needs of ELLs, and help them to thrive in learning and in life.

Focusing on family engagement, this issue brief's review of current research confirms that children, families, and programs benefit when parents are involved in their child's preschool learning both inside the classroom and at home. Family engagement in preschool programs can take many forms. Programs can use research-based strategies to overcome some of the barriers that parents face in their efforts to be involved in their children's preschool educations. This brief outlines research findings that highlight some of the challenges in and effective strategies for engaging culturally and linguistically diverse families in their young children's educations. California's existing State Preschool Program and First 5 Commission grantees currently use some of these research-based best practices. Additionally, some local preschool programs in California communities and state preschool programs in New York, Tennessee and Wisconsin offer innovative approaches to family engagement; California should consider these as it builds its own preschool for all system.

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Based on the research summarized in this issue brief, we recommend the following for any preschool programs in California that serve ELLs and their families:

- *Written Plans:* As part of their application for funding, programs should submit written plans that describe how they will partner with families throughout the year and meet families' cultural and linguistic needs. Families must be involved in drafting these plans. Each program should include in its plan discussion of the following areas: meeting and orienting new families; ongoing communication with families about program updates and their children's progress; working with families to create a role for them in the program and in the program's curriculum; encouraging families to participate in and lead program governance; and providing training for families in home literacy activities, parent-teacher conferences, advocacy skills and other requested topics, with special attention to how these activities will be offered given the cultural and linguistic needs of families.
- *Communication:* Programs should aim for ongoing communication with families in appropriate languages and should use bilingual staff or, at minimum, interpreter services when needed. Programs should also be required to hold a minimum of two parent-teacher conferences per year, with training on effective parent-teacher conferences available beforehand for all interested families.
- *Staffing:* Programs should aim to recruit and retain staff who reflect the community and who understand cultural differences and their impact on family engagement. Programs should recruit staff qualified to work with culturally and linguistically diverse children and families, and emphasize hiring staff who mirror the cultures and languages of children in the program. Program staff should be recognized and validated for their effective outreach to and partnering with families.
- *Professional Development:* Programs should provide ongoing multilingual technical assistance and professional development to teachers, program staff and program administrators who serve ELLs. Program staff should be trained in family-centered approaches to educating preschool children, strategies for partnering with culturally and linguistically diverse families, and ways to validate and encourage family involvement.
- *Special Needs:* Programs should proactively partner with families of children with special needs to ensure that families understand their legal rights, how special education services and programs operate, and their child's educational options. Early detection and inclusion should be core aspects of all programs, and programs should support and advocate for families' access to the most culturally and linguistically appropriate services for their child. Programs should also adjust their approaches to special needs based on cultural and community beliefs about special needs and recognize that expertise on special needs comes from a variety of sources, including parents' knowledge of their own children.
- *Community Partnerships:* Programs should build partnerships with trusted community members and informal parenting networks already involved in ELLs' lives, such as child care providers. These individuals and groups can act as family liaisons to educate preschool providers about ethnic differences among families and to strengthen outreach to and engagement of isolated or disenfranchised families.
- *Funding:* Programs must be provided with adequate funding to staff family engagement activities, with extra support available for programs working with families of ELLs.
- *Partnerships and Opportunities:* Families and programs should work together to create meaningful partnerships to support children's development and learning. Parents and program staff should create a continuum of opportunities for both program staff and parents to learn more about each other, their child's strengths and needs, and potential parent roles, from volunteering in the classroom to making decisions about programmatic issues to advocating for their children's education.

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- *Governance:* A parent advisory group or council should advise and govern the program or a cluster of programs. Parent advisory groups should be representative of the children served in the programs and be decision makers providing input and community perspectives to program staff. Parents should be given leadership training and language barriers should be addressed.
 - *Orientations:* Programs should be required to hold two types of orientations for families. The first type of orientation should focus on programs establishing ongoing, positive relationships with families. It should be held at the beginning of the year and cover families' and children's educational rights, program goals, child development basics, and the importance of family engagement in their children's success. The second type of orientation should consist of a series of meetings held throughout the preschool year, to help families feel ready for entry into the K-12 school system.
 - *Evaluation:* Program staff and parents should be required to conduct an annual program evaluation that solicits comments and recommendations from parents and community members.

*Note: In this issue brief the term English language learner (ELL) is used to refer to children who speak a language other than English at home and/or who have been designated by educators as not proficient in English. The term ELL is used to encompass other terms such as limited English proficient (LEP) and English as a Second Language (ESL) students. Also, the term family engagement is used to represent involvement from any family member or family friend who contributes to the parenting of preschool children. The term parent is used interchangeably with a child's primary caregiver, whether or not they are biologically linked to the child.

I. Introduction

IN CALIFORNIA, MOMENTUM IS BUILDING for a voluntary, high-quality, publicly-funded preschool for all system for three- and-four-year-old children. Although a recent state Assembly bill outlining the initial foundation for such a system was vetoed, many advocates believe that legislation or a ballot initiative in the near future will bring California closer to the goal of preschool for all.³ In addition to these efforts, two high-profile state commissions – the Universal Preschool Task Force in 1998 and the Master Plan for Education in 2002 – have recommended universally accessible preschool. Recent polling shows that most Californians support publicly-funded universal preschool and believe that all children need preschool.⁴ Furthermore, several California communities, most notably Los Angeles and San Mateo, are well on their way to developing preschool for all programs at the local level. Adding to the urgency, brain research indicates that 90 percent of children’s brain growth occurs in the first 4 years of life.⁵ Given that most children do not enter kindergarten until age 5, many miss out on learning experiences during this critical stage that could impact their later development.

A high-quality preschool for all system in California must be designed to draw on and support the strength of the state’s ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse child population. Of the estimated 1.1 million children who are 3- to 5-years-old and not yet in kindergarten:

- 46 percent are Latino, 34 percent are white, 9 percent are Asian or Pacific Islander, and 6 percent are African-American.⁶
- Approximately one in two has at least one parent who is non-native to this country.⁷
- Approximately 40 percent are likely English language learners (ELLs), based on the number of *kindergarten* students who are ELLs.⁸

Californians recognize that quality preschool has important benefits to offer to young ELLs. In a statewide poll conducted in April, 2004, 73 percent of voters said that they believe that preschool ensures that children learning English as a second language are as prepared as other children.⁹ In the same poll, Latino voters voiced stronger support for preschool programs, with 86 percent of Latino respondents supporting voluntary, state-funded preschool for all compared to 75 percent of all respondents.¹⁰ Preschool can help ELLs increase their English and first language proficiency, and enhance their cognitive, social and emotional development, all of which foster school success.¹¹ This issue brief aims to inform discussions related to building a preschool for all system in California, with specific regard to how such a system can meet the needs of ELLs, and help these children thrive in learning and in life.

This brief focuses on issues related to engaging the families of ELLs in their children’s preschool experience. Parent involvement in preschool programs can take many forms, and programs can use research-based strategies to overcome some of the barriers parents face in their efforts to be involved in their child’s preschool education. A review of current research confirms the many benefits that children, parents and programs gain when parents are involved in their child’s preschool learning both inside the classroom and at home. This brief outlines research findings that highlight some of the challenges and effective strategies for engaging culturally and linguistically diverse families in their young children’s education. California’s current State Preschool Program and First 5 Commission grantees currently use some of these research-based best practices. Additionally, some local preschool programs in California communities and state preschool policies in New York, Tennessee and Wisconsin offer innovative approaches to family engagement; California should consider these as it begins to build its own preschool for all system.

I. What is Family Engagement?

Families are their children's first teachers and have a powerful effect on their young children's development. Research demonstrates multiple benefits of family engagement, also referred to as parent involvement, in children's formal education and indicates that timing is important: family engagement has a more positive impact if it begins early in a child's educational experience.¹² For this reason, early care and education experts agree that the presence and engagement of families in preschool is essential. Many consider family engagement to be even more critical for children who are designated as ELLs, given that American educational expectations may not coincide with their families' experiences or values and that communicating with preschool program staff may be difficult due to language barriers. As one researcher has written, "To promote the healthy self-esteem of each and every young child, early childhood education programs must be thoughtfully designed to serve both parents and children – all the more so for those who speak a language other than English at home."¹³

In addition to providing support for ELL children, family engagement efforts can also allow parents of ELLs to serve as a vital resource for program staff. As one ESL teacher stated, "The involvement of culturally and linguistically diverse parents is critical to the unique educational needs of their children. The teachers and administrators...can, through commitment and collaboration, utilize to its maximum this potentially powerful tool to augment current educational programs."¹⁴

A Continuum of Family Engagement Strategies

Family engagement strategies can take many forms. Historically, family engagement efforts in many early care and education programs have been designed from a program perspective. For example, typical efforts in the past have included programs sending newsletters to parents, holding teacher-parent conferences, or asking parents to volunteer in the classroom. Efforts that confine their scope to school-based family engagement activities, however, risk "serious underrepresentation of the level and range of involvement activities among minority and low-income families," since activities in the home and community are not accounted for.¹⁵

Research shows the value of a family-centered approach in which families' needs and strengths form the basis for strategies that families co-create with programs.¹⁶ In family-centered programs, traditional parental roles as program helpers are transformed into creative roles in which families partner with program staff to establish goals and make decisions related to the programs.¹⁷

Through these active and dynamic forms of family engagement, families share power and responsibility with program staff or families autonomously set their own agendas and invite program staff to work with them.¹⁸ Experience demonstrates that when parents have some responsibility for making decisions about budget, hiring and curricular issues, their involvement was more meaningful to them and their families.¹⁹ Supporting the use of more active, family-centered strategies, a comprehensive review of the literature has found that programs successful in engaging families from diverse backgrounds follow practices that:

- focus on building trusting collaborative relationships among teachers, families, and community;
- recognize, respect, and address families' needs, as well as class and cultural differences; and
- embrace a philosophy of partnership where power and responsibility are shared.²⁰

Research also shows that programs that engage in and offer a variety of strategies are successful in involving more families in meaningful participation. Experts suggest offering a continuum of opportunities for families to become involved with the program, especially in appealing to family members who may be new to this country's educational system or who feel reluctant about their English language skills. Many family engagement efforts require ongoing and frequent interaction, but the quality of family engagement activities can be more important than quantity. According to one expert, "Studies have shown that the *quality* of practices chosen in school efforts to improve parent involvement affects the outcome... Therefore, it is important to design interventions that are comprehensive, systematic, long term, and involve parents as integral members of the school team. It is also important to evaluate such efforts and make adjustments as time goes by."²¹

Barriers to Family Engagement

In contrast to some common misconceptions, research shows that families of ELLs are concerned with education and are willing to participate in their children's schooling. Researchers have found that "economic well-being is closely related to parent involvement [in that more economically stable families are more likely to be involved], yet it is unrelated to the value parents place on education."²² Although many families face barriers to involvement, such as lack of time and transportation, families of ELLs may face barriers unique to their cultural and linguistic diversity.

Barriers to family engagement have been grouped into three categories: logistics, family attitudes and program or institution-based barriers.²³ Logistical barriers include limits on time, economic insecurity, work schedules, child care needs, safety concerns regarding the program's location, and unavailability of materials or information translated into the appropriate languages. Families' attitudinal barriers are of three types. First, families may feel uncertain about their role since they may not be familiar with the expectations of programs and teachers or how their actions can impact their child's cognitive development and school readiness. Second, some families may be impacted by their own negative experiences with educational systems or may have been subject to discrimination by American public systems and programs.²⁴ Third, some families may feel hesitant about their own capabilities and feel that they lack the language skills to interact with school staff or carry out home involvement activities, such as reading to their children.²⁵ While not exclusive to parents of ELLs, attitudinal barriers often intersect with some cultural values and expectations. Finally, there are five categories of institutionally-based barriers among programs:

- lack of ability to communicate in families' languages;
- use of jargon and technical language to establish distance between the educational program and the family;
- lack of consideration of families' schedules when planning activities;
- lack of personnel dedicated to parent engagement; and

- lack of positive attitudes towards the role of linguistically and culturally diverse families in their child's development.²⁶

An additional barrier may be teachers' perceptions of families. Surveys of teachers' views on parent involvement have found that teachers are often unaware of the support given to children by their parents and the ways that families feel schools minimize families' contribution.²⁷

Despite facing many of these barriers, families still want to be involved in their children's education. As one researcher stated, "Despite the many challenges facing families, national survey data indicate that participating in their children's education is a priority among families, regardless of their education or socio-economic status."²⁸ Given the constraints families face, program staff and families must work together to define what "involvement" means in each program in their community.²⁹

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II. What the Research Says

Impact of Family Engagement in Early Care and Education Programs

Family engagement in early care and education programs can have positive impacts on children's cognitive, social and emotional development. Research on the 2000 cohort of the Head Start *FACES* study indicated that children with parents who were more involved in the program scored higher on vocabulary, book knowledge, early writing, early math, and letter identification tasks. Additionally, the number of activities that parents engaged in with their children on a weekly or monthly basis was positively related to positive child behaviors and emergent literacy and negatively related to problem behaviors.³⁰ Similarly, a study of Georgia's Pre-kindergarten Program found that children whose parents were more involved in the program scored higher on all assessments of pre-math problem solving, letter word recognition, vocabulary, story and print comprehension, and basic skills mastery.³¹ Positive effects of family engagement have been found across demographic groups of differing educational levels and ethnicities.³²

Family engagement also demonstrates to children the value their parents place on education. Family engagement opportunities can empower parents to be effective advocates for their children, which can in turn increase parents' sense of efficacy and self-confidence and improve their relationships with their children and the preschool programs they attend.³³ Encouraging family engagement supports low-income parents especially; it can provide opportunities to connect with other parents, encourage parents to further their own educations, and improve their sense of self-worth.³⁴

Benefits/Impacts of Family Engagement for ELLs

In addition to the general benefits described above, we also know some benefits of family engagement accrue uniquely to parents of ELLs. One researcher outlined three such benefits that support children's academic success: maintenance of native language, maintenance of culture, and high expectations.³⁵ In addition, parents of ELLs may support their children in ways that may not be recognized by program staff. As some researcher state, "The ways in which linguistically and culturally diverse families support and sustain children in their academic

success are complex and sometimes not what one might expect or what is defined by schools."³⁶ Some scholars attempt to describe these contributions from parents and families as distinct forms of "social capital" that can support their children and communities. Social capital includes the resources that a person has access to through their social networks, such as knowing a referral source for a certain service, understanding the history of a community, or membership in community groups. As one researcher wrote, "Unfortunately, most previous research has overlooked the importance of these non-dominant forms of capital...Parents use this cultural and social capital to support their educational participation."³⁷

Troubling trends indicate that the achievement gap may be widening for non-native English speakers, while ELLs face significant challenges in the public education system. Appropriate family engagement strategies might aid in reversing such trends.³⁸ Family and cultural values about education are well-known to affect students' motivation and performance. Research has shown that "family cultural values often determine what students mean by success."³⁹ Cultural groups differ in how they view success for their children. For example, many Latinos believe "success" goes beyond a simple achievement and includes "what you have done, and is tied to what you have become," or your full potential as a person.⁴⁰ On the other hand, some East Asian cultures highly value formal education and believe that achievement brings honor to the family, while failure brings shame.⁴¹ Given that studies have shown that "school learning is most likely to occur when family values reinforce school expectations," family engagement strategies can be important tools to support ELLs' development and learning.⁴² As one researcher wrote, "This does not mean that parents must teach the same things at home that teachers do in school. It does mean that parents and community must project school achievement as a desirable and attainable ideal if the children are to build it into their own sense of self."⁴³ Developing appropriate family engagement strategies means responding to the needs and values of the different racial, ethnic, cultural, and language groups in California's preschools.

Family engagement also plays a critical role for ELLs with special needs, which is a particularly important issue given the overrepresentation of language minority students in special education programs across the country. Researchers find that the provision of special needs supports to young children demands active parent engagement. Some researchers assert that the overrepresentation of ELLs in special education may be due to program staff's misinterpretations of ELLs abilities when staff do not share the same culture or first language as the child. On the other hand, some also fear that some ELLs with special needs are not identified as such because program staff may overlook a genuine delay or disability and instead attribute it to a child's linguistic or cultural context.⁴⁵ Given the potential for misdiagnoses, actively engaged parents can serve as advocates for their children and provide critical information that can inform program staffs' views of a child's abilities and needs.⁴⁶ Many parents of ELLs may not be aware of their child's rights to an inclusive education, so pre-school programs can provide parents with information that will affect their child's immediate and future education.⁴⁷ Research also shows that effective programs incorporate into their curricula and Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs) the cultures of ELLs with special needs and teach them in their most dominant language.⁴⁸ Parents can help programs implement this type of approach.

Overall, while there has been little research on the impact of family engagement on ELL children specifically, interest in this area is increasing. Some of the emerging research on this topic will be described in later sections of this paper (*see section on Practice in California*), but this remains a critical topic in need of further work.

Best Practices for Family Engagement

While studies on family engagement within certain ethnic communities exist, few focus specifically on pre-school-age children. However, we can learn from the studies that investigate the impact of family engagement on culturally and linguistically diverse children in child care and in grades K through 12. For example, one study on Latino communities showed that the quality of parent involvement activities matter more than their quantity.⁴⁹

Successful family engagement strategies require many elements, such as:

- strong design and implementation, and ongoing communication, which impacts parents' level of participation;⁵⁰
- time, effort and an investment of resources;⁵¹ and
- ability to adapt to the needs and assets of a community.⁵² As one researcher stated, "Because one approach may not be successful with all groups, researchers advise early childhood teachers and service providers to examine a range of strategies to enhance their relationships with families from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds."⁵³

The following is a summary of research on barriers to family engagement among culturally and linguistically diverse groups and strategies to overcome them, with examples drawn from early care and education and K-12 programs. This research has its limitations. As with much research on topics related to race, ethnicity, language and culture, people are often grouped together with a common label, such as Asian Americans or Latinos, in ways that minimize geographic and cultural diversity within the group. Caution should be used when extrapolating from such findings to groups that inherently consist of people with diverse characteristics and beliefs.

Understanding differences among families

Families of ELLs vary in significant ways due to differences between cultures and within cultures. These needs must be taken into account when family engagement programs are designed.⁵⁴ Experts urge programs to consider factors such as families' length of residence in the United States, English language proficiency, access to language support, and prior experiences with educational programs.⁵⁵ Beyond some of the more evident differences between cultural groups, such as language and socioeconomic status, other factors such as gender roles influence parent involvement. For example, in some families the mother acts as the head of the family, while in others the father is the family decision-maker. Researchers also warn against making generalizations about family characteristics within certain cultural

groups and instead encourage consideration of these factors on a family-by-family basis “because intra-group differences are as great as inter-group differences.”⁵⁶

Families of ELLs may also vary in their family structure and differ from commonly-held visions of a nuclear family. The mainstream concept of a nuclear family tends to feature parents as the primary authorities in children’s lives, while some cultures may view extended family members or friends of the family as sharing both responsibility and authority for raising the child. Some families value informal parenting by godparents, friends or other family members, and thus parental involvement becomes more relevant to language-minority populations when it is intergenerational and includes extended families.⁵⁷

Understanding the variety of family structures in a community will increase educators’ ability to engage those families and respond to their needs.⁵⁸ This may be particularly important in preschool settings given that many working families involve their extended family and friends in providing child care before or after preschool and filling transportation needs related to preschool.

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One strategy preschool programs serving ELLs can use to gain a deeper understanding of these cultural differences among families is to build partnerships with the informal parenting networks already involved in ELLs’ lives, such as community groups and child care providers. This approach can help program staff overcome language barriers and provide culturally sensitive ways to reach some families. For example, one researcher found that community groups have been helpful for many Chinese ELLs, whose parents’ involvement is limited by work constraints and language barriers.⁵⁹ Research on Latino communities suggests similar approaches to partner with existing networks, such as child care providers, church groups and neighborhood organizations.⁶⁰ Partnering with child care providers can prove very effective given that many working families depend on them for infant care and for wraparound child care before and/or after preschool programs.⁶¹

Other researchers go further in describing programs’ responsibilities, suggesting that early childhood professionals should be trained to identify characteristics of a family’s structure and approach to their child – both inside and outside the classroom – to inform their ability to reach out to children’s families.⁶² A method many programs use to deepen their understanding of families is to conduct home visits. In addition to gathering information, some cultural groups, such as Asians, view home visits as a sign of sincerity, potentially enhancing the trust between the program and the family.⁶³ Home visits may help family members realize how they already affect their child’s learning and how intentional educational activities can help their children. Rebeca Valdivia of WestEd has suggested that during home visits, preschool program staff can identify regular activities in the home that help foster children’s learning, such as storytelling, reading the names on food products, and singing songs.⁶⁴

Addressing cultural views on family involvement in education

In some Latin and Asian cultures, parents view teachers as “pedagogical experts” and are unlikely to interfere in anything related to education, viewing it as the teacher’s domain.⁶⁵ In Latino culture, this belief in the absolute authority of teachers leads to the social norm that intruding on a teacher or on an educational program is considered rude. Studies have shown that Latino parents have so much respect for teachers that they will blame themselves, rather than the teacher or educational program, for their children’s problems in school.⁶⁶ Research on Asian ethnic groups has found that parents believe they should not interfere with teachers and that teachers who seek parent involvement may be considered incompetent.⁶⁷ In addition to traditional cultural views of teachers, some immigrant parents of ELLs may attach their hopes and expectations for their children in this new country to teachers. As a researcher of Latino families stated, “Especially in the case of newcomers, families may view the teacher as a model of acculturation and the facilitator of their children’s entrance into an American world. An admired teacher is visionary, spiritual, proactive, and connected with the world of the children as well as other private and public spheres.”⁶⁸

Programs can gain a deeper understanding of families and thus facilitate engagement if they can tap into some of the parents' motivations for immigrating, if that is relevant to the family experience. A study on Asian families found that the cultural emphasis on education, combined with immigrants' perceptions of greater opportunities through the American education system, shaped families' optimism for socioeconomic mobility in the United States.⁶⁹ This study suggests that schools can support family engagement among immigrants by first recognizing their optimism and using that as a bridge to communicate information about the preschool program.⁷⁰

Family education and training

Family engagement may be enhanced by offering training and educational workshops for parents and family members on topics such as the preschool program's goals, school readiness and transitioning into kindergarten, the K-12 educational system, advocacy and leadership skills, and the value of home literacy. This training is critical, since family engagement strategies can be negatively impacted by parents' lack of awareness of the expectations of the educational programs, especially if parents are recent immigrants. As one researcher stated, "A responsive parental education program includes sessions on expectations and roles of parents."⁷¹ One ethnographic study on school readiness found that parents from varying backgrounds did not share the same understanding of what school readiness means. Middle class and upper middle class parents believed that readiness meant that their children would arrive at school with some pre-literacy and other skills, while working class Mexican American families said readiness meant children had reached the legal age for school entry.⁷² Given these differences in perspective, several researchers suggest orienting parents to their potential roles in their children's education as well as the goals for the preschool program.⁷³ Research has also found positive results among programs that provide parents with training on the K-12 system and how they can serve as advocates for their child as he or she transitions to kindergarten and beyond.⁷⁴

Preschool programs can effectively engage parents in their child's development and learning by offering educational classes and trainings that meet their needs and interests. Head Start's experience in providing such training is discussed in detail later in this paper, but other preschool programs have experienced similar success by offering trainings in advocacy skills, leadership, how to conduct effective parent-teacher conferences, topics related to parenting in general, and English as a Second Language. For ELLs in particular, programs can enhance families' abilities to foster their children's language and literacy skills by teaching families how everyday activities can be valuable teaching tools.⁷⁵

Integrating different ways of communicating

Many culturally and linguistically diverse parents have reported that language differences are a barrier to their involvement in their child's formal schooling.⁷⁶ These differences are not only in the language spoken. Groups often vary in the style of preferred communication, with some cultures favoring communication styles that rely on body language, facial expressions and situational context to convey information, and others preferring elaborate verbal expression.⁷⁷ Some cultures prefer more formal communication with education professionals, such as letters or scheduled meetings, while others may desire more informal, friendly modes of communication, such as chatting when they pick up their child or an unannounced phone call.⁷⁸ Researchers also have found that "if professionals assume a dominant role in conversations, the submissive role in which the family is placed may be a source of tension and may result in family members withholding information."⁷⁹ One teacher who has worked with culturally and linguistically diverse parents stated, "The comfort level of culturally and linguistically diverse parents should be of prime consideration. They should be made to feel physically and mentally comfortable and welcome in the schools of their children. Special efforts should be initiated to make these parents feel their importance."⁸⁰

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Recruiting and retaining appropriate staff

Culturally and linguistically diverse families respond more positively to program staff who reflect their cultural backgrounds or who speak their native languages. Although barriers may prevent program staff from mirroring the cultures and languages of participating families, experts urge programs to aim for such matching in order to increase trust between programs and families.⁸¹ Beyond hiring staff that reflect the culture and language of participating families, some researchers suggest it is even more essential “to hire staff who embrace diversity as an asset and demonstrate a willingness to learn about the experiences and traditions of individuals whose backgrounds are different from their own.”⁸² Programs with effective family engagement train staff on how to foster a family-centered program, in which “the families’ goals and needs become the stimulus for program design and practice,” and families are viewed as active partners in their child’s education rather than recipients of information and helpers in predetermined roles.⁸³

Offering staff professional development

Given the importance of adapting communication and outreach methods to culturally and linguistically diverse families, researchers suggest providing professional development workshops for program staff. Topics for such professional development sessions should include how to operate family-centered programs, cultural communication styles, cultural beliefs about education and parents’ roles in children’s development and learning, varying family structures, and ESL techniques for communicating with parents who speak languages different from staff.⁸⁴ Leaders from the community can also aid in expanding program staffs’ understanding and skill in

communicating with parents of ELLs. Some researchers encourage the participation of community leaders as “cultural guides” to facilitate communication and understanding between professionals and families.⁸⁵ Clergy, business associations, and community organizers, can help program staff gain insight into families’ concerns, communication styles and values.⁸⁶

Evaluating efforts

Many programs are required by funding agencies to evaluate their family engagement efforts, but evaluation tools can also help adjust programs and strategies to better suit the needs of participating families and program staff. Programs that serve culturally and linguistically diverse families may face challenges around appropriate language, culturally sensitive wording, and access to families when they try to evaluate their programs, but several innovative approaches may help programs navigate these obstacles. For example, some researchers support the use of family portfolios that include items such as self-evaluations, teacher observations, writing samples, student reports, tape recordings or journal entries about activities at home. Such portfolios can actively engage parents and serve as a way to facilitate parent-teacher interaction about children’s development and how the program may or may not be meeting the child’s needs.⁸⁷ Other methods to evaluate the impact of family engagement strategies include parent surveys, child assessments, and staff observations. Some experts also support the use of nontraditional tools such as interviews, conversations, and journal writing, which may be better able to capture parental beliefs about their roles in children’s learning, attitudes toward school, and confidence in helping their children succeed in school.⁸⁸

III. Policy and Practice in California

IN CALIFORNIA, WITH ONE OF THE largest and most diverse preschool populations in the nation, state agencies and program providers in California have taken important steps to address the needs of the state's ELL preschool-age children and their families. California has two existing state-funded programs that deliver preschool services, and numerous private preschool providers that have developed innovative ways to engage the families of ELLs in preschool. While any new universal preschool system would not be bound by the existing regulations or program models at the state or local levels, these might provide insights into both what has been successful and what has been ineffective in addressing the family engagement needs of ELLs.

Policy: Programs under the California Department of Education

The California Department of Education (CDE) administers the existing state-funded preschool program, which served about 96,700 children in 2001-2002. CDE also oversees General Child Care and Development Programs, which served about 40,485 children, from infants to 12-year-olds, in 2003-2004.⁸⁹ CDE does not track how many ELLs are served by state-funded preschool programs, but the proportion of preschool-age ELLs can be estimated from the state kindergarten population, 38.9 percent of whom were designated as ELLs in 2001-2002.⁹⁰ The California Education Code that governs these programs includes a stipulation about how these programs should approach family involvement. The education code specifically states that the programs should provide services to children and their parents and “provide the opportunity for positive parenting to take place through understanding of human growth and development.”⁹¹ Beyond participation of parents in child development programs, the statute addresses the right of families to also have a “choice of programs that allow for maximum involvement in planning, implementation, operation, and evaluation of child care and development programs.”⁹² In addition, it lists family involvement, parent education, support services for families and responsiveness to the cultural and linguistic needs of children and families as indicators of quality for child development programs.⁹³

The law governing the state's preschool program requires participating programs to hold parent meetings, two parent-teacher conferences per year and to host a parent advisory committee. The education code also requires that State Preschool Programs complete a *Desired Results Parent Survey* to monitor family involvement and satisfaction.⁹⁴ In addition, each State Preschool Program must develop an annual evaluation plan, which includes self-assessment, completion of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), and identification of areas in need of improvement. This plan should include assessment of the program by parents, staff, and board members.⁹⁵

While these regulations mention that programs' family engagement strategies should be responsive to the cultural and linguistic needs of children and families, only some programs receive funding specifically for any extra services or supports needed for ELLs and their families. Providers under the General Child Care and Development Program, can apply for an “adjustment factor” for each ELL they serve, through which they receive a small amount over the normal daily reimbursement rate. Although this adjustment factor allows programs to receive a higher *daily* rate for ELLs in the early part of the program, it does not increase the total allotment of funding for each ELL throughout the *program year*. Providers funded through the State Preschool Program are not eligible for this ELL adjustment.⁹⁶

The Child Development Division of CDE has developed several publications to guide programs that try to engage the parents of ELLs. One such publication, the *Prekindergarten Learning and Development Guidelines*, outlines many suggested activities for effective family engagement, but only a few of these address the specific needs of families of ELLs.⁹⁷ CDE has also created a companion video to the *Guidelines* document called *Parents and Teachers: Working Together to Support Young Children's Learning*, as well as a few other publications that cover parent involvement for a variety of early care and education programs.⁹⁸

In terms of evaluation and accountability support, the education code mandates CDE to perform a triennial quality review of child care services programs. CDE's *Coordinated Compliance Review Training Guide* is used by a child development consultant hired by the state to monitor program quality and compliance with state regulations. One of the six "key dimensions" that consultants review is parent and community involvement.⁹⁹ The guide evaluates each program on development of a parent involvement plan that includes linguistically appropriate outreach. The guide also states that reviewers should look for the following components in programs' parent involvement plan:

- an open-door policy that encourages parents to participate in daily activities;
- an orientation for parents on program philosophy, program goals and objectives, program activities, eligibility criteria and priorities for enrollment, fee requirements, and due process procedures;
- two parent-teacher conferences to discuss the child's progress, scheduled annually; and
- program activities that meet cultural, linguistic, and other special needs of children and families.¹⁰⁰

The guide states that programs should establish a parent advisory committee or council that includes, if applicable, non-English-speaking parents. This parent advisory committee should hold regular meetings and advise program staff on issues related to the program.

Policy: First 5 California

In addition to programs funded through CDE, state-funded school readiness and preschool for all efforts are funded by the state through the First 5 California Children and Families Commission. Approved by voters in 1998, Proposition 10 established the California Children and Families Program including both the state-level commission and county-level commissions. Local commissions use state funds generated by a tax on tobacco products and local matching funds to provide a variety of programs for children 0- to 5-years-old, including those that "improve the transition from early care settings to elementary school and increase the

schools' and communities' capacity to promote the success of young children." To date, 207 school readiness programs in all 58 counties have been established to target high-priority communities. Almost half of the children in those communities are ELLs.¹⁰¹ Many school readiness programs encompass preschool programs, so First 5 California also established a preschool for all funding stream for preschool demonstration projects.

To receive First 5's school readiness funding, programs must offer each of the following: early care and education services, health and social services, school readiness services and school capacity building, sound program infrastructure, administration and evaluation, and parenting and family support services. Parenting and family support services include efforts to improve literacy and parenting skills, home visitation, employment development, and family court services.¹⁰² Although First 5 funding guidelines simply require applicants to describe their activity in each of these areas, other documentation from First 5 indicates that service levels in this area should link to established or recognized providers. For example, if an applicant plans to provide adult education services, those services should be provided "through recognized providers such as school districts and community colleges." Likewise, proposed home visitation programs should be "linked to services through Family Resource Centers, Healthy Start sites, etc."¹⁰³ In addition to funding programs that promote parent engagement, First 5 California also publishes brochures and toolkits for parents in English and Spanish on topics such as the importance of early learning and home literacy practices.¹⁰⁴

Practice: Several Models of Parent Involvement

Many California communities have found innovative ways to meet the needs of ELL preschoolers and their families. Below are several examples of how preschool programs across the state reach out to families of ELLs.

Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE): Parent Trainings

Program description: PIQE aims to increase parents' knowledge and skills to support the academic achievement of their children through informal educational techniques such as dialogue, consciousness raising and skills development. PIQE has worked with more than 350,000 mostly Latino parents across California and currently has nine offices throughout the state.¹⁰⁵

Family engagement features: PIQE has developed a replicable parent involvement program for parents with children in preschool to grade 12. It consists of an eight-week course for parents followed by four monthly follow-up calls from PIQE graduates to participating parents about their use of the strategies they were taught in the course. PIQE programs are typically given at an elementary or middle school by a PIQE-trained instructor and are offered in fourteen languages, including Spanish, Russian, and Vietnamese. The program aims to teach parents how to establish and maintain a supportive home learning environment, how to communicate and work with teachers and school staff, how to navigate the school system and access its resources, and how to identify and avoid obstacles to their children's school success. In some communities, PIQE also holds workshops for teachers to discuss ways to reach out to and work with diverse families more effectively.

Evaluation findings to date: An evaluation of PIQE programs in six San Jose schools found that program/school staff and parents could be most effective in increasing the engagement of Latino immigrant parents by a) making personal connections with parents, b) raising awareness around the need for parent involvement in children's academic success, c) establishing a clear goal that is shared with parents, such as helping children go to college, d) demystifying how the school system works, e) suggesting concrete behaviors that parents can use to support their children in school, and f) creating a sense of community and peer support that lasts beyond the PIQE training.¹⁰⁶

Para Los Niños (PLN): Emergent Literacy and Lending Library Activities

Program description: PLN, a nonprofit family service agency in Los Angeles, operates an emergent literacy program with significant family engagement. The agency, founded in 1980 to raise at-risk children out of poverty through educational opportunities and family and community support, serves more than 3,500 families each year and more than 1,300 children, who range in age from 6 weeks to 18-years-old.¹⁰⁷

Family engagement features: Through PLN's emergent literacy program, Spanish-speaking 4-year-old children engage in reading and writing activities in both Spanish and English in the classroom and at home.¹⁰⁸ Parents are taught to reinforce what their children are learning in the child development classroom and choose books to take home and read with their child. About 81 percent of parents participated in the center's on-site Book Loan Program for families.¹⁰⁹

Evaluation findings to date: A four-year research project confirmed that the emergent literacy program implemented at one site positively affected children's achievement in kindergarten through second grade. The quasi-experimental research project compared PLN preschool graduates to other ELLs of the same grade level in the same school district.¹¹⁰ Findings indicated that 53 percent of the 47 graduates of the PLN program increased their English proficiency by one level, compared to 40 percent of the other 27,451 ELL children in the district. Additionally, a higher proportion of PLN graduates were classified as proficient English speakers than other ELLs in the district.¹¹¹

Livingston Community Center: ESL Classes for Parents to Empower Them as Advocates

Program description: The Livingston Community Center in Merced County, which houses a State Preschool Program for more than 60 children, aims to empower parents in its community by offering a series of Community-Based English Tutoring (CBET) classes.

Family engagement features: Each semester, the CBET program teaches English to about 200 adults, and offers life and parenting skills training ranging from how to use the local bus system to how to read to their children to how to participate in an effective teacher-parent conference. Although any adult can enroll in the state-funded CBET classes, most at this site have children under the age of five and some have children in the center's preschool program or at a nearby preschool program funded by First 5 Merced. CBET classes are taught by instructors from Merced College, so students are required to register for the class through the community college system. Classes are held in the morning, afternoon and evening to accommodate the varying schedules of the adults, most of whom work in agriculture. Child care is provided while the parents are in class.

Saddleback Valley School District's Bridge Program: Parent Training Integrated into Preschool

Program description: The Bridge Program, funded by First 5 Orange County, is offered at five schools and trains parents to lead their children in literacy activities both at home and in a preschool classroom. The program operates three days a week for two-hour sessions: two days consist of a drop-off preschool program for 12 low-income children and one day requires parents to attend with their children. Most of the children are Spanish speakers and all program staff are bilingual.

Family engagement features: Parents, one third of whom are fathers, are trained on how to use the educational materials in the classroom, how to read aloud to their children, and how to increase comprehension through home literacy activities. Parents visit kindergarten classrooms, go on field trips to PTA meetings and meet school staff who orient them to K-12 policies and

resources. The program also attempts to link families to comprehensive services provided by its partner organizations, starting with home visits at the beginning of the year to assess educational, health, social and other service needs.

Evaluation findings to date: Most of the children who participate in the Bridge Program enter kindergarten the following year. According to program staff, the K-5 feeder schools report that about 85 percent of parents remain active in their child's education through first grade. A 2003 study of 60 children and their parents who participated in the 36-week program revealed that more than half of the students increased at least one English language designation level and two students gained two designation levels.¹¹² The study also asserted that the more involved parents and children were in the program, the greater were the increases in children's academic gains. The study also reported that parent involvement increased after participation in the study.¹¹³

IV. Policy and Practice in Other States and in Head Start

SOME RESEARCHERS BELIEVE THAT educational systems in most states fail to provide adequate support for meaningful family engagement regardless of the age of the children being served or whether they come from culturally and linguistically diverse families. A nationwide study found that states' lack of commitment to parent engagement is evident in the superficiality of legislation and the fact that only nine states devoted one or more full-time equivalent (FTE) staff member per 100,000 students to coordinate parent involvement activities at the state level.¹¹⁴ The study also found that the growth and development of systemic parent involvement programs was linked to certain activities under the purview of state agencies. Those activities, although not prevalent in most states, were a) standards for in-service training for teachers to work with parents, b) development of materials for teachers to distribute to parents, c) coordination of material and activity development for parent programs, and d) evaluation of program initiatives.¹¹⁵ Overall, most state preschool programs offer a range of family support services or family referral services. In a recent survey of 43 state programs, 28 offer such services or refer families to such services. Although not as widespread, many state programs are required to hold parent-teacher conferences or home visits. The same survey found that 17 state preschool programs require such conferences or home visits.¹¹⁶ Four state-administered programs (Kentucky, Minnesota's Head Start Program, Oregon and Wisconsin's Head Start Program) mandate home visits.

In other respects, state-funded preschool programs appear to vary greatly in their approach to family engagement both in terms of program regulations and types of support provided to programs. Several states refer to Head Start's standards around family engagement, while others refer to the standards of accrediting entities. At least five state programs require only some sort of parent advisory group or representation of parents on decision-making entities, although other parental involvement activities may be encouraged. State programs in Florida, Georgia, Louisiana and Maine have no requirements regarding family engagement beyond parent-teacher conferences, although they encourage

such activities. Below are more detailed descriptions of how a few states approach family engagement.

New York : Programs' Experience Working With Diverse Families Factors Into Funding Competition

Preschool program description: New York has two pre-kindergarten programs,¹¹⁷ an experimental and universal program, both of which serve ELLs and other children.¹¹⁸

Number of children served: 19,600 (FY00) in the experimental program; 27,412 children (FY00) in the universal program¹¹⁹

Number of ELLs served: State does not track.¹²⁰

Family engagement features: Several of the regulations for the state's universal program explicitly call for special attention to parents and families who may not be native English speakers. For instance, program requirements state, "Support services in the child's home language and in English must be provided for children who come from homes where languages other than English are spoken."¹²¹ The guidelines also state that parental involvement activities must be conducted in the language parents best understand, and that the program must promote English literacy through collaborative efforts between the program and parents. Some of the criteria used to award these competitive preschool grants includes the program's capacity and experience in serving ELL families and the quality of its plan to serve such families.

Tennessee: Programs Required to Hire Staff for Family Engagement Efforts

Preschool program description: Tennessee's Early Childhood Education and Parent Involvement Program provides full-day services to Head Start-eligible 3- and 4-year-olds and their families.¹²²

Number of children served: 3,000 in 2002¹²³

Number of ELLs served: State does not track.¹²⁴

Family engagement features: The program requires two parent-teacher conferences, that program services be designed to recognize the importance of parents in a child's learning, and that programs provide parents

training and opportunities to be involved.¹²⁵ Programs are required to create advisory groups that include parents and hire parent involvement and family services counselors who have at least a bachelor's degree and experience.

Wisconsin: Programs Allowed Setaside Funding for Family Engagement

Preschool program description: Wisconsin's Four-Year-Old Kindergarten Program is administered by a quarter of the state's school districts, which may collaborate with other early childhood programs.

Number of children served: 16,556 children in 2003¹²⁶

Number of ELLs served: State does not track.¹²⁷

Family engagement features: The program allows for 20 percent of program funding or staff time to be used for outreach to parents and primary caregivers. When the law governing the program was revised in 1991, legislators tried to create a fiscal incentive for school districts to incorporate a parental outreach component to their center-based four-year-old kindergarten programs. These outreach activities "should also be sensitive to cultural, racial, and religious differences among families."¹²⁸

Head Start Has Long History Working with Culturally and Ethnically Diverse Parents and Families

Head Start was established in 1965 to improve the lives of low-income children and their families by delivering health and social services as well as increasing children's readiness for primary school. Currently the federally funded program serves more than 909,000 children nationwide, many of whom are non-native English speakers. About 57 percent of the children in California's Head Start programs are ELLs.¹²⁹ Beyond educational programming for preschool-age children, Head Start programs also aim to meet the needs of the child's family by providing health services, social services, workforce development and other assistance to ensure that families have access to adequate housing, food and other basic needs. Within this comprehensive service delivery model, Head Start programs must also engage families in their children's education.¹³⁰ To ensure that Head Start programs address and integrate the cultural and linguistic diversity of the families they serve, ten *Multicultural Principles* were integrated into the program's federal performance standards in 1998.

Although none of these ten standards directly addresses family engagement among parents of ELLs, the last one states that "culturally relevant and diverse programming and practices" should be incorporated into all Head Start components and services.¹³¹

Parent involvement rates have been relatively high in most Head Start programs and this involvement has had positive impacts on both the parents and their children. About 80 percent of the 3,156 parents or caregivers surveyed in 1997 for the Head Start *FACES* survey (about 17 percent of whom were interviewed in Spanish and less than 1 percent in another language), reported that they had visited with Head Start staff in the family home, and slightly less than 80 percent had observed their child's classroom.¹³² Another analysis of the *FACES* survey data found that parent involvement has positive impacts on children and parents. One study found that the frequency of weekly and monthly family activities was positively correlated with parents' sense of control, parent-reported emergent literacy activities and parent-reported positive child social behaviors.¹³³

As far as family engagement in Head Start among culturally and linguistically diverse families, a national report in 2000 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that in a typical month, parents served as translators, helped integrate cultural components or activities into the curricula (such as a presentation on a country or cooking ethnic dishes), and engaged in other activities.¹³⁴ Site visits revealed that in many cases, however, when parents volunteered in classrooms they focused on cleaning and preparing materials, rather than engaging in activities with the children. Almost all Head Start classrooms surveyed had parent areas or bulletin boards inside the classroom with information posted in multiple languages, when appropriate. Most programs reported having a Policy Council, a group of parents and other stakeholders who provide direction for the program. Some Policy Councils provide input for decisions that relate to programming and personnel, while others actually make these decisions. The Head Start Bureau found that parents who lacked English language skills were often unable to participate in the Policy Council or other program planning activities.¹³⁵ According to program staff, many Head

Start programs in the study conducted home visits to establish contact with families and gain more insight into the child in the context of the family.

Parent Involvement

The national report in 2000 on Head Start made a distinction between parent involvement activities and services offered to parents, although some overlap exists. In terms of parent involvement activities, the 61 programs surveyed viewed participation on committees as the most important parent involvement activity, followed by group meetings and workshops with staff, participation in Policy Councils conducted in parents' first language, and family literacy activities in English and in the family's first language. Among staff surveyed, most were pleased with the level of parent involvement. Strategies staff used to increase parent participation included: circulating newsletters or flyers in different languages (or recorded in different languages for parents with low literacy rates), parent appreciation activities, social events that included the sharing of food, adopting a buddy system where parents invite other parents to activities, provision of transportation and child care, and the use of translators. In terms of outreach, programs reported placing ads in local and ethnic media, holding open houses, going door-to-door to talk to families, and networking through churches, agencies and cultural groups.

Another report on Head Start found that fathers rarely participated in the program, and many parents felt that something should be done to encourage male participation.¹³⁶ Since that report was published, the Head Start Bureau has supported several nationwide efforts to increase awareness about the role fathers can play in their child's development, as well as innovative strategies to make Head Start programs more father-friendly.

Head Start also engages some parents by helping to train them as paraprofessionals who can then be hired to work in their child's Head Start program. Some programs assist parents in attaining their Child Development Associate credential, while others hire bilingual parents as program aides to ensure that staff

can communicate with ELLs. In a 1996 report, some programs reported that as much as 60 percent of their current staff was comprised of Head Start parents.¹³⁷

Parent Services

In terms of services offered to parents, Head Start programs provided life skills trainings, ESL classes, GED classes, and college courses, in some cases. The 1996 report revealed that ESL classes were frequently cited as one of the most important services for parents, with 52 of the 61 programs surveyed offering such classes. Classes on parenting skills were listed as the next most important service for parents.¹³⁸ Given Head Start's comprehensive program model, parents also received services such as employment search assistance, social services and health services.

In its continuing effort to improve the quality of Head Start services, the Head Start Bureau convened an English Language Learners Focus Group of parents, local staff, researchers and other experts in the fields of first and second language acquisition, bilingualism and biculturalism in 2002. After a review of research and many discussions, the group made the following recommendations related to parent involvement to the Bureau:

- Share information with parents about current research on how the process of first and second language acquisition takes place and their important role in it.
- Inform parents about ways to support their children's language development and learning, using the home language as the basis for the development of English, without compromising their first language and culture.¹³⁹

V. Recommendations

BASED ON THE RESEARCH SUMMARIZED IN this issue brief, we recommend the following for any preschool programs in California that serve ELLs and their families:

- *Written Plans:* As part of their application for funding, programs should submit written plans that describe how they will partner with families throughout the year and meet families' cultural and linguistic needs. Families must be involved in drafting these plans. Each program should include in its plan discussion of the following areas: meeting and orienting new families; ongoing communication with families about program updates and their children's progress; working with families to create a role for them in the program and in the program's curriculum; encouraging families to participate in and lead program governance; and providing training for families in home literacy activities, parent-teacher conferences, advocacy skills and other requested topics, with special attention to how these activities will be offered given the cultural and linguistic needs of families.
- *Communication:* Programs should aim for ongoing communication with families in appropriate languages and should use bilingual staff or, at minimum, interpreter services when needed. Programs should also be required to hold a minimum of two parent-teacher conferences per year, with training on effective parent-teacher conferences available beforehand for all interested families.
- *Staffing:* Programs should aim to recruit and retain staff who reflect the community and who understand cultural differences and their impact on family engagement. Programs should recruit staff qualified to work with culturally and linguistically diverse children and families, and emphasize hiring staff who mirror the cultures and languages of children in the program. Program staff should be recognized and validated for their effective outreach to and partnering with families.
- *Professional Development:* Programs should provide ongoing multilingual technical assistance and professional development to teachers, program staff and program administrators who serve ELLs. Program staff should be trained in family-centered approaches to educating preschool children, strategies for partnering with culturally and linguistically diverse families, and ways to validate and encourage family involvement.
- *Special Needs:* Programs should proactively partner with families of children with special needs to ensure that families understand their legal rights, how special education services and programs operate, and their child's educational options. Early detection and inclusion should be core aspects of all programs, and programs should support and advocate for families' access to the most culturally and linguistically appropriate services for their child. Programs should also adjust their approaches to special needs based on cultural and community beliefs about special needs and recognize that expertise on special needs comes from a variety of sources, including parents' knowledge of their own children.
- *Community Partnerships:* Programs should build partnerships with trusted community members and informal parenting networks already involved in ELLs' lives, such as child care providers. These individuals and groups can act as family liaisons to educate preschool providers about ethnic differences among families and to strengthen outreach to and engagement of isolated or disenfranchised families.
- *Funding:* Programs must be provided with adequate funding to staff family engagement activities, with extra support available for programs working with families of ELLs.
- *Partnerships and Opportunities:* Families and programs should work together to create meaningful partnerships to support children's development and learning. Parents and program staff should create a continuum of opportunities for both program staff and parents to learn more about each other, their child's strengths and needs, and potential parent roles, from volunteering in the classroom to making decisions about programmatic issues to advocating for their children's education.

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- *Governance:* A parent advisory group or council should advise and govern the program or a cluster of programs. Parent advisory groups should be representative of the children served in the programs and be decision makers providing input and community perspectives to program staff. Parents should be given leadership training and language barriers should be addressed.
 - *Orientations:* Programs should be required to hold two types of orientations for families. The first type of orientation should focus on programs establishing ongoing, positive relationships with families. It should be held at the beginning of the year and cover families' and children's educational rights, program goals, child development basics, and the importance of family engagement in their children's success. The second type of orientation should consist of a series of meetings held throughout the preschool year, to help families feel ready for entry into the K-12 school system.
 - *Evaluation:* Program staff and parents should be required to conduct an annual program evaluation that solicits comments and recommendations from parents and community members.

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- 9 Results of a statewide survey among 1,167 registered voters, conducted April 1-6, 2004. Peter D. Hart Research Associates and The Tarrance Group.
- 10 The bipartisan team of pollsters surveyed 1,167 registered voters in California, including an oversample of 150 Latino voters (for a total of 307 Latinos). The margin of error is +/- 2.9 percent but is higher among subgroups. Peter D. Hart Research Associates and The Tarrance Group.
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Children Now is a research and action organization dedicated to assuring that children grow up in economically secure families, where parents can go to work confident that their children are supported by quality health coverage, a positive media environment, a good early education, and safe, enriching activities to do after school. Recognized for its expertise in media as a tool for change, Children Now designs its strategies to improve children's lives while at the same time helping America build a sustained commitment to putting children first. Children Now is an independent, non-partisan organization.

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1212 Broadway, 5th Floor
Oakland, CA 94612
Tel: 510-763-2444
Fax: 510-763-1974
www.childrennow.org