



Advocates will work for “clear and continual progress” toward universal preschool

Oct 9, 2015 | By [Maira Kenney](#)



In vetoing [Assembly Bill 47](#), titled The Preschool For All Act of 2015, Governor Brown states that there isn't a need to set a deadline for meeting the needs of California's youngest learners. Tens of thousands of families in every corner of the state would disagree. His decision, to keep the goal of providing universal preschool to every child who needs it elusive, is out of step with President Obama, the California legislature, and the more than 70% of California voters who support universal preschool.

Even though more than 60% of California's Latino four-year-olds and half of African-American four-year-olds are not enrolled in preschool, Governor Brown says we can continue on modest, incremental

efforts rather than clear and decisive planning. We stand with Assemblymember Kevin McCarty, and AB 47 co-authors Assembly Members Bonta, Chávez, Eduardo Garcia, and Rendon, declaring that children’s futures deserve more.

From President Obama, to a majority of Republican and Democratic members of the State Legislature, to business leaders, neuroscientists, teachers, parents and advocates — everyone agrees that high quality universal preschool matters.

Broad-based community planning processes that include educators, school administrators, philanthropic partners and child advocates foster systems of early learning that prove quality preschool can, and should, be a reality. While California has made significant strides, the promise of universal preschool remains elusive.

It’s hard to find an investment with higher returns. A recent meta-analysis of 50 years of preschool studies clearly demonstrates that high-quality preschool education can “meaningfully enhance early learning and development.” This early investment produces long-term improvements in both academic and social

success that “generate benefits to individuals and the broader society far exceeding costs.”

Our own research, including a randomized control study of First 5 San Francisco’s decade-old Preschool for All program, showed that children who participated demonstrated a 3-4 month gain in early math and literacy skills compared to kindergartners who had not. Graduates also demonstrated significantly better self-regulation than their peers – a distinction that has been documented in other counties across the state.

We’ve worked hard to leverage resources from federal, state, and local partners to invest in improving the quality of early learning. These efforts are not standalone preschools — they’re part of a comprehensive, integrated, systematic approach to increase access to and raise the quality of early learning environments.

And what does quality look like? It means focusing on the components of early learning that matter: teachers, curriculum, environments, and the integration of early learning with health, developmental and family support systems.

One model of this integrated approach just launched at First 5 Santa Clara, where Educare California at Silicon Valley will introduce a laboratory for high-quality early learning for at-risk children. The school will provide direct services to nearly 170 low-income children and their families and will house the state’s leading early learning professional development and research institute.

We know that our programs build a foundation of skills that support children as they continue through school. Data from First 5 San Joaquin’s school readiness longitudinal study showed the positive impact of attending high quality preschool programs, with attendees demonstrating lower rates of absenteeism, higher rates of grade retention, and better classroom performance in language arts and math.

All these investments are clear proof that high-quality early learning can be scaled, with systems in place that effectively deliver programs that make a difference for children and families.

Early learning advocates will continue to work together to answer California’s families call for relief.

For now, we will take the Governor at his word, that the budget process will result in clear and continual progress towards the goal of full access. This generation of parents knows, from experience and research, that preschool can be an important part of their child’s readiness for school and life. We must not leave our most vulnerable children behind as we seek to build a California which truly leads the nation.

Moira Kenney is the Executive Director of the [First 5 Association of California](#), an advocacy organization working with the 58 First 5 commissions that provide a network of care for children 0 to 5.

WHAT IS ALREADY STATE LAW AND WHAT AB 47 CALLED FOR

Budget trailer bill SB 858 (excerpted below): Signed by Gov. Brown on June 20, 2014

It is the intent of the state to ensure a fair start to all low-income children by providing quality preschool opportunities for all low-income children whose families wish to enroll their children. It is further the intent of the state to provide all low-income 4-year-old children from working families with full-day, full-year early education and care.

AB 47 (excerpted below): Vetoed by Gov. Brown on Oct. 9, 2015

On or before June 30, 2018, all eligible children, pursuant to subdivision (a) of Section 8263, who are not enrolled in transitional kindergarten shall have access to the state preschool program the year before they enter kindergarten, if their parents wish to enroll them, contingent upon the appropriation of sufficient funding in the annual Budget Act for this purpose.

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