

**Advancement Project's
Policy Recommendations on
Facilities for Preschool and Early Education
for**

***Getting From Facts to Policy: An Education Policy Convening*
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By

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Statement of Problem (one-half to one page)

Assuming an ultimate objective of improved student achievement, please summarize the pertinent facts of the existing problems or challenges that your policy ideas or recommendations aim to address.

California currently lacks preschool-suitable spaces for approximately one in five (1 in 5) of its four-year-olds. This one-in-five shortfall exists whether preschool were made universally available or on a targeted basis for children who are likely to attend low API schools and/or are socio-economically disadvantaged. 117,000 new spaces would be required for universal preschool, while 45,000 spaces would be needed for the targeted scenario.

The preschool facilities shortfall is very unevenly distributed—even more unevenly distributed within counties than between counties. In most regions of the state, some areas can easily serve all of their four-year-olds while many others lack space for over half of their children. In the universal preschool scenario, all but five counties have some facilities shortfall, though the amount varies greatly. In the targeted preschool scenario, though many counties have no shortfall, a majority would continue to require funds to construct facilities.

Failing to build a robust facilities plan into any preschool program will mean disproportionately failing to deliver preschool to the highest need children. The children who currently lack access to a physical preschool space are disproportionately the very children who would benefit most from early education and preparation for school: children in poverty, children whose parents do not speak English as their primary language, children whose parents did not graduate from high school, and children of

color. Even under the targeted scenario, this skew persists, leaving children who could benefit the most from preschool without meaningful access to preschool, when programmatic dollars are provided.

In order to make preschool a reality under a targeted or universal approach, policy and education decision-makers must make preschool facilities a key focus for the 2008 year of education reform.

Discussion of Policy Issues, Options, and Recommendations (4-5 pages)

Please address how the policy area you are discussing is related to improved student achievement, what the policy issues are, what some of the policy options might be, and what you or your group is recommending and why. Discuss how your policy recommendations might fit into a more comprehensive set of education policy reforms addressing school finance, governance, personnel and leadership, and state education data systems.

I. Preschool Improves Student Achievement

Early education is critical to improving student achievement because it holds the promise of providing young children with a solid foundation to prevent the early onset of the achievement gap for poor children and children of color. For example, a 20-year study found that low-income children who attended preschool had higher levels of educational attainment and were less likely to be placed in special education or held back a grade than their counterparts who did not have the benefit of preschool. Similarly, Latinos who attended preschool show a 54 percent improvement in test scores, reflecting stronger cognitive development and language skills. In short, a strong foundation in preschool can lead to stronger academic outcomes in school.

Recent studies show that disparities exist in terms of school readiness even when children start kindergarten. Given that 95 percent of California kindergarten teachers state that their students who attended preschool were better prepared for kindergarten than those who did not, we must focus on early childhood education to close the school readiness gap before it metastasizes into the achievement gap.

II. Educational Benefits of Preschool Will Reach Communities of Highest Need Only If We Address the Facilities Shortfall

Growing awareness of the benefits of preschool has led to bi-partisan support for gradually increasing State Preschool program revenues so that more children that attend low API schools may be served. But preschool expansion proposals necessarily beg the question of where we will find the physical facilities so that such preschools might be provided. In neighborhoods where many low API schools and poverty exist, there are far more children than there are physical spaces in which to deliver a preschool program. Pumping more revenue into preschool programs without addressing this facilities

problem means that program funding will flow disproportionately to areas where money from local sources exists for space and space is more plentiful, where the children are more likely to come from English-speaking, Anglo, and middle to upper class homes where parents can share the benefits of higher educational attainment in neighborhoods with uncrowded K-12 schools. Of course, all children should enjoy the benefits of preschool, but children should not have their early childhood educational opportunities predetermined simply by virtue of where and to whom they were born. In short, we cannot improve our K-12 school system if we fail to address the preschool facilities problem and continue to foreclose the early educational opportunities of the least advantaged children. Unfortunately, this is already happening. Los Angeles County already fails to receive all the Head Start funds for which it is eligible because it lacks facilities in which to house the program. Nor is this phenomenon limited to Los Angeles. On a statewide basis, the most common reason cited as to why the State's early education funds are left unspent is that providers cannot surmount the obstacle that facilities shortages pose. We have the opportunity to solve this problem in the coming Year of Education and should seize the opportunity now.

III. The Facilities Bond Strategy

The simplest and most robust source of funding to lower barriers to preschool would be a general obligation bond, such as the highly popular and successful bonds for K-12 school facilities. Voters have approved 14 of the last 15 school bonds, generating almost \$46 billion for K-12 facilities since 1982.

We support making preschool facilities part of the next statewide Education facilities bond and doing so in the largest amount that is feasible. Inclusion in the Education bond will enhance political and financial support for its passage and is consistent with public preferences about preschool, based on polling and focus groups that show that the strongest support for preschool funding exists when it is linked to helping our public schools succeed.

The funds should be made as a grant, as occurs for K-12 facilities, which includes school districts, county offices of education, and charter schools. A match should not be required because there is no local funding source of matching dollars for preschool facilities to which all entities have equal access.

We would encourage local education agencies to use the land they currently have on their K-5 campuses and early learning centers, especially on campuses that are experiencing declining enrollment. This available land, which results from the large acreage of many campuses, is already owned and has already met state standards.

But where a district does not have available land in a particular neighborhood -- because the schools in that neighborhood are already hyper-dense as measured by students per acre -- districts will likely have to acquire land. Therefore, where new land is required, a local education agency would receive grant funding for the actual cost of the land,

subject to the approval of the State Allocation Board. The remainder of the grant would provide funds for a basic quality preschool facility, with a classroom for every 20 eligible children, which meets state standards, including options for modular construction, portables, and regular building construction. Amenities could be added at the discretion of the local education agency.

Early education facilities funds allocated as part of an Education facilities bond would be distributed to local education agencies because they already have the expertise and ability to rapidly construct educational facilities. Indeed, local education agencies have built over 1,000,000 new classrooms seats since 2000. Even with the expenditure of significant duplicative resources and time, other non-LEA systems would very unlikely be able to develop preschool facilities on the scale that is needed to meaningfully address the access disparities that currently exist in so many different parts of California. In addition, we support enabling local education agencies to take advantage of the strengths of existing non-LEA entities by permitting LEAs to contract with non-LEA preschool providers, which would offer preschool in public facilities at a nominal cost.

To be clear, preschool bonds would be structured to ensure that a school district's K-12 facility eligibility would not be adversely impacted if the district builds preschool facilities. Preschool facilities would be a separate program that would not affect a district's separate eligibility for K-12 facility funds, while encouraging them to use excess capacity in facilities where K-12 enrollment is declining.

The Advancement Project estimates that eliminating the current shortfall in preschool facilities spaces for four-year-olds – and thereby providing a preschool space for all preschool-eligible children – could cost approximately \$2.6 billion. Given the unlikelihood that such a large amount could be provided in the next bond, some prioritization is called for.

The Advancement Project suggests focusing the funds where the need is greatest: in neighborhoods where the shortfall in spaces is very large – over 80 four-year-olds lack preschool space – and either (1) the API score of the local school is a 1, 2 or 3 or (2) the local elementary school is in the highest 25% of the state receiving free and reduced price lunches. Our preliminary analysis suggests that there are at least 140 neighborhoods in California that meet these criteria, that they exist throughout the state, and that the cost of curing these high-need facilities shortfalls is approximately \$1.2 billion.

IV. Use of Preschool Facilities After Part-day Preschool

We envision that a preschool facility would be used from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. (or longer) to encourage working parents to avail their children of preschool and wrap around child care services to be provided on site. Local education agencies would build preschool/early education facilities on public land and then would be encouraged to provide “wrap around” services that could be contracted out to a private provider, who could use the facility rent-free. We are also aware that some private providers are willing

to transport children to/from their child care center or home before or after preschool, and we support child care reimbursement rate amendments to encourage this kind of inter-sector cooperation.

There are some excellent models of school-sited early education centers that serve not only four-year-olds but children 0-5 with a blend of program funding from Head Start, K-12, and other state and federal sources using a blend of public and private effort both in funding and personnel. We support that the early education facilities bond funds in the Education bond be blendable with other private and public sources of facilities funding so that local education agencies may build this kind of comprehensive center or may provide preschool to both three and four-year-olds if they can raise the program funding. There is precedent for this kind of blending in the joint use provisions of prior Education bonds.

Different communities and neighborhoods will have different preferences with regard to how preschool dovetails with childcare, and these individual preferences should be respected as long as the children are safe, well-cared for, and receiving a high quality preschool component for at least half the day that helps give them a fair chance in school. Local education agencies, as a matter of policy, should be encouraged to cooperate with private child care providers, ensuring that the needs of parents and children are met as they receive quality early education and care.

Summary of Research/Evidence Supporting Recommendations (one-half to one page)

Please give sources and citations for the nonpartisan research, study, data, and analysis supporting your policy brief and the recommendations you have proposed.

- California's Preschool Space Challenge (Los Angeles, CA: Advancement Project, February 2007): The study shows that California currently lacks facility space for approximately 1 in 5 preschoolers. Additionally, the facilities shortfall disproportionately affects low-income children, children of color, children whose parents do not speak English at home and who did not finish high school – the very children who would most benefit from expanding access to preschool.
- The Effects of Universal Pre-K on Cognitive Development (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University, 2005): In a study comparing Oklahoma children who have completed one year of preschool with those just entering preschool and those who didn't attend preschool, the authors conclude that Oklahoma's universal preschool program has succeeded in enhancing the school readiness of a diverse group of children.
- High/Scope Perry Preschool Project through Age 40 (Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press, 2004): Based on a study tracking the same group of low-income Michigan preschoolers for 37 years, researchers calculate a return of \$17 for every dollar invested and report that children who attended an effective program were more

likely than those who did not to graduate from high school and be more prosperous as adults, among other benefits.

- **The Effects of State Prekindergarten Programs on Young Children's School Readiness in Five States (Rutgers, NJ: NIEER, 2005):** This study of effective preschool programs in five states (Michigan, New Jersey, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and West Virginia) finds that children attending state-funded pre-k programs improve significantly in early language, literacy, and mathematical development regardless of ethnic or socio-economic background.
- **Effects of a School-Based, Early Childhood Intervention on Adult Health and Well-being (Journal of the American Medical Association 161:730-739, 2007):** Arthur Reynolds and a team of researchers at the University of Wisconsin followed more than 1000 low-income children who attended the high quality Chicago Child-Parent Center Preschools, tracking their development over 20 years and comparing them to children who did not attend preschool. Preschool participants were more likely to graduate from high school, and less likely to need special education, be held back a grade, or get in trouble with the law.
- **Praise for Preschool: California Kindergarten Teachers Say all Children Will Benefit (Oakland, CA: Preschool California, November 2005):** More than 9 out of 10 kindergarten teachers in California say it is important for children to go to preschool before they start kindergarten, according to a new statewide poll of California public school kindergarten teachers. The poll, conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates for Preschool California, found near-unanimous support for quality preschool among kindergarten teachers, no matter where they teach or for how long they have been in the profession.