



# **Early Childhood Education Work Group Report**

**from the  
Los Angeles County Education Coordinating Council**

*an appendix to the ECC's*

## **Blueprint for Raising the Educational Achievement of Foster and Probation Youth**

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## Introduction

The Education Coordinating Council charged the Early Childhood Education Work Group (Work Group) with developing recommendations to ensure that children from birth through age 11 under the auspices of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and children of parents supervised by the Probation Department are ready for school and school success. To that end, the Work Group, under the leadership of the Policy Roundtable for Child Care (Roundtable), has explored the challenges and opportunities for linking families to programs and services that provide support to ensure positive developmental outcomes in their children. Considerable attention is given to two important areas:

- First, connecting children and their families (parents, foster parents, relative caregivers, and legal guardians) with high-quality early care and education services
- Second, assuring early identification and intervention for children with disabilities, developmental delays and other problems (from behavioral to mental health and learning problems)

Progress in these areas will strengthen families and improve school readiness and success. In fact, complementary new provisions in two federal laws, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, Early Intervention or Part C), require that any infant or toddler (age 0–36 months) who experiences a substantiated case of trauma be referred to IDEA Early Intervention services for evaluation. In Los Angeles County, the IDEA Early Intervention programs are called “Early Start” and are primarily run by the seven Regional Centers, with the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) providing services to children with low-incidence problems.

This document begins with a brief summary of the current early care and education system, including governance, types of early care and education programs, and prevailing issues affecting the field, followed by the National Education Goals Panel’s definition of school readiness. The next section addresses the importance of early identification, intervention and education, the first line of defense for school readiness and success. The last section of the document outlines key policy and action recommendations for consideration in the overall blueprint to be presented to the Education Coordinating Council.

On July 27, 2005, the Education Coordinating Council adopted the *Policy Statement Regarding Child Development Services* presented by the Early Childhood Education Work Group. The *Policy Statement* recognizes the contributions of high-quality early care and education to children’s school readiness and long-term success and lists overarching recommendations for the participation of children under the auspices of DCFS and children of parents on Probation in high-quality programs. The Work Group, with support from the Roundtable, is committed to working with community partners focusing on early care and education and early identification and intervention to implement the recommendations.

## **State of the Early Care and Education System Affecting Access to DCFS and Probation Families**

### **Governance and Types of Programs**

The Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD) of the California Department of Social Services licenses and regulates family child care homes and centers to ensure compliance with Title 22 of the Health and Safety Code. The regulations are designed to ensure the basic health and safety of children enrolled in child care programs, including:

- Family child care homes: licensed to provide care and supervision to up to eight or 14 children from birth to age 13 in the provider's home for periods less than 24 hours<sup>1</sup>
- Centers: licensed to provide care and supervision for infants and toddlers (ages birth to three), preschoolers (ages three to five) and school-aged children (up to age 13) in a group setting for less than 24 hours<sup>2</sup>

A license is not required for care of children from one family in addition to the provider's own family, related or unrelated by blood, or care provided to children as part of a parent cooperative when no payment for care is involved.

The majority of early care and education services are available in fee-based programs on a full-day (up to 12 hours) or part-day (3\_ hours) basis. Early care and education is also available in publicly funded programs either full- or part-day for low-income families who meet stringent income eligibility criteria. These programs are operated in private, nonprofit organizations, faith-based settings, and school districts. Unfortunately, the need for subsidized services far outpaces the supply.

### **Capacity to Serve Families and Affordability**

In Los Angeles County, the need for early care and education spaces outweighs the existing capacity, particularly in center-based settings for infants and toddlers, preschoolers and school-aged children. While there appears to be a relatively ample supply of family child care homes across the county, it is not necessarily the program of choice for families as compared to center-based care, particularly as children become preschoolers, or license-exempt care.<sup>3</sup>

It is notable that a large percentage of working families use license-exempt care<sup>4</sup> for their children: 63 percent with infants, 27 percent with preschoolers, and 75 percent with school-aged children.<sup>5</sup> Families who select license-exempt care often do so because licensed care is not read-

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<sup>1</sup> California Code of Regulations, Title 22, Division 12, Chapter 3, Article 1. (January 2004)

<sup>2</sup> California Code of Regulations, Title 22, Division 12, Chapter 1, Article 1. (January 2004)

<sup>3</sup> County of Los Angeles Child Care Planning Committee. (April 2005) *2004 Child Care Needs Assessment for the County of Los Angeles*.

<sup>4</sup> Licensed exempt care refers to care provided by relatives, neighbors, friends, babysitters, and nannies.

<sup>5</sup> County of Los Angeles Child Care Planning Committee. (April 2005) *2004 Child Care Needs Assessment for the County of Los Angeles*.

ily available to them due to cost, hours of need, or lack of knowledge or comfort with the formal child care market or to supplement the family income with the child care subsidy. Most license-exempt care is not regulated, although to receive payments from child care subsidy programs, license-exempt providers must receive criminal background checks. There are no assurances in license-exempt settings that the programs are meeting at the minimum the health and safety standards set forth in Title 22 of the Health and Safety Code, let alone quality standards. The exceptions are exempt centers, such as special education preschool programs, and school-age programs operated by schools, among others, which may be covered by other stringent statutory requirements.

Many families throughout Los Angeles County cannot afford the cost of early care and education services, regardless of quality. As of September 30, 2005, in Los Angeles County 27,072 families with 41,527 children were registered with the Centralized Eligibility List (CEL), waiting for some type of child care subsidy.<sup>6</sup> Children under the supervision of child protective services or documented as at risk of being neglected or abused receive priority for admission to California Department of Education (CDE) contracted programs, however as space is available.<sup>7</sup> CDE-contracted programs typically exceed licensing regulations, meeting higher quality standards.

### **Quality**

Research has confirmed that high-quality early care and education, especially in the early years, improves educational achievement among children and their long-term success.<sup>8</sup> The gains are particularly notable for children of low-income families and children at risk. Unfortunately, the quality of early care and education in Los Angeles County ranges from excellent to poor and possibly even harmful to children. Moreover, even when high-quality programs are available, they are not affordable for many families.

High-quality early care and education programs exceed licensing regulations and are found in family child care homes and center-based programs. The following programs generally meet higher standards than basic health and safety:

- Centers and family child care homes accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC) respectively. A small percentage of programs in Los Angeles County are accredited.
- Child care and development programs funded by the CDE. These programs are limited to serving mostly low-income families, and the demand for these programs outstrips supply.

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<sup>6</sup> Office of Child Care. (September 2005)

<sup>7</sup> California Department of Education – Curriculum & Instruction Branch, Child Development Division. (January 2004) *Changes in Law Affecting Child Care and Development Programs (AB 300 (Chapter 552, Statutes of 2003). Management Bulletin, 04–03.*

<sup>8</sup> Bruner, C., Floyd, S. and Copeman, A. (January 2005) *Seven Things Policy Makers Need to Know about School Readiness.* State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network.

- Head Start Programs, which are subject to federal program standards<sup>9</sup>
- Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP) programs<sup>10</sup>
- Other child care and development programs may meet the high-quality standards, but do not necessarily participate in those listed above.

High-quality early care and education programs go beyond compliance with health and safety standards, and actually facilitate the development of young children. These programs are distinguished by:

- Warm, sensitive responsive caregivers who are committed to working with young children and building upon the strengths of families
- Low child to staff ratios and small groups of children
- Caregivers with formal education, primarily Bachelor of Arts degrees and secondarily, with early care and education units
- Adequate compensation for child care workers, resulting in low staff turnover
- Planned experiences for children
- Adequate facilities that are safe, provide ample space for learning and provide appropriate materials and furnishings<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Head Start Programs give preference to children in the child welfare system.

<sup>10</sup> LAUP provides for a fee waiver for foster parents, parents whose children are under the auspices of DCFS and teen parents in the foster care or juvenile justice systems.

<sup>11</sup> For Improving Child Care Quality, UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, (2004). *Building Quality Child Care in Los Angeles County*.

## Preparing Children for School and School Success

In 1990, the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) established three inter-related components of school readiness: 1) readiness of children; 2) school's readiness for children; and 3) family and community supports and services that contribute to children's readiness.<sup>12</sup> For the purposes of these recommendations, the child's readiness is the focal point, supported by the engagement of the parents and/or caregivers (foster parents, relative caregivers, and legal guardians), high-quality early care and education, and effective early identification and intervention.

The NEGP defined the readiness of children along five interacting dimensions:<sup>13</sup>

- **Physical well-being and motor development:** good health, nutrition and physical capabilities
- **Social and emotional development:** a healthy sense of trust, self, and competence and ability to cooperate, regulate emotions (to calm oneself and to be calmed by others) and get along with others
- **Approaches to learning:** curiosity, persistence, and problem-solving
- **Language development:** receptive and expressive communication skills
- **Cognitive and general knowledge**

The NEGP recognized the critical role of parents and community supports to the child achieving the five dimensions of readiness. As such, the NEGP recommended that parents be recognized as their children's first and most important teachers and receive the supports they need to fill that role. Included among the supports families need are access to high-quality and developmentally appropriate early care and education services, and being a key partner in identifying and effectively addressing disabilities, developmental delays, or other problems their children might have.

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<sup>12</sup> Emig, C., Moore, A., and Scarupa, H.J. (Eds.). (October 2001, Second Printing), *School Readiness: Helping Communities Get Children Ready for School and Schools Ready for Children*. Child Trends.

<sup>13</sup> Bruner, C., Floyd, S. and Copeman, A. (January 2005) *Seven Things Policy Makers Need to Know about School Readiness*. State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network.

## The Importance of Early Identification, Intervention and Education: The First Line of Defense for School Readiness and Success

A quarter of the children in foster care in Los Angeles County are less than five years old,<sup>14</sup> and four out of five of these children have been maltreated.<sup>15</sup> Children who are separated from their parents because of abuse and neglect or other maltreatment are more at risk of adverse outcomes and more in need of support for healthy growth and development. As such, abused and neglected children often have difficulty developing the strong social and emotional bases measured by their ability to form attachments and trust from which they build confidence to test the consequences of their behaviors, form peer relationships, problem solve, and learn to handle life challenges and stress that ultimately prepare them for learning.

Furthermore, a child in foster care is more likely to have a disability than a child living with one or both parents. More than 22 percent of children in foster care have a disability, compared to less than 6 percent of children living with a parent. In addition, a child in foster care is five times more likely to have multiple disabilities than a child living with a parent.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, up to 97 percent of youth in the California Youth Authority have mental health problems, many of which were never identified or treated as the child was growing up. This means that early identification and treatment of disabilities, developmental delays and other problems (from mental health to learning disabilities) is especially critical for children in the child welfare system.

Ensuring vulnerable children's healthy social and emotional development, the foundation for their later educational and life success,<sup>17</sup> will require integrated, multidisciplinary and timely approaches. Essential collaboration among key partners should engage parents and caregivers, the child welfare and probation systems, early intervention programs including Early Start programs operated by Regional Centers and school systems or districts, the early care and education system, and other community stakeholders. Key approaches to improving the well-being of children under the auspices of the child welfare system and children of parents under the supervision of Probation include early identification and intervention for children with disabilities, developmental delays and other problems, and enrolling children in high-quality early care and education programs.

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<sup>14</sup> California Department of Children and Family Services, table entitled "Child Welfare Services/Case Management System: Characteristics of Children in Out-of-Home Care for the Month of December 2003." Website: [www.dss.cahwnet.gov/research/res/pdf/CWS2/2003/cws2Dec03.PDF](http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/research/res/pdf/CWS2/2003/cws2Dec03.PDF). This report cited more than 33,000 L.A. County children in out-of-home placements in December of 2003. The Children's Planning Council *2004 ScoreCard* (cited below) reported more than 31,000 in 2002. As for children under age six, the December 2003 DCFS report noted that 26 percent of all California children and 24.4 percent of Los Angeles children in out-of-home care were under age six.

<sup>15</sup> Los Angeles County Children's Planning Council. *2004 Children's ScoreCard*, pages 13–14.

<sup>16</sup> US Census Bureau, *Children and the Households They Live In*, Census 2000, page 8 (Table 3, "Characteristics of Children Under 18 by Relationship to Householder: 2000." All figures are for children ages 5 to 17 years.)

<sup>17</sup> Bruner, C., Floyd, S. and Copeman, A. (January 2005) *Seven Things Policy Makers Need to Know about School Readiness*. State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network.

Identifying children at risk of poor development early on and then providing the children and their families with effective interventions and supports can dramatically improve a child's health, learning and social and emotional development in ways that are often more challenging, and sometimes impossible, just a few years later. According to the National Academy of Sciences, "Compensating for missed opportunities, such as the failure to detect early difficulties or the lack of exposure to environments rich in language, often required extensive intervention, if not heroic efforts, later in life."<sup>18</sup> Yet, the vital steps of high-quality developmental screening, good assessment, and effective services and supports are often missed for these children – the children who most need early help.

High-quality early care and education programs frequently help link families to health and social services, including early identification and intervention programs such as those offered by Regional Centers for children ages 0–3 (0–36 months) and by school districts for children age three and older.

Importantly, new federal provisions require that any child age 0–36 months who experiences a substantiated case of trauma due to exposure to family violence be referred for evaluation for Early Intervention ("Early Start") Services. There are three key reasons for Los Angeles County to move quickly to comply with these new federal requirements:

- It will improve school readiness and educational outcomes for the children by addressing disabilities, developmental delays and other problems before they fester and worsen;
- It will likely lower the percentage of the children who will require special education services once they are preschool- or school-aged; and
- It will place Los Angeles County in a leadership position in meeting the federal requirements.

Parents and families also benefit as they find out about community resources, gain an understanding of child development,<sup>19</sup> and learn to manage their children's needs.<sup>20</sup> However, enrolling at risk children who have not had opportunities to develop close, trusting relationships or attachments with adults in early care and education programs potentially introduces yet another transition and separation into their already fragile lives, particularly if they have experienced multiple separations and losses. In addition, there are implications for the staff of the programs who will be expected to meet the needs of all the children under their care.<sup>21</sup> Strategies for enrolling children and facilitating their transition and adjustment into an early care and education

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<sup>18</sup> Shonkoff, J.P. and Phillips, D.A. (Eds.) (2000) *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. National Research Council, Institute of Medicine.

<sup>19</sup> Langford, J. and Ahsan, N. (Eds.) *Protective Factors Literature Review: Early Care and Education Programs and the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect*. Strengthening Families Through Early Care and Education, Center for the Study of Social Policy.

<sup>20</sup> Dicker, S. and Gordon, E. (January 2004) *Ensuring the Healthy Development of Infants in Foster Care: A Guide for Judges, Advocates and Child Welfare Professionals*. Zero to Three Policy Center.

<sup>21</sup> Fernandez, M.T. and Marfo, K. (July 2005). *Enhancing Infant-Toddler Adjustment During Transitions to Child Care: A Screening and Intervention Tool for Practitioners*. Zero to Three, 25 (6).



program are included in the recommendations outlined in the next section and suggest weighing the benefits of enrolling children based on their individual circumstances and needs.

## Proposed Policy and Action Recommendations

### Introduction

Unlike public education (e.g. kindergarten–12), participation in a high-quality early care and education program is not an entitlement. Enrollment depends on whether there is an opening and the family has the means to pay for the services or is eligible for *and receives* subsidized child care. Keep in mind that the demand for early care and education services in licensed programs outweighs the supply, particularly for infants and toddlers and school-aged children and, when it is available, the quality of the programs overall are uneven, ranging from excellent to mediocre or even harmful to children.

In contrast, there is now a federal requirement that any child age 0–36 months who experiences a substantiated case of trauma due to exposure to family violence be referred for evaluation for Early Intervention (“Early Start”) services.

As such, the recommendations apply to children from birth through age 11 in three generally distinct age groups:

- Infants and toddlers (birth to three)
- Preschoolers (three to five)
- School-aged children (five to 11)

The recommendations are organized under five goals:

1. Assure that all children in the child welfare system age 0–36 months involved in a substantiated case of child abuse or neglect are referred to an Early Intervention (“Early Start”) program; and that appropriate developmental screening and referrals are done within 45 days for children ages three to eight years.
2. Develop awareness and understanding of early childhood development and mental health and the role of high-quality early care and education in promoting healthy childhood development, strengthening families and early intervention.
3. Promote families’ participation in programs and services intended to address childhood development and effective parenting, including high-quality early care and education programs and early identification and intervention for children with disabilities, developmental delays or other problems.
4. Ensure and advocate for adequate funding to support families’ access to and continuous participation in services and programs that promote healthy childhood development and effective parenting, particularly for families eligible for child care subsidies.
5. Develop mechanisms that facilitate, encourage and ensure that pregnant and parenting teens and their children are connected with services that promote healthy childhood development, including participating in subsidized, high-quality early care and education programs through

their emancipation from DCFS and termination from supervision of the Probation Department.

### **Proposed Recommendations**

- 1. Assure that all children in the child welfare system age 0–36 months involved in a substantiated case of child abuse or neglect are referred to an Early Intervention (“Early Start”) program; and that appropriate developmental screening and referrals are done within 45 days for children ages three to eight years.**

Early identification and intervention for children in the child welfare system is the first line of defense for school readiness and school success. This section outlines three ways to assure this.

- Educate program staff (including Regional Center Early Intervention staff), foster parents and other caregivers about the high incidence of disabilities and other problems among children in foster care, the importance of early intervention, and the new federal requirements to refer to Early Intervention (“Early Start”) any child age 0–36 months who has been abused or neglected.
  - Require that a high-quality developmental screening tool, such as ASQ (the Ages and Stages Questionnaire) or PEDS (Parents’ Evaluation of Developmental Status), be completed and in the child’s records for all children ages birth through eight as soon as the foster parent or caregiver has had some experience with the child (and no later than 45 days after a child enters the child welfare system).
  - Train staff, foster parents and other caregivers so they can competently complete these screening tools, spot the signs, and follow up (be strong advocates) when needed, including developing an Early Intervention ISFP (Individual Family Support Plan for Early Intervention for children 0–36 months under Early Intervention, IDEA) or an IEP (Individualized Education Plan for older children requiring Special Education, IDEA).
- 2. Develop awareness and understanding of early childhood development and mental health and the role of high-quality early care and education in promoting healthy childhood development, strengthening families and early intervention.**

The Center for the Study of Social Policy developed the Strengthening Families through Early Care and Education as a strategy to prevent child abuse and neglect.<sup>22</sup> The goals of the initiative encompass the importance of collaborations among key stakeholders who may engage with families through the child welfare system or Probation to building awareness and understanding of early childhood development and the of quality early care and education programs as a means for strengthening families with benefits reaped by the caregiving adults (e.g. parents) as well as the children. The thrust builds upon the notion of the parent as the child’s first and primary teacher.

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<sup>22</sup> Langford, J. (2001) *Protective Factors Literature Review: Early Care and Education Programs and the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect*. Center for the Study of Social Policy.

This section outlines recommendations for collaboration and community partnerships to enhance outreach efforts that educate and inform families of the benefits of early identification and intervention and quality early care and education on parenting and children's healthy development and influences their participation:

- Develop and implement semi-annual multidisciplinary staff development seminars and collaborative dialogues on issues relating to early childhood development and early care and education.

The joint seminars and dialogues should be targeted to and include the joint participation of representatives from: the Los Angeles County Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, Policy Roundtable for Child Care, DCFS, Probation, Family Preservation programs, judges, dependency attorneys, the community colleges offering KEPS (Kinship Education Preparation and Support) and MAPP (Model Approaches to Partnership in Parenting), the Community College Foundation, early intervention programs (Regional Centers, school districts), First 5 LA, Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP), Southern California Association for the Education of Young Children (SCAEYC), and other relevant social service programs.

Topics of training and dialogue may include but not be limited to: early brain development, childhood development theory and practice and effective and positive parenting; language development; school readiness; strengthening families through early care and education as an approach to prevention; a summary of the current early care and education system including program types and challenges and opportunities for connecting children and families with quality programs; and, an overview of the resources available to assist families with finding and selecting care, accessing the subsidized system, and navigating early intervention services.

Education should also include information about the high incidence of disabilities and developmental delays among children in foster care, the importance of early identification and intervention, and the new federal requirements for referring children who have been abused or neglected.

The Policy Roundtable for Child Care is committed to facilitating participation by the early care and education community.

- Promote practices that encourage the healthy growth and development of all children among parents, foster parents, relative caregivers, and legal guardians. Provide information and educational opportunities, including resources to parenting education and support services, on child development topics and effective, positive parenting practices. Prioritize targeting to families caring for young children (birth to three), particularly those who have not accessed a quality early care and education program.
- Integrate into existing training calendars and develop where nonexistent regular (quarterly) trainings targeted to parents, foster parents, relative caregivers and legal guardians on topics that address the following: early brain development and its relationship to attachment and regulation of emotions, childhood development and developmental milestones, positive

parenting techniques, language development, school readiness, and the use of high-quality developmental screening tools, such as ASQ (the Ages and Stages Questionnaire) or PEDS (Parents' Evaluation of Developmental Status).

- Integrate into existing training calendars and develop where nonexistent regular trainings targeted to parents, foster parents, relative caregivers and legal guardians and that highlights the benefits of participating in high-quality early care and education programs. The trainings should include information on the types of early care and education programs available, using the resource and referral system and other resources to find and select a quality program that meets the needs of the child and the family and supports parents and other caregivers as partners in their child's growth and development, accessing the subsidized system, and navigating early intervention and other health and social services.
  - Conduct ongoing research and assessment of current and emerging countywide and community-based initiatives addressing the needs of children and families and pursue opportunities for collaboration. Examples of current and emerging initiatives include First 5's School Readiness Centers, First 5 LA's Prenatal to Three Focus, Zero to Three, WestEd: Program for Infant Toddler Caregivers, etc.
  - Determine and pursue data collection and analysis opportunities, such as: comparing the numbers of children under the auspices of DCFS with the areas of greatest need for early care and education services; tracking connections between families and high-quality early care and education programs; etc.
- 3. Promote families' participation in programs and services intended to address childhood development and effective parenting, including high-quality early care and education programs and early identification and intervention for children with disabilities, developmental delays or other problems.**

The recommendations in this section build upon and maximize the use of the existing systems, including early identification and intervention services and the early care and education system, beginning with the local child care resource and referral agencies. In Los Angeles County, there are 10 geographically based child care resource and referral agencies (R&Rs). The R&Rs provide referrals to licensed centers and family child care homes to families with children from birth to age 11. The R&Rs also provide resources and referrals to low-income families eligible for child care subsidies and, through the Special Needs Advisory Project (SNAP), assist families with children with special needs connect with early care and education programs, early intervention programs and other health and social services.

The following recommendations necessitate the DCFS and the Probation Department to assume a proactive role in assisting families with early intervention assessments, determining their early care and education needs, and navigating the systems to ensure that they are connected to early intervention and quality early care and education programs and receive the resources they need to access and maintain their participation:

- Direct families to their local child care resource and referral agency for information on and support for finding and selecting high-quality early care and education and subsidy programs.

- Refer families to SNAP (Special Needs Advisory Project) for information on and support for finding and selecting high-quality early care and education services for their children with special needs.
- Develop and supply each Children's Services Worker (CSW) and Probation Officer with a comprehensive early care and education checklist to assess the child and family's needs for and enrollment and participation in a high-quality early care and education program. The assessment should occur at every point of engagement in the child's case, from voluntary entry to detention to permanency planning, and include information on the child's overall well-being, physical, dental and mental health, and early identification of special needs.
- Dedicate a staff member at DCFS and Probation respectively to offer case management services to assist CSWs, Probation Officers, and families in learning about early care and education services and navigating systems, including but not limited to the child care resource and referral agencies and subsidy programs, the Centralized Eligibility List (CEL) for income eligible families, early intervention programs for behavioral and mental health assessments, and referrals to services (e.g. Regional Centers for birth to three and school districts for ages three and up), among others.
- Develop and supply each CSW and Probation Officer with a comprehensive packet of resource materials to assist connecting families with quality early care and education services and related health and social services. Materials should include information on referring families to their local child care resource and referral agency, how to find and select high-quality programs, topical materials that promote healthy child development and effective parenting practices, and resources to related health and social services, including early intervention programs.
- Provide every DCFS and Probation family with, for example, a Child Care Portfolio to help them maintain and organize the information needed to enroll their children in an early care and education program. The Portfolios should also contain information and resources on how to find and select a high-quality early care and education program, as well as topical materials that promote healthy child development and effective parenting practices, and resources related to health and social services, including early intervention programs.
- Encourage the adoption of tools (i.e. Early Care Adjustment Rating by Educators (E-CARE)) to be used by high-quality early care and education programs to assess and ensure the parents and their young children's smooth transition into and optimal continuity of participation in their programs.<sup>23</sup>
- Develop and facilitate partnerships to provide ongoing and continuous mental health consultation to high-quality early care and education programs. Mental health consultation may encompass the following activities: develop classroom and home-focused interventions;

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<sup>23</sup> Fernandez, M.T. & Marfo, K. *Enhancing Infant-Toddler Adjustment during Transitions to Child Care: A Screening and Intervention Tool for Practitioners*. Zero to Three, Vol. 25, No. 6 (July 2005).

providing training and professional development opportunities to early care and education program staff; and help families access more specialized services.<sup>24</sup>

- Support implementation of the Quality Rating Systems for Centers and Family Child Care Homes. Implementation efforts should include directing DCFS and Probation families to high-quality early care and education programs.
- Ensure that families with infants and toddlers ages birth to three have access to an array of services and programs that support their healthy growth and development. Services may include, but not be limited to: parent education, family literacy, home visitation programs (i.e. Early Head Start), high-quality early care and education programs (center-based or family child care), mental health services, early identification of developmental disabilities and intervention services, as needed, and parent-child enrichment opportunities, such as parks and recreation and library programs. For families seeking a quality early care and education, a *high-quality* family child care home may be encouraged as a viable option given the short supply of center-based options for infants and toddlers.
- Promote and facilitate enrollment of three- and four-year-old DCFS children and children of Probation families in State Preschool, Head Start and Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP) programs on an annual basis. Outreach regarding enrollment opportunities to DCFS and Probation families should begin in the early spring through late summer, continuing through early fall. To facilitate outreach and enrollment, establish liaisons at DCFS and Probation respectively to connect with preschool program staff administrators to learn of openings and match families interested in enrolling their children into a preschool program. Progress should be tracked, including the number of families actually enrolling their children as a result of this outreach effort. A pilot was launched in the Fall of 2005 and generated significant interest from preschool programs.
- Promote and facilitate enrollment of school-aged children in before and after school programs, including recreation and enrichment activities as well as academic supports, such as homework assistance, mentoring and tutoring. School-aged children under the auspices of DCFS and Probation and children of parents on Probation should be allowed the same opportunities to participate in the same range of before and after school activities, including enrichment and recreation, as any other school-aged child.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Cohen, J., Onunaku, N. & Clothier, S. *Helping Young Children Succeed: Strategies to Promote Early Childhood Social and Emotional Development*. Early Childhood (A project of National Conference of State Legislatures and Zero to Three), (September 2005).

<sup>25</sup> *Through Their Eyes: Results of Youth and Adult Caregiver Focus Groups on the Education of Youth in the Foster Care and Probation Systems*, available on the ECC website (<http://www.educationcoordinationcouncil.org>) provides a more comprehensive listing of activities relevant to the school-aged population.

**4. Ensure and advocate for adequate funding to support families' access to and continuous participation in services and programs that promote healthy childhood development and effective parenting, particularly for families eligible for child care subsidies and for children in foster care requiring early intervention or special education.**

Key to many families' ability to access and maintain their participation in high-quality early care and education programs will rely on their ability to also access limited financial resources and then maintain those resources. DCFS and Probation families eligible for child care subsidies will be competing with other income-eligible, working families for State and Federal dollars that are in short supply. As such, it behooves DCFS and Probation to rethink their current funding streams if we are to ensure that children and their families have access to quality programs that support children's readiness for school and long-term school success.

The following are recommendations to facilitate families' participation in early identification and intervention services and high-quality early care and education programs and transition into the current child care subsidy system, augmenting the support currently provided through the DCFS Child Care Program:

- Identify and explore current funding streams within DCFS and Probation to target monies to support the early care and education of children under the auspices of DCFS and children of parents on Probation.
- Support improved funding for Early Intervention programs, including "Early Start" (Part C of IDEA for Children age 0–36 months) and Preschool Special Education (Part B, Section 619) to improve early intervention services.
- Dedicate bridge funding to ensure enrollment and continuity of care without interruption of children already enrolled in quality early care and education programs that meet the needs of children under the auspices of DCFS and children of parents on Probation until they are connected to the larger subsidy system and before the family leaves the DCFS or Probation system.
- Develop a mechanism to automatically transition families receiving funding from the DCFS Child Care Program to other subsidy funding before the end of their 18 months to ensure continuity of services, including but not limited to using the CEL. Research results of efforts to ensure that families are able to make the transition without interruption.
- Use the Centralized Eligibility List (CEL) to connect eligible DCFS and Probation families to subsidized, high-quality early care and education services.
- Identify and utilize all available funding streams within DCFS and Probation and other County Departments to subsidize the cost of early care and education services on behalf of children under the auspices of DCFS and children of parents on Probation, with priority to pregnant and parenting teens and children birth to age three. Funding streams to explore may include but not be limited to Department of Mental Health funds, Cal-Safe and Cal-Learn,



Family Preservation, Independent Living Program (ILP) funds, and Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds.

- Ensure the continuity of care for children enrolled in high-quality early care and education programs, even if their placement changes. When not possible and only if absolutely necessary and all other options have been exhausted, develop a transition plan for enrolling the child in another high-quality early care and education program. Continuity of the child's care should be a priority in an early care and education program as well as in the child's out-of-home placement, e.g. relative caregiver or foster home.
- Explore, adopt and implement best practices to facilitate children's transition from their early care and education program to elementary school.

**5. Develop mechanisms that facilitate, encourage and ensure that pregnant and parenting teens and their children are connected with services that promote healthy childhood development, including participating in subsidized, high-quality early care and education programs through their emancipation from DCFS and termination from supervision of the Probation Department and early intervention programs, as needed.**

With respect to pregnant and parenting teens, we have a unique opportunity to intervene in their cycle of parenting by supporting their attachments and needs for nurturing, while in turn they are learning to nurture their own children.<sup>26</sup> Efforts to connect teen parents with quality early care and education services should focus on the young parents and facilitate meaningful engagement of the fathers as well as the mothers. The recommendations listed in this section are specific to pregnant and parenting teens and are therefore an augmentation to those listed in the previous sections, also applicable to this population.

- Identify and regularly track the number of pregnant and parenting teens under the auspices of DCFS and Probation. Data collection should occur on a semi-annual basis and include where they live, the number and ages of their children and whether their children are dependents of DCFS. Data collection efforts should be inclusive of fathers as well as mothers.
- Develop and implement quarterly community strategy meetings to explore community approaches to meeting the early care and education needs of parenting foster and probation youth. The strategy meetings should be conducted geographically and include representation from, but not limited to, the following groups: local child care resource and referral agencies (including Special Needs Advisory Project representation), the DCFS, Probation, Department of Public Social Services, Adolescent Family Life Programs, Transition Resource Centers, Early Head Start, First 5 LA, Regional Centers, local school districts, and others. The Policy Roundtable is committed to helping facilitate implementation of this recommendation.
- Conduct regular (quarterly) outreach efforts to pregnant and parenting teens to discuss early care and education, including what it is and why it is important, their options, and how to find and select quality programs appropriate to the needs of their child and family.

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<sup>26</sup> White, B.A., Graham, M. & Shilling, M. (March 2005) *High Quality Child Care: A Shelter from the Storm for the Children of Teens*. Zero to Three, 25 (4).

- Extend eligibility of the DCFS Child Care Program to include teen parents under the supervision of the Probation Department. The children of the pregnant and parenting teens are likely to meet the “at risk” criteria and the teen parents meet the “qualifying need” given their education requirements as a condition of release from probation.
- Ensure that teen parents are enrolled in subsidized, quality early care and education programs prior to emancipation from DCFS and termination from supervision of the Probation Department. Pending enrollment in the existing subsidy system, identify and allocate bridge funding to subsidize the cost of the child’s participation in a quality early care and education program.

## Concluding Recommendation

The Early Childhood Education Work Group's recommendations are ambitious and will require phenomenal resources, financial as well as human, to be realized. The system as it currently exists is relatively fragmented, lacking a master plan to fully prepare children (ages birth and up) for school entry and school success and simultaneously support working families. One challenge is the lack of high-quality early care and education programs across the County for all children, but particularly infants and toddlers, and an under funded subsidy system. Another challenge is to assure that children and young people in the care of DCFS and Probation receive high-quality screening and referral to effective intervention services; this is especially important since these young people have much higher rates of disabilities, developmental delays and other problems (including mental health and social-emotional problems) than other children and youth.

As we embark on a concerted effort to connect DCFS families and children of families on Probation with high-quality early care and education and child care subsidies and high-quality and effective early identification and intervention, we must be mindful of the potential unintended consequences. For example making it harder for poor, working, income-eligible families to access subsidy programs when children in the DCFS system and children identified as at risk for neglect and abuse receive priority as space and funding is available.

Achieving these recommendations will require the mobilization of multiple partners and defining new methods for meeting the needs of all families for high-quality early care and education services. In particular, we will need to work with the existing child care community to identify and address their capacity and needs for enrolling and working with children with varying life experiences of trauma that may affect the children's abilities to form attachments with caring adults and succeed in group settings with their peers. Simultaneously, we must work to ensure the parents, child care providers, medical professionals and others who encounter young children in the child welfare system have the capacity to screen the children effectively and, when necessary, ensure that they receive appropriate intervention services.

For that reason, we offer the following overarching recommendation: that partnerships be established among key stakeholders to advocate for:

- First, a high-quality early care and education system with educated, qualified and well-compensated staff and an adequately funded child care subsidy system to ensure that every family has access
- Second, high-quality developmental screening and, when needed, effective intervention for all children ages birth through eight in DCFS and for children of teen parents under the supervision of Probation

The partnership may be facilitated by the Policy Roundtable for Child Care and include: the Education Coordinating Council, relevant County Departments (e.g. DCFS, Probation, Department of Mental Health, and Department of Public Social Services), the local child care resource and referral agencies, Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles, early care and education programs

(centers and family child care homes), the California Department of Social Services–Community Care Licensing Division and Department of Education–Child Development Division, the Children’s Planning Council, First 5 LA, LAUP, Regional Centers, and school districts, among others. Similarly, the partnership for high-quality developmental screening and intervention will build on the work of the Los Angeles County Early Identification and Intervention Group, which promotes high-quality screening and effective intervention for all children in Los Angeles County.