



Early Childhood Policy Council 2025 Annual Report



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I. Legislative Mandate

The Early Childhood Policy Council (ECPC) was established in law under the Child Care and Development Services Act ([California Welfare and Institutions Code \(WIC\) section 10320](#)) to advise the Governor, Legislature, and the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) on statewide early learning and care policy, including the planning for and the implementation and evaluation of the state's [Master Plan for Early Learning and Care](#) (Master Plan) and the [2019 California Assembly Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Education Final Report](#). As stated in WIC 10320, the ECPC is responsible for preparing a formal public annual report on the work of the council that includes, at a minimum, the successes, challenges, and gaps in the state's early childhood education systems and recommendations to facilitate advancing the state's vision for children, families, and communities.

The Council is a 27-member body, with members appointed by the Governor, the Speaker of the Assembly, the Senate Committee on Rules, and the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Additionally, the Council has two standing committees, the Parent Advisory Committee and the Workforce Advisory Committee. More information about the Council can be found on the [Council's website](#).

II. Executive Summary

This report is organized by the four goals of the Master Plan, describing the topics that were addressed in the four quarterly meetings in 2025 with advice and recommendations from the Council and its Advisory Committees to advance these goals.

Master Plan Progress to Date

In early 2025, the Council reviewed the State's progress over the last four years toward improving access to quality ELC programs, as outlined in the Master Plan. The [progress report](#) shared at the Council meeting on February 26, 2025, provides details on California's achievements for each of the four goals of the Master Plan. Council members highlighted gaps and concerns to address as the work continues.

Challenges and Concerns

- **Implementation Gaps:** Concerns that expansions and training investments, such as resources for inclusive education, are not fully reaching programs.
- **Infants/Toddlers:** Calls to better address a persistent shortage of infant/toddler slots.

- **Whole-Child Lens:** A desire for more robust efforts to ensure families' access to mental health support and health care (for example, Medi-Cal).
- **Children with Special Needs:** A greater focus required to ensure tangible supports like smaller class sizes and access to specialists (e.g., speech, physical, and occupational therapists) to allow all children's full participation.

III. Advancing Master Plan Goal 1: Unify and Strengthen Programs and Services to Support Children's Learning and Development

Impacts of Federal Immigration Enforcement

One focus of Council and Advisory Committee discussions in 2025 was the impact of federal immigration enforcement actions on California families. Safety is a prerequisite for learning and development, and children, families, and child care providers were experiencing trauma and instability due to federal immigration enforcement.

Council and Advisory Committee members shared fears and uncertainty caused by federal immigration actions. These fears were compounded by a lack of clarity regarding how federal policy changes impacted access to funds, as well as other service provider disruptions. Council and Committee members highlighted the vital role ELC providers play in creating stability for children and families in turbulent times.

Educating Families and Providers About Protective Measures Against Immigration Actions and Support Efforts Underway

Liza Davis, Advocacy Director for Children and Immigrant Families at The Children's Partnership, presented an update on immigration policies impacting access to early childhood education and how to equip providers with tools to protect their settings.

Davis shared that the Children's Partnership and Californians Together launched [ALL IN For Safe Schools](#), a campaign to help schools and ELC programs create safety for all families. Davis also shared legal aid resources, noting that [Public Counsel](#) and the Center for Law and Social Policy [CLASP](#) provide free advice to California-based ELC providers. She reviewed a suite of provider resources, highlighting that the [ALL IN Keep Kids Covered Educator Toolkit](#) includes information about state benefits that immigrants are eligible to apply for. This information is provided in shareable formats in multiple languages. Infant and early childhood mental health fact sheets and resources are also available. Davis also

shared an invitation to the American Civil Liberties Union ([ACLU of San Diego and Imperial Counties' "Know Your Rights" webinar series](#)), which informs people of their rights and what to do if they are violated. Davis stated that schools and ELC programs can develop “safe space” policies to protect immigrant families’ safety and privacy. Safe space policies may define (1) which staff members are authorized to speak with an agent of authority, (2) rules for storing and releasing private information about parents, children, and staff, and (3) processes for communicating urgent information to staff and parents

Guidance from State Officials

The Council invited state officials to share important information and resources to protect individuals and communities targeted by federal immigration actions.

Jackie Gonzalez of the California Department of Justice, Immigration Affairs, shared information on legal protections and limitations, including:

- [California Values Act \(Senate Bill 54\)](#)
- Constitutional protections
- Distinctions between warrants and administrative notices

Richard Barrera of the California Department of Education, State Superintendent’s Initiatives Office, shared:

- K–12 guidance and information on a specific attempted immigration enforcement action in Los Angeles Unified School District
- Details on recently passed legislation ([Senate Bill 48](#))

Eliana Kaimowitz of the CDSS Office of Equity shared information on:

- Guidance from [Provider Information Notice \(PIN\) 25-06.1-CCP](#)
- Addressing misinformation and fear
- Nonprofit legal services

Proposed Solutions from Advisory Committees

Members of the Parent and Workforce Advisory Committees proposed the following strategies to protect communities amidst immigration enforcement measures:

- Stabilize the ELC workforce by implementing rate reform and significant financial compensation.

- Include home-based providers in policy discussions about safe spaces, emphasizing that all child care settings, not just schools and center-based programs, should be protected.
- Create specific guidance for Tribal communities, ensuring they are aware of their rights when dealing with immigration enforcement in Tribal child care settings.
- Incorporate trauma-informed approaches to care.
- Actively advocate to ensure continued support and resources for families and communities.
- Provide more recognition of immigrants' contributions to California's economy and society, urging a shift from fear to positivity.
- Proactively seek mutual peer support and connection.

Council Concerns and Recommendations

Council member Mayra Alvarez led a Council discussion and solicited the following concerns and recommended strategies to protect child care providers and families:

- **Cross-Agency Collaboration:** Council members urged for continued and strengthened collaboration among CDSS, California Department of Education, and Department of Justice in their guidance and model policy frameworks.
- **Child Care Inclusion in Protective Legislation:** Council members advocated for inclusion of child care centers and family child care homes in student protection legislation. They raised concerns about these settings being omitted in Senate Bill 48 and Assembly Bill 49.
- **Data Collection and Privacy:** Members advised state entities to find ways for providers to “verify but not retain” immigration/citizenship documents to minimize sensitive data on file.
- **Funding:** Members urged increased funding for child care and immigrant services.
- **Preserving Medi-Cal for Undocumented Families:** The council proposed advocating for continued access to Medi-Cal for undocumented children/families.

IV. Advancing Master Plan Goal 2: Support Children’s Learning and Development by Enhancing Educator Competencies, Incentivizing and Funding Career

Pathways, and Implementing Supporting Program Standards

Quality Rating and Improvement System Improvements

CDSS is working to improve the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) under the federally funded Child Care and Development Fund State Plan. An Equity-Centered QRIS Advisory Panel was recruited and charged with recommending changes to QRIS. This included developing a recommended definition of quality that encompasses racial equity and inclusivity, as well as family, community, cultural, and linguistic preferences. It also included recommending equitable tools and methodologies to measure, recognize, and support quality in all child care settings (including family child care homes and family, friend, and neighbor care).

The Workforce and Parent Advisory Committees provided feedback on equity priorities and definitions to help inform the work of the Equity-Centered QRIS Advisory Panel.

Advice from the Advisory Committees

The Advisory Committees noted it was premature to address quality indicators and assessments, given that rate reform had not been fully implemented. Committee members asserted the need to address foundational elements of fair pay and adequate staffing first. The Advisory Committees' additional recommendations were as follows:

- Family child care providers are often excluded from early education systems and decision-making processes. There is a need for better integration and recognition of these providers, with adequate pathways to participate and contribute within the broader system.
- Systems should be designed to center the needs and priorities of families and children. Wraparound connections and services by all types of providers should be expanded, including those in family child care home or family, friend, or neighbor settings. Equitable access to resources, training, and services is necessary to support providers and the children they serve, particularly those with special needs or experiencing challenges like homelessness.
- Funding should be increased through intentional funding mechanisms that support all types of early childhood programs. Funding should follow the child, regardless of the type of program selected, to ensure resources reach where they are most needed.

- Partnerships across different sectors—including public providers, family child care, and other social services—are crucial for supporting children and families holistically. The culture within the system must shift from competition to prioritize collaboration and partnership, where programs interact and support each other.

Comprehensive Literacy State Development Grant Activities

In 2025, Erika St. Andre from the California Department of Education provided the Council with an overview of the [Comprehensive Literacy State Development \(CLSD\) grant](#), seeking feedback on how to effectively distribute information about the recently awarded grant and opportunities for partnership in upcoming work.

Council Discussion

Council members provided the following feedback on the CLSD grant program:

- **Early Childhood Education and CLSD Grant Alignment:** Council members raised questions about what is addressed in the most current research and curriculum approaches and highlighted the need for enhanced collaboration across educational roles.
- **Inclusion of Family Child Care Providers:** Council members advocated for family child care providers to be included in grant programs, noting the importance of their current participation in education partnerships. They expressed the need for improved communication and access. St. Andre announced plans to expand family child care engagement, with expectations of more widespread inclusion in forthcoming grant periods, backed by existing collaborations with San Bernardino, Fresno, and Orange counties.

V. Advancing Master Plan Goal 3: Unify Funding to Advance Equity and Opportunity

Council's State Budget Letters

In 2025, the Council monitored the State Budget process and submitted letters to legislative leaders and the Governor to advise on early childhood budget priorities. A subcommittee comprised of Council members Andrea Fernandez Mendoza and Donna Sneeringer led the process for both letters. The final letters were endorsed unanimously by the Council, with abstentions only from Council members who also represent the Governor's Administration.

The Council reaffirmed the importance of rate reform efforts and extended appreciation to the Governor and Legislature for support of Rate and Quality Advisory Panel recommendations. In response to the Governor's May Revise proposal, the Council highlighted the critical need to uphold and prioritize investments in early childhood programs by focusing on (1) rate reform and fair compensation, (2) enrollment-based payments, (3) expansion of child care spaces, (4) workforce support, and (5) health care access for young children. The full text of the letters were posted publicly [on the Council web page](#).

Council Feedback on Rate Reform

One of the Council's primary areas of interest in 2025 was the effort to [reform child care subsidy payment rates](#). At each quarterly meeting of 2025, the Council received status updates on rate reform and provided feedback to help inform the process. The following is a summary of Council feedback over the course of the year:

- **Regions:** There was a request for clarification on which counties were represented by the "regions" and concern about the regional breakdown cost model outputs needing adjustment.
- **Categories and Criteria:** There was concern that the criteria were cost containment proposals and did not relate to wages and working conditions. Specifically mentioned were the inclusion of Transitional Kindergarten-age children in school-age category and the benchmarking of family, friend, or neighbor care at 50 percent of family child care homes.
- **Care and Reimbursement Challenges:** Concerns were raised about adult-to-child ratios in state preschool programs due to wide age ranges. Council members noted that broader age ranges change the requirements for quality of care. There was also concern about moving to prorated weekly rates without input from providers.
- **True Cost of Care:** Multiple Council members emphasized the urgency of implementing a new rate system because current operating conditions are detrimental to the workforce, families, the economy, and the survival of child care. Council members underscored that CDSS' final cost estimation model report must show the true costs of care, not "what we can afford."
- **Non-traditional Hours:** The Council advised that the State needs to clearly define "non-traditional" hours and determine what constitutes fair compensation for providing care during these times.
- **Inclusion Services:** The Council asked the State to explore expanding eligibility for inclusion services rates to cover children who have 504 plans or who are still undergoing assessment. In addition, there is a need for

expanded professional development—particularly for family child care and family, friend, or neighbor providers—to better support children with higher or special needs.

- **System Changes:** The Council raised concerns about how the new system would address increasing administrative burdens, cost complexities, and additional benefit and labor requirements.
- **Rate and Quality Advisory Panel:** Council members questioned whether the State would meaningfully apply the recommendations of the Rate and Quality Advisory Panel and urged the State to adopt these recommendations.

VI. Advancing Master Plan Goal 4: Streamlining Early Childhood Governance and Administration to Improve Equity

CalWORKs Child Care Program

In 2025, CDSS sought input from the Council to inform efforts to improve the CalWORKs Child Care Program through focus groups. [Findings and recommendations](#) were presented to the Council. **Council Feedback and Recommendations**

Council members expressed appreciation for efforts to streamline the CalWORKs Child Care Program and highlighted ongoing challenges and related recommendations, as follows:

- **Eligibility Information:** Families in CalWORKs are often unaware they are eligible for child care, particularly when they are no longer receiving cash aid. There are also issues around notifications about continuing and changing eligibility.
- **Reimbursement:** Concerns were raised over reimbursement delays and the impact of such delays on both providers and families.
- **Communication and Education:** Program information can be complex, and families and providers do not always receive the same information at the same time. Council members advocated for webinars to improve understanding of program requirements. A request was also made for a comprehensive list of county subcontractors, so providers know who to contact when questions arise.

- **Case Management:** Case managers play a vital role in helping families navigate the program but are working with high caseloads and have experienced many changes since the pandemic. There was a question about whether families maintain a consistent case manager across stages of the program. A recommendation was made for more training to support front-line staff to handle high caseloads with empathy.
- **Tribal Outreach:** Council members asked whether Tribal families were represented in focus groups. They suggested outreach to the large Tribal consortia in California to ensure information is accessible to eligible Tribal families.
- **Internal Staffing Continuity:** The Council highlighted the need for processes to ensure continuity and communication when a family’s assigned case manager changes.
- **Support System Clarity:** Council members noted the lack of a clear support system for families and the challenge of finding the right resources. They advocated for a structured guide to help navigate services, especially services and resources for children with disabilities.
- **Defining Stability:** Varying county-set definitions of “stability” can create confusion about program stages and progress. The Council recommended creating a systemwide definition of “stability” to support child care providers and families and to minimize transitions and related challenges.

VII. Summary

The Council and its Advisory Committees faced and addressed multiple challenges in 2025, including the federal government shutdown and immigration enforcement actions impacting families and the early childhood landscape. In addition, the Council was presented updates on State programs and efforts such as CalWORKS and rate reform. These bodies served as safe and brave spaces to address the critical needs of children, families, providers, and communities. Through this work, the Council and its Advisory Committees provided valuable information, resources, and recommendations for implementation of powerful supports and legislation.

As the Council and its Advisory Committees look ahead to 2026, they do so with continued determination to advance a shared mission: to support children, families, and the ELC workforce in creating an equitable system that fosters the best possible outcomes for children, families, and their communities.