

Senate Bill 976

Universal Preschool

Senator Connie M. Leyva (D-Chino)

SUMMARY

SB 976 establishes universal preschool in California. Specifically, this bill ensures that parents have the option to send their children to a public elementary school provider or a community-based provider to benefit from universal transitional kindergarten.

BACKGROUND

In 2021, the Legislature passed and the Governor signed SB 130, which authorized universal transitional kindergarten. Under this new law, transitional kindergarten was expanded to require that all children who turn four by September 1 must be admitted to a transitional kindergarten program by the 2025-26 school year.

Transitional kindergarten is the first year of a two-year kindergarten program that uses a modified kindergarten curriculum that is age and developmentally appropriate. This program is designed to serve “older” four-year-olds and “younger” five-year-olds.

PROBLEM

Pursuant to the enabling legislation passed in 2021, public elementary schools are the exclusive setting where transitional kindergarten can be provided. Under current law, age eligible children would not have the option to stay with their current community childcare provider to receive state sponsored transitional kindergarten, as this is currently offered only by school districts, only during school hours and school calendar year.

While some children and families will benefit directly from transitional kindergarten, many have different needs and will not be able to access or benefit from this system due to individual child needs or parent needs for hours of care to align to their work.

In addition the public school only model creates significant challenges for a childcare system that is on the brink of collapse because of the pandemic. Due to the high cost of caring for infants and toddlers, childcare programs rely on serving a range of age groups.

If four-year-olds are forced to attend preschool elsewhere, the costs of infant care will skyrocket. In addition, community-based childcare programs will be left with no choice but to increase costs for infants and toddlers—or close entirely. The majority of childcare providers are women and

women of color. The strain of rising costs and closing businesses will leave women without jobs and families without access to safe, high-quality care.

These programs cannot simply take on more 0-3 year-olds to make up for the loss of four year-olds due to the high costs associated with caring for younger children. Without four year-olds in a childcare program, it is too challenging to operate a childcare business.

SOLUTION

SB 976 ensures that the goals of universal transitional kindergarten are accomplished by providing flexible childcare options for California’s working families. This bill not only provides parents with the logistical flexibility that they require, but it also allows them to choose a provider that fits in with their unique cultural and linguistic needs.

Furthermore, SB 976 promotes educational continuity for children and much-needed stability for licensed community-based providers and their employees, most of whom are women of color.

STATUS

Introduced – February 10, 2022

SUPPORT

Child Care Resource Center (co-sponsor)
EveryChild California (co-sponsor)
California Child Care Resource & Referral Network (co-sponsor)
California Alternative Payment Program Association
Early Care and Education Consortium
California Rural Indian Health Board
Californians for Quality Early Learning
Child Care Law Center
Children’s Council of San Francisco
Crystal Stairs
Early Care and Education Pathways to Success
First 5 California
Head Start California
KinderCare
Learning Care Group
Parent Voices
SEIU/CCPU
Tribal Child Care Association of California
UDW
YMCA of San Diego

CONTACT

Cameron Urkofsky, (916) 651-4020
Office of Senator Connie M. Leyva
1021 O Street, Suite 7610
Cameron.Urkofsky@sen.ca.gov