



# PROJECT SUMMARY

## ADEQUACY AND EFFICIENCY OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION IN CALIFORNIA

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Funded by The David and Lucile Packard Foundation

Faced with mounting evidence that California has fallen behind on many key indicators of educational performance, there is considerable interest among policymakers and the public in improving the outcomes of the state’s K-12 education system. One potential area of investment is expanding access to high-quality preschool education so that California’s children enter kindergarten ready to learn and succeed in meeting the state’s educational standards. Within this context, this study seeks to address four overarching questions:

- What are the achievement gaps for California’s children in terms of the state’s kindergarten through third grade (K-3) educational standards and what is the potential for high-quality preschool programs to raise achievement?
- How adequate is the quality of preschool education being received by California children, and what proportion of families have access to high-quality preschool that would be expected to produce the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits necessary to help children achieve the state’s early elementary standards?
- What efficiencies can be obtained in the current system of funding for early care and education (ECE) programs serving children one or two years before kindergarten entry in order to improve K-3 educational outcomes?
- What additional ECE policies or resources would be required to ensure that all children in California are prepared to meet K-3 standards?

A multi-disciplinary RAND research team will address these questions through three inter-related studies that will collect new data and conduct original analysis to fill important gaps in our knowledge base regarding (1) achievement gaps among California children in the early grades; (2) the system of public funding in California for ECE programs in the two years prior to kindergarten entry; and (3) the utilization of ECE services among California’s children and the quality of those experiences. A fourth synthesis study will integrate the results from the three focused studies, as well as relevant prior research, in order to answer the overarching research questions above.

### Focused Research Studies

The project entails four study components that will run concurrently.

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### Study 1: Analysis of Achievement Gaps in Meeting California K-3 Standards

This study component will address how far California is from having all children meet current education standards in kindergarten through third grade, with a focus on achievement in English-language arts and mathematics. In particular, the following questions will be addressed:

- What is the number and share of California's children in grades K-3 who do not meet the state education standards in reading and math in their respective grades?
- How does the fraction that fails to meet state standards vary across key population subgroups defined by gender, race or ethnicity, or other measures of family background?
- What is the potential for increasing access to high-quality preschool programs in order to close the observed achievement gaps?

The analysis will draw on state- and district-level achievement data in California, as well as California data on school readiness from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Kindergarten cohort of 1998-1999.

### Study 2: Policy Analysis of Publicly-Funded Preschool and Child Care in California and Case Study Counties

The objective of this study component is to fully document the complex system of public funding for ECE programs in California today. Specific questions to be addressed include:

- What federal, state, and local funding streams currently fund ECE programs for children one or two years before kindergarten entry?
- What populations of children are served by these programs and what are the program eligibility requirements? How is program eligibility determined? What fraction of the eligible children are served?
- How much funding is available per child served? What requirements for program services are maintained (e.g., requirements on caregiver or teacher training, group sizes, and curriculum) and are programs meeting those requirements? Are the funding levels and other program requirements sufficient to ensure that programs are high quality?
- How are the available funds allocated across direct service provisions versus eligibility determination and other program administration?
- Are there inefficiencies within programs or across programs in terms of funding streams, program eligibility, service delivery, and program administration? What are the sizes of any inefficiencies and how many resources could be made available if the inefficiencies were eliminated?

The analysis will provide a comprehensive assessment of ECE programs—for California as a whole, as well as three case study counties—including Head Start, the California State Preschool Program, and the General Child Care and Development Program, as well as child care funds available through the First 5 commissions, Child Care and Development Fund under Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and other funding streams at the county, school district, or city level.



### Study 3: Collection and Analysis of New Data on ECE Utilization and Quality

An important gap in the knowledge base is current information about the non-parental care arrangements experienced by California children before kindergarten entry and the quality of the care they receive. To remedy this gap, this third study component will design and field a new survey, representative of children in California, about ECE utilization and quality. The study is designed to address the following questions:

- What is the distribution of non-parental care arrangements for California's children in the year prior to kindergarten entry? What fraction of children attend Head Start, the state preschool program, other public or private preschool programs, or participate in other types of child care arrangements in center or non-center settings?
- What is the distribution of the quality of the ECE arrangements across California's children in the year prior to kindergarten entry? What fraction of children is in lower-quality versus higher-quality settings? How does quality vary along key dimensions such as provider training and experience or group sizes?
- How does the distribution of ECE arrangements and the quality of those arrangements vary with the characteristics of the child or the child's family?

The data collection effort will gather information from families about their children's care arrangements and from providers about the features of the care they provide (both from information provided by providers and from independent observations by specially-trained interviewers in the care environment).

### Study 4: Synthesis Study of Preschool Adequacy and Efficiency

The fourth study will integrate the results from the other three study components to provide a comprehensive policy analysis of the gaps in access and quality in the current ECE system in the two years prior to kindergarten entry and the consequences for student achievement in the early grades. Policy options for improving preschool opportunities in California through efficiency gains, new policies, or additional resources will be delineated. Future research needs will be identified as well.

## Study Timeline

The study findings will be made available in a series of RAND reports expected to be available in May 2007 (Study 1), June 2007 (Study 2), October 2007 (Study 3), and December 2007 (Study 4). All project documents will be available without charge for downloading through RAND's website ([www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org)).

For additional information, see [http://www.rand.org/labor/projects/ca\\_preschool/](http://www.rand.org/labor/projects/ca_preschool/), or contact:

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