

Children, Families, and Communities Program

Early Learning Strategy Brief

The Children, Families, and Communities Program strives to ensure that all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential. Our grantmaking strategies address two interrelated and fundamental needs that must be met for children to thrive: health and education. The Early Learning strategy specifically seeks to improve the quality of early learning and developmental experiences, in both formal and informal settings, for all children in California from birth through age five.

The Challenge

While most middle-class children will be blessed with community, public, and family resources to help satisfy these basic needs, too many low-income children are uninsured and do not receive high-quality care and connections to early learning opportunities. The foundations for health and learning are built in the first five years of a child's life, but many of the adults caring for children do not have the support they need to provide quality care and early learning opportunities. Formal caregivers need opportunities for training and professional development, while parents, family, and friends need to know the importance of reading, playing, and forming quality relationships.

Our Strategy

We aim to improve the quality of early learning experiences for the three million children birth through age five in California by:

- Improving professional development for educators and caregivers to improve the quality of care provided through the formal system. Children will enjoy learning, exploring, and making friends—skills they need for success in life—and adults will have pride and confidence in the education and care they provide.
- Providing parents, family, and friends that care for children with the skills and support they need to provide quality, nurturing environments for children to grow to ensure they are on track and ready for the classroom by age five.

Our Approach

We can help children start strong by providing information, coaching, and support that empowers parents and educators to help children stay healthy and start learning in the crucial early years of their lives.

We are focusing on distinct sectors (formal and informal) to account for the fact that we do not have a unified system or set of integrated systems of care to reach our youngest children. Each is intended to improve the multiple interactions between caregivers and children over time and through the multiple transition moments between birth and a child's transition to school.

Formal System

We support professional caregivers who care for children in licensed settings—which serve approximately 60 percent of children in California—by

supporting the development of new models of training and professional development that are aligned with the early learning standards. Emerging models will be tested in select local communities and geographies with the hope of scaling them, state-wide.

Informal Settings

We create opportunities for informal networks of families, friends, neighbors, and parents—who are estimated to be caring for the remaining 40 percent of children—to access child development and early learning resources, information, and opportunities.

Cross-System

We also work to foster relationships among caregivers in both the formal and informal settings and spread best practices by (1) communicating effective practices to formal and informal caregivers, (2) providing technical assistance on quality, and (3) supporting mechanisms for knowledge diffusion.

Advocacy

We seek to build advocacy, stakeholder engagement, and political will around the issues of program quality and the workforce at the local, state, and federal levels.

*Adults will know how to provide the
kind of nurturing and enrichment
kids need early in life in order
to reach their full potential.*

Where We Work

While most of our resources are concentrated in California, we will also consider funding a small number of groups and/or initiatives outside of the state that demonstrate best practice, as well organizations that seek to improve early learning systems and policies at a state and/or federal level.

Goals

Our work in early learning will ensure that:

- Models of professional development are implemented, evaluated, and scaled across California.
- Opportunities exist for family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) caregivers of infants and toddlers to access evidence-based, actionable information on early learning and childhood development resources.
- Parents have access to high-quality preschool for their children by age three.
- State and federal policies support the professional development of caregivers and teachers in childcare, preschool, and elementary school settings.

What We Don't Fund

The Foundation does not fund projects that influence specific legislation or ballot measures. We also do not fund direct service programs (i.e., individual child care centers, preschools, or schools) or research unrelated to specific needs identified by program staff in consultation with grantees in the field.

The David and Lucile Packard Foundation is a private foundation. We accept grant proposals only for charitable, educational, or scientific purposes, primarily from tax-exempt, charitable organizations. We do not provide funding for projects that benefit specific individuals or that serve religious purposes.

To Learn More

We encourage you to carefully review the guidelines and geographic limitations for your area of interest. To find information about current and previous grants, visit our [Grant Database](#).