

# Preschool Development Grant-Renewal

## Experiences in Transitional Kindergarten

### INTRODUCTION

The Preschool Development Grant-Renewal (PDG-R) helps states assess and streamline the early learning and care (ELC) mixed-delivery system to improve quality. The Child Care Resource Center (CCRC) leads California's efforts to engage families in feedback sessions that inform policymakers on ways to improve the ELC system.

In May 2022, CCRC hosted a parent feedback session to discuss families' experiences in transitioning from early learning programs to kindergarten. During this conversation, it became evident that many caregivers were generally confused about Transitional Kindergarten (TK) and how it differs from other preschool settings. Thus, to build off that feedback session and dive deeper into parents' understanding of TK, CCRC spoke to two mothers about their experience in TK in October 2022.



*"I tried to get information from her school, but they didn't have much. I had to go online and learn for myself...TK wasn't really explained to me, I was basically told 'She has to go, she has to go. No way out of it'. I still don't really understand it."*

- Parent, Los Angeles County

### CONFUSION SURROUNDING TRANSITIONAL KINDERGARTEN

In line with our findings from the previous feedback session, both parents indicated that they knew very little about TK, including its purpose, benefits, who is eligible, and its role in a child's educational trajectory. Parents stated that they had to research TK on their own and individually seek out information through informal networks, such as online groups and other parents. According to a mother of two, "I never heard about TK prior. I thought kids just went from preschool to kindergarten. I was preparing my child for kindergarten, when suddenly I was told that she had to go to TK."

This lack of understanding was most evident by both parents' shared confusion regarding TK eligibility. Across both this feedback session and the one held in May, parents thought that the availability of TK was solely a coincidence based on a child's birthday and were unaware of the nuances of the program, such as its focus on kindergarten-readiness, co-location with elementary schools, and a higher student-to-teacher ratio. As one mother put it, "I had heard about TK more as a birthday situation, like pre-k, but if you have a certain birthday, you just do TK instead." Both mothers agree that at the local level and within school districts key elements that are missing include parental education, shared resources and the purpose and benefit of TK.



### PARENTS' EXPERIENCE WITH TRANSITIONAL KINDERGARTEN

When it came to enrolling children in early learning programs, parents expressed wanting more flexibility in selecting the option that works best for both their children and family, rather than feeling forced into TK based on their child's birthday. As demonstrated by both parents, many factors- including parents' work schedules, children's attention span and temperament, and need for additional services outside of TK- can all play a crucial role in whether or not TK is the best option for families. Thus, both mothers felt strongly that TK should be available to all children and that parents should be able to enroll their child based on their individual needs or through a child assessment that helps to determine which early learning program would be best for their development.

One parent shared, "My oldest daughter didn't need TK [but was forced to enroll because of her birthday], but my youngest does. Unfortunately, my youngest doesn't qualify because of her birthday. I feel like it should be based on what the child needs, like they take an assessment to determine if they go to TK or not, rather than having it be determined by their birthday." Additionally, the other mother decided to continue in state preschool for three days a week and enroll her child in a private TK program twice a week. This option allowed her son to continue enrollment in an environment where he felt comfortable, was familiar with his teachers and received the academic and school-readiness TK benefits. In both cases, each parent felt that they should be able to select the early learning option that best fit the needs of their child and their family.

*"I really wish that there would be an assessment and not necessarily put children into TK. I think that children should be assessed and treated individually, not just enrolled based on their birthday."*

- Parent, Los Angeles County



## RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PARENTS

*"I can see the benefit of TK, but as it stands right now, I know I'm not the only parent that is hesitant. If there was a way to address this hesitancy, I could see more parents enrolling in TK."*

- Parent, Placer County



When asked if they would recommend TK to other parents, both mothers felt it was an important early learning option, but that the program decision should be based on which option(s) best meets the unique needs of children and families. Recommendations for assisting parents in making decisions regarding early learning and care options include:

- **Increase Parental TK Knowledge.** Both feedback sessions indicated that parents are generally confused and unaware of TK. More needs to be done at the local and state levels to increase awareness of the program, its availability and the benefits of participation through in-person and online resources.



**Recommended Action:** Create more visual charts and resources to help parents navigate their early learning options.

*"I think they should let parents know that these are the California state standards we are using. There should be transparency about everything: the class size, hours of operation, enrollment process, the curriculum."*

- Parent, Placer County



**Recommended Action:** Share the differences between more traditional preschool and TK (curriculum, hours, ratios, etc.) to alleviate confusion regarding the benefits of TK and help parents decide which option is best for their child and family.

- **Individual TK Child Assessment.** Both parents felt that TK should be available as an option to all families, but children should be assessed on their need and fit for TK rather than enrolling solely based on their birthday.



**Recommended Action:** Utilize individual TK assessment results to allow families to make an informed decision regarding their families early learning journey.

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